



CSRC  
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

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# DAN GUERRERO

INTERVIEWED BY CAROLINA A. MIRANDA  
ON JULY 17 AND 18, 2013

Dan Guerrero, acclaimed for his one-man theatrical production *iGaytino!*, began his entertainment career in New York in 1962, first as a performer and then as a theatrical agent. After twenty years he returned home to Los Angeles, where he was a casting director for stage and television before turning to producing and directing. He has been an independent producer for network and cable television programming in both English and Spanish, including talk shows and music specials.

Carolina A. Miranda is an independent cultural journalist based in Southern California covering everything from fine art video games to architectural pedagogy. A former staff reporter at Time magazine, her stories have also appeared in *ARTnews*, *Fast Company*, *Architect* and *Art in America*. She is also a regular contributor to National Public Radio and its popular Los Angeles affiliate KCRW.

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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 LGBT AND MUJERES INITIATIVE PROJECT

Dan Guerrero  
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# INTERVIEW WITH DAN GUERRERO

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## JULY 17, 2013

**Dan Guerrero:** Well, I'm Dan Guerrero and I do a lot of things. I like variety. So I produce and I direct and I perform, but it all boils down to show business. That's been my life. It's always been my life. I grew up with it. It's all I ever wanted to do. It's all I have ever done, so that's it.

**Carolina Miranda:** Which brings me to the first question which is, you have led a very eclectic—within that, you've led a very eclectic life.

**DG:** Correct.

**CM:** You grew up in East LA but spent two decades in New York. You worked as a performer but also as a talent manager and producer. You've been an activist and you've managed your dad's career. What do you think ties all of this together? What's been the constant in your life?

**DG:** The constant in my life, well, the obvious answer would be show business, entertainment. Because although I've had many incarnations, they're all within that same genre, and they all made sense. One kind of led to another. But I would say, if I had to pull out a word, I would say the constant would be that I always—the choices and decisions I made were to move forward. Everything moved forward for me. Personally, career-wise, it was always, "Okay, what is the next step that will move me forward?" I'm very big on not moving back or losing . . . I'm all about moving ahead. Even at this stage of my life, I'm still looking for that next thing, that next challenge, that next—I get bored easily, you know, so sometimes . . .

And PS: I think it's important to know that all those things I did were and are for real. You know, I'll see people's résumés, you know: singer, dancer, actor, voice-over. Yeah, they do them all for like five minutes, and maybe not well. I mean, I was a performer for many years. I was a theatrical agent on Broadway for like twelve, fourteen years. Moved back to LA, was casting for a couple of years. Then I've been producing, directing for the last fifteen. And then more recently I've gone back to performing. So I do all those for real. They're not just words on a résumé.

**CM:** Not just once.

**DG:** No, no. And I do them all pretty well, I'd like to think.

**CM:** If you've been doing this this long, I would hope so.

**DG:** I would hope so. I've paid my bills all these years by doing it, so—

**CM:** Perfect, that's the—

**DG:** Sometimes that's all the career boils down to, you know: paying your bills.

**CM:** All right. So let's go back to the early years. I'd love it if you could give me an overview of who—a brief overview of who your parents are and, you know, what were they doing and where were they at the time you were born?

**DG:** Both my parents were born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. My dad came from a Mexican-born mom and dad, Concepción and Eduardo Guerrero. She was from Sonora, some town I can't pronounce. He was from La Paz, Baja [California]. They came up around the Mexican Revolution time because he was—my *tata* was an expert boilermaker for the Mexican Navy, and the Southern Pacific railroad was down there looking for skilled laborers. And I'm sure my *nana* and *tata* thought, "Well, let's get out of here." With the revolution. Off they came, so all the kids they had were born in the United States and they were born in Tucson. So my dad was born and raised there.

My mother came from a Mexican-born mother, Fermina Corral. My mom's mother was from Durango. Again, I don't know where but the state of Durango. Her father was first generation Irish American. His name was Marmion, Charles Francis and he was a mining engineer. He's born in San Antonio. His parents were from Dublin. So he was down there working the mines. That's where he met Fermina. The Marmions were not happy with that little left turn, I will tell you that. But my mother grew up very *mexicana* because her father died when she was like five. So she was raised by her mother.

So my parents met. My dad was a musician always, always, and he was . . . She was sixteen when they met, he was like twenty, twenty-one. Only boyfriend she ever had. They married when she was seventeen. I was born when she was eighteen, in Tucson at the Stork's Nest, which was a maternity hospital. My dad was at that time with a group called Los Carlistas, a quartet. That was his first musical group.

Legend has it that when he—of course he was working. I mean in showbiz, "Okay, have the baby but I'm working." You know? And when they told him the baby was born, he rushed over there and he went into the nursery which you could do in those days and he grabbed me. He was on his way to the Charro Café with me and they were, "No, no, no, no, no! You can't take the baby out there." But I never lived in Tucson because my dad had to come to LA to follow his career. So I grew up in East LA.

CM: You were the firstborn?

DG: Yes.

CM: So it's you and your—

DG: My brother, Mark. Mark Anthony Guerrero. He is nine years my junior and he lives out in Palm Springs. He's a very gifted musician himself.

CM: And when is your birthday?

DG: October 14. You want the year? I'm proud of it. Nineteen-forty. I'm seventy-two.

CM: And looking damn good.

DG: I'm still trying to break into showbiz. That's all it is.

CM: The dream never goes away.

DG: No, and it shouldn't. You know, I always think of my dad who was eighty-eight when he passed. He did his last concert performance in October and then he died the following March. And he would always say, "I feel like a kid, I feel like a kid." You know, I think that's a great gift to always be going, "What's next? What's next?"

You know, there was some report on TV this morning, and they did a study, and if you keep working and your brain is going, you won't get dementia or have less chance. I'm thinking, "You had to do a study to know that?" Of course you've gotta keep active and going, you know.

CM: What are some of the earliest memories of your parents?

DG: Oh, my gosh, earliest memories of my parents—

CM: Even if it's like a little glimpse—

DG: Well, really—really, the earliest, earliest is not a good one. Should I spit it out? [pause] My dad was a marvelous man and just, you know, he was very beloved in our community. Lalo Guerrero. I haven't said his name, have I? My mother was Margaret Marmion Guerrero. My dad was Lalo Guerrero. But his fatal flaw was that he was weak when it came to women. So my earliest memory: we were living on Marianna Avenue in East LA and we moved from there when my brother was born, so I had to be five, six—really little—and I remember sitting in a car parked outside of our one room apartment. He was just starting his career.

And I'm sitting in the car and it's dark. So I don't know if it's midnight. But it's dark and I could hear them fighting in there. So obviously they were having a fight and my dad was taking me and I guess he went back to finish the fight and I'm sitting in the car, but I remember very well not being upset at all, very calm and thinking—and I totally remember this thought—"Why are they going through all this? They're just gonna get back together anyway." Sure enough, the door opens, my dad takes me back inside, and that's my first memory of my parents. It's not a very good one, huh? But I already knew. So, in fact,

recently I was thinking about that. And I thought, “So this must have happened before.” Why else would I think, “They’re just gonna get together again.” Because I remember very clearly thinking that. I was very little.

CM: It’s amazing how those moments stay recorded.

DG: Yeah.

CM: Now what prompted the move from Tucson to Los Angeles?

DG: Well, my dad had to follow his career. What was he going to do in Tucson, be singing at the Charro for the rest of his life? Nothing wrong with that, but he wanted more.

CM: So what was he doing in Tucson?

DG: Always singing.

CM: But where was he singing?

DG: The Charro.

CM: He was singing exclusively at the Charro?

DG: At the Charro Café. He started singing when he was . . . He knew he could write music and lyrics came to him very easily, so he knew by the time he was a teenager. You know, he learned to play the guitar when he was about sixteen, seventeen. My grandmother taught him. His mother—his mother taught him how to play the guitar. And he formed a group with three other guys. They were called Los Carlistas. There was actually a social club in Tucson. I have a photo of it. My mother’s, like, sixteen. My dad’s, like, nineteen, and there’s all these Mexican Americans in this fancy—like a table, big. I mean, it looks like there’s fifty people there. [A] U-shaped table. And the club was called Los Carlistas, after King Carlos of Spain. Why? I have no idea why these Chicanos in Tucson decided to name themselves Los Carlistas. And they were a social club, so when he and three other fellows decided to form a quartet, they called themselves Los Carlistas. And they got really, really popular in Tucson. They even did a movie with Gene Autry, *Boots and Saddles*, and—

CM: What did your dad do in that movie?

DG: They just sang. They were serenading. Gene Autry is there, romancing some girl, and he walks in and they’re playing in the background. And then he decides to sing and he kind of motions to them, and so all four of them come and, you know, they’re singing and they go out. They’re on, you know . . . But my dad weighs about twenty-seven pounds. And they filmed here in LA. So they had to get themselves to LA. There was a lot of cowboy movies filming exteriors in Tucson.

So obviously that’s when they said, “Hey, do you wanna be in a movie? If you get to LA on your own, you can be in this movie.” So they did. Someone drove them in a Model T Ford or something. We’re talking late ’30s. But they had no money for costumes, so their manager bought muslin and he made them white *trajes*. And then he got a tire and cut out soles to make *huaraches* and used string. That was their costume for their big film debut in *Boots and Saddles*. Showbiz, you do what you gotta do.

CM: Did your dad have any stories about Gene Autry at all?

DG: Not really. He had a funny story about [actor] Bob [Robert] Mitchum because he did a couple of things in those days. And there was a movie called *His Kind of Woman* with Jane Russell and Robert Mitchum. And again, Dad is singing in a bar. They’re in wherever they are, and they’re singing in the bar—Dad is, he’s by himself. And then she sings a song—“twenty-two miles to San Berdoo”—and he’s playing and then he says, “Very good, Señorita.” And then he leaves.

So, Dad said they were filming it, and during the whole time Bob Mitchum is at the bar, you know, eyeing Jane Russell there while my dad’s singing. And soon as Dad leaves, he goes after her. But in this one take, they shout, “Cut! Cut!” And then the director says, “Bob,” he said, “you know, you should look at Jane Russell when the guy leaves. Don’t be looking at him.” And Bob Mitchum says, “What? Have you seen the ass on that guitar player?” And everybody laughed. But Jane Russell was not amused and she walked off the set. I like that story.

CM: So we learned something new about your dad’s talents.

DG: Yes, although he had a flat ass, so I don't know . . . I think it's just a joke. [*chuckles*]

CM: It's a good gag. So what year did the family move out to Los Angeles?

DG: Well, I would guess about '41, '42, because I was born in 1940 and we lived here when I was a baby. But I think at that time, they just had rented a room somewhere and Dad was singing wherever. He sang on Olvera Street. I think, La Golondrina. I'm not sure, but he sang on Olvera Street. He had a partner at that time, Lupe Fernandez, who was not a good person and he was my godfather—don't ask. He cost him the job because he was hot-tempered. They said, "You can stay, Lalo. But we don't want him." And, of course, my dad was, "Well, he's my partner, you know." So, my mother was like, "Really?"

So he had little jobs. And during the war we actually moved to San Diego, and we lived in San Diego for a few years. And that's the only job that he ever did in his life when he wasn't making a living as a performer. He actually worked in an aircraft plant. I can't believe that, because that man couldn't do *anything*. He could play a guitar, write songs, and sing. That's it. When my bicycle would get a flat, he'd take it to the gas station so they could fix it. He didn't know how to do anything. So the thought that he was working in an aircraft plant—I'm amazed we won the war.

CM: Do you know what he did at the plant?

DG: I don't know what he did at the plant. I'm hoping it was nothing too dangerous. You know what, I don't know what he did, but he was there a couple of years. But he was also always singing for—in the Admiral's Club. So he was still always singing and he'd entertain the troops, which kept him out of the war because (a), he had an infant. I was only a couple of years old and they would keep deferring him because he was more valuable for the morale of troops and stuff, so he was always singing.

And my mother loved that, because during rationing, he'd come home with a big thing of butter and steaks. Because they'd be, "Hey Lalo, take these with you." Because the country was rationing, but not in the Admiral's Club and the officer's club. So we were okay. We lived in San Diego during the war for a couple of years, but by '45 or '46, we came back to LA. And we were there forever, in East LA.

CM: Do you remember where in San Diego you guys lived?

DG: Linda Vista. I think that was what that area was called.

CM: In a little house or—

DG: No, they were like projects, what sounds like "projects." But in those days it just meant they were rows of houses. They were new at that time, you know. And I think that area was called Linda Vista. My mom was happy because two of her sisters were there.

CM: Did you guys have any family in LA?

DG: No, actually. Others came later, but no. Everybody was in Tucson, except my Mom has these two sisters, Kate, and Evelyn, who's still alive. She's the only one left to date. I lost my Mom and Dad a year apart, in '05 and '06, almost to the day. He went first. And so she had two sisters, yeah.

CM: Why move to East LA?

DG: I have no idea why, but that's where we lived. First we were on Marianna—214 South Marianna Avenue. My first school was Marianna Grammar School. I went there kindergarten, first grade, second grade, I think. Maybe third. And then we moved. That's where we were in one room. I remember there was no room for a bed even, if I was, you know, I was too big for a crib. But there was no room for a bed. So I was like three, and I was sleeping in a crib. And they slept not in a Murphy bed, but this thing pulled out like a drawer. So it was the living room, then at night you moved whatever furniture and you pulled this thing out. And it was one room, kitchen, and bath.

So then when my mom got pregnant again, by that time, my dad's career was kind of doing pretty well, and they bought a house on McDonnell Avenue, 526 South McDonnell. And that was two bedrooms, one bathroom. This was way before the era of two, and three, and four bathrooms. And, living room, kitchen, breakfast nook, a huge backyard, front yard with a lawn. And we were the first Latino family on that block. Our neighbors were the Browns. The Carters were across the street. The Thompsons, a Mormon family, right next door. There were no Latinos on that particular street.

- CM: Which brings me to—tell me a little bit about East LA in the period, because these would be post-War years, right, when you move back. Who was living there? What was it like?
- DG: There were a lot of Latinos, though not necessarily on our street. But by that time, my memory of the cultural diversity of East LA was more junior high, high school. And I had lots and lots of Armenian friends. There were a lot of Armenians in East LA, at Garfield. I went to James A. Garfield High. I don't know why, but there were a lot of Armenians, a lot of Jews, some Asians, Latinos of course, Anglos as we called them in those days—non-Latinos. We had one black girl in our graduating class of three hundred, Frances Wooten. I don't remember—I don't know if she was the only black in the entire school, but she's the only black person I remember. But it was very mixed.
- CM: Did the 710 Freeway . . . I guess that came later.
- DG: Gosh, way later.
- CM: What about the neighborhood in terms of, like, do you remember what kind of restaurants or shops, just growing up—
- DG: We were north of Whittier Boulevard. Whittier Boulevard was the main shopping drag, and that's where you had the movie theaters, you had the stores. It was a whole—no malls, you know. The Golden Gate Theater, that was the fancy one. That was fabulous. The Golden Gate is the one you wanted to go to. The Center and the Boulevard Theater, not so much. You would never go to the Boulevard. Center, you could stand if you really wanted to see the movie, but we always went to the Golden Gate. And there was one other one, I forget, that was also nice.
- CM: What movies did you like to go see?
- DG: Oh my God. Well, I remember the movies really with my friend Charles [Carlos Almaraz]. By now we're in the '50s, you know, and we loved all the sci-fi movies, you know. *War of the Worlds* and *The Body Snatchers* and *Them*, with the giant ants. I love them to this day. So we loved those. And then of course came the spectacles, when you had *The Robe* and *The Ten Commandments*. And so all the movies of the '50s are still—I guess everybody does, from when their teen years, what they were, you know. But oh yeah, we loved those. And we'd go to the Golden Gate Theater.
- CM: What made the Golden Gate so special? Was it just beautifully done or . . .
- DG: Yeah, it was gorgeous, and it had even—like Grauman's Chinese Theater used to have—this long walkway. You'd walk under a canopy, an awning, to get to the main theater. It was beautiful. It was really fancy, and now all that's left is a facade. It's all been torn down. But they at least saved the facade and it's been there for years, just standing there. I don't know what they're gonna do with it, but at least that exists.
- So our neighborhood was just a neighborhood. There were frame houses. And over the years my parents, you know, they stuccoed the house, and then they put in a new driveway, and then they eventually built apartments in the back. Our property was quite large, so they could rent them and have extra income. And, you know, put in bay windows. But it was a continual—when I got to be about fifteen, they added a bedroom so I could have my own room, you know. So they just kept fixing up that place. But they would not leave East LA. My parents used to say, “No, the minute anybody does well, they leave. And we wanna stay here.” I wasn't crazy about that, but we did.
- CM: What was the class make up of the neighborhood, in terms of social classes? Who lived there?
- DG: It was just middle class people, just middle class people. I think we seemed to be, you know . . . And believe me, my dad . . . Look, people think we had money, because you read my dad's bio: three hits in the Top Ten at the same time, and it's true. But you're talking Spanish language records in the '50s. It's probably selling five hundred records. It wasn't like Beyoncé. So we were just a nice middle-class family. But we were a very glamorous family because of . . . Whereas, you know, our neighbors, if they were lucky their summer holiday would be Catalina for a weekend. And we were flying to Mexico City in 1951. That was big.
- CM: What were the professions of the people around you?

DG: Mechanics, electricians, plumbers. They were just, you know, middle class people. It was just a nice neighborhood with a corner store. In those days, I could—“*M’hijo*, go get me a quart of milk.” I’d be ten, eleven, I’d go to the store. I wouldn’t send a ten-year-old kid to the store nowadays, you know. I don’t know. Times have changed. But in those days, you did.

CM: Did you have street vendors?

DG: I remember street vendors because for ten minutes, we moved to Montebello. I don’t remember why, but we lived in Montebello for just a couple of years. But we had rented our house and they bought another house. And I loved Montebello. But after two years, they missed East L.A and we went back. But there was the Helms Bakery man. That was the best. Oh my God, he’d do this whistle, or whatever, and you’d run out there. He’d pull these drawers and there’d be two thousand, you know, glazed donuts. It was donut heaven and bread. Oh my God, I remember the Helms man. I’m sure there was an ice cream man, but that was it.

CM: But you weren’t getting the *tamaleros* or the—

DG: *Paletas*.

CM: That came later.

DG: No, way later.

CM: The churro guy that sets up on Whittier now—

DG: No.

CM: In front of the Target.

DG: They did not exist in those days.

CM: The churro–fried banana guy. I love him. Now were there at all—I know you were really young, you know, just a whippersnapper at this point—were the memories of the *pachuco* riots [zoot suit riots] still fresh at this point?

DG: I’m sure they were, but not to me. I remember hearing stories. I remember, you know, especially in San Diego during the war, you know. There, because there you had—the sailors would just drive around and see *pachucos* and jump out, beat the shit out of them, get back in the car and leave. Police wouldn’t do anything and, you know. I remember my parents talking about it, but I don’t really have any memories of it.

CM: But you were in East LA at the time when East LA started to go from this very sort of mixed ethnic neighborhood to becoming a largely Mexican enclave.

DG: Not really. I kind of missed that because I graduated from high school in ’59—1959. And then my parents wanted me to either go to UCLA, or they even talked about the university in Mexico City because we’d been there several times over the years. But I already knew I was going to go in show business, and I thought, “I’m not gonna go to school for four years.” Why would I have them spend all that money? You don’t need a sheepskin to sing and dance in musicals, you know. I knew that. I didn’t say that to them, but I said, “Well, let me just go to two years [of] college, and then we’ll decide from there.” So I started going to East LA College, which I did. And then I graduated from there in ’61 and I moved to New York in ’62 and I stayed for twenty years. So really, that transition, I don’t know when that exactly started, but I was not aware of it happening.

CM: Yeah, it was probably while you were in New York.

DG: I think so, I think so.

CM: Did the area you lived in have a particular nickname? Or the neighborhood you were in?

DG: No, not that I’m aware of, no.

CM: Were there other areas besides the area you lived in? It was McDonnell near Whittier, was the—

DG: It was north of Whittier. And I think—was it Third Street above us? I mean were we between Whittier and Third? Maybe. I should know that, and you know why I should know that? Because a couple of years ago, you know—we now have that Gold Line subway here in LA, and I was aware that a subway stop in East LA was dedicated to Dad because the artist had sent me the sketches to approve and, you know, I corrected

some things. And I had never seen it, so I said to a friend of mine, blah, blah, blah, “Let’s go.” I said, “Let’s take the train.” So we left our car at . . . Not Grand Central Station, the depot, [Union Station]. And we took the train, And we got off and we’re looking at it and taking pictures, and it’s really very beautiful. Then I looked on, and I felt, “Oh my God.” It’s at McDonnell Avenue by sheer coincidence. What the big street is, where it stops, I don’t know what that street is.

CM: Atlantic?

DG: No, it’s not Atlantic. That I would know. I think it’s Third Street.

CM: The one before, there’s Indiana and there’s one other.

DG: There’s a church, a big church near it. And could it [be] Ford?

CM: I think so, maybe. I forget the name of that stop.

DG: But anyway, so McDonnell Avenue, coincidentally. So cutting to the chase here, we walked down and we went to my old house just to look at it and now our big bay window was covered by a hedge, I mean the whole house is covered by this hedge. So I’m talking to my friend and said, “Well, this is and the . . .” And I hear a voice from the hedge. “Can I help you?” I said, “Oh, well, I lived there,” blah, blah, blah. “You wanna come inside?” I go, “Yeah!”

So I did. I went in. This is like two years ago. So I go inside and I go to my room which—it was trippy. But funny thing is, I called my brother, and I said, “You’ll never guess where I’m standing. I’m in my old room.” He said, “I’m in East LA!”—because he lives in Palm Springs—“I’m in East LA. I’ll be right there!” So there was, you know, this teeny, teeny hallway between my parents’ bedroom. I’m like, “What were we, hobbits?” This place was small. It didn’t seem small when we lived there, but it was awful little, it seemed to me. Rooms were littler in those days.

CM: Totally, those old houses are much smaller. Were there other areas—you mentioned having a bicycle—were there other areas in the neighborhood that you would maybe go explore on your bikes? Did you go by the train tracks?

DG: Oh, no, we were not strictly—we would go to Whittier Boulevard. We go to the movies. We go to the Thrifty drugstore and take pictures in the corner photo booth thing. We’d take our bikes and go up streets and visit other friends. But no, we really basically stayed in that area.

CM: In your one man performance, *iGaytino!*, you describe a moment of seeing a sign that says, “No dogs, no Mexicans.” Could you tell me about that moment? Where in—

DG: It wasn’t a moment for me. I do say that in *iGaytino!* because I heard that from many people, including my parents. Even Paul Rodriguez had told me once when he was little and they were driving through Texas and they would see those signs. No, I never saw that. So in the show, I think I say there are signs around the Southwest that read . . . But no, I didn’t have that moment.

But Paul told me a really hurtful story where his dad—they were all piled in the car, and they stopped somewhere and they were all hungry. They wanted hamburgers and they probably, “Okay, fine, fine, fine.” His dad goes in and he walks back with nothing, and he knew that they had refused to serve him, his father. The loss of dignity, you know. The father of the house couldn’t even buy his kids hamburgers, you know. But I never experienced that.

CM: I must have misinterpreted it to think that you had seen it. Was this something you heard about as a kid, or was it just something that you came to learn about as an adult?

DG: More as an adult, as an adult. You know, people, they still think this country in terms of the racism is black and white. They really do. It’s brown, too. It’s other things as well, but I’m just talking about the Latino experience. I saw—what’s his name, a wonderful actor—Ed Begley Jr. produced a show, kind of a . . . It was on the life of César Chávez and Ruben Salazar, and about them meeting in heaven, you know, whatever. And there’s a scene there where César and his wife go to the movies and they’re not allowed to sit. And a very educated friend, at intermission he said, “Is that true? They couldn’t . . .” I go, “Yeah!” I mean people don’t really know. They think of the black experience, the black and the racism but—and clearly it’s still

going on. But racism in this country still seems to be very much a black and white issue. Anyway, I throw that out.

**CM:** Regarded as such. Going back to East LA, so tell me about the elementary school you went to. What school—

**DG:** Humphreys Elementary. Mrs. Leonard. I loved Mrs. Leonard, my teacher. I think she was fifth or sixth grade teacher. And, well, Humphreys was difficult because I was very, very skinny and I couldn't wear a belt with my jeans because it wouldn't work, so I had to wear suspenders. Great! Suspenders in East LA! So, and of course, I was not good at sports. I shouldn't say "of course," but I was not good at sports. And so it was wretched when you would go up to bat and everybody would, like, take thirty-seven feet in and they were like two feet away from me.

I don't remember grade school being so hotsy-totsy, but that's where I met my "brother," my lifelong friend Charles [Carlos Almaraz]. And the funny thing is, that as adults, one time he said to me, "I remember before we met, seeing you around the school yard." I said, "Really?" He goes, "Yes, you were always very glamorous." I'm like, "Glamorous? What possibly . . ." And I'm sure what he meant is that I was different. I was different from the other kids. I just was, just the way I dressed. It's not that I was dressed fancy, and it wasn't just the suspenders. I mean it just had to do with your persona. I was different. I still am.

**CM:** What were your favorite things to wear as a kid? Every kid has their favorite little outfits.

**DG:** I just—you know, jeans. All I remember is wanting to wear jeans. My favorite outfits came in the '50s when we had the Ivy League period. Oooh! Me like. You had your khaki pants and then you know, the little belt in the back. And then . . . Oh no, I was quite the fashion plate by the time I got to high school.

**CM:** But going back to Humphreys. So who was it—a big school? Who went to Humphreys? Was it just—

**DG:** Again, very mixed. And I just—I've been going through a lot of things because my papers and my career stuff is up at the University of California at Santa Barbara in their archival, in their library there, and I'm about to make a second donation. And I'm running across photos, and I found a little picture of me: graduation from Humphreys. And I'm looking at this photo and I see a couple of Asian kids. I see most—a lot—of Latinos and then a lot of Anglo kids. So I think it was pretty much mixed. And I think economically, we were all pretty much the same. It wasn't like there were the really poor kids. That I'm aware of, you know. But grade school, I just remember Mrs. Leonard. She was—and I do have a photo of her, too.

**CM:** So who was Mrs. Leonard and why did you like her so much?

**DG:** I don't know. I think she was very kind to me because at that point in particular—I mean I always felt different. Period. And I don't know if it's because of the gay issue and maybe on some level I already knew, but I just never felt I fit in with people. I think a lot of kids feel like that when you're growing—everybody feels like that. "Oh, it's because I have curly hair." "Oh, it's because I have a wart on my nose." You know, you just do. Well, you're looking for yourself, you don't know who the hell you are yet, so. And she in particular—I don't remember any other teachers there being mean, but she was just particularly just kind and very sweet and very loving. And I really love Mrs. Leonard.

**CM:** What did she teach?

**DG:** She was my sixth-grade teacher. I think in those days, you had, you were in your class all day. I don't remember going, "Here's your math teacher . . ." That was in junior high, high school. Grade school was your sixth-grade teacher.

**CM:** What subject areas were—I mean, what were you good at? What were you bad at? What were you like as a student?

**DG:** I was actually pretty good at math. I was always a very good student. I always got A's and some B's, always was very good. Not because I particularly studied, but, you know, I was kind of smart. I didn't get into trouble with that until algebra in high school. That killed me. And it didn't help—that bitch, Mrs. Wilson. I'm sorry if she's still alive, and she could be. She was mean enough!

This woman, I'll never forget her. She was coiffed. She was like something out of a 1940s movie. She had this beautiful silver hair and it was like coiffed with a curl thing. Bright red lipstick. Manicured nails,

bright red. I mean I can see her. She was very elegant, classy—but mean. I mean *mean*, because she literally would do this. She wouldn't scratch *herself*, that's me. She would literally, and blah, blah, blah, blah and such and such, "What do you think, Eddie?" Because I grew up Eddie Guerrero. That's my name, Edward Daniel Guerrero. Hated Eddie, I dumped it the minute I moved to New York.

And then if you gave the wrong answer, with her nail on the chalk board, "No, it's Z plus. How can you be so stupid?" That's how she would talk to us. Now that's not conducive to learning, you know what I'm saying? So, as a result—oh, and then, you do your tests. And when it was time, she'd grade the papers, the next day bring them in, and she'd have them on her desk. The highest grade on top, the worst at the bottom. And she'd call out your name and you'd have to come up, and she would announce your grade and hand you your test. Now that's just mean.

CM: Terrible.

DG: So I was just blinded. I just couldn't learn anything and my parents, God bless them, they got me a tutor. And I'm like, "Oh, it wasn't that hard." But she so terrified me that I never really caught up. By the time I got to algebra two, I think I squeaked through with a D or C minus. I had to—no real foundation, so then I got into trouble. But I always got A's and B's. I was a good student.

CM: Do you ever remember any special happenings at Humphreys that sort of impacted you, maybe a speaker coming, a performance of—

DG: No, my first series of memories of school other than Mrs. Leonard are junior high, but not grade school at all.

CM: Which junior high did you go to?

DG: It was then called Kern, Kern Junior High. It's now Griffith, Griffith Junior High.

CM: Was it a sixth through ninth, seventh, and eighth?

DG: Yes, six to nine. No, seven, eight, ninth. And then you went to Garfield, ten, eleven, twelve.

CM: And so what was that experience like? What were you like as a student there? What classes did you like? Do you remember any of your teachers, like . . .

DG: Oh, yeah, I remember all my teachers. I remember that there were substantial Latinos, although not like today. Garfield—in fact, when I was producing for Paul Rodriguez, and we were doing a television special, and we're doing it at four high schools. And one of them I picked was Garfield. When I went to scout and all that, I met the principal, a Latina. And all I could see was a sea of brown faces. It looked like Guanaajuato. I'm like, "Oh my God!" And she said, "Oh, the breakdown's 99.6 [percent] Latino." I was, like, "Holy something!"

But here's the interesting thing, because when you were a Latino in Garfield in the '50s, you were of Mexican descent. That's it. You were Mexican. Now that school is Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua. You know, lots of Central Americans, Mexicans. So it's not strictly . . . But when I was going there, it was strictly. If you were a Latino, you were of Mexican descent.

CM: So did your junior high have like a similar makeup to the elementary school?

DG: Pretty much. It was pretty mixed, yeah.

CM: All the neighborhood kids?

DG: Yeah, and it was, you know, I don't remember. There were what you'd call the bad kids. They weren't really called gangs, but I do remember because you had your 'chucos. They weren't the *pachucos* from the '40s, but they were . . . You know, they wore the khaki pants and the, like the flannel shirt buttoned to here. They have already tattooed, and they had their girlfriends who would put razor blades in their hair. So there was that element, but they never bothered with me.

CM: Did that start in junior high?

DG: No, I remember in high school. I don't remember it in junior high.

CM: Okay. And then what did the 'chucos usually do that made them the quote-unquote bad kids?

DG: Well, of course they'd cut class. They'd smoke, you know. I don't remember drugs at all. At all. I'm not saying they weren't there, but I don't remember ever hearing about it or seeing it, at all. But they must've

been around, because I remember vividly my mom, who was very dramatic—oh, she was a drama queen, that woman—and I was going to junior high or I was going to high school from junior high, but I remember her saying, “If anyone offers you marijuana . . .” And that’s how—she didn’t say [*with an American accent*] “marijuana,” she said it in Spanish. “You say no, because that leads to heroin. So you stay away from *marijuana*.”

I was like, “Holy . . . Okay!” I never saw one joint. I took my first toke in my mid-thirties because I was so terrified by it leading me down the path, you know. So, I don’t remember drugs at all. So they’d smoke. I do remember there was one area. I don’t know where it was in East LA, but certainly in our area, in, like, a ravine or whatever the hell it was. But there was gonna be a fight after school. And, “Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!” So everybody went, because some of the *’chucos*—the *cholos* and the *cholas* were gonna have a fight. But we were strictly observers.

But I never had problems with them. I don’t know why. Although I kind of came up with a theory not that long ago, because I was thinking about that because I was teased for being gay. I remember that early on, but not so much in high school. But just recently I was thinking, “Gee, Dad started to get really well-known in the ’50s, and maybe those who would do that, they knew who my dad was and they were Latinos and maybe they just respected that.” I don’t know. It was just a theory I came up with not long ago, because I started thinking, you know, they never really gave me grief. They could have, and you think that’s the first thing these big cholos would do, but I never had problems.

CM: So they were using the term *cholo* already when you were in school?

DG: Uh-huh. As I recall. To my recollection, yes, we had the *cholos* and *cholas*. Not *’chucos*.

CM: But *’chucos* was not being used?

DG: No, not that I recall.

CM: Okay. And so then, but these were sort of very—

DG: And there were no guns. There’d be chains, there’d be knives. Never a gun.

CM: Were they—did these groups of kids have names? Did they give themselves names like, you know, like a proto-gang?

DG: Probably, but I really didn’t know them. I would just see them, you know, and there weren’t that many. There weren’t that many. But I’m sure they did. I’m sure they did.

CM: Great. So three years at Kern. And then, did you do—was there a theater program at Kern?

DG: Oh, please! I was in drama class by junior high. What are you talking about? Of course I was in drama class. Mrs. Jourdane, I loved Mrs. Jourdane. She’s great. She was my drama teacher. So I was taking that. And she’s the one that really got me into show business, because I always knew that I was gonna do something. You know, I mean I grew up with it. That’s what I knew. And I don’t know, I just always knew that’s what I would do. I didn’t think I was gonna sing, necessarily. I didn’t wanna compete with Dad. I didn’t wanna be compared. I should say, not compete. So I didn’t think of that. So I guess I thought I’d be an actor you know. I don’t know.

CM: Tell me a little bit about Mrs. Jourdane.

DG: I’m about to. Well, here’s the thing. She was about two feet tall. She was this tiny little thing. Adorable. And I remember she had these high heels, always very high heels. I guess when you’re two feet tall, you’ve got to wear high heels. And you hear click, click, click, click, you know, coming down the hallway, click, click, click. She was always smiling. She was a sweet, sweet, sweet lady, Mrs. Jourdane. And one day she announced to the class that we were going on a field trip to Hollywood to see a movie musical.

We didn’t know what a movie musical was. I knew what Hollywood was. So, I’m there. And so I asked if Charles [Carlos Almaraz] could go, my best friend, because I don’t recall he was in drama class. Although in the annual, he’s in the picture, too. But you know what we used to do? We used to go and get into every picture. So when I go to the Garfield annual: we were not in the chess club, we were not in the . . . We’d go in and we’d be in all the pictures, Charles and me.

But anyway, so off we went to see *Oklahoma!* with Gordon MacRae and Shirley Jones at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood.

CM: The film?

DG: The film, first run. I mean it just came out, so we were talking 1954, maybe 1955. Something like that. [*Oklahoma!* was released in 1955—ed.]

CM: Had you been to the Egyptian at this point?

DG: No. I think this is my introduction to Hollywood. And so off we went and that—I didn't know about musicals. So, oh my God. That was it. Singing and dancing through life, what could be better? So that was it. I was hooked. So that's why a few years later, you know, Charles was like, "Well, if I'm gonna be an artist . . . " He always knew he wanted to be an artist. I was always going to be in show business, performing. So he said, "We should be in New York." And that's why we eventually moved to New York.

CM: What appealed to you about the musical theater format?

DG: They were happy. Even in scenes when stuff went crappy, you know they'd be singing and dancing in a few minutes, you know. So omigod! Omigod! Music, music! Even today I go to New York several times a year, and there's nothing like going to a Broadway house and the lights dim and the orchestra starts to tune up. Omigod! I don't see that many plays, because I miss the orchestra! I do see plays, but generally I'll go, we'll see three or four musicals, you know. That orchestra tuning up—you can't beat it. You just can't beat it. It just seemed a happy way to live one's life.

CM: What did you study in her [Mrs. Jourdane's] class? Did you put on shows? Did you—

DG: Haven't a clue. I don't remember *anything* of the class at all, not at all. I just remember her and going to see *Oklahoma!* But what we did in class? I mean we must have read scenes. I remember, you know, the only time I remember something like that was not there but we lived in Montebello for a very short time and I went to Montebello Junior High and I was in some kind of a class. Maybe it was drama? Must have been. Because I know we were supposed to do a little bit of a song.

And oddly enough—I know you'll find this really hard to believe—I was very shy, even though I was outgoing. I was shy because I felt different. I didn't feel like them. I didn't wanna draw attention to myself. You know, so it was a very scary thing for me to get up in front of someone and sing. But I remember I sang "Hernando's Hideaway" from *Pajama Game*, and I think it went pretty well, considering I was shaking, and I'm sure my voice was shaking. But I did get through it. And I remember—I wish I could remember her name. Mrs. Diehl! Mrs. Diehl at Montebello Junior High.

But the funny thing is that in that same class, I remember that one day we had to write something about our positive traits and our negative traits. Maybe it was in English class. I don't remember but we had to write out these things. So I wrote out whatever I wrote out, and when she returned it to me, she had written in the thing—I read, "Gift of God." And I thought, "Wow, I am fabulous, I'm a gift of God." Years later, I realized she'd written, "Gift of gab." [*laughs*] Which indeed is a gift, but I had read, "I am a gift of God."

CM: Like, "It's not just my mother who thinks that."

DG: That's right, good ol' Mrs. Diehl, or Diehl, however she pronounced it. Yeah, Mrs. Jourdane.

CM: So Mrs. Jourdane was at Kern, Mrs. Diehl, or Diehl, was at Monte—

DG: Yeah, it was in Montebello Junior High.

CM: And that was a brief—

DG: Yeah, I think we lived there maybe two years. I really loved it over there, and I don't know why I loved it so much there. I felt more comfortable there. I don't know why. I just felt very comfortable there.

CM: During this time, did you guys ever, like, either as a family or with your friends, maybe go to other parts of LA? Like, did you go to downtown to—

DG: We only . . . No, not that much. The only time we would leave our area was at Christmas, when we would go to Sears. The building is still there, but it's gone. It's somewhere between—

CM: The one on Olympic?

DG: Yeah, just past downtown. It's just a little past downtown, before you get into Boyle Heights and all that, I think.

CM: Yeah, it's still a Sears.

DG: Really?

CM: It's still a Sears.

DG: It was big time, because, oh my God, there were Christmas trees and decorations and it was *huge*. We were used to going into our little stores, boutique shops, you know. My mother would shop. She would get all her gowns and stuff. There was a shop called the Wonder Shop. It was very expensive. When I say expensive, you know, I guess you could buy dresses for probably twenty, thirty bucks. But she would get her cocktail dresses and stuff there. You know, a hundred, hundred twenty-five dollars, at the Wonder Shop. So it was very fancy and it was right there on Whittier Boulevard.

She had her account there for years and going through photos and stuff. My mother was beautiful. She was gorgeous. And of course with Dad, she was always dressed up, you know. In fact it was funny because I remember grade school. I guess it must have been Marianna. I do have this memory, because at PTA . . . Oh, I have another memory from grade school. You're gonna love this. The—

CM: Hold on a second. Is there—can we close that door because I'm getting the buzzing of the . . .

DG: The leaf blowers?

CM: Leaf blowers. There we go. Much better. We still get a little bit of it but—

DG: You know what—

Friend: Here's another window.

CM: Okay.

DG: Thank you.

CM: So you were gonna [tell] me a story about—

DG: Yeah, I do remember from grade school at Humphreys. Get this. Now tell me showbiz is not in my blood. There was a very popular TV show at the time—I don't know what it was—oh, *Twenty Questions*, black and white, it was. We had the first TV on our street—Zenith, beautiful blond wood thing. And so at school, we decided to do a version of that, I guess at a PTA meeting or something, and of course who was the emcee? Me.

I may be six, seven years old, and again I am nervous, wildly nervous, but I do it. But it's not like I'm, "Hey, yeah!" I'm, like, shaking. And I remember I had a little fake microphone. I don't know what they made it—and I was walking down the aisle and I would ask the questions. And then they used to give "twenty questions." They would give, like, I think silver dollars or something, so I had vanilla wafers, and that's what I would give the people. But there at six or seven—I mean I didn't volunteer, I'm quite sure. They just picked me, you know. So I've always been show business, even in grade school. And my mom, all the mothers there—because my mother also was younger than almost everyone. She was eighteen when I was born, you know.

So she was beautiful. We're talking, you know, she would have the short Italian cut made famous by Gina Lollobrigida at the time, you know, and the Capri pants. She was young and beautiful, and they were all there in their little house dresses, their little buns and stuff. She always looked, like, she just looked like a movie star among all those other moms. So that's why I said we would just—believe me, we were just a middle-class family, but there was glamour involved because of Dad being in the business, especially when you're in East LA. There weren't a lot of people—if we were living in Beverly Hills, we would've been like everybody. But, it was different.

CM: So elementary school and junior high, like, what are your parents doing?

DG: My dad singing up a storm. Everything revolved—my mother was the mother and wife of life. That's what she was about. She was a wife. She was a mother. She had no career, girlfriends, no. It was about that. And believe me, my dad was a full-time job. She literally would you know—we always had dinner. We were a structured family. You know, five o'clock was dinner, and we all sat at the dinner table and had dinner. And

then my dad would go to the club. He'd perform. She'd put us to bed, whenever that was, nine o'clock. You know, curfew. She'd go to sleep. He'd come home. She'd get up, cook him a steak. He always wanted a steak, at that hour, before going to bed.

She'd get up at two in the morning. He would work 'til two. She'd get up. She'd make him a steak, blah, blah, blah. They'd go back to sleep. She'd wake us up at six to get us ready for school, give us our lunch money, you know, make us our breakfast. Then by the time she did all that and cleaned up, my dad was getting up at ten or eleven, then she'd make the breakfast, then she'd make him . . . She was just all about—that was it. It was just the family. So that's all she did. It was keeping Dad fit and happy. And my dad, all he would do—not all—but he'd sing, he'd do this thing, he'd get paid, he'd come home.

I remember he'd always have money, and then he put it on the bureau, and that's it. And my mother paid the bills, and he didn't know anything that was going on. It's not like she was on a budget: "Well, no, Margaret, you spent . . ." No, it was just whatever we wanted, and he just didn't care. He was just keeping us fed and, you know, we got braces on our teeth. We got all the stuff, you know. They built me my room. But we were just a middle-class family, but they were really all about . . . Because they'd had nothing. They'd grown up really poor. They were never hungry, but they didn't have stuff to buy clothes at all. So we got the Easter baskets. We had the birthday parties. We had the Christmas tree. We had all the stuff, even though we were just an average middle-class family.

**CM:** Your father during this time, was he gigging independently? Like you were in elementary school, junior high.

**DG:** He used to play always at the Paramount Ballroom. That was a big ballroom. It's still there.

**CM:** Where is it?

**DG:** On Cesar Chavez, I think. It's still there. I went there maybe two years ago. There was some sort of an event there. I'd never been there. And he was there for years, but he would only perform Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday *tardeada*. So all week he was home. He'd be writing music, writing lyrics, whatever, you know. So it was not your daddy going to work at nine and coming home at five life, at all. So my mom really was juggling everything all the time.

**CM:** So it might be the sort of scenario where you come home from school and your dad's playing guitar, working out some lyrics. Your mom's—

**DG:** Right, cooking or cleaning. Our house was always immaculate.

**CM:** Cool. But during this time, did your family go to church at all?

**DG:** No, thank God. We did all of the stuff—meaning we were baptized, first communion, confirmation, all that stuff. But no, we never went to church.

**CM:** Were you ever an altar boy?

**DG:** Oh God, no. I'm grateful for that because as a gay man, believe me, most of the gay boys I know—men who have real issues were brought up very strict Catholics. And I don't mind saying that on camera.

**CM:** I think being raised very strict Catholic for anybody's kind of—

**DG:** Gay or straight. I think you're right. I think you're right.

**CM:** During this time—

**DG:** That's what's so funny—if I can interrupt here. Because my dad passed, I had two big memorial masses for him, one in Palm Springs where he'd lived for thirty-five years and then one in his hometown of Tucson at the cathedral where he was baptized, where he and my mom got married. And that's where I had the memorial mass. And there were two bishops, two or three monsignors. I had Linda Ronstadt singing "Barco de Oro." I mean, I put on a show. It was a show. But we'd have all these monsignors and bishops in the back—and he hadn't been to church, probably since he married my mom. You know, but whatever.

**CM:** In terms of, in this period, were you—how aware were you of your own ethnicity and how that ethnicity might be regarded by the larger society?

**DG:** Always, as far back as I can remember. Because I mean, God knows there's discrimination today, but then it was really terrible, you know. Though I would get those secondhand because when I was little, especially,

I really didn't look Mexican at all, because my mom is half Irish, half Mexican. She's very light-skinned. My dad is *moreno*, but not *moreno*. But he was olive—dark olive skin. I had light brown hair and brown eyes and I was not dark, so many times, kids would say to me, "Oh, those Mexicans." And I'd have to go, "I'm Mexican." So I would get a ricochet very often.

But the Thompsons next door, one of the brothers used to yell over the fence, "Dirty Mexican." And meanwhile our yard was spotless, the driveway swept and the lawn mowed, and they had tires in the background. They keep geese and I'm like, "Something's wrong with this picture," you know. So I was always aware of that. And that's why I had trouble even though I . . . It's a dichotomy, because I had trouble really embracing being Chicano, because it seemed to be something that was not good.

More than that, it seemed to be something, to me, that was gonna limit me. It was gonna hold me back in that environment. And oddly enough, that's why I think one of the reasons I liked Montebello, you'd think it would've been more because I don't remember how many Latinos were there, to tell you the truth. I do have the yearbook from there. I should look through it. I don't remember Latinos. I remember it to be much less Latino, but I felt more comfortable with them. You would think just the opposite, right? That I'd even feel more Mexican there. But I didn't. I felt like them, I didn't feel like I was like most of the Mexican kids. I didn't feel like them. I don't know why.

CM: What language did you guys speak at home?

DG: Only English. Only English. And that's because—I would hear Spanish, of course, my dad would be on the phone, you know. Company would come, and they'd speak Spanish. But no, only English. And that's because my dad—I produced a documentary on him, and the reason I called it *Lalo Guerrero: The Original Chicano*, because he was of that first generation that dealt with this duality, you know. He was born in Tucson and in his barrio—and remember this was a time when "barrio" simply meant neighborhood. Nowadays, *barrio*: gangs, murder. *Barrio* was just neighborhood, and in that neighborhood in Tucson—as was the case in San Diego, San Antonio, Fresno, everywhere—in the area where the *raza* lived, it was Mexico.

The signs were in Spanish. Everybody spoke Spanish. They were in Mexico and until they went to school. That's when they found out they were in the US. And in Tucson, there was railroad tracks and all the *raza* lived on this side, and all the non-Latinos—

CM: To which side of the railroad tracks did the—

DG: I have no idea, but I know it was separated. And it cracks me up, because in the documentary I asked Dad about all that, about discrimination at that time, and he says that he didn't realize it because they never mingled with them. So he says, "As a matter of fact, I thought we were the majority and they were the minority." He had no idea.

But what happens when these kids would go to school and they would speak Spanish in school, which is all he spoke, they would get punished. They would put soap in their mouth, they'd stand in the corner. So when that person grows up, he does not teach his kids Spanish. He wants them to assimilate. He doesn't want them to suffer and so that's—it's different now. But in that time, that's why so many Latinos of a certain age, *mexicanos*, don't speak Spanish. People are, like, "How could he not speak Spanish?" That's why. And this was true of the Italians when they first came to New York. Poles. Everybody. They wanted their kids to be Americans. They wanted to be US. So we were not taught it at all. I picked it up as an adult.

CM: So it was really that environment of, you acculturate. To be successful is to acculturate.

DG: That's right.

CM: Charles, your friend Charles ended up becoming the very well-known painter Carlos Almaraz. So let's start with, how did you two meet? Do you remember how you met?

DG: Vividly. Ishmael Ramos. In fact, we used to laugh, because as adults, we would go, "Whatever happened to Ishmael Ramos? Whatever happened to Ishmael?" Because he and Charles—same thing. Carlos was actually born in Mexico City, brought here as a child, but went by "Charles" for the same reason. Wanted to assimilate. And so he was "Charles" growing up, and it wasn't until he started his activism years during

César Chávez and all that, that he went back to “Carlos.” So for our purposes, in this chunk of time, he’s “Charles,” because that’s who he was. And I was “Eddie.” So Charles was a friend of Ishmael’s.

CM: And who’s Ishmael?

DG: A kid at school, at Humphreys. And I’m friends with Ishmael, and he decides Charles and I would probably really get along, so he wants to introduce us. So he does, and I’m guessing it was on a schoolyard. It might’ve been on the street. I remember a chain link fence. Do you think they had chain link . . . Yes, we had a chain linked fence at home, so yeah, I remember a fence. And Ishmael Ramos introduces us. That was the end of Ishmael Ramos. We never hung with him again! Charles and I were like, that was it. There was no room for Ishmael Ramos in our lives, poor guy. So yeah, as adults we go . . . Yeah, and we were serious. I wonder whatever happened to Ishmael Ramos? He’s got to be out there somewhere. I hope he had a happy life, you know, because we dumped him like a hot patootie the minute that we met.

CM: This was at Humphreys.

DG: Yes.

CM: Did he go to Humphreys, too?

DG: Yes.

CM: So what do you think made you connect in that way? First of all, what did he look like during this period? Your meeting him for the first time, describe him to me as if you’re describing somebody over the telephone, they can’t see him.

DG: Well, the thing that was the most prominent thing about him is that he was quite *moreno*. Black, black hair—*moreno*—and he had teeth like, you know, Lena Horne, because he’d smile and he was, like, “Whoa!” These teeth were so white and so straight. And at that time—this was before I got my braces—my dad used to say, “You look like you’re eating popcorn,” because these were in the back and these were in front. You know, they had to file this. Also my—by the way. So, thank you, Mom and Dad, for getting me braces.

But he had these gorgeous straight teeth. So he just had this great smile, and we just connected instantly. I’ve had that happen only a couple of other times in my life. My friend of thirty-five years, Mark Sendroff in New York. Big entertainment attorney now, but he had just graduated from law school when I was just starting as an agent when we met. We got introduced by a mutual client, and mid-sentence we picked up, and that was it. From that day, we were best friends. Instant. That’s how it was with Charles.

CM: What was he like? What was he into? What did he like to play at? What did you guys do?

DG: Mostly we laughed. We had the same sense of humor, which is a big, big connection.

CM: And what is that sense of humor?

DG: Hilarious. Clever, funny, fabulous . . . What am I gonna say?

CM: No, did you make fun of other people or did you do—

DG: Oh, probably. But in a clever way. We—how was that sense of humor? I don’t know. How could I, I don’t know. I just know we were always laughing. We’d always be laughing. We both had that same feeling that, “What are we doing here in East LA? There’s something wrong with this picture.” We just, you know . . . And I’ve been thinking about that a lot recently, because I talk about it that way in my show and I’m thinking I don’t wanna give East LA a bad rap. I think we probably would have felt that way almost anywhere.

It wasn’t so much that we didn’t like East LA, but we knew there was a whole world out there and we could not wait to get out there. And this was a drag. Oh God. Grade school, then junior high, then Garfield. “God, is it never gonna end?” You know, “When do we get to go out and do our lives?” So he had that same feeling as me. He knew he was an adventurer, as I am an adventurer, you know. And so that connected us. He was very smart.

CM: Was he a good student?

DG: Oh, yes, he was a good student, and he was already drawing. He was already drawing. Just like I was already an emcee at age seven, he was already drawing.

CM: What kind of stuff did he draw?

DG: He used to—his idol was Walt Disney, so he loved drawing. *Bambi*, I remember and *Fantasia*. Omigod, he loved the characters, these dandelion things. He used to draw that. What he would do, he would, I guess, use watercolors. No, it couldn't have been. I don't know what the hell they were but whatever paint it was, he would draw Bambi on a—he'd get a frame with a glass and he would paint on the glass and then flip the glass over so that the actual painting was in the back and so you could, it gave it kind of a 3D thing because it was flipped the other way. But he would paint on glass and then flip it over and then put it in the frame. I remember—in fact, the exhibition that I put together at the Vincent Price Art Museum, in East LA [College] campus, had one of his little Bambi drawings there. [*Carlos Almaraz: A Life Recalled*, August 25–December 8, 2012—ed.] So he loved to draw Disney characters. And because of Dad, he actually met Walt Disney once. That was *the* greatest moment of his life.

CM: How did that come about?

DG: My dad was writing—my dad wrote a parody of *Davy Crockett* in the mid-'50s, and it was called *Pancho Lopez*. [*singing*]

Born in Chihuahua in 1903  
 On a serape out under a tree  
 He was so fat he could almost not see  
 He could eat twelve tacos when he was only three  
 Pancho, Pancho Lopez, King of Olvera Street.

Whatever. So he wrote this song on a whim. He actually wrote it in Spanish. Because he started recording in Spanish in the late '30s in this country—recording in Spanish in the late '30s. So by the '50s, he was already well known. By the '50s, people would go to his dances, he was touring. So he was already a big name in our community.

And so he wrote this song in Spanish and somebody he knew who, I don't know, a record producer, English-language guy. Just hearing “Pancho, Pancho Lopez” instead of “Davy, Davy Crockett,” he said, “Omigod, could you write that in English?” My dad said, “I guess.” So he wrote “Pancho Lopez.” They recorded it and thought, “What the hell, it'll sell a few records.” *Time Magazine*! It was a sensation.

So, of course. *Ring!* “Hello?” “This is Walt Disney.” Because he hadn't gotten permission. Ah, what the hell, it's a little parody, a little thing, you know. So this is how the business has changed. He actually met with Walt Disney. No attorneys, no finance department, no . . . It was Walt frigging Disney. So he goes up, my dad, to meet with Walt Disney.

“Well, Lalo, that's a very clever song you wrote.”

“Thank you, Mr. Disney.”

“Well, but you know, you didn't get permission to use the music.”

“That's right, Mr. Disney.”

“Well, I think it'd be fair if we just did fifty-fifty, don't you?”

“Yes, Mr. Disney.”

They shook hands and that was done. So then he hired Dad to write some of the stuff and do some stuff. So on one of those times, my dad took Charles and me to Walt Disney Studios. And I met—the *Mickey Mouse Club* was on the TV at that time—and I met Jimmy Dodd. He autographed sheet music for me, the *Mickey Mouse Club* sheet music. And then who was the heavy guy? It was Jimmy Dodd and, um . . . Roy. And Roy drew a Mickey Mouse and said, “To Eddie, Love, Roy.” And I got those, and I guess maybe they did it for Charles, too. They must have. They wouldn't have just done it for me.

And so now we're leaving, and we're ready to get on the elevator. The elevator opens and who's standing there: Walt Disney. And my dad . . . [Walt] goes, “Oh, hi Lalo.”

“Oh, hi Walt.” Shake hands. And Carlos was like, “Charles . . .” [*choking sound*]

“Oh, this is my son Eddie.”

“Hello, hello.”

“And this my . . .” [*choking sound*]

So Charles meets him. It was the greatest moment of his life.

Now fast forward three hundred years, and I'm producing a big television special for Disney International, *Navidad en las Americas*. All bilingual Christmas music. Ricky Martin, Chayanne, Celia, Tito Puente. Huge. We're filming it in front of the castle of Disneyland, blah, blah, blah. And I'm up at Disney offices and I have a meeting and I'm gonna leave. And I go over and I'm waiting for the elevator and the elevator door opens and there's Michael Eisner, who was then the *king* of Walt Disney. Alone—he's standing there, so I get on the elevator. And I stand next to him, and I say, "You know, the same thing happened to me once, except when the door opened it was Walt Disney." He looked at me—and I've seen this before; I've seen it on Linda Ronstadt's face once—where Michael Eisner, president, was a little boy. Because he worshipped Walt Disney. So that's why when he headed the studio, it was his dream come true. He was a little boy. "What?!" And then I told him the story.

But I've seen that before, where the person . . . Linda was doing a TV show and we had Dad as a surprise guest. And Linda my dad knew when she was a baby. He used to serenade her. Her father and my dad were good friends. And she was doing her *Canciones [de Mi Padre]*. And I was producing this talk show for Paul [Rodriguez] and she was Linda Ronstadt. I mean she's a very down lady. I don't mean that she was giving airs at all, because that's not who she is. But she's Linda Ronstadt. We go, "Oh my God, it's Linda Ronstadt." She was still professional, chatting away, and we said, "We have a surprise." And Dad came out, and she became a little girl. I swear, she went to my dad, and I watched and I go, "Wow!" I've only seen that a couple of times, where the other persona just goes away and then the eyes, they're that child again, you know. It's kind of cool.

CM: Was the Disney thing something Charles would talk about—

DG: Oh, yes, oh sure. I bet you a buck it's in his oral history, because it was a big thing that he met Walt Disney.

CM: And then did you guys go to each other's houses a lot? Did you meet on the street?

DG: Oh, yes. He lived on McDonnell Avenue, too. We were on the same street and I was—it was a bit of a hill. I don't mean *hill* hill, but slight. And I was down here closer to Whittier Boulevard and he was up there, and there was a little grocery store, frame thing, and it was painted yellow. So we used to call it the Yellow Boards. Makes sense. "I'll meet you at the Yellow Boards."

"No, no, no." Because he'd always want me to go up there.

I'd say, "No, you come down here."

"Well okay, I'll go to you, but meet me halfway at the Yellow Boards."

"Okay."

And so we meet there. So, oh yeah, we were at each other's houses all the time.

CM: Then what sorts of things would you do when you played together?

DG: I don't know what we'd do. Mostly talk, I think. We didn't—it's not like we played games. I think mostly we would talk and maybe listen to music. I mean we weren't playing catch or stuff like that.

CM: But were you drawing or . . .

DG You know what we'd do? We—what am I talking about? I'm thinking younger, but by the time we were early teens, we were putting on shows in my house.

CM: What kind of shows were you—

DG: Big shows, extravaganzas. We did—in fact, about five years ago, Renee Santellanes, who I was very, very close to. I remembered her from Garfield, never saw her after that. She came back in my life because she showed up backstage when I did *jGaytino!* here in LA and so we connected again. And we now get together every three or four months. We'll have dinner or something, and she's great. And she, it turns out—we went to Humphreys, Kern, Garfield, and East LA College.

And I go, "I only remember you from high school."

"You asshole, we went all the way from . . ."

"Really?"

"You used to make me sell candy at those shows you and Charles used to do."

“Really? I have no memory of you whatsoever.”

It doesn’t make poor Renee happy.

But we’d put on big shows and what we’d do . . . I remember one was a Western show—I remember two of them in particular. One of them was a jungle theme, and one was Western. And we were in a bar, in a Western bar, and he came up with this idea. He’d seen it somewhere. We kind of made a hole in the bottom of a Coke can, and then you tie a stick with a string, and then you’d stick the stick into the hole, which then of course would lock it in. Then you put the string into a cardboard box and tie it with a big knot at the other end. And so, in the bar scene, you have these little tables with these cans—and in the fight, you’d go like this to the audience. And woo, the cans would come out, but of course the string would stop it—most of the time. Whack! We were having kids injured and everything sometimes, but we put on that show. And we had a jungle show.

CM: What would your sets be made out of? Like, you have these, was it just furniture around the house?

DG: Yeah, cardboard stuff. And we—I had this huge backyard, and I had a big double garage and that’s where the Western thing was. But we had a big patio that was completely covered in vines with a barbecue pit and all this stuff. And so the jungle one, of course, we did in the patio, because that was more correct for the set.

And we had an investor, Tony Vasilevich. Tony lived around the corner and he would—I don’t use his name in the show [*iGaytino!*] because he might still be around, but here, what the hell. Because his mother was an alcoholic. So, she would pass out and he’d take money out her purse and then we’d put on our shows. So, of course, we had to give him a part in the show, which I wasn’t happy about because he was not a good actor. But I let him be the chief, and he had this crepe paper skirt that was supposed to be banana leaves. Meanwhile, he was, white. White. He was Polish, you know. He had this white-blond hair. He was the native, you know, a chief and he had all these—and we said this is the most important role because he’s the chief. And at the end of the thing, after Carlos and I, of course, had done twenty-nine scenes, you go, “Boogalah!” And that was his big line. He was not happy. I believed that’s when he stopped investing in our shows, after the “boogalah” experience.

We’d put on shows, we’d listen to music, and I think we would just talk about what we were gonna do one day. When he was gonna be a famous artist, and I was gonna be in show business. We were always dreaming.

CM: Do you remember what kind of music you listened to?

DG: You know what, because in my home you only heard Lalo Guerrero. That’s all that was ever in the record player was my dad’s music. Although he loved Agustín Lara. Agustín Lara was his all-time idol. His [Almaraz’s] father, who was a very interesting fellow—his whole family was interesting—was a big music fiend. So he’s the one that first would have us listen to LPs of Celia Cruz, Peggy Lee, jazz. So he introduced us to a lot of that kind of music. I was already, by fourteen, only buying Broadway musical albums. That’s all I would listen to. So from my brother’s room, he was playing Mickey Mouse. I had musical Broadway in my room. My dad’s music, mariachi was playing in the living room. So it was all a mixture, you know.

But we [Carlos and I] were inseparable, and we lived a block apart. When we weren’t together, we were on the phone. We’d talk on the phone for an hour, and my mother would say, “You just saw him yesterday.”

“Well, yeah, but, you know . . .”

So we were just, I don’t know, mostly talking about what we were gonna do when we went out into the world.

CM: At this early stage, had the issue of your or possibly his sexuality ever come up at any point?

DG: Say that again?

CM: At this point, when you’re, like, in junior high, super early teens, had the issue of your sexuality come up between you two in terms of discussion or—

DG: No. It came up later. It came up quite a bit later. I already knew, but it came up much later, I would say. Because I remember telling him, and he was doing some work and I was his assistant for the Pomona fair, and he was painting posters or something like that. So I'm thinking, you know, it was well into high school, you know, well into high school. It might've even been first year of college, you know. So I could've been seventeen, eighteen. But that's when I first told him and he, I'm sure, was not shocked. His sexuality came out much later but, well, yes and no.

CM: Okay. But this was not something you would've discussed at this stage.

DG: Not at that early stage, no.

CM: Okay, yeah, just trying to get a sense of—

DG: Yeah, no, it was much later, much later.

CM: So these costumes that you would make for these—

DG: Crepe paper, the finest crepe paper.

CM: Where would you buy the crepe paper?

DG: At the Woolworth's, you know. At the dime store, you know. It was very big, you know. I was born October 14, so my birthday parties were always Halloween themed, and my mom would get a big sheet cake with the witches and the goblins and, you know, we'd have orange and black crepe paper. Everybody used crepe paper in those days. Very big.

CM: Were your two families friends as well or . . .

DG: No. They were so different. They were—we kind of adopted Charles, meaning if we were going away for a weekend, we'd take—Charles would come with us. And he had a brother Ricky, who was my brother's age. It was Charles, his brother Rudy, and Ricky. Ricky and Mark were the same age, and then Carlos and I were a year apart. He was a year younger and he was born October 5, '41. And then Rudy was just kind of there in the middle.

So we would often take Charles. And we'd invite Rudy but most of the time he wouldn't go. It was Ricky could play with my brother and then Charles and I would go off to Crystal Lake for the day. And so he was kind of . . . And he always—he loved our family structure because we go off on vacations, lots of family trips. My parents never went anywhere that we didn't go. My dad was traveling for work, then he would go and then sometimes we'd hook up with him. I remember one time he was—he did his tour with his band, and then they drove everything back and he stayed in Santa Fe, and my mom and brother and I took the train to Santa Fe.

This was the day of trains when there was, you know, linen on the tables in the dining car, and we had a room. You know, it was . . . Oh! I love trains. It was really, it was great. So then we flew to Mexico City. It was the first time, I was eleven [in] 1951 and my brother was an infant still. He was, like, two. And then we went again in '57 and '58, but those times we drove. My dad used to get a brand new Pontiac station wagon every year, and he would do that because he would take two tours a year. Five, six weeks with his band.

So they were like five or six of them. So they'd all pile into the station wagon and then there'd be a roof thing and then they would pull a small trailer with all the instruments and all the luggage and off they go, all through Central California. I mean they go all the way up to you know, Wyoming, Montana, coming through New Mexico and you know, live music. It was not like today. And, of course, he did it to keep his record sales going. And so when he comes to town, it was like, "Oh my God." The guy they buy the records from actually coming to, you know, Podunk, Montana. You know, there were still Latinos. They were everywhere even at that time.

So we'd always go to Tucson a couple of times a year to see family, both my dad's and my mom's. And Catalina, Yosemite. Always family trips. Family trips, always every souvenir shop they'd stop because I wanted this, I wanted that. I wasn't spoiled, honestly. It sounds like I was. I don't feel like I was spoiled. They just, they enjoyed doing things for their kids, you know.

CM: And Charles would accompany you guys on some of these?

DG: Some of them, not the big ones. But we'd go to Vegas. Oh my God. When it was Sinatra and Peggy Lee, and you know. It was, oh yeah, that was fabulous. We'd go to Vegas.

CM: What was Charles's family like?

DG: They were disconnected, but they were fabulous. There was the father, who I'll save at the end because that's a little longer, I think. The three kids I told you about. And then his mother, who was Mexican-born, and, as I recall hearing, the father who was born in this country—I'm almost positive—he went to Mexico to find a wife because he wanted a Mexican wife. And she was that kind of docile, you know. She spoke not a word of English. She was teeny tiny. Her name was Rose. Sweet lovely lady. I loved her. And her mother lived with them. So it was the parents, the three kids, and the *abuela*. I wish I could remember her name. I don't remember her name.

CM: The *abuela's* name?

DG: Yeah but she was your quintessential Mexican *abuela*. She had the *trensa* down the back, you know, the *rebozo*. She was working every minute of the day. She was either in the kitchen or she was sweeping the driveway or the two of them. That was all, because where we had dinner every day at five, they just—because his father worked at Bethlehem Steel and he had the night shift. So you know, he'd be gone when it was dinnertime and, you know, Charles was doing this and that. So there was kind of always food on the stove. And so whenever you came in, when you're hungry, you'd eat something so there wasn't the dinner hour. It wasn't that kind of structured family.

They were a close family, but the mother was extremely shy—very, very shy—so she'd always speak very quietly. She'd hardly ever talk to us. But she was lovely. She was really a sweet, sweet lady. I loved Rose, but she was—you didn't really have a conversation with her. And I think they were a little dazzled by Charles, you know, because Charles was always a star. He ran that family. He was the star.

CM: How so?

DG: Everything was what Charles said. Or if Charles said that, then it must be true. And he had that same effect on me. I mean, if I'd say, "Oh no, I just planted this bush but I think it's gonna die."

"No, it's gonna live."

"Oh, thank God."

I mean, I believed him. He had that air of authority about him and they knew he was smart. You could see he was gifted in his art. So he was the star.

CM: Did they support his creative aspect, or was there pressure for him to do something more practical?

DG: No, not that I'm aware of. Because, you see his father, that's why his father was this strange creature. We could never quite—and we talked about it mostly as adults, even as teenagers we did. Because you would have been willing to bet money he was gay, and yet he worked at Bethlehem Steel. I mean with the big work boots and the lunch pail and we were, like, "This does not jive." He was a music lover. That doesn't make you gay. He was somewhat feminine and, you know, we just always—we thought either he had a secret life or he was just so repressed, which I would guess was the case, I think, at that era, and being very *mexicano*. I don't know anything about his [Charles's father] family, or I don't know that much about his family. But we could never get that, this man who loved jazz and Celia Cruz and this man who was quite light in the loafers and worked at Bethlehem Steel. And, you know, and then he married this very docile wife. That's why he went to Mexico. He wanted it. We never were able to quite—

CM: There was something that wasn't clicking there for you.

DG: Yeah, we never figured it out.

CM: But you got along with all of them.

DG: Oh yeah, and he liked us. I mean yeah, I mean oh yeah. Oh yeah. No, no, they knew Carlos and I were like brothers. They did. They were thrilled that, you know, that my parents loved Carlos so much, you know. We'd take him on trips, and we'd go out to dinner and stuff like that, and they were happy with that connection, I think.

CM: What do you think Charles found in your family that he didn't get from his?

- DG: I think that structure, you know. Even though Dad in show business is not exactly structure, but you know, we . . . I don't know. I think we were a very tight family. It was all about, from my mother, she was a wife and mother, end of story. Then for the two of them [my parents], everything was for the kids, getting them braces, getting them college education. "He's fifteen now, he should have his own room," you know. It was always for us, you know. And I'm not saying Charles's family wasn't like that, but I think all those things . . . And I think you know—again, I keep using this word—but we were a very glamorous family. Who was flying off to Mexico City in 1951? There was something very exotic about us, and I think that was very attractive.
- CM: And perhaps inspiring. I mean your father was a major cultural—like he produced culture for his work.
- DG: True. And I wish, there's not even a single photo, but after my dad had sung for years at the Paramount Ballroom, he said, "Enough with this," and he bought his own nightclub with the money from "Pancho Lopez." He bought Lalo's, and Carlos painted a mural in the club of all of Dad's characters. So there was Pancho Lopez, Las Ardillitas, Un Marciano en la Tierra—he wrote a song about the little Martian. What else? There were five or six of these cartoons, and Carlos painted them. Dad paid him, of course. And there was this one wall that kind of went like this, and it was on that wall in this corner but it was a flat wall. And I can still see it. And I'm thinking, "Oh my God, there's not—there's not a single photograph." I've never seen one, and I . . . Gosh, I know our archives pretty well. But I'm amazed there's not a photograph out there at all.
- CM: So that was one of Charles' earliest commissions.
- DG: Yes! And that's what I'm saying to myself. His first commission, his first mural was not for César Chávez, excuse me. It was for Lalo's nightclub. How cool is that?
- CM: Pretty cool.
- DG: And Carlos was born in Mexico City, I told you. My mother is the one that sponsored him to become an American citizen. So we were like—he was a member of our family.
- CM: Well, so leaving Charles a little bit and going back a little bit to junior high and the trip to see *Oklahoma!* So you see *Oklahoma!* for the first time. Up until that point, what had been your exposure to theater or performance or live?
- DG: Well, mostly of course, seeing my dad. But also, you know, I was in drama class. So I don't remember doing shows there. But looking at the Kern yearbook, which is in my next donation there, I'm on stage and a lot of things, wearing costumes. Not plays, mostly like variety type shows. In fact, there's one, because of course I was humiliated, because when you're in junior high, you wanna get away from your parents. If they say, "Let's go to the movies."  
 "Oh my God, what if somebody sees me with my parents? How tacky!"  
 You know? There's my dad performing in my auditorium—junior high, high school. Mortified. Oh my God, I just—plus he was not a morning person. And they'd always want him to sing at the ten a.m. assembly. "Oh God, his voice is not gonna be good because he gets in late from . . ." Oh, no, no, it was not pleasant. But there's more than one photo in Kern, and there's one where I'm in some sort of strange concert. It looks like it was fiesta time. Maybe it was a Cinco de Mayo show, I don't know. And Dad's in the center and I'm there. There's a whole bunch of, all of us in costumes. So, you know, I was doing shows always, always. It's just that the musicals in terms of a story and the character singing . . . These were like variety shows, you know. I did, you know, parts, and by high school I was doing the shows and all that kind of crap, you know.
- CM: By then it wasn't, like, beyond your father's performances or proudest, perhaps, other Mexican musical performances. It's not like as a family you were going to the theater to see dramas or . . .
- DG: No, no, no. Our life was Lalo Guerrero, you know what I mean? As I'm saying, he was a full-time job. Between his touring and you know, getting new musicians, and then the club, then . . . It was so . . . No. We never went out to theater. We never went to the ballet. No, nothing. It was Lalo Guerrero, beginning

and end. [chuckles] Until I saw *Oklahoma!* and that's when I started buying all the Broadway musical albums. *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, *Bells Are Ringing*. Songs of that era, shows of that era.

CM: So going back to *Oklahoma!* In *iGaytino!* you talked about an incident on the bus after—

DG: Yes, that's the only fudge in my entire show. It's a true story, but it did not happen coming back from *Oklahoma!*

CM: Okay. So explain to me a little bit about—

DG: Well, there are two things, if you wanna go—if you wanna go there, missy!

CM: I'm going to go there.

DG: Okay, there's two stories that I think . . . One is the bus, because that did happen, but for theatrical purposes, I moved it to our coming back from seeing *Oklahoma!* It really happened on a field trip going to Fern Dell, which is this part of Griffith Park, and it's this area that now in fact is all in disrepair. At that time it was paths with fountains, you know. A little waterfall, huge ferns, tropical ferns. It was beautiful. And we went on a trip there, and that bus incident happened there.

CM: Could you tell me what that bus incident was?

DG: It had happened before at school, but not on a bus, which made it worse because it was, like, trapped. We got on a bus and somebody yelled out, you know, "Maricón!" Or something like that. And I'm, you know, standing there in a bus. You know, there's like nowhere to go. All the kids—we were like the last ones getting on, so all the kids are there. So you know everybody heard it. Everybody's looking at you. You really are desperate to be invisible and you know. But because I had practice already, I just pretended I didn't hear, which was what I'd done before. I didn't hear, and I just walked down straight on the thing. And I didn't address that person, and I sat down, and Charles sat next to me. But one that stands out a lot, and it was in a school cafeteria. And I don't know—

CM: And this is at Humphreys or Kern?

DG: Certainly not Humphreys. I'm saying I'm not sure if it was Garfield or if it was Kern. I'm thinking it was Garfield. I feel a little older. It may have been early Garfield, like the tenth grade, and it was in the school cafeteria. And somebody yells something as I had my tray, just leaving the line. And somebody yells something out, and I was standing at a place where I could've easily gone along the side, you know what I'm saying? Here's all the cafeteria. Everybody's seated here. I could've just gone along the side so as not to be—and I made a decision, a conscious decision, that I was not gonna be lurking in the shadows, and I walked right down the center, everybody left and right of me, even though everyone had heard it. Because I thought, "No, I can't be hiding." And I walked right down the middle like I hadn't heard it. But I did walk right down the middle of that cafeteria. So yeah, some incidents like that happened.

CM: Did that happen with regularity or just a couple of times?

DG: A few times, not . . . They were difficult, because I already really felt that I was . . . And not just the gay thing, it was also the Mexican thing. And the gay thing and the—you know, even if my dad was famous. You know, in our world he was famous. That sets you apart, and at that age you don't wanna stand out. I think most kids don't. I think Barbara Streisand probably did, but most don't. And you know, you don't want to. So everything [about] me [was] different. My dad was singing in the school assemblies, you know. People who had, "Oh, my parents went to your dad's club." "Oh yeah, okay." You know it was just . . .

So, then somebody's yelling things like that, too. It just made it worse, you know. Although I'm telling you, people's memories are what they are. Because Renee Santellanes, who came into my life recently, and Don Busche, who was also—there were four or five of us at Garfield. We went to the beach, we did everything. We did all the Annette and Frankie Avalon things, you know. The barbecues in my backyard. We were like the picture kids. You look at the scrapbooks, you're going, "Whoa, fabulous." He's also come back into my life recently because of my show, and so we've gotten together a few times. And both of them say the same thing "Oh, we were the 'it' group." And I'm like, "What are you, kidding me? We were the losers. What are you talking about?"

To me the “it” kids were the football player team captain and Norma Williamson, the blond cheerleader. Those were the “in” kids. We were like the—you know, we were no “it” group. But to them, we were the best dressed. I will say we were the best dressed. [*chuckles*] “Everybody wanted to be us.” I’m like, “What are you—you’re kidding me!” I couldn’t believe my ears. I don’t think that at all. But that’s not to say that to some groups, we might have been. I’m saying we’re off to the beach in what’s-his-name’s broken down convertible, but it’s a convertible. Don’s convertible. You know, we were doing barbecues in my house, birthday parties. So to some people, maybe we were. But I certainly didn’t feel that we were. We were just kind of the geeks, what you’d call them today. I thought that was very funny. I cracked up. We were the “it” crowd. No, I can’t buy that.

CM: You never know.

DG: I guess.

CM: You never know if you were the “in” crowd to somebody.

DG: Yes, Ishmael Ramos.

CM: Ishmael Ramos. Poor Ishmael, this is dedicated to Ishmael.

DG: Yes!

CM: So what sense of your own sexuality did you have at this point, that the—

DG: Well, I always knew I was gay, if that’s that you mean. Is that what you’re meaning?

CM: Yeah. Because, and again, I don’t know if this is something you dramatize. In *iGaytino!* you talked about that moment where you look in the mirror.

DG: Oh, no, that’s true. Every single thing in *iGaytino!* is absolutely true. The only fudge is that one bus thing. No, absolutely. I looked in the mirror, I’m like, “Omigod.” It did make it real because even though I always knew, I hadn’t discussed it with me. You know what I mean? I just knew I was different. I knew I was attracted to boys, and by that time I’d certainly had experiences, such as they were for that time. Some of the boys I would suspect were going through their experimental time. I wouldn’t say they all were gay. Some might have been. I don’t really know.

But something about that mirror, because I’ve always been self-aware, very self-aware. In fact, when I first donated things to Santa Barbara, Sal Guereña, who was the director of Davidson Library up there, the archives—they have the Luis Valdez papers, they have . . . It’s huge. It’s quite renowned. It’s fantastic. It started, I believe, in the ’60s as a Chicano archives, and then it morphed into multi-cultural archives. But I totally forgot what the hell your question was.

CM: Well, about your sense of your own . . .

DG: Yes.

CM: You said you always knew you were gay.

DG: Oh yeah. So when I was giving my first bunch of stuff to him—I forgot how it came up—and I told him the story that I remember keeping Dad’s scrapbooks in the ’50s. My dad never saved anything. As most artists don’t, they’re too busy doing it. They’re not sitting there, putting stuff, I don’t think. But my mother kept scrapbooks of my dad in the ’30s and in the ’40s, and then as a teenager, when Dad really got really known, I was keeping his scrapbooks. And I remember very vividly one day, well, while pasting something, then I thought, “Omigod, I better be careful, because if I’m not careful, I’m gonna be a sixty-five-year-old man putting in my dad’s clippings. I gotta to make my own clippings.”

And I thought, “I need to get out of here more than ever,” you know. I knew I had to get away from him in order to really find out who I was. And Sal said, “Oh my God, that’s so self-aware for that age.” I’m like, “Really?” It didn’t seem like that to me at all, but the mirror was like that—where I really decided, “Okay, I’m sixteen now”—or fifteen, whatever I was—“and I better see what I have, my tools. Okay, not too bad looking and, you know, nice teeth. And I’m pretty smart, very impatient. I have a bad temper and I’m literally doing the goods and the bads.” And I suddenly go, “Oh my God, I’m queer.” I’d forgotten that little bit, and when I said it out loud, I was like “Oh God. Well, what does that mean, exactly?” I didn’t know what it was gonna mean in my life, because as I’ve beefed up that scene in *iGaytino!* only recently, because of

the recent Supreme Court wedding thing. And that was, you know . . . Richard and I went to the rally here in West Hollywood, thinking we're gonna hear the mayor of West Hollywood and all that. Who comes on stage? The team, direct from the Supreme Court steps, right here. The two attorneys, the gay couple, and the lesbian couple. It was amazing. Ooof. [chokes up]

CM: Take your time.

DG: And I thought of the mirror scene. And I thought, "You know, when I say that mirror scene, people really have to know what it was like, and I don't make it clear enough what it was like, you know?" So I've added, like, five sentences. That's all it is, but it really, I think, makes you realize you know, because I'm saying this is the '50s, you know. Being a gay man is a degenerate, you know, a deviant, a mental disease. And then I wrote [that] there's no out and proud celebrity on the cover of a magazine. There's no *Glee*, there's no *Modern Family*. It's just me and my mirror. That's basically the new lines that I'm playing with. I haven't performed it yet, but I think it really makes you go, wow, that's right. It's really important.

But, oddly enough, knowing all that, I accepted it right away. It's not like I thought, "Oh, I need to get help." Or, "Oh, no, I'm gonna be a bum." It was like, "Oh, wow, well, there you go." Oh, I know, because that's what I say: I accept it surprisingly. It's just a part of who I am. It's like being Mexican. I might want to be French. I can't change that and I can't change this.

CM: Was it something you felt that you had to keep hidden?

DG: Of course! Absolutely. Even though I was okay with it, it's not something like I wanted to put on a peasant blouse and hoop earrings and run off to school, you know. And in fact, as I also say in the show, Dad asked me when I'm in my teens once. They suspected, and I denied it because I was afraid, even though he said, "We'll understand." I'm like, "No, I don't think so." I didn't quite believe it and I was not ready for everybody to know. But I had no trouble accepting it, for which I've always been grateful, because I didn't go through suppressing it or, "No, I can't." No, I never went through that. Never, thank God.

I had some serious tests with it because—and I think of her often, Susan. And I don't even remember her last name or how I met her. But I met her just before I moved to New York, and we really did fall in love. And she was like sixteen or seventeen. I was twenty, but she was very mature. Beautiful and very mature. She had it all, this girl. She was fabulous. And I moved to New York and then I came back. You know, I'd come back for Christmas and I'd see her. The whole thing lasted maybe a year. We never did anything serious other than neck. And she wanted to get married, and I said, "I'm gay." I told her. She says, "I know, but I don't care."

I said, "Well, I do." I said, "I don't want to be having two lives. It's not fair to me. It's not fair to you. I don't wanna be feeling guilty. You should have a husband who's gonna give you all that you need. It's not fair to either of us, you know." And to this day I'm glad I made that decision, of course. And I've often thought about Susan. And I hope she got a really great guy because she was great. She was smart. I just loved her. A baby—sixteen—but very, very mature. But I did run across a photo of her, going through these things. I had no idea—at Lalo's club. How was she at Lalo's, but she was only sixteen? Maybe she was eighteen.

No, you had to be twenty-one. She was not twenty-one. Maybe we snuck her in. Yeah, I never even went to Lalo's until I was twenty-one. I had my twenty-first birthday at Lalo's, and I only knew one person who was that age: Elsa, and she went with me. And Dad announced on the bandstand that it was my twenty-first birthday and then they played "[Las] Mañanitas." The whole place sang, and my mother led out the waiters who were carrying this huge cake that everybody had. That's a good twenty-first birthday.

CM: It sounds darn good.

DG: Yeah.

CM: Now, you said it earlier that you always knew you were gay. Was there a moment as a kid that you were like wait, there's this, you know, there's all this societal pressure for boys to like girls.

DG: Well, my first big crush was Lillian Franco at Marianna. Oh, I can see her today. She was like frigging Snow White. She was white as snow. She had black, black, black hair all curls, ringlets, curls, and I remember

she had dark, dark eyes with incredible, curly lashes. Obviously all natural. She was, what? We were in grade school. She was beautiful, Lillian Franco. I just had a mad crush on her. But now I look back, it wasn't because she was a female but [because] I like pretty things. I think that's what it boils down to. I just like pretty things. But I don't remember—whereas that mirror moment was not a moment of epiphany, because I already knew it. But it just kind of made it real for me. But I don't remember an actual, "Oh my God, oh, gosh, gosh, gosh."

CM: Do you remember your first boy crush?

DG: Not really. I remember boys that I thought were really good looking, and handsome and stuff, but I don't remember having a crush on boys at all. I really don't remember.

CM: Not in the early teens or late—

DG: Not really, not really.

CM: Okay, figured I'd ask. I had a friend that tells a good story, talks about how he's watching James Bond with a bunch of friends and the friends are all commenting, you know, they're like seven or eight years old and the boys are all commenting about the Bond girl, and he's like, you know, that Sean Connery, he's a looker . . .

DG: Now you're talking something different. But in terms of school, no. But Donna Reed's husband, Carl Betts? Please. Oh, yeah! Wally? *Leave it to Beaver*? Hubba hubba. Yeah, TV ones, but not anybody in school, no.

CM: Okay. But [was] there was this sense of, like, you know, those people we kind of admire through . . .

DG: Well, there was a cutie. Jerry. I won't use his last name. His mother was a teacher at our school, and he was cute, and we played around.

CM: What school was this at?

DG: I'm trying to think if it was Kern or if it was Montebello Junior High. I'm not remembering.

CM: But it would have been the junior high period.

DG: Oh, definitely junior high. Oh yeah, we were like fourteen-ish. Thirteen, fourteen. Maybe twelve, maybe eleven. Wait a minute. We were young. I mean it wasn't fifteen, sixteen. It was young, you know. Not ten or eleven, but it could've been twelve, thirteen. Yeah. But I don't think he was gay. It was just, "Hey, that feels good." Yeah.

CM: Kids experiment. So getting on to high school, you went to Garfield, right? Did Charles go to Garfield as well?

DG: Oh, yeah, oh sure. He was a year behind me. He graduated—I graduated winter '59. He graduated summer '60, I think. He was the next class. I was in A-12. He was in B-12.

CM: What was the high school like during this period? Just paint out a little bit of an overview picture.

DG: It was a 1950s high school. The girls wore poodle skirts and we were wearing Ivy League clothes. And as I said, it—there were a few *cholos* and *cholas*, but really, the minority. I don't remember. You know, they were completely on their own. Teachers were nice. I liked my teachers. I thought it was very strange that the Spanish teachers at Garfield were Mrs. Barnhard and Mr. Sherman. Like, really? "Mr. Lopez, please say this." We're like, "Really?" It was kind of funny. Mr. Gomes—not "Gomez," Gomes with an S. And he looked totally gringo. He was the shop teacher. It was very typical. It was very typical high school of the '50s. I don't remember any, you know, gang fights. I don't remember—it was just very typical, very typical, and we were, as I say, we were, our group was the fake TV teens, you know. Really barbecues and beaches and birthday parties.

CM: And this is the group of you and Charles and Renee.

DG: Charles, Renee, Donald Busche, Gloria Garcia, I think for a while was with us. There were about five. Betty Feinberg, who was my girlfriend through all of Garfield. I don't think it was Kern. I don't remember if she was at Kern, but she was my prom date. We wrote the weekly column, "Eddie and Betty," seniors Eddie and Betty. We wrote our weekly column and, oh yeah, we went to the prom together. Her mother was not happy not because I was Mexican but because my father was in show business. I thought that was hilarious. She didn't care I was Mexican, but she was not happy that my dad was in nightclubs, yeah.

CM: Dirty show business.

DG: Yeah, Betty Feinberg, Betty Feinberg, lovely girl.

CM: I take it you were still studying theater during this time as an elective. I mean were you doing any—

DG: Did I do it in high school? I'm telling you, I only have memories of it because of the yearbooks and in East LA College. I'm in drama class although I don't ever remember doing anything. And in high school, too, but I don't remember ever doing plays. I really don't. I remember what we did. Maybe we just did exercises in class, but I had no memories of any of them other than I was in them. Unless I was just in the pictures of them, but I don't think so. I really was, but I don't remember any films or anything.

CM: And then other than algebra, were you generally a good student?

DG: Oh, yeah. I didn't like history. I never liked history because I couldn't identify with it, because my people had not come into Ellis Island and traveled west, and I couldn't relate to it. And Washington and Jefferson and all the Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, had nothing to do with me. So I always thought it was very boring. I did not care for the Alamo story. Now as it turns out, I did have roots in Ellis Island, because that's where my mother's father came from. They literally, you know, came from Dublin. They sailed, they were born—my mother's grandparents were both born in Dublin and came to the US, where her father was born in San Antonio. So I did have—and I went on that *Ancestry.com*—my mother did a tremendous amount of genealogy, when it meant going to the library and checking books and not like . . . [*click, click, click*] But you know, I wasn't into it in those days.

CM: But did you get good grades like in history or—

DG: Oh, yeah, I got all A's and B's. I was a good student. I was smart.

CM: Did you work, like, outside of high school? Did you maybe have a little job or have other extracurricular activities?

DG: Yes and that was because—my parents were hilarious because my mother is, "He should work. He should learn the value of a dollar."

And my dad, "He's gonna work his whole life. We don't need it, so let him enjoy himself."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm with him."

I agree with him, you know, but I did. I had a couple of jobs. Carlos always had part-time jobs, and he was working across the street from a big cemetery in East LA. Evergreen, I think. It was a florist, and he would work there. Creepy. And he left for some reason, probably for another job, so I took that job over for like twenty minutes. I'm, like, "No, I don't think so." I was not good at that. It was too creepy. But I did have my most hilarious job. I did work at McCormick's Pet Store, and I had that job for a little while.

CM: Where was that?

DG: Whittier Boulevard, somewhere. It was not on Whittier Boulevard. It must've been on some side street, but it was like *the* place. Everybody went there. It was the pet store and it was pretty—I only worked Saturdays. I think I just worked—I don't think I worked after school. It was only Saturdays, and I did that for a while until I let the monkey out of its cage and then I electrocuted a whole thing of fish. Well, I was cleaning and the light thing on top fell into the tank. Oh, baby, all these fish went *buzzt*. So you know, omigod. So I couldn't go put my hand in the water, you know. So I'm, like, "Oh my God." So I'm waiting for it to settle and it's starting to settle down. The fish are coming up. The sand is going down. The castle's all fucked up and so finally I remember I got a broom with a wooden handle to lift out the metal thing that fell in and it still worked so I kind of just set it up. Never mind all the fish were all . . . It was like I wanted to prop the fish up against the castle, cigarette like nothing's happened but . . .

CM: All the fish were dead?

DG: Dead as door nails! Electrocuted. You know, so then I went about sweeping, and Mr. McCormick is like, "Eddie!"

"Yes?"

"These fish?"

Because he didn't really know what had happened because everything got cleaned up pretty well. So yeah, so I didn't work there too long. I had a paper route for a while, but it was so cold and early. And so sometimes my parents would drive me so I could throw the paper from the car, because on the bicycle it was too cold. So I didn't do that very long.

That's why when Charles and I went to New York, that's when my parents were hysterical because I was completely inept. I didn't know how to do anything. Really, I didn't cook. I didn't do anything. Charles did everything. He was always very independent, and he knew it, too. That's why he said, "Let's go to New York together. I can help you get settled and set up." Because he always went just for one semester, he took one semester off of, I guess, Cal State. So he always knew he was only going for three or four months. And then I could come back with him if I was like, "I loved it, but . . ." Or I can stay. And I stayed twenty years.

**CM:** Besides you and Charles, were there any other interesting figures that emerged from your classes at Garfield High School, like noted . . .

**DG:** Not from our classes, but a lot from Garfield later. You know, Los Lobos are from Garfield, Oscar la Hoya's from Garfield. Patssi Valdez, my dear friend Patssi's from Garfield. A lot of people have come out of Garfield, but none from our generation that I recall other than Carlos, I think.

**CM:** In those high school years, was that when you had your membership to the Columbia Record Club, or was that from before?

**DG:** No, that was Garfield yeah. I didn't know how I found out about it, but the thing is, you . . . You know, it's one of those things [where] they get you because you sign up, and then they automatically send it to you every month unless you say no. Well, I always forgot to say no, so I got a few shows I didn't care about. But you know—yeah, that's when I started my record collection and that saved me, because I would just do all these shows, you know. I would lip sync in my room to all these things. That's how I got through.

**CM:** What were some of your favorites?

**DG:** Well, of course I loved Chita Rivera—big Chita Rivera fan. I loved Judy Holliday in *Bells are Ringing*. And I liked lip-syncing to her songs, not because I wanted to be a woman, but she had these hilarious comedy songs and that's what I was. I was a comic, I was funny. But when I did go to New York and started to perform, I never got those parts. Because I was good looking when I was young, and so I would get the sappy juvenile roles, and then somebody who looked funny or short or bald or fat or whatever they were, they would get those comic roles. But that's really the part . . . I got a few I was able to do, you know, when—sometimes in summer stock, because you go and you do nine musicals in ten weeks. You'd be rehearsing one during the day and performing another one at night. Then the following week, the one you rehearsed you're doing at night and then you rehearsed the new one. Nine musicals in ten weeks. By the last week you were like—you couldn't learn another step. You couldn't learn another harmony. You were fried, but it was fabulous. Summer stock was the greatest.

**CM:** And this was a foundation you'd had listening to all of that music.

**DG:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So sometimes in those, in other words this week you have a small part. The next week you had the lead. The week after that—so I get to do a couple of comic things because of that. But whenever I went in for a show, I would never get the funny things and that's really what I wanted to do. That's why I liked singing along with Judy Holliday and those people.

**CM:** What's your favorite Judy Holliday song?

**DG:** [*singing*]

Is it a crime to help old ladies cross the street?

Well, put me in jail without bail,

Bread and water from an old tin pail

If that's, if that's a crime

I could still sing the goddamn thing. Isn't that pathetic?

**CM:** Not at all.

DG: I loved Judy Holliday, and of course in my show I do a little bit of “Spanish Rose” from Chita. And, of course, Chita I got to work with when I did go to New York. And we worked together, and I’ve known her through the years. And when she’s at Disney Hall, I go see her. I go backstage. And you know, we don’t go out for pizza, but I certainly know her. And I still—she is about to have her eightieth birthday concert. She’s turning eighty. In New York, she’s doing a big eightieth birthday concert.

CM: Fantastic.

DG: Still going strong.

CM: Good for her. So during high school, what was your relationship with your parents like? Like were they strict . . .

DG: [*bored teen voice*] Mother! I just thought they were—I was . . . No. I would call myself a surly teen. I was not somebody who went out and, you know, smoked and did drugs to rebel. I was just surly, you know, because I didn’t wanna—I was just surly because I didn’t wanna be there. I wanted to go out and do my thing, you know. It’s a terrible thing when you already know you’re gonna have this fabulous life and you got to wait, because you really don’t start your life until you leave home. You’re in your parents’ home, you got to go by their rules. You’re in the school because it’s in your district. You have no choice, you know, and I couldn’t wait to get out and make my own choices. So that’s why. So by the time I was in my teens, I was really over being at home as a teenager. I was like . . . [*claps*] So, you know, so yeah. They were . . . Yeah.

CM: Were they strict?

DG: My mother was. Oh my God, my mother raised us, you know, because Dad was traveling. He was into his Lalo thing and building his career and then keeping it going, and so that’s what he was doing. I don’t think that was uncommon, especially for the ’50s. The mother did all the—it wasn’t like, “Wait until your father comes home.” No. She was the disciplinarian. She—you know, it was her. She’s the one that raised us. She was extremely strict with me, very strict with me.

CM: In what sense?

DG: And not very nice. Not in a very nice way, and it’s hard. I don’t go into it a lot in my show because it really has nothing to do—my show was about my journey as a Chicano, embracing that as a gay man. That’s what it’s about. And she didn’t really fit in that path, so I don’t talk that much about her. But she had a fierce temper. Irish-*mexicana*. She had a fierce temper and she was always highly stressed and that’s because—and we never spoke of it. And I—I never spoke of it with her because I did not want to be one of those kids: “And then when I grew up and when I was sixteen you did this . . .” It’s, like, get over it, you know? Really. Parents do the best they can. They’re just people too, and they make mistakes too. And as I’ve already said, she couldn’t have done more than she did in terms of all the stuff. Get an education, braces on our teeth, birthday parties—did all the stuff. But on the day-to-day thing, she was under tremendous stress with my dad, because as wonderful as he was, he was weak with women, always. And so she knew it, and there was nobody to take it out on.

My brother was still little, and the reason I say that is only because I never understood it. I mean, because she was not nice to me. One time my dad and I even spoke about this. He did—when I was still living at home. And you know, my mother was also very *curandera*, all that, and so she loved all that. And he said, “I’ve often wondered . . .” Because he could see she was just so hard on me and not my brother. He was much younger. But he said, you know, because I was born October 14 [and] her mother died October 31, so she was still with me, an infant. And he said that some customs believe that “one life for another,” and that he wondered if she felt that she’d lost her mother to make room for me.

I mean, farfetched as it sounds, that my point is that I’m not imagining that she was like that. He could see it, you know. And the only time it came up with my mom—because believe me, the woman, when I moved back to New York—[I mean] from New York at forty—this was the most loving, warm . . . She was so proud of me and all my friends: “Oh, you’re mother’s so . . .” But that’s not the woman that raised me. That’s not the woman that raised me. And I don’t talk about it often, because I don’t wanna paint her in bad light, because I have tremendous respect for that lady. That was a strong lady, a fantastic lady. My dad

always said there would be no Lalo Guerrero without her, because she knew he had to have his music. And instead of saying, “Hey, you’re married now, you have a kid. Get a job.” She knew he had to have his music. And she said to him—he told me—“If we live under a bridge, as long as we’re together, that’s fine.” She knew. She always supported him in that. So, she was a strong lady.

And those early years were hard, let me tell you. Very, very, very hard. I slept in a drawer because they couldn’t afford a crib, and she said—but even then, I would not drink regular milk or baby milk, no. She said there was this, and she used to say the brand, it was a dollar a can. Now a dollar a can in 1940 . . . That’s all I would drink. She said, “You were always like that, always.” I don’t know where things come from. That’s when you believe in reincarnation. Clearly I was royalty in my other life. But always she said, “Always you were like that. You always had expensive tastes.”

But one time, I did. I don’t know how I brought it up. All she said, “I was under a lot of stress with your dad.” That’s all she said. And I just let it go at that. It would’ve helped me understand it more, but we’re talking about forty years ago. But it was very hard. Very, very hard because of that. And I have often thought, recently again—you know, you get to this age, you really start looking back a lot and think—you know, wondering. And I thought maybe she—if she didn’t know I was gay. She knew that I was different. And maybe she was trying to protect me in some way, and that’s why she kept her eye on me and didn’t want, you know. It might have had to do with that, you know. And the truth is . . .

CM: And so in which way was she strict? Did she limit you from going out?

DG: Oh God, yes. Oh, I couldn’t go far. I couldn’t go in a car with people. I couldn’t go—it was, like, Carlos had to, like, practically, you know, get a papal blessing to allow that he could drive Renee and me to Disneyland. That was far. She didn’t let me to go far. She just—she was extremely protective. That’s why she was strict. Very, very—and not with my brother. He was—and I would tell her. She’d go, “Well, you and your brother were different.” That’s all she’d say, so I’m thinking that it might have been she knew I was delicate. There was something that she was worried about.

CM: How did you get along with your brother? I know he’s much younger than you. At this point, if you were in high school at sixteen, he would’ve been—

DG: Yeah, you know, it’s not a—I feel very sad about that. I was thrilled that I was gonna get a brother, because, in fact, friends have said, “Well, you were both only children.” Really, I was already nine when he was born, and then [when] I left for New York, he was only twelve. So, it’s strange. It’s fractured. I mean he’s my brother. I’m there for him, and I’m sure he’d be there for me. But we’re not, you know. We don’t hang out. There’s no—it’s really sad. But it’s better than it was. I mean, we couldn’t even be in the same room because, you know, [we’d] fight. And you know, it’s just not good. Which was a great source of sadness for a long time. Then eventually I thought, “You know what, what am I gonna do? I can’t worry about it. It’s not gonna change. I’m happy at least to settle into a . . .” So I’m not happy about it, and I know my mom was very unhappy about that. But I think, in the end, she understood as well. We’re very, very, very different in many, many, many ways.

CM: I mean, just because you were born to the same family doesn’t always mean you’re going to get along perfectly.

DG: Totally. It’s just completely—we’re completely different. And I don’t blame him and I don’t blame . . . It just is.

CM: Now, what did the family do when you weren’t going on a road trip to Tucson or you weren’t worrying about your dad? Were there any activities that you guys did regularly?

DG: No. I don’t remember anything. We just go to school. Maybe an occasional movie. And then I’d be hanging with Carlos. No, it’s not like we went—no. We basically just did all the trips. It’s not like, you know, “On Sunday, let’s . . .” Well, when I’m—because there’s photos. Littler—I see my dad, and there’s a picture of Mark in a stroller, and I’m, like, I guess, ten, and we’re at Griffith Park at the trains. And so they would take us to places like that when we were really little. But as a teen, by that time I was with my—you know how that is. You’re off with your friends.

So no, I barely remember him not being there. No, because he was—both of them, by the way, were just huge, bigger-than-life people. My mother was beautiful. And, you know, she could not do this. I mean she would say, “Omgod, I don’t know how you’d talk in front of people. Just put a microphone in front of me and I freeze.” But she was not shy. But she was very strong. And so they were both really, really big personalities, which is why I also knew I had to get away. Because I thought I’d never—between my mom being so protective and my dad being who he is—I’m never going to find out who the hell I am. So, I said, I got outta Dodge.

CM: Exactly. Did you ever see extended family?

DG: You mean uncles, aunts, and all that?

CM: Yeah, cousins.

DG: Oh, yes. Very tight, the Guerreros, very tight. The Marmions, only a couple of them. Oh, yeah, very.

CM: And where would you go?

DG: Tucson and San Diego, that’s it.

CM: And then they come—

DG: Both my parents were all about family, all about family. So, you know, at least two trips a year to Tucson to see *nana* and *tata*, uncles, aunts, and cousins. At least once or twice to San Diego to see my mom’s two sisters. The Marmions, not so much, except for my Uncle Dave, my mother’s brother, who I adored. My Uncle Dave. He’s the only one my mother would say, “Okay, I’m gonna go with Lalo today, so I’ll leave him here.” He’s the only one she’d kind of trust with me, when I’m little. And I’d be in my white shorts and my little—because I was dressed like a little doll all the time when I was really little. And my Uncle Dave was like . . . There’s a story of his wife, my Aunt Adele. She just passed a couple of years ago. Uncle Dave, we lost him in his early ’60s, quite a few years ago. But Aunt Adele used to tell me this story that one time my mom left me with them for a day in Tucson. Tucson was like the Old West in the ’50s, and she [Aunt Adele] looked out the window and I was jumping in the mud, and she was like, “Margaret is gonna kill me!” Kill my Aunt Adele, not kill me. She went out there, and Uncle Dave, “Ah, leave him alone. He’s having a good time. He’ll be fine. Don’t worry about it.”

So I love my Uncle Dave. And he put me on a horse. And, oh, I love my Uncle Dave and his two daughters. He had three daughters and a son, but two of the daughters, we’re, like, thick as thieves. We talk all the time. I stayed with them when I was in Tucson. Antoinette—Toni—she’s in San Antonio, so I don’t get there as much, but I’m very close to her sister Alice. I’m very, very close to them. So those I’m very close to. But the other Marmions, I hardly know. In fact, it used to piss my mom off because we’d go to Tucson and then we’d have our Marmion day, where Dad would drive to where Uncle Charlie was working. He’d come out. He’d talk to us in the car for a few minutes and then go back in. And then we’d drive to where our Uncle Bob worked. He’d come out, he’d talk for a few, and then he’d go back in. I don’t know them at all. I don’t know any of their kids. They’re completely—but it was only my Aunt Isabel—Mom’s sister—who I loved. But she died when I was, like, eleven. That was the first death. I was eleven. I loved my Aunt Isabel and she had two sons, but they were already men, you know. And Aunt Kate, her other sister, had one son, but again, older. So those my age were my Uncle Dave’s kids. And yeah, I loved my Uncle Dave.

CM: So family was a regular part of—

DG: Oh yes, and still. The Guerreros—all my friends go, “Another reunion?” I mean every ten minutes there’s a Guerrero reunion, you know. So, oh yeah, family, all about family.

CM: Are there any other musicians in the family?

DG: Not professional. A lot of them like it and do it. Well, how far down are we talking? My dad’s brother Gene, who I also loved, he was a *pachuco*. He was the bad boy. He was the black sheep. I loved my Uncle Gene. He was great. He died about seven, eight years ago, and his daughter Nancy . . . He had his kids, [Nancy, Danny, Johnny]. I’m very close to them, very close. And my first cousin’s [Nancy’s] son, he is the first professional musician. He’s a fantastic conguero. He’s got a band and he lives up in the Bay Area I think. But he’s doing very well. He’s very, very talented—Aaron. But none others went into it. Johnny, my Uncle

Gene's other son, was a musician and did it for a while, but doesn't do it anymore. But yeah, the Guerreros are particularly tight, the Marmions a little fractured.

CM: Great.

[break in audio]

Male speaker: Rolling sound.

CM: All right. So one more question about the school years, before we move on to moving to New York. How were your parents about, say, encouraging your creative pursuits during this time? I mean you're really into theater, you're thinking about getting out of East LA.

DG: Well, they were always very supportive of my brother and me overall, but they absolutely didn't want either of us to go into show business.

CM: Why is that?

DG: Because my dad would say, "I was lucky. There were a lot of people more talented than me, and they've never made it." He said, "It's really hard, and it's a hard life." And so they really didn't want either of us to go into it. But of course, there was not a chance—but yeah. So it wasn't that they weren't supporting of us wanting to follow our dream, as it were. They just knew firsthand how difficult it was to have a career and to make a living off it. But they were just overall supportive parents. And certainly, you know, when I was in New York, I think they worried, especially during the acting years. It wasn't so much when I became an agent, because then I had a job. You know? And that was different.

But those early years—in fact, it's really—I almost thought, "Shoot me now." In going through my archives, I found this letter that is on stationery that Carlos [Almaraz] designed while we were in New York—this strange East Indian thing. And the letter is typed—remember typewriters?—to my mother, and I think the date is, like, '71. It's in the '70s. But he went back and forth a few times after that initial thing. And it's typed. And I'm like, "Oh, I've just come back from summer stock and it was great. But, oh, now again, there's no money and I can't get a job. I guess I'll go back to my lessons and audition. This is so hard." And I'm thinking, "Omigod, I could have typed that yesterday." Because even after all these years, and I have had success, there's always that down time. There's always that "oh, crap, again, really?" You know? And I read that, and I couldn't believe it. But also I said, "This is stationery that Charles—Carlos—designed, and it's all over town." It's funny. Because it was more commercial art. But he was looking for work and he had to eat as well, you know? But that letter depressed me. I thought, "Oh, geez, forty years later and it's the same." Now I do it on a computer, but it's the same damn letter. [laughs]

CM: Do you remember your high school graduation?

DG: Yes and no. I remember that I was just one of the graduates, no big deal. So, of course, Carlos and I, in my full robe, went that afternoon, and I stood at the podium like I'm speaking, and we took all these pictures of me doing that. And then—oh my God, these pictures are great. I have two eight-by-tens he took of me. He decided this would be very artsy fartsy. He took me to like a—I don't know what it was. I guess like a—not a dump, but there was this junk everywhere, and there were a lot of suitcases. Why? I do not know. And how he knew about it, I do not know. But there was something dramatic about, in my cap and gown, starting life and surrounded by old valises. Okay? So, there's two eight-by-tens that exist. And one of them I'm, like, it's profile and I have my hand like this. And I'm sitting on this pile of suitcases surrounded by just junk. You know, full cap and gown. And the other one I'm looking at—I don't know what the hell.

CM: And this was a scenario that Charles had conceived?

DG: Oh yes, yes. I don't know how he found the place. I don't know. But all I know is I'm sitting on old suitcases, complete in cap and gown.

CM: So you had a little conceptual photography going on there.

DG: Yes, yes. Yeah, it was just about the future and valises and traveling and adventure. [laughs] Oh God, he was so funny.

CM: How important was that moment of graduating for you?

- DG: Not a big deal. It was just like, “Thank God I’m out of high school. Now I’ll do two years of college, and then I’m out of . . .” So, you know? No, it was not like passage of time. I was the keynote address or whatever at junior high—Kern. I did make the whatever, speech. And I wasn’t a valedictorian or anything, but it was just a speech. I have no idea why they chose me. But I did it. And that probably—that could be the first speech that I wrote. I now do speaking engagements and keynotes all the time. But that could have been the first one, like Carlos’s first mural at Lalo’s. But yeah. But no, high school graduation was just, like, whatever.
- CM: And then after you graduated, you ended up doing some college in LA. If you could just tell me what that was.
- DG: Well, but let’s back up a little bit, missy, because—and I totally forgot until this second—between Garfield graduation . . . Actually, it fits right in this thing. Between Garfield and East LA College, you asked about my parents being supportive. I spent the summer at the Pasadena Playhouse. They had a summer workshop thing—eight weeks, whatever—and my parents let me go. They paid and sent me there. That was between Garfield and going to East LA College.
- CM: And was that an acting thing?
- DG: Yes. And we did a play, *Dark of the Moon*: “We was in the barn, a-shuckin’ dry corn. Corn shucked dry, corn shucked good.” Something like that was the line. And I have eight-by-ten photos again to prove it.
- CM: What character did you play?
- DG: I was some farm boy. I looked very pithy. I was some farm boy. In the photos, yeah, they’re very dramatic. I had a girlfriend, I guess, and we were in the barn shucking dry corn, doing whatever it is barn people do. And—but yeah, so they were supportive. They were letting me do my thing. I forgot about that for a second, the Pasadena Playhouse.
- CM: During this time, did you go see—once you got, started to get older and maybe graduated from high school, or maybe even late high school—did you go see any works of theater in Los Angeles?
- DG: Yes—well, not until East LA College. Because I met someone there named Michael Padilla. I talk about him in my show as well. I only say Michael, but his name was Michael Padilla. He got us jobs as volunteer ushers at the Philharmonic [Auditorium], which no longer exists. And all of the big Broadway musicals would come to LA with the original stars. Now the original stars rarely go on tour. But in those days, their contract was the Broadway run, and then tour for a year or whatever the hell it was. So I saw Ethel Merman in *Gypsy*. I saw Judy Holliday in *Bells Are Ringing*. And there’s this scene where she sings, “The Party’s Over,” and she writes a love note, she throws it on the sofa. Well you know damn well, I went backstage after the show, and I got me that note, and it’s in my scrapbook. It’s just scribbled, but that’s Judy Holliday’s note. Oh, I was pathetically star struck. I still kind of am, actually, with some people.
- CM: Was it very inspirational to be there, seeing those performances? Did that drive you?
- DG: Oh, are you kidding me? Oh, yes. When Merman sang that Sondheim lyric, “Some people can be content playing bingo, paying rent. That’s okay for some people, but some people ain’t me.” I’m like, “Oh, she’s singing about me.” I was not going to stay home and play bingo, and live in the house I grew up in, and live in the same . . . A lot of people do, God bless them. I’m just saying it wasn’t me. You know? And that lyric, oh Lord, it was, like, she was singing it to me. Oh yes. Oh God, it was thrilling. Yeah. We got to see all the big musicals, all the big Broadway stars at the Philharmonic.
- CM: And where was the Philharmonic at the time?
- DG: I have no idea. Downtown LA is all I know. But it got torn down for the Music Center, I think. Not sure.
- CM: Do you remember anything about the building at all, what it looked like?
- DG: Not really, other than it was just big. And we—after we would usher, we would go to the very, very top, third balcony, and sit on the aisle steps, not even on a seat, to watch the show. Yeah. We saw them all. And all those programs are in that scrapbook.
- CM: That’s fantastic.

DG: I saved everything. I always did. I saved everything of Carlos's because I knew he was going to be famous one day. So I saved everything. And he was pissed off because he had saved all my letters, and they were in a box under the bed, and his mother threw them out. She didn't know what they were, so she threw them out. So he had saved my things as well.

CM: Omigod. Do you know what? I had a curator at LACMA tell me that. I thought it was a great adage. She said that history is told by the hoarders.

DG: That's right. Except we like to call ourselves archivists. It sounds so much better. Yeah, I'm a hoarder. But I am! Maybe it comes from starting—saving Dad's stuff, when I was in school. But I always have saved all that stuff. And it's come in handy. When I did the documentary on my dad, everything was there. We need a picture of Los Lobos. "Oh, yeah, yeah, I have one. I took it at . . . Yeah, where is that?" You know? And the same thing when I was writing *iGaytino!*, you know? And doing the visuals, you know. And now, especially, people do little TV profiles on me or they want a magazine article:

"Are there pictures of you when you were performing?"

"Oh yeah, here you are."

"Pictures when you first moved to New York?"

"Oh yeah, here you are."

I mean I just saved everything, always. Not because I knew I was going to be famous. I just did. I have a sense of history.

CM: I think UC [University of California] Santa Barbara will appreciate that.

DG: I hope so. I think so. Yeah.

CM: Now in terms of—okay, so you spent the summer at the Pasadena Playhouse, and then go to East LA—

DG: Correct.

CM: College. And how long did you study at East LA College, or what were you studying?

DG: It's just a two-year college. I took liberal arts, but that's when I first breathed. Because a college student was a whole other kind of person. I ran for social chairman, and I won. I mean, I became very out there, for the first time. After trying to—you know, I don't know . . . I was just . . . It's not that I wasn't out there in high school, because I was. I was writing that column. But just me personally. East LA College, I absolutely opened up. It just—it was just a completely different ballgame than high school was for me.

CM: Were any of your friends from high school also at East LA College?

DG: Yes, but I seemed to have made new friends there. I don't remember many from Garfield going there because, you know, they kind of went lots of places. But I didn't stay friends with any except for Renee, I guess. But I had new friends, most notably Michael Padilla. Who, fast-forward two million years, he was going to be a film director. And he was very talented, and he staged a variety show we did that I was in at East LA College. And when I did *iGaytino!* at the Kirk Douglas Theater—which is where the premiere was, the Center Theatre Group did the premiere—afterward there was a reception, and some guy comes up to me and says, "There's somebody over there who you should say hello to."

I said, "Who?"

He goes, "Michael Padilla."

I said, "You're kidding. Well, why didn't he come up to me?"

"Well, he felt shy."

I said, "What?!"

He wouldn't even come up to me! So I went over there, and there was Michael Padilla, all those years later.

He had tried to go into directing, but it was a different era. You know, it cost money in those days. He went to USC, I think, but cameras and film, he just couldn't afford it. So he wound up being a counselor, I think at a high school I want to say. It was some Eastside . . . Not Belvedere. It was a high school. And, I guess, for years. And I'll bet he was very good, because he was a really, really good guy. But it made me sad because he had such passion, you know, and he was going to direct, and he was talented. And I'm not

saying he didn't have a happy life, but I was a little sad. But he's had a steady job. He's probably sad for me. I'm still trying to break in. So it's all relative, honey. It's all relative. *[laughs]*

CM: Now you graduated from high school. Carlos is still in school.

DG: Yes, yes.

CM: Carlos Almaraz, a.k.a. Charles.

DG: A.k.a. Charles.

CM: He is still in high school. Did you keep your friendship going during that time?

DG: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh yeah.

CM: And what kinds of stuff did you guys did you do? Did you—

DG: That's when he decided I needed to be more adventuresome in my sex life, and that got very strange for a while. Pity you're running out of tape. I'm just getting to the good part.

Technician: Five minutes.

DG: What?

Technician: Five minutes.

CM: Well, what were you guys doing? Going to bars, like—we got five minutes.

DG: He would kind of—because he was experimenting as well. So we'd never do anything together. I mean he was like my brother, you know? There was one threesome, but we were so careful not to touch each other, not to look at each other. It was like, "Oh God, oh God, oh God." So it was not much fun. But he kind of would use me for bait, and it only happened a few times. But it was very strange. Because I say, I was not adventurous. I was—I was adventuresome in that I had a big picture of what I wanted to do in life, but to go out and meet somebody or pick them up, I was not about to do that. But he was, "Oh yeah, well, let's go down to Lincoln Park or Selma Avenue in Hollywood and see." I'm like, "Okay." [Selma Avenue was a popular hook-up spot.] I don't know how he found out about these places, and it was very strange. It didn't last long, though.

CM: At this point, obviously, he knew you were gay.

DG: Yes.

CM: You told him you were gay.

DG: Yes.

CM: How did that come about?

DG: I told him—I don't know, one day I just decided I needed to tell him. And he was painting posters at the Pomona Fair, and why in particular I picked that moment, I have no idea. But he was, "Uh-huh. Oh, okay. Yeah. All right." He was like—he didn't bat an eyelash. But he didn't say anything about his sexuality—at all—at that time.

CM: Was it only later that—

DG: Mm-hm.

CM: At what point did you—

DG: Well, I would imagine during this point when we were experimenting, you know? Which we were already—I was already at East LA College. Because he was driving and everything. Omigod.

CM: But it wasn't something that he necessarily announced either.

DG: No. It was like he was helping me come out, as it were. It doesn't mean he wasn't enjoying a little of this, too. But it was to—because I wasn't going to do it, you know, on my own, at that time.

CM: That's a good friend.

DG: You know, he was a great friend. He was hilarious.

CM: Did you guys go out, like—okay, so you're young, at this point, in your late teens, possibly early twenties. I mean did you go hit the town to go out or see shows or—

DG: Oh no. We were—oh yeah, but you know what we'd do? We'd drive to Hollywood, and we'd walk up and down with Betty Feinberg and Don Busche. And we'd go to Dino's Lodge or we'd go to . . . We were

just—we'd go and just walk through the Statler Hilton. "Ooooh," you know? And walk through the lobby. Nah, we were just star struck and looking at stuff.

And we'd go to Kelbo's. It was a restaurant called Kelbo's on Fairfax. Polynesian. And we would go, "Oh, let's go to Kelbo's." And now, nobody in our group, you know—we were the only ones from Garfield who were always on this side of town. And my mom was always, "Why do you always have to go over to Hollywood?"

"We like it!"

You know? So we were always—but we were doing very innocent things as a group. Yeah.

CM: Perhaps we just cut it now, because now I have the big question about how the decision to move to New York came—

DG: Oh yeah, that's big.

CM: And it's going to be big. That's going to be really big.

DG: Yeah.

[*break in audio*]

CM: So the big decision to move to New York. How—at what point did you and Carlos start batting this idea around? How did it come about?

DG: I don't have a specific memory of that, other than it was his idea. He's the one that said, "You know, if you want to be in musical theater and I want to do art, we need to go to New York. So I'm going to take a semester off." I think he was going to Cal State, but I can't swear to that. But he was taking a semester off. "And we'll go to New York. And I'll come back in three or four months," whatever the time was, "and if you want to come back, you'll come back with me and we have a great few months in New York. And if you want to stay, at least I've got you settled." Because really, I didn't know how to do anything. He could cook. He could do—I couldn't do anything. And so that's what we did.

And I—the funny thing is, it was like, right away, "Yeah, yeah, let's do it." So I told my parents. They were *not* happy. They were particularly pissed at Carlos, by the way. I think they knew I wouldn't have come up with that on my own, you know? But I was, like, all over it. It wasn't like, "Well, gee, I don't know." No, I was like, "Yeah, I'm there." And so I think my parents said, "Okay, but then you have to pay for it yourself." So I got a job at United Parcel Service. Not what you think at all. But I was—they were in the middle of transferring invoices to microfilm. So my job, literally, was to leave the offices, go in the back, get these huge boxes of invoices, go to this machine, and feed them. [*sucking noise*] Eight hours a day. And all I kept saying, "This is going to get me to New York. It's going to get me to New York. It's going to . . ." And I just put my check away every week because I was still living at home, so I had no expenses at all.

So I just put it away, and sure enough, in a year, I had—like a year, six months, seven, eight—whatever the hell it was—I saved a thousand dollars. Now, a thousand dollars in 1960 was a little bit of change. So I wasn't arriving with a bus ticket and ten bucks. I was arriving with a thousand dollars. And then my parents bought me a three-piece set of matching luggage, Samsonite luggage that weighed about a hundred pounds empty. But, matching set of luggage. [Artist] Frank Romero, who we'd already met, gave me—get this, because I think there was a party they gave—Frank Romero gave me what looked to be a cane, a beautiful wood, carved cane, but when you unscrew the handle part, it opened up to an umbrella. How fancy was that?

CM: Style.

DG: Yeah, style. So I had my thousand dollars. I had my umbrella from Frank Romero and the luggage. And Carlos had whatever it is he had. And the cheapest way we could get there was a prop. I don't remember the airline, but it was a prop. It took us twelve hours with one stop to refuel in Chicago. And we got on that plane.

CM: What year is this?

DG: Sixty-two. We arrived in New York City on Valentine's Day, 1962. And they had just had, like, a blizzard a day or two before, which was perfect because, as we were flying east, you know, that wonderful sound of—you know, it's like a train. I love trains, that—it's just adventure. And that was the same thing. A jet, but [a] prop. I don't know, there's just something about it, exotic. And as we were traveling east, we could see, you know, ice forming on the wings. So it was like we were—think about it. Today everybody goes back and forth to New York like they're driving from here to Boyle Heights. But flying to New York . . . We didn't know anybody who'd ever been to New York, ever.

CM: Had you been to New York?

DG: No. Neither of us had ever been there.

CM: Did you know anybody in New York?

DG: No! We didn't know anybody. We'd never been there. We didn't know anybody who had been there. We were just going. So I found a book at the bookstore, wherever, called—it was a whole series of books. And it was called—they did them on different cities. This was "New York on \$5 a Day." And I went through and I picked out a hotel. Oooh! St. James Hotel. Fabulous. Great name, right? So I circled that, and it's in the heart of the theater district. Well, come on, we're there. So that's all we knew, we were going to be at the St. James. Whether we called and made reservations, or whether we just showed up, I don't remember. But we knew we were going to the St. James. And we flew there. We stopped in Chicago, where it was freezing and it was snowing. Now we felt like we were in Mongolia. I mean we were on the other side of the world. And then we got to New York at dawn. And we hailed a cab, St. James Hotel, blah, blah, blah. Well, when that cab started, left the airport—we landed at Idlewild, which eventually became Kennedy Airport. And when we saw that skyline, oh my God. It was—well, I . . . It was something to behold. It was our whole future. It was everything. This was it.

PS, we had just seen that new movie, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which is like a Valentine to New York. Everything's gorgeous, right? Every building, every street, is beautiful. You know? We had just seen that. It had just come out. We'd seen it a couple of months before. So, oh, there we were, and I was for sure going to be Holly Golightly. There's no question. So there we are, and the cab—this was magic time—because the cab took us through Central Park. Of course it was just all covered in snow. So it was like silent. You know? You're just driving, and there's—you know how after a snowfall, it's just quiet? Everything is muffled. So there was no big city noise. It was just through the park, it felt like we were moving in slow motion. It was just—oh my God. It was just, just magic. That's the only word. It was absolute magic.

CM: Do you remember anything Carlos may have said on that ride?

DG: I just remember we were kind of just, mostly ooh-ing and aah-ing. I don't think we probably said that much. What was there to say? It was just—you couldn't . . . You know what it was like? A few years ago we were in Peru. We went to Cusco and Machu Picchu. And that train ride, along the Urubamba, you know, as you're going through and you're looking out at the Andes, layer after layer, from a gray to a blue to a purple. It is so—it takes your breath away. I was in tears half the time on that train because it was so much beauty, you couldn't hold it in. It was like that.

So I don't know that we were talking that much. I don't remember. We were just—not 'til we got to the St. James, which looked like a dump to me. I'm like, "What the hell? It's old. It's so crappy." But it was twenty-two bucks a week for a double, so we checked in. One room, one big saggy bed in the middle of the room. And then we set out, (a) looking for jobs, and looking for an apartment. And we knew nothing! I mean so—nothing. So we're looking at the paper. Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, Long Island. How far is that? We're just like—we just didn't know anything. We were just—we knew nothing. And so I got a job pretty quickly. He got a job at an ad agency that was in the Time-Life building, right across the street from Radio City Music Hall. I don't remember the agency, but he did get a job there. And I got a job in this teeny, tiny office on Wall Street. It was two old men and me.

CM: And what was the office? What did it do?

- DG: Stocks and exchange, whatever the hell it was. Because I know I would have to—during my lunch hour, I would go and just sit at the Stock Exchange, just 'til . . . Because everything was like in the movies. Everywhere you went was like the movies. “There’s Rockefeller Center with the ice rink! Omigod, it’s Radio City!” Everything was, like, just like in the movies. It was just—you weren’t just in another city. This was—oh, it was unbelievable. And to be working on Wall Street, you know? But the bad news is, of course, I made no friends because there was nobody there. It’s not like I met people at work. It was these two little old men and me, the clerk typist, that did what a clerk typist does, you know.
- CM: And what was Carlos doing at the ad agency?
- DG: He was in the art department, doing graphics and doing—not doing art, but doing what they do at ad agencies. And . . .
- CM: Had he changed his name to Carlos already at this point?
- DG: No.
- CM: Or would that come later?
- DG: That’s later. That’s during the César Chávez and Luis Valdez and all that. No, he’s still Charles.
- CM: Going—stepping back a little bit, how was it that you settled on New York? Because you could have moved to Hollywood.
- DG: Well, but see, I was in love with musical theater. I wasn’t in love with movies, you know. Or television, which was three networks, was all it was. So that wasn’t even in—and, you know, it was *Leave It to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. What am I going to do there? But no, it was musicals. That’s why. And also, he, as an artist, New York. It’s the center of everything. So that’s why. That’s why we didn’t move just across town.
- CM: Who took you guys to the airport?
- DG: You know what? I don’t remember. It might have been my mom. I don’t really remember. Isn’t that funny? Maybe it was Frank [Romero]. It might have been Frank. I should ask him: “Do you remember driving us to the airport?” I don’t know.
- CM: Was it LAX? You flew out of LAX?
- DG: Yes. Yes.
- CM: How had you met Frank?
- DG: Through Carlos. Carlos met him at school. I’m not sure what school. I’m sketchy about Carlos’s life during that, because he was Cal State, then he went to Chouinard [Art Institute, now Cal Arts]. I’m not positive about all that, but I know they met in school. [. . .] So that’s how. Because they became friends pretty quickly. And so that’s how he met Frank. But getting back for a second to United Parcel Service. Because you could see it from the freeway. So every time my mom would pick me up, when I’d come home for Christmas, we’d drive by that damn United Parcel Service. And for years, she would say the same thing: “You know, *m’hijo*, if you’d stayed there, you’d probably be a manager today.”
- CM: And what would go through your head?
- DG: This is exactly what: “Omigod, she still doesn’t know who I am.” That’s what I would think. I wouldn’t say it, but I thought, “Omigod.” But see, my mom, she never wanted a show life at all. But she fell in love with Dad, what was she going to do? But she—oh God, no. She always said the happiest years of her life were when we lived in San Diego. Because Dad went to work in the morning, came home at night, probably no women around, you know. And I was a baby. That’s when she was the happiest. She really wanted a nine-to-five life. And she never had that. Now the life she had [was] pretty good, except for the women part. But she never really liked it. So to her, that “oh my God,” now both her sons . . . And if I’d stayed at UPS, you know. And it’s understandable. Because let’s face it, you go, you know, it’s not easy. It’s not easy, you know.
- CM: No, and parents always want stability for their children.
- DG: Of course, of course. You know? So yeah, but it was always, “You’d be a manager today.” [chuckles]
- CM: Now how long were you guys at the St. James Hotel?
- DG: Not long.

CM: Talk a little bit, like, what did this hotel look like? Was it like a Miss Havisham kind of—

DG: Oh, it was definitely out of Miss Marple series or something. You know? It was probably—and it's still there, by the way. There are projections in my solo show, and there is a photograph of the billboard—not the billboard, the sign—that I took maybe sometime in the '80s on a trip back. I was like, "Oh my God, it's the St. James." And I snapped a picture, which I then used in my show. So it's still—it was there up to a few years ago. But even in the '60s it already looked like it had seen way better days. I mean there weren't, you know, vermin and rats, but it was not anything great. We weren't there long. I would say we were there a few weeks maybe. A month maybe—not very long.

And we found an apartment in the upper Nineties, on Ninety-Second Street. Now Ninety-Second Street, in 1960s New York, was like, forget it. You did not go past the '70s. Then it got really funky. But obviously it was cheap, and it was one room with a teeny kitchen. But instead of a kitchen sink, it was a tiny bathroom sink in the kitchen. And then there was a little extra room, which was barely enough for one little bed. And we had our friend Chris Hernandez, she came and stayed a while, and she stayed in that little room. You could hardly call it a second bedroom. So it was tiny, this little spot. And there's a photo of us in there, too, that exists. And that's where we were. And we felt just like the two sisters in [*Wonderful Town*], you know. Because there we were. And oh, "Mr. Appopolous, Mr. Appopolous." I think in the movie they had their . . . And ours, because [we had] no heat, and we'd be banging on the thing. We were living a movie. We were like in a movie the whole time. You know? And there was—

CM: What did you guys do, like, in your spare time during that time? I mean you're working during the day.

DG: You know what? I don't remember what—we had no money to really do anything. I know we ate a lot at Tad's Steakhouse because you could get a steak, baked potato, and salad for, like, two ninety-nine. We also ate at the Automat a lot. Loved the Automat because it was cheap. And that's where we would steal all the silverware, flatware, for our apartment. But I don't remember—I guess we must have . . . You know, we couldn't really afford to go to the theater much. What did we do at night?

CM: Did you go to museums? Did you just hang out?

DG: Yes, we'd do museums. But very—you know, we were doing a lot of the tourist stuff still, don't forget. You know? So we'd to the Statute of Liberty or we'd go . . . I loved being down on Wall Street. But it's not like we were going to theater and all that stuff so much. Mainly because there was no money. I mean I did see shows. In fact, the first Broadway show I ever saw was *Bajour*—gypsies—and it starred Nancy Dussault, who's fabulous. She did lots of Broadway. She was Tony-nominated and today, a very dear friend of mine. Nancy Dussault and Chita Rivera [who also starred in *Bajour*.]

CM: Do you remember what theater it was?

DG: I don't. But I bet I could Google it. *Bajour*. Or I could ask Nancy. She'd tell me what the hell theater it was. But—and I never told Nancy because I adore her, but she was kind of the straight ingénue. I think she was kidnapped by the gypsies or something like that. But Chita Rivera was this wild gypsy woman. When she came out on that stage with that . . . You know Chita Rivera. Oh my God, that energy and dancing. I thought I was going to die. I, of course, knew who she was—because of *West Side Story*—by reputation. I mean, I never saw it, the stage version.

But I just couldn't imagine that much energy and charisma. She was like an explosion. Well, then it was really a sealed deal for me and Chita. That was it. You know, she—I'd never seen anything like it. Omigod, she was fantastic. So—and I remember seeing *Camelot*, but the only original star left was Robert Goulet. So I did go, but last row and not very often.

CM: Seeing that first Broadway show—"Bajour," was it?

DG: *Bajour*.

CM: "Bajour."

DG: *B-A-J-O-U-R, Bajour*.

CM: "Bajour." Was it—did you have a feeling of maybe you were beginning to live your dream?

**DG:** Yeah, sure. Well, just arriving in New York, we were finally, after all those years—since Humphreys, talking about it—we were finally doing it. We weren't just talking about it. We were doing it. We were doing it for real.

**CM:** Do you remember if Charles was making art during this time? Did he sketch, did he . . .

**DG:** Not that much. Not that much. A little later. Because he left after the three or four months, which was, omigod, then it really got hard because I didn't know anybody. I mean in the whole city. It was really lonely. Never occurred to me to go home, though. Not even in my—no. But it was really, really hard. But then I got another job at Fifty-Third and Park Avenue in a bank, except I was down in the basement. Because again, they were converting something to something else. You know, there was a lot going on in the '60s, and they were converting these things, and we had to sit there with ledger seats, marking. It was just hideous.

But I made a whole bunch of friends. And it was the kind of friends that you never had in East LA. One was a girl from Dublin. Another was a girl from Finland. This guy was from Latvia. I had barely even heard of Latvia. It was thrilling, you know? After just the sameness of East LA, or anyplace. If you go from Oklahoma or anywhere. Omigod, all these accents and cultures. Omigod.

And by then, there'd been an in-between horrible place. Because when Charles left, we didn't know anybody, except he knew one guy, Jerry Stanley—there are photos—who had an apartment on West Eighteenth Street, 305 West Eighteenth. And he said, "Well, Danny can stay with me." And I was like, well, I didn't really know him, but it was better than—what was I going to do? I couldn't afford that place by myself. I didn't know anybody. And Carlos and Jerry were kind of a little item at that time. So I stayed with him. That's before I realized that there was only one sofa bed in that apartment. Which means I didn't want to go home every night. Because then I'd be at work all day, still on Wall Street job, and time to go home. But omigod, I know what that means. So it was not good. But I wasn't with him that long, thank God. Maybe a couple months.

And I happened to run into somebody—I'll never forget—I was walking up Central Park West: "Hey!" And I don't know how I knew him, Michael Emory. I had met him—I don't know how I met this fellow, but I knew him. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, you know, I'm kind of looking for a roommate."

"I'm looking for a roommate."

"You're kidding!"

And we decided to get an apartment. Thank God, because we got a really nice apartment, 103 West Seventy-Fifth Street, between Columbus and—

**CM:** Amsterdam?

**DG:** No, Columbus and—yeah, no. You've got the park, and then you've got Columbus and Amsterdam, right. Yeah, Columbus and Amsterdam. It was really cool, a great apartment. And then that's when life really got great. Because Michael was a really great guy. We got along really well.

**CM:** What did Michael do?

**DG:** You know, I don't remember. I think he was—he worked at a publishing house or something, I think. He was gay. I mean we didn't—I mean we were just friends, but he was gay, a Southern boy. And really fun and really nice. And then I started to meet all those people when I changed jobs. And then I was having parties, and then my life . . . And I was auditioning—I wasn't auditioning, but I was taking lessons. And so that's when things started to get better, when I moved to Seventy-Fifth Street.

**CM:** And that would have been, what? Six months, nine months, a year after you went to New York?

**DG:** Maybe. Yeah, yeah. Certainly within that first year, for sure, after he left. Yeah.

**CM:** Were there any other Chicanos hanging out in New York at the time?

**DG:** As it turns out, there was one, but I don't know that it was that early. But I did not know him. I then learned about him after I moved back to LA in the '80s. His name was Marc Allen Trujillo. He was a gay man, and I vaguely remember walking by the village, and you know, there are all those cabarets

downstairs. I remember Marc Allen Trujillo and thinking, oh, you know, “It’s a Latino name.” It turned out he was a Chicano from East LA. I don’t know if he was from East LA, he was from LA. And then years later, when I moved back in the early ’80s, he was very prominent in the Latino community because he and his partner, Frank Nanoia, used to run *Nosotros* for Ricardo Montalban.

And I was very much into getting into all the Latino organizations, and then that’s when like, “How could we have never met?”

“I was at . . .”

“Well I was at, I was at,” blah blah blah.

So—but we had never—he’s the only other one that I know of. Because there was one Mexican restaurant in all of Manhattan that I knew about. It was down in the village. It was the only one I knew about.

CM: And what was it called?

DG: I don’t remember, but I do remember it was downstairs. You had to go downstairs. It was this little Mexican restaurant. So my mom used to send Carlos and me chorizo, frozen, and flour tortillas. And she would freeze them, send them special delivery airmail. There was no FedEx, you know. And so that would mean that they’d get there maybe in three days. So it really just kind of started to thaw. You know chorizo: you could eat it nine years later after being out in the sun, and you’ll be fine. There are so many spices in it. So that’s how we would get our fix. Because there was nothing. There was nothing at that time.

And no, I never—because this was even kind of—even though the *puertorriqueños* started to go there, I don’t even remember them that much at that time at all. But they were already starting by the ’50s. So they were there, but not in any way that I recall. I’d see them on the subway and stuff like that, but I didn’t have any *puertorriqueño* friends or Latino friends at all. I didn’t have any Mexican friends in LA really, except for Carlos and Renee Santellanes. All my other friends were not Latino. Those are the only two.

CM: Who were you and Charles hanging out with when you first got there? I mean—

DG: Well, we didn’t know anybody when we first got there.

CM: But I mean, you had to have met some people at some point in Carlos’s stay, no?

DG: Not that much, except . . . As I said, I didn’t meet anybody where I was working, and where else would I meet people but work? He was at an ad agency, but the only one I remember is Jerry Stanley, who I wound up staying with. So I don’t really remember. I guess it was just us, pretty much, exploring and discovering and just walking. You know, just walking. And Times Square in those days, omigod. You saw *Midnight Cowboy*. I mean, it was really . . . And of course it was fabulous. It was like, oh, it was so naughty and so daring and so brave. It wasn’t scary. I was never scared. I was lonely after he left, but I was never scared.

You know, people always say, “How brave, how brave.” I don’t think—I didn’t feel brave, because I knew I could pick up the phone and my parents would send an airline ticket immediately. So it’s not like I’d been thrown out of the house, I had nowhere to go. So I guess it was brave in one way, but I knew that I could always go home. Although, as I say, I never saw that option at all. I had fish to fry.

CM: Did Frank Romero ever go out to visit you there, sort of in those early—

DG: He and Carlos came together and lived together in New York for a while, a chunk of time. Again, sketchy to me, because during those periods . . . And they were there for a while. I’m talking—I remember he was there a few years, a couple of years, that kind of thing. He came back and forth a couple of times in the ’70s. He always had this love-hate thing with New York. He loved New York, but he never felt he could be a part of it because he was really a Chicano artist. Even today, pretty much still considered Chicano artist, and not in with a [David] Hockney. You know, oh, he’s a great Chicano artist. And then you have Hockney, and then you have these other California people. So imagine, then.

So I think New York especially was snobbish about California, period. And then a Chicano to boot? Well, you may as well go shoot yourself. So he had this love-hate for the city, very much so. And so he went back and forth a couple of times. But when he’d be there, we’d only see each other on occasion because I was into my musical theater life. He was trying to get into the art thing, and then he was with Frank. So we’d get together. We’d see each other. But it wasn’t like a constant thing at all, at that time.

- CM: Do you have a sense of, like, if you did, in those sort of early adventures, go to museums, or go to galleries? do you have a sense of what art Carlos may have found inspiring during this time? Like was there anything he ever talked about, like, “Omgod, I went and saw a Willem de Kooning today, and it blew my mind,” or . . .
- DG: I wish I could say yes, but I really don’t remember. You have to realize that I just got swallowed up with musical theater. That was it. I just breathed and ate musical theater, and there was just nothing else out there. And I—you know, that’s why I’m telling you to the ridiculous extent, you know. Stonewall [riots]—yeah, I was busy doing *Bye Bye Birdie* in summer stock. You know, the civil rights—oh, well, I was doing theater. And I just was completely—that’s all it was.
- CM: You were in it.
- DG: I was just in it. And nothing else existed, you know? And it wasn’t until I moved back to LA that I became this big Latino activist. Big time. And then because of my solo show, more recently, a gay activist. But all my New York years, I was just in show business. End of story.
- CM: But you would come back to LA maybe, what, once a year to visit?
- DG: Once a year at Christmas. Yes, for Christmas.
- CM: Once a year at Christmas. Okay, great. So what—Carlos’s stay in New York was always going to be just a few months, right?
- DG: Yes.
- CM: I mean was there ever a possibility that he might stay longer?
- DG: No. No. I think he wanted to finish his schooling out here, etcetera. So that first plan was just to go for a few months so he could see what was going on there. I’m sure he thought, “Oh, maybe I can come back one day.” But not that “Gee, maybe I’ll stay, too.” Not at that time. No. And he went back at least two times that I remember. Once with Frank, and then I think Frank came back and he stayed. And then he went through a very—what’s the word . . . Self—oh hell, you’ve been hurtful to yourself. Why can’t I think? Self-destructive, that’s the word I’m looking for. Very self-destructive period in New York. But I think that was not with Frank. I think Frank had already gone back.
- CM: And that was significantly later.
- DG: Yes.
- CM: This was not in the period with you.
- DG: Correct, correct.
- CM: And then during this period when you were together with Carlos in New York, I mean, did you ever do stuff, like go to gay bars or—
- DG: No. I never went to gay bars.
- CM: Okay.
- DG: I didn’t like bars, period. And especially, at that time, there were police raids on them all the time. I didn’t want to get arrested. So no, I never did the gay bar scene. Also I was very insecure. You know, I wasn’t going to stand there waiting to see if somebody picked me up. And I wasn’t secure enough to go up to somebody. I couldn’t deal with that. So there was no sense of me going to the bars. So no, we never did that. No.
- CM: Where did you meet people?
- DG: Other than work? Do you mean sexual partners or just people?
- CM: Yeah, guys.
- DG: In those days?
- CM: Mm-hmm.
- DG: On the street. You’d just be walking down the street, and you’d pass somebody and you’d kind of eye, and you’d eye. And then one of you would stop and look in a window, and the other one would walk up. “Yeah, do you live around here?” That’s how you got picked up, you know. There was really nowhere else in those days, except for a few bars, and there weren’t many. I went to a couple in my day, but they were scary. I

just was too afraid in the '60s. It changed later. But the '70s was a whole other ballgame. The late '70s, before AIDS.

CM: This is like—I mean, the era you're in, you're pre-Stonewall—

DG: Oh yes. Oh yes. So you know, the police raids. And it was not pretty, you know, so you were very careful. Now I didn't feel oppressed as such, because I was in musical theater. Everybody was gay. You know? So it was very freeing for me, but it was not something you did out in public. I won't say out in the streets, because you did. But you know, it was not a gay bar situation. There weren't that many. And there were police raids. So you just didn't do that. So really, that's kind of how, you know. And I was young and I was pretty. It was not hard.

CM: Do you remember the gay bars you went to? Do you remember what they were called?

DG: No. No.

CM: Now when Carlos—did Carlos tell you at some point, he's like, "Okay, I'm getting ready to leave?" Or did you always know that this end date was coming?

DG: I think we had an end date. I think we knew that end date.

CM: How did you feel about that, as that end date approached?

DG: Omigod. Well, I don't remember the approaching of it, but I remember the day. Omigod. It was horrible.

CM: Tell me a little bit about that.

DG: Well, I took him to the bus station because the bus would then take you to the airport. So that's where I took him. And I'm standing there, and then we said goodbye. And then he gets on the bus, and then I see the bus and I'm waving as the bus goes away, and the bus gets smaller and smaller, and I'm just standing there and I'm going, "Oh my." And I look around, and I'm, like, "Fuck." I'm really alone. I mean I don't know anybody except Jerry Stanley, who I don't really know, and I don't like that much. I still didn't know that it would be a nightly attack, but even—I just didn't like him that much. So it's hardly like we were friends.

And I was just alone. Thousands of miles away. I mean, at that time, you may as well have been in, you know, Mozambique, the other side of the world. That's what it was like. And so it was really—I stood there a long time because I'm like, "So where do I go? I don't have any friends. I don't want to go to Jerry's. What do I do?" It was just hard. And it was like that for a while, until I ran into Michael Emory in the park. I wish I could remember how we met.

CM: What did Jerry do?

DG: He was at the ad agency with Carlos. I guess he was in the—he must have been in the same art department. I think he was a commercial artist. Sleaze ball.

CM: How did you stay in touch with your family during this period?

DG: Telephone calls. Telephone calls.

CM: Did you write letters?

DG: Yes, some. Yeah, I wrote letters, but mostly it was phone calls. Carlos and I would send postcards because we couldn't afford long distance calls. But of course, calling home, I would call collect. So, not too many letters, except for that one I told you I found. That was so pathetic.

CM: So these postcards that you would send to each other, tell me a little bit about them. I mean were you guys communicating mundane things? Was it, "Oh my God, I had a brilliant idea today"? Or, "I had a breakthrough on a painting"? Or "I got an audition"?

DG: They were—

CM: What were you—

DG: No, they were—most of them, yeah. Some of it was mundane stuff, but some of them, you know, which were fantastic. And only a few of them were in the exhibition at the Vincent Price. But especially when he started to get into the movement, you know. Because then it would be, "Oh, I was up—I met César Chávez at the Farmworkers [*inaudible*], but I don't like the way they deal with artists. But I do want to help. But we'll see how it goes." And they were amazing. One about Luis Valdez, you know. So they were very important. Because he would really say—it wasn't like, "Oh, I met Luis Valdez and I'm having a lovely time. How

are you?" No. This was the—yeah, yeah. There was neat stuff. And then, "Oh God, I'm as usual broke. I'm here in Echo Park. I really feel horrible. If I don't get some rent, I don't know what I'm going to do. I may have to get a job." Yeah, no, serious stuff. And I'm sure I was writing, oh, "I auditioned for this, and I'm doing *Bye Bye Birdie*." You know? We always had this bizarre . . . I remember when he almost died. That was in the '70s, early '70s, because the alcoholism was really horrible.

CM: Was he drinking a lot already as a young man?

DG: No. No, it started later. Some of it was during that self-destructive period I talked about in New York, when he was really—that's when he really got . . . And then when he came back and was living with Frank [Romero] up on Bunker Hill. Frank had a house up on Bunker Hill. He was with a woman whose name escapes me. I know her name. [Diane.] She is the mother of his first daughter. I guess, Colette. Is she the artist? No, he has two daughters, but the one from the first—oh, I can see her, too. Hmm.

And by that time, he was drinking really, really badly. And then that's when he got pneumonia, or I don't know what he got, and his body was so ravaged already, that he literally was near death. And I remember per usual, and I was feeling so guilty because I came out here for Christmas, and he was at General Hospital. I can never go on the freeway without thinking of him when I see that hospital. And he was all tubed and blah, blah, blah, blah, you know? And I go up there, and of course I'm like, "Well, I'm on my way to Palm Beach, because I'm doing *Irma La Douce* with Chita Rivera," and then I went on with my silly little life, and he's there like near death. I'm like, "Omigod." It was just odd, you know? It was just odd. I mean I was still barely making ends meet, but I just remember that particular time. I was thrilled I was going to work with Chita, my idol, in Palm Beach, Florida, in the middle of fucking winter, getting away from New York. Hello? I was a happy camper. And there was Carlos, all tubed up.

CM: So this was in the '70s?

DG: Yeah.

CM: Do you know approximately what year? Early, mid?

DG: It had to be early because I was with a director choreographer at that time and he directed this production, which may have had something to do with why I was in it. But—and we broke up in '73. So it had to have been about '71, '72.

CM: Now when he came—you said he came, he went to New York a couple of times.

DG: Yeah.

CM: Once with Frank Romero.

DG: Yeah.

CM: And that would have been, what? You estimate a couple of years after you moved there? Like mid-'60s?

DG: No, I think it was—well, I don't know why I keep thinking '70s, but—

CM: Because you moved there in '62.

DG: Yeah.

CM: And he would have left in late '62, right?

DG: Yeah. And then if—went a couple . . . That is still the '60s. I don't know why I think of . . . I guess it was the '60s. It must have been. The two chunks with him that I remember, is when he was there with Frank.

CM: And that would have been the next time—

DG: That was . . . I believe so.

CM: So he leaves. He's gone for several years, and then he comes back with Frank Romero.

DG: That is my recollection.

CM: Your recollection.

DG: Correct.

CM: Exactly. We don't know if this is—

DG: Right. And we went through this at the [Vincent Price] museum too because—and I'm, like, "I can't remember." And [his widow], Elsa [Flores], kind of helped fill the—even she wasn't sure, because she wasn't around, you know? It's sketchy to me. But I believe that is so.

- CM: So we're estimating that a few years after leaving, he came back with Frank Romero. Do you remember approximately how long he was in town?
- DG: The second time? They were there a while. I don't think it was months. I think it was longer. A year, a couple of years, maybe. I should ask Frank. You know, I should email Frank. He's in France now. Just so I know for future things, because I'm really not sure about all that. He would know. He'd remember what years they were there.
- CM: And they shared an apartment together during that time?
- DG: Yes. Although I don't even know where. And I wouldn't see them that often. But I used to have a lot of parties in those days, and Carlos loved show people, and he loved—he always wanted to design sets for theater or for opera. He always said he was going to do that one day. And so he loved that. And as a matter of fact, if you see [his] *Night Theater* . . . Look. [referring to a work by Almaraz] *Night Theater*. This was called *Moonlight Theater*. You know? So he had a theme of that—theatrical curtains. And he loved all that. So he would love coming to my parties because of all these show folk, and he loved them. So I'd see him mostly that way, as opposed to, "Let's have dinner." Because I was just into my world, and he was into his, you know?
- CM: And what were these . . . Was Carlos one of those sort of life-of-the-party kind of person? Or how—I mean how would he be within that kind of social setting?
- DG: He certainly was . . . "Life of the party" is . . . I don't know if that's the right phrase. He was very outgoing, clearly. This is not somebody who's going to stand in the corner. No, not at all. But he was more intellectually . . . I'm more life-of-the-party because I'm just full of crap, carrying on about stuff, and telling stories and making people laugh. But he would be getting more into conversations, and he was much more the intellectual between us. And—but he was very funny. And he was a fabulous storyteller. Oh, when he would tell stories and he'd go into the accents and the gestures. And he was a great storyteller. So he was very outgoing. But at a party, he would be the one to find somebody, and they would be into a deep conversation, while I would be flitting from person to person. It was a completely different thing. [chuckles]
- CM: Do you remember any particular story of his that really—that you recall?
- DG: Oh God. I wish I could. I wish I could. Stories that he would tell?
- CM: Yeah. Like what kind of stories did he tell?
- DG: Well you know, if he would tell about—let's say he was telling a story about his aunt. I think it was his father's sister, you know, he would become her. You know what I'm saying? He would become the character as he was telling the story. So he was very funny. He was a funny, funny guy. I remember after he died, one time Elsa said to me—because of course Maya, his daughter was only, I don't know, what, six, seven years old? She was little. Elsa said that all the fun went out of the house. Because Elsa's kind of serious, but Carlos would put on wigs and he'd paint a face, and he'd tell stories, and he was just fun. She said all the fun went out of the house. And for a little six-year-old girl, that's hard.
- CM: So he had—he was a little bit of a performer, too.
- DG: Oh yes. Well, we used to star in our shows in East LA. What are you talking about?
- CM: The great East LA revues.
- DG: Please, I believe I had star billing, but I'm not really—I couldn't swear to that.
- CM: It was in your contract.
- DG: Yeah, no. He was a star, believe me. He was a star, Carlos. No question.
- CM: Now, when you visited him—
- DG: And a leader. And a leader.
- CM: The kind of person that could get other people to do stuff.
- DG: Oh yes. Oh, you ask anybody. You ask Barbara Carrasco or people that knew him during those days, when I was in New York and he was involved with César [Chávez]. He was a leader and, yeah. No, he was a leader. No question.

CM: During that time when—okay, he'd already moved back to LA permanently and you would see him every once in a while, did you still maintain a certain closeness?

DG: Oh, always. Always. However, it wasn't always easy. When he went through his political period, oy. You know, I don't know what he was. I don't know if he was a communist or what the hell he was. I think he might have been a communist. I'm not sure. But you know, when he got into something, he was in it, you know? And I—

CM: He didn't do it halfway.

DG: Oh, no, no, no. And he went off to Cuba and he went off to China. You know? While I was busy doing *Bye Bye Birdie*. And I remember one time I came home at Christmas . . . And you know, I wish I knew what it meant. Because this whole Christmas, it was 19—I want to say '79. I've got to think there. It was definitely the mid, late-'70s. I'll have to look it up. And it was Christmas, and my mom— my parents had divorced by then. They divorced—it had all exploded when I had been in New York three or four months. So on top of everything else, it was like my family was gone. You know? It was—and I've often thought how traumatic it must be for a child. I was twenty-one and had already left home, and I was, like, devastated. And I suddenly thought. "I have no family. I have nowhere to go home to." So imagine when it happens to a little kid. Well, my brother was only twelve, you know? And it certainly has taken its toll. So I digress for a minute there. What—oh, oh.

So, after the divorce, my mom moved to Monterey Park. And so I was at her house, and he came to visit. And I remember it was a very foggy night. You know how it can get very foggy? And the Christmas tree was up, and we exchanged gifts or something. And I have, from that Christmas, a little gift tag, and I just found it like a year ago. And it's in his handwriting, and it says, "Every once in a while, we need a good kick in the pants. Love, CDA"—Charles David Almaraz. But I don't know if it means I gave him a kick in the pants or if he gave me one. The way it's worded, I'm not sure. And I'm trying to remember, but he said, "Every once in a while, we need a good kick in the pants." And I'm, like, "Damn, I wish I could remember who got the kick and who did the kicking." Who was the kicker? And who was the kickee? How do I find that out? Well, I guess I never will unless I go under hypnosis.

But at that visit, he was deep into his politics. And I was deep into being pretentious. So I was shopping at Saks, and I had my Gucci scarf. And he just thought that was disgusting, you know, when there's so many poor people and blah blah. And he'd just been to Cuba and blah, blah. And he was just pontificating. I'm like, "Omigod." And I kept saying, "Well, wait a minute. If it's okay with me, that that's what you want to believe, why can't it be okay with you that this is what I believe?" The whole night. And it was a disaster. And I remember when he left, and I was standing on the porch with my mom. And he walked down the driveway to get to his car, and he walked through the fog. And I said to my mom, "I don't know that we can be friends anymore." I just couldn't believe that we couldn't be friends anymore. And the picture was so perfect, because he disappeared into the fog, into his car. I didn't think our friendship was ending that night, but that it was becoming impossible to be friends with him. So you know, there were those times, but he came around eventually. He came around, you know.

CM: Well, friendships have that habit of . . . You know, you grow apart, you come back together.

DG: Relationships.

CM: It's like all relationships.

DG: I've been with my partner thirty-four years, and everyone's like, "Wow, that's great. You're our idols." And I go, "Well, it hasn't been easy, honey." You know? It's hard. You know, you both change and you try and change together and you support each other, you know, but it's hard. It's hard to keep a relationship.

CM: Now when you visited LA, would you see him every time you came?

DG: Oh, of course. Oh, of course. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Absolutely.

CM: So from the '60s into what . . . He passed away in the '80s, right?

DG: He passed away in '89.

CM: Eighty-nine.

DG: Yeah.

CM: Eighty-nine.

DG: So, happily, we got a few more years together because I moved back to LA in '82. So we had that little chunk of time.

CM: And so during that whole period of the '60s and '70s, you were still seeing him at least once a year on those visits home.

DG: Definitely. If he was in New York, we'd see each other more. I'd come home every year, see him. Sometimes I'd come home twice a year, but usually it was just at holidays. And then in between, there were postcards or phone calls. So there was never like, oh, we didn't talk for a few years, and then we—no, no. Never.

CM: Constant contact.

DG: Constant.

CM: Now that destructive trip, self-destructive trip, he had in New York. When was that?

DG: Well, that had to have been the '70s, I would think. Early '70s. I don't think it was the '60s. No, you know what? It may have still been the '60s, because I'm envisioning—and I think I was still on Seventy-fifth Street. Yeah. It had to all be the '60s. Even—remember earlier when you were saying what—it had to be because I was not . . . All these stories. I was still on Seventy-fifth Street. And I met Darwin Knight, and we were together seven, eight years. And we met, like, in—we broke up in '73. And one of these stories, Darwin was around. So it had to have all been in the '60s, including the destructive period. Wow, I think so.

CM: And what was it that made that period so self-destructive for Carlos?

DG: He always had issues with his sexuality. And I still don't have an answer. I mean I'm guessing he might have been bisexual. But he never felt good—Catholic boy—about the gay thing. This is my two bits of psychology. Because he was always very destructive, and this awful period was—he would literally drink himself 'til he could barely move. And then he would get in a cab and go up to Harlem at midnight, and get dropped off and go into bars. And he would tell me, and I'd say, "You're going to get killed one night or beat up or something." I couldn't believe he was doing things like that.

CM: Was he doing drugs at the time, too?

DG: I don't think he ever did drugs, other than smoking dope. Not that I'm aware of. Not that I was aware of. He never did coke and stuff like that, not to my knowledge. I just—and I don't even know if he was smoking yet. I think that was when he came back to LA. But he was very destructive. And then he met this really sweet man. A German, a chef.

CM: In New York?

DG: In New York. Gunther [?], something like that. I can still see his face. Really a sweet, sweet man. And I remember one time—and they were together a little bit of time. But then I remember him coming to me one time without Carlos and saying, "I don't know what to do. I've tried to—but he does everything to try and break us." Oh, they had, like, a tumultuous . . . I mean fisticuffs. I mean they had a tumultuous relationship. And Gunther, whatever his name was—I'm sure there is a German name that is something like that. Gunther sounds familiar. That Carlos would do almost anything to start a fight. Like, "Uh-oh, we're too happy," you know. And that's what—Gunther was, "That's what it is. I know it is. I don't know what to do. Can you talk to him?"

And I'm, like . . . You know, you can't—people do what they do. You know? And you can talk to them until you're blue in the face. It's like the poor people who are addicts, you know, or alcohol. You can say it 'til you're blue, but until the day comes when they want to do it, there's nothing anybody can do. You know? So . . . And they eventually did break up. But he was a really, really nice guy. But he—Carlos—always wanted a wife and a family and kids, you know? That's what he always wanted.

CM: And was it like he felt maybe he wasn't fulfilling that because he might have been gay? Or . . .

DG: I'm guessing. Or if that was getting in the way of it. But he also had serious romances with a lot of women. Patricia—I forget her last name. He was really in love with her. That's when he lived in Echo Park. He would

write me about her. So he definitely—so I’m saying, I guess, he was bisexual. When I was young I didn’t believe there was such a thing. I thought, “Please, it’s just somebody who can’t make up their mind.” But there obviously are people like that, they just fall in love with the person. It happens to be in a male body, it happens to be in a female body. And maybe that’s the ultimate, isn’t it? What difference does it make? I just love that creature, whether it has tits or a dick. You know? So, but when I was young, I thought that was pooh-pooh, you know. But now I’m sure. So if I had to guess, I’d guess he was, you know? I don’t know. We really never talked about those things. Isn’t that funny?

CM: Yeah, but you never—during that self-destructive period, you never had a conversation with him about his drinking or say, “Hey, you know . . . ?”

DG: Even when he was diagnosed with AIDS, we never discussed how he might have caught it. Ever. Never. It really didn’t matter. All that matters was that he got sick. But how he got it, I really didn’t give a shit. I mean he just had it. You know?

CM: It’s kind of moot at that point.

DG: Yeah. And he might not even have known. How do you really know? “Oh, it was that . . .” Who knows? I don’t know. But, yeah, it’s funny.

CM: Did you just feel that he wasn’t going to be willing to hear anything you had to say? Or you just felt like—

DG: Probably. Probably. I knew him so well. I thought, “He’s not going to listen to me.” It doesn’t mean I shouldn’t have tried. But I just didn’t.

CM: It’s tricky, because, like you said, it’s, like, he has to make the decision to change.

Speaking of that, in the years that you knew him—I mean from the time of moving to New York to the time of his death in 1989—what sort of arc do you see in his person? Like, did he change? Did he, at the end, remain the same Carlos? Was it the same Carlos you knew as a kid?

DG: Oh, I think he went back to the same Carlos. Yes, yes. As he started to finally get success as an artist, yeah. I always remember that—I used to live just a few blocks from here, here in West Hollywood. And his gallery was about two blocks from where I lived, on Melrose. The gallery that kept his work. Oh God, I know it’s a woman’s name. Jan Turner. Jan Turner Gallery. And he was going to have a big exhibition. And so he called me and he said, “I’ll come and meet you at your house, and we’ll walk down together because Elsa’s coming from . . .” She was going to be somewhere, she was going to meet us there, whatever. I said, “Okay, good.”

So I’m waiting there, and then he—I hear the buzz or knock, whatever, and I open the door. And he goes, “I’m rich.” And he put out his hand like he wanted me to shake it, and he goes, “I’m rich.” And I said, “What are you talking about?” “All my work has been sold.” I said, “But the show hasn’t opened.” He said, “People have been going to the framers and buying the work. I’m rich.” I love that story. He was so happy. Yeah.

CM: Was the—do you think his sort of very hardcore political activism was like he was looking for something? Because—I mean, do you get a sense that in sleeping around, in getting drunk, in running off to Cuba and becoming militant, and then disappearing into the fog, do you see like a search for something there that he—

DG: Oh, sure, sure. And I’m not even sure he exactly knew what he was looking for, other than I know he always wanted to have a wife and a family. That I know. But oh yeah, he was always searching. He was a ferocious reader. I mean, omigod. And he read all the fancy books, you know? He read all the psychologists and the histories and *Ulysses*. I mean he was just—and kept dozens of journals. There’s dozens and dozens and dozens of them. I have copies of all of them here. Either Elsa has—she must have them. Yeah, because some of them were in the exhibition. I don’t think they’ve been donated anywhere. But there are lots and lots of journals. You know. Cuba, and then China, and then New York years. All that. There are lots of journals. They’re all there, and he was very open and honest with them. And there’s drawings in there, they’re incredible. There were a couple of them in the [Vincent Price Art Museum] exhibition. So his life is very well detailed, believe me, through his own hand.

CM: When did it dawn on you that he was going to be a significant artist?

DG: I always thought he would be.

CM: But did you have a moment where maybe you saw a piece or you heard him talk about something?

DG: No. It's just because I knew him. I just knew him, and I just believed in him. I mean I can look at that Bambi drawing, and go, "Oh my God!" No. But it was him. There was no doubt in my mind that he was going to succeed. If he had decided he was going to be a sculptor or whatever it was, he was going to succeed. So it wasn't necessarily the work itself.

CM: Did you ever go to a show of his where you were particularly blown away by the quality of work?

DG: I was always blown away by his stuff. Yeah, when he—during that period they were huge, and they were just breathtaking. I couldn't believe he could have done all that. Even his last showings, you know, when he was so ill that last year, you couldn't believe the output. And my partner, Richard [Read], was his assistant for, like, the last six, seven years of his life. Well because—well, we moved out in '82, he died in '89. And Richard wasn't sure what he wanted to do, and he did this for a while, then he worked here. And all of a sudden he wasn't working at what he wanted to do, and Carlos said, "Well, I can use an assistant."

And Richard loved him, and so he was his art assistant. And God bless him, Richard was there during that awful period because he'd be with Carlos, and Carlos would collapse, and then he'd call Elsa and they'd get him in the car and get him to the hospital. So Richard was really in the thick of it during all that period. But the outlet—that's not the word . . .

CM: Output.

DG: Yeah, the output of work was unbelievable when he was so ill that last year. Yeah.

CM: Is there one work of his that you just, either for nostalgia reasons or because it personally spoke to you, just stands above all his other pieces?

DG: Well, I don't say it's the greatest piece, but that piece up there, that pastel of Bali Ha'i. Only because that is the only piece of work I've ever asked for. Now that being said, I never had to because he was always very generous. Christmas, birthdays—artwork, always. And if they were serigraphs, they were artist proofs. You know? A few pieces I bought. He'd tell me, "Buy *Night Theater*." And so I had pre-publication price. I bought *Night Theater*, *Greed*. I had quite a few *Greeds* because he said to me, "This is going to do something." So I bought quite a few *Greeds*. But almost everything you see here were gifts.

But that one. We were in Kauai, where he's buried. And Elsa had some kind of attachment with Kauai. Her mother used to go there or—I don't remember what that was. So they started to go there, and after they went through a couple of years, they bought. They had a little house there, and that's where Elsa spends most of her time now, in Kauai. But they—I think they were already in their little house, and we—Richard and me and two friends of ours, Barry and George—went to visit. And we were on the beach, looking at Bali Ha'i. That's what that mountain peak is called in Kauai. That sunset was so beautiful, and Elsa was next to me, and it was just a magic time.

And I said to her, "You know, my birthday is in three weeks. Do you think Carlos could do just a little pastel? Not a big one, just a little pastel of Bali Ha'i?" She goes, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." So sure enough, about two days before my birthday, that came in the mail. So I do think it's a gorgeous piece. If you look closely, the sky, it's really beautiful. But mostly it's because of that. Yeah, that. And then I love, omigod, another piece that's in my bedroom. I love that piece. That's the one I love the most aesthetically, really. I came out on a visit, and he was at Echo Park. That was a very, very, very hard time for him, in Echo Park.

CM: This would be roughly when?

DG: It had to be '70s, early, mid-'70s maybe. Oh, in fact, the piece is dated '79. You know, he had no money. He was broke. He was trying to learn to play the guitar and he couldn't do it. And he'd broken up with Patricia, and he was a mess. And I came out for a visit, and I went over there, and he said, "My rent is due and I don't have any money. This pastel, seventy-five dollars." I said—first of all, I was in New York on unemployment, which was fifty dollars a week. So when you're living off fifty dollars a week on unemployment, you don't go out and buy a piece of art for seventy-five dollars. And I'm like, "Oh, Carlos, I love it." And I did. I

just loved it. I just loved it. But I said, “I don’t have seventy-five dollars.” And how come—I’m, like, I said, “Okay, okay.” And I did buy it. So I paid seventy-five dollars for that. And—

CM: What’s it called?

DG: I don’t remember that it has a name. I called it “Winged Horses,” or “Winged Figures,” because it was in the exhibition, and we had to give it a name. But I don’t recall that it had a name. But I think it’s a spectacular, spectacular. We’ll go see it in a minute.

CM: What’s it of?

DG: It’s a kind of a landscape, but it’s nighttime and there’s the moon. And there’s two horses that are in flight—not in flight—they’re like leaping, and the figures on them have wings. And it’s all blues and purples with some reds, and it’s just—some stars—it’s a gorgeous piece. I love it. And I must be right because when I did the exhibition, I had never had the artwork appraised. I never had because I just never had. It was just stuff I had that Carlos gave me. You know, when I first moved to New York on Seventy-fifth Street, and he was living there—he’d come over. “You have a Diego Rivera poster from a museum shop? You gotta have art.” And then he’d do a painting or he’d do a drawing so I could have real art. And so you know—so he was always very generous. But that piece, I really, really love. I love that piece. Yeah, yeah. I would have to say that’s my favorite piece. For two reasons. The story and also I think it’s so beautiful. So beautiful.

CM: So he’s left New York. You’re on your own. What—in the months that follow, like, what are you doing? Are you working? Are you starting to take classes? What are you doing?

DG: Yes, I’m always working. I’m always working. Which is not so clear in my show. It makes it sound like I was a ho. And I wasn’t. Oh, it doesn’t? Because I know myself about—I wouldn’t—gentlemen would . . . I’d get perks, meaning they take me to the opera, they take me to an expensive restaurant. But I always worked, paid my own bills, paid my own rent. In fact, there was a hilarious story that really points it out that’s out of movie. But anyway, so I was never “kept,” as it were. You know? And the way my show goes, I’m going—maybe I should say, and I always worked full time and paid my bills. So I always worked. I was at the bank for a good—I think a few years.

CM: This is the bank on Fifty-third and Park?

DG: Fifty-third and Park. Citibank, yeah.

CM: And what were you doing there at Citibank?

DG: I was in the basement, where they were converting something. We were looking at ledgers.

CM: That’s right, all the microfilm.

DG: Yeah, so I’m looking at ledgers. It was a bore. But at least it was fun people. And I was there a while. And then, I think, after that I started to just get piecemeal work, because then I’d go off to summer stock. I’d come back with no job, and then maybe I’d temp somewhere for a couple of months. I worked at Grolier, Inc., which was—they were putting out a new set of encyclopedias. So that was fun. I loved that. But of course, once we—I was a researcher. That was really fun. And I liked it, and they were great people.

But by then I was starting to do a few things. As a matter of fact, I was doing an off-Broadway show, and everybody from Grolier was going to come. And then we postponed the opening night two nights because this wasn’t ready. And I’m there, we’re rehearsing, I look up, and there’s all my Grolier friends walking in the theater, looking around. I forgot to tell them that we’d postponed! God bless them, they had flowers and everything, and I’m like, “What are you doing? Oh, oh, we postponed.” Poor little things. So you know, I just had various jobs. Until I finally got an agent, Beverly Anderson. Little one-woman agency, and she would send me out, and blah, blah, blah.

And one day she said to me, “Oh, God, I need somebody to help me out here. I’m always so busy. And if you know an actor who wants to do it, they can still go on auditions and they can do things, but at least . . .” I said, “Well, I might be interested.” And that’s how I became an agent. Because before I knew it—because I was already getting to the place where, “this is not working so great.” Two reasons. First of all, I was too “exotic” for most parts. You know? All the juveniles were blonde, blue-eyed in the ’60s. So, and

yet I couldn't play the swarthy—I wasn't that person. I was really a comic character, but I would never get to play those roles. So I couldn't find that niche.

And also it was an era when you better be as butch as you can. You know? You couldn't be flitting around on stage. So, in other words, I really was never able to just go out and be who I was. I had to be careful, too. [*lowers voice*] "Hi, how are you?" And so I had to get as serious as I could and butch it up best I could. And so it was the two things. And I thought, "You know what?" And I was getting a little older for the juvenile roles, and I certainly wasn't a leading man. So I thought, "Well, fuck it. I'll do this for a little while." Twelve years later . . .

I was an agent for that long. I was an agent from *A Chorus Line* to *Cats*. Those were my agent years. Half the original cast of *A Chorus Line* were my clients. And my last Broadway contract was for *Old Deuteronomy* in *Cats*. So those were my years, and I loved it. I really loved it. I loved it. Just the last couple of years, it started to get to me.

CM: Okay, but before we get too far down the agent track . . . So tell me a little bit about . . . What were some of the first classes you took related to show biz?

DG: Omigod. Well, first of all, I always thought I'd be a dancer because I moved very, very well. But you know—well okay, so I go to the phone book, I look up dancers, and I go and I start to take a class at the Martha Graham School of Dance. What the fuck? I don't want to be a modern dancer. But I heard of her at least, you know. But this is how green I was. I go there, and they say, "Okay, classes are here," blah, blah, blah, whatever, "Wednesday. You'll have to get tights" and blah, blah. "Oh, okay, fine." So I go to Capezio, and I tell them I need tights. Okay, well you know, so—and I was like twenty-eight-inch waist at that time. I'll be, "Okay, you're a medium," then, "Here's your dance belt." And I'm, like, "Dance belt? What the hell is a dance belt? You know what a dance belt is? I'm thinking it's a belt to hold up your tights."

They give me a box, I go to the dressing room, and I open it up. It looks like a jock strap, except the top part is wide, you know. Five, six inches of elastic, and then the pouch. And I have the tights on, and then I'm looking at this thing. I'm going, "Oh, you put this over the tights so that it doesn't look—so the bulge there isn't, like, real . . ." So I put the belt on over my tights. And then I walk out into the thing, and the guy goes—yeah—and he goes, "Oh yeah, that's your size. And once it's under the tights, it'll be fine." I'm like, "Oh yeah, uh-huh, yeah, yeah." I'm thinking, "Omigod." [*laughs*] Yeah. How—thank God I did it there and not in the Martha Graham School of Dance. I thought it was for the outside so it wouldn't look too nasty. "And once you put it inside where it belongs, you stupid twit . . ." Yeah, that's how sophisticated I was.

And then I started taking singing lessons, and I very quickly realized I was not going to be a dancer. I just didn't have the discipline. That's serious discipline. You know? So, no. So I—I always moved very well. And it was also an era where you would be—if you could sing great and move well, great. If you were a fabulous dancer and could carry a tune, great. Nowadays, they do everything. I mean, they dance like [Mikhail] Baryshnikov, they sing like [Barbra] Streisand. I mean they are trained to the max. A little too trained, I find because I don't see the heart up there in a lot of people. You know, they're too busy getting trained. But in those days—

CM: They start them when they're super young.

DG: Yeah, yeah, and they're machines, you know. But, so I became a singer-mover, as it was, because I sang pretty well and I moved great, but I was not a dancer. But I did lots of dance parts because I moved so well.

But I saw that theory when I went to the big Broadway revival of *A Chorus Line*, because I was so closely connected to the first one. And in that original *Chorus Line* you had some of those incredible dancers, and they sang okay. Then you had some really good singers who could dance okay. This one, everybody sang great and everybody danced great. And not one of them touched me. I'm watching them. I go, "You sing great, you dance great, and you're leaving me cold." Whereas that original cast, you know . . . That's just my theory. I think some of them are just so trained, they're just trained, and they lose the heart. But that's just me. What do I know?

CM: Well, you have been in theater a long time.

DG: Yeah, I guess.

CM: Tell me about your first audition. What was it for?

DG: Oh my God. I could tell you what it was. It was for Liza Minnelli's stage debut in New York. She was eighteen, sixteen. *Best Foot Forward*, an off-Broadway show. They wanted lots of personality, teenagers. Well, I was twenty-one, twenty-two. I really looked sixteen, seventeen years old. And I had taken several dance classes, and I had taken two or three voice lessons—I'm in. So I go to this audition. Hilarious. Little theater there, because it was an off-Broadway show. This was before *Flora the Red Menace*—that was her big Broadway debut. This was before—the first time. I think she was, like, sixteen. *Best Foot Forward*. And I sing whatever little song I do. And they like me.

“Can you dance?”

“Yeah, I can dance.”

“Okay,” he said, “Can you do a double,” blah blah blah?

And I go, “Yeah, sure.”

This is visual. It's not going to work for your oral history, but anyway, this is what I did. It's this and this and then you go and then you turn. But I do the thing, and I get this, and I go, “This is the part where I get confused. Do I go left or do I go right?” Literally, I'm in this position. And I wasn't sure if it's this or—well it had to be this, so your foot—but, no, I did . . . Yeah. It had to be this way. And I'm like, “Do I go left or right?” Well, big laugh and I did not get the show. That was my first audition. *[laughs]*

CM: Did you go have a cocktail afterwards?

DG: I probably let myself get picked up on the street. I don't remember. But yeah, yeah, yeah. True story. That was in my show at one point, and then I cut it because it was just getting too long. But it was funny.

CM: Was that process of auditioning very nerve-racking to you?

DG: Oh, horrible. Horrible.

CM: What did you do to prepare?

DG: Not much, other than just vocalize and warm up. But it was very, very difficult for me. And a lot of it had to do with what I'm saying. You were afraid they were going to know you were . . . They didn't care if you were gay, you just couldn't act or appear to be gay, you know. And so that was the—that's what made it the hardest, to really try—yes, hi—try not to appear to be gay, as it were.

CM: It's like you're trying to give it your all as you're hiding yourself.

DG: Yes. That's exactly right. You're giving it your all, except you're hiding it. Yeah. Yeah, that was hard. That's why I'm telling you, when I saw that kid from *Glee* win the Emmy, the guy was five feet off the ground with pixie dust. I'm like, “You've got to be kidding me.” He wouldn't have even gotten a job back in my day. Now he's fucking winning an Emmy. I mean, times have changed. I'm not saying it's bad, but I mean when I see those—I'm just stunned. Lord. They wouldn't have even gotten a summer stock job.

CM: Why?

DG: Because they were too gay.

CM: That's interesting. So tell me about your first successful audition.

DG: Did I ever have one? What was it?

CM: Was it your first summer stock gig?

DG: Yeah. Well, I did a lot of summer stock, and I did a lot of—

CM: And how do you get those jobs?

DG: Well, there was a—what do you call it—a trade paper called *Backstage*. You would read that, and there's auditions in there. You go to open calls. I mean you literally would be number hundred forty-two, after waiting four hours. That's what it was like. When you had an agent, then it was different. You had an appointment time, you know. So I did have an agent. So I didn't have—those are called “cattle calls” for good reason. And well, I mean, I worked. I did work, so obviously I did have good auditions. But I don't remember those. I just remember the bad ones.

CM: At least you wore your dance belt in the right place.

DG: Omigod, that was funny.

CM: Tell me about your first role in *Joan of Arc*.

DG: Oh, that's funny. That was actually a dance concert, and it was—the woman named Flower Hujer—*H-U-J-E-R*. Flower. And she was no flower. She was about six feet tall, had a face that would stop a clock, feet the size of snow shoes, and she was a ballerina. And she played Joan of Arc. And she decided she was going to rent Town Hall for the night and do—this is my first time on a New York stage—and do this ballet, *Joan of Arc*. And I was a French soldier. They had maybe twenty dancing French soldiers. And believe me, I was just a mover. So that shows you what kind of a corps de ballet that was. And they literally were sewing us into our costumes backstage during the show.

I mean I remember they were sewing up this sleeve. “But my entrance!” “Yeah, wait, wait, wait. I’m sewing this up. I’m sewing this up.” And we go zapping out there, and I remember I had one problem—and aaaaah, I put my arm and the sleeve came right off. And then the next day, the *New York Times* covered it. Why they did, I have no idea. But they did, and of course, it was scathing. And it said that—the writer said that for the first time in his life, he couldn’t wait for Joan to be burned at the stake. Poor Flower.

There’s a very, very famous dance photographer named Jack Mitchell. He was already famous when I was young. And now—I just had to connect with him. I thought, “Is he still alive?” Because in my show, *iGaytino!*, there are visuals of me young, dancing. Those were taken by Jack Mitchell for free, God bless him. He was a very good friend of a good friend of mine, and he said, “I’d like to photograph Dan.” He met me at some party. And I said, “I can’t afford . . .” He said, “No, no, I just want to photograph you.” I’m like, “Really?” And that’s really all he did. And so those photos [in the *iGaytino!* projections], especially that one at the end, he took them. Jack Mitchell.

So when I was going to do these photos in my show, I had to Google and see if he was around so I could get permission. He’s done Baryshnikov and [Rudolf] Nureyev. There’s a documentary on him. He got to be huge. But anyway, he did a photo of Flower Hujer as—and I didn’t realize until I was going through a dance photo book a few years ago that I have—and there she is. She looks fabulous in that photo [as Joan of Arc]. So I guess he often did pathetics. He did Flower, he did me. [*laughs*] Nice guy, Jack Mitchell.

CM: Now, so *Joan of Arc* was your first role, period.

DG: Yes. First time—I would hardly call it a role. It was my first time on the stage in New York, at Town Hall.

CM: Oh, at Town Hall.

DG: At Town Hall in New York. Somewhere in the Fifties, right? Fifty-Fifth, Fifty-Sixth—something like that.

CM: I think—yeah. Or top Forties.

DG: It’s near Carnegie.

CM: Yeah, yeah. Somewhere around there. And so following that, what kinds of . . . So after that was when you decided to focus less on dancing—

DG: Yes.

CM: And more on singing, moving.

DG: What I had more than anything was that I was very cute, and I had a lot of personality. And I worked the shit out of both those things. And I sang okay. And so I did—this was the era of revues. You know, there were a lot of revues. There was a place called the Upstairs at the Downstairs, very elegant supper club, Upper East Side. We were in a revue upstairs called *The Manhattan Arrangement*. They were all the same. Three men, three women, or two men, three women. They were all alike, tuxedos, the gowns, you know, very chic. And I did this one upstairs.

And downstairs was a new comedienne, Joan Rivers. She was so funny-fabulous. And so, because hardly anybody came to see our show, sometimes we’d cancel the second show, and so then we’d run downstairs and we’d watch Joan Rivers, who of course was playing to *packed* houses. And she was young. We’re talking the ’60s. So she was barely starting to do the [*Ed*] *Sullivan Show* and all that stuff. And so that was fun, *The Manhattan Arrangement*. And I’m desperate, I’ve kept everything. Do I have that? No. Because I did a number called “I’m Cuban and Nobody Knows.”

[In that song] I was passing off as Puerto Rican because there were so few. And it was a comedy song called “I’m Cuban and Nobody Knows.” I thought, “Omigod, I wonder where those lyrics were.” And I Googled to see—Rod Warren was the writer—and I’ve tried and I can’t find it, you know. But yeah. And I remember the song was about that you have to be Puerto Rican to get anything these days, so I’m really Cuban but nobody knows, and it was a very funny number. I have a photo of me doing that number. So I did that one. I did a revue down at the Bon Soir in the Village, where, of course, Barbra Streisand was first discovered the year prior. That led to *Funny Girl*. But that’s where she started, at the Bon Soir.

CM: And what were you doing at the Bon Soir?

DG: A revue.

CM: But do you remember, was there a specific theme to it?

DG: Yes. It was called “Hello Turista.” That’s all I remember. And it was Patti Deutsch. It was two—I think there were four of us. Yeah, there were four. Two men, two women. So I did that revue there. And then I did a revue in Washington, D.C. at the—what was it called? The Washington Theater Club. I don’t think it’s there anymore. Sweet little hundred-seat house. And it was *The Rise and Fall of the Entire World as Seen Through the Eyes of Cole Porter*. So it was all Cole Porter music.

And that’s the one where somebody from the White House saw it, and thought, “Oh, this would be great entertainment for the White House dinner for the retiring chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, McChesney Martin, something like that.” [William McChesney Martin was the ninth chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank—ed.] And so we did. We did a tab version—we did like twenty-five minutes of that revue at the White House. Nixon—Nixon White House. That was exciting.

CM: What year would that have been?

DG: Seventy. Nineteen-seventy.

CM: Nineteen-seventy. What was the first, I guess, really successful production, in your eyes, that you were a part of?

DG: It was an off-Broadway show, which was the last thing I ever did on stage. It was called *Hark!* It was a revue, and it was at the Mercer Arts Center, which was down in the Village, which burned down, I believe. So I don’t think it’s there anymore. It was fairly new at that time. It was a complex of a few theaters, as I recall. And we did this revue called *Hark!* Four men, two women. Only because two of the men were the composer and the lyricist. In fact, the composer went on to write *Nonsense*. Made a fortune off it. [The composer was Dan Goggin—ed.] So there was the two of them, and then two men—me and another guy—and two women. And we did this revue. You know, all kinds of numbers, whatever. And it was a big, big hit. Big, big hit—I don’t know, we ran four or five months.

But that’s about the time when I thought, “I’m going to die if I keep doing this,” because I was already working pretty much full-time as an agent. And I was doing *Hark!* So even though I got off for rehearsal time, I would be at my desk at nine o’clock in the morning, on the phone all day—this is pre-emails, honey—and running to theaters with my clients for auditions. And then, six o’clock, I’d run down to the Village, grab a sandwich at a coffee shop, and go and do a show with thirty-five musical numbers. We were on that stage constantly. I thought I was going to die.

CM: So even when you were performing, you were also working at other things for most of that time that time?

DG: When I was performing, until I started working as an agent, I would do temp jobs, and then I’d go off and do stock, I’d come back and get another temp. So, little things. But once I started working as an agent, I was still auditioning things, so I was kind of balancing the two for a little bit, which was very weird because I thought I’m going to be sitting next to somebody that I’m also their agent. It was getting funky, but it hadn’t been that long, and then I got *Hark!*, which was a hit. But I had to decide. “I can’t do this.” It was killing me, if you can imagine. Eight shows a week of that, and working full-time. So when *Hark!* closed, I’m like, I just, “You know what? I really like being an agent. I can do it every day.” And I liked it. So I stopped performing.

CM: How did it feel? What went through your head the first time you took a bow to applause, as part of a show?

DG: It's so funny because you know, I never—I don't lap it up. It's hard to explain. I thought about it quite a bit because I almost feel, "I did my show, I should just go now." Instead of going, "Thank you, I'm really getting this because I did work like a frigging dog." But it's not like that at all. Because now, it's like if I'm doing the show, I'm within that character, and I'm in a bubble. And once I'm in—the bow, I'm me, taking a bow.

Even with *jGaytino!*, which is autobiographical, I'm not playing another character, but I'm a storyteller. And it's my story, but I'm telling you stories. And then in the applause, I'm Danny Guerrero. So I almost feel I'm not supposed to be there. It's an odd thing. And I've been very blessed. I think in six, seven years, only once or twice have I not got a standing ovation. I always get standing ovations, always, for that show. Probably they're amazed I'm still alive and can do it. But whatever the reason, I'm glad to get it. But it's not like I stand out there going, "Ah, this is the best," at all. No. It's, like, I bow and I bow, but I'm a little embarrassed by it.

CM: When did—*Joan of Arc* was the first—

DG: The first time I was on stage in New York.

CM: The first time you were on stage. Do you remember what year that was?

DG: Well, I have a program of it. It'd be easy to find, but it's got to have been early. I'm talking it had to be '64, '65. Very early.

CM: And then from that point on, you were working as a performer for what? Roughly a dozen years?

DG: Oh yeah. I started working for that agent, I would say, '72, '73. And then when Darwin Knight and I ended our relationship, I was like—you know—because the two of us splitting the rent, and all of a sudden, there was one person. I thought, "I can't keep an apartment," and I was not going to get a roommate at that stage of my life. You know, I was thirty, thirty-one, whatever I was. Yeah, I was thirty-one. And so I thought, "I'm just going to agent." And then that's when *Hark!* came up. And then I stopped after that because it was just too hard to do it all together.

CM: So in your years as a performer, I just want to make sure I have clear the types of work that you did. You worked summer stock. You were—

DG: I basically did summer stock. I did it up in Cape Cod for a couple of years. The Cape Cod circuit was fabulous because you would do the show for three theaters, Hyannis, Cohasset, and another city, I forget. [Beverly Hills, Massachusetts.] Three different theaters at the Cape. And one year, I did two shows, so I went up the Cape [with one show] and then came down the Cape [with another]. That was great. So it was heaven, because New York in the summer, I don't need to tell you. And during the summer, I'd be up in the Poconos, or I'd be up at Cape Cod, or I'd be . . . It was great for that. So I did summer stock up at Cape Cod. I did it in Pennsylvania. Lots of places.

And then I did lots of musical revues, which were very trendy at the time. And then I did a couple of off-Broadway flops. I did that one quasi-hit, *Hark!*, which was the last one on stage until *jGaytino!* It had been thirty-five years since I'd been on the stage performing, between *Hark!* and *jGaytino!* But as I always say, you can't cure a ham. It went right like a duck to water. And that was mostly it. I never did a Broadway show. I never did a Broadway show. I never went after film or TV. There was a lot of that in New York. Mostly later. Certainly not in the '60s, but when I was an agent, they started to do a lot of casting in New York.

CM: In sort of switching just a little bit, in *jGaytino!* you talk about sort of this period in New York that you were there, and seeing works like *Boys in the Band*. I don't know if you saw or maybe heard about Bette Midler during—

DG: I was there.

CM: You were there during her bathhouse years?

DG: Right.

CM: So what were some of the more inspirational works to you at this time? And why were they important to you?

DG: You know what was fantastic because of the gay element is—it was not a Broadway show—was Peter Allen at Radio City Music Hall. Do you know who Peter Allen even is?

CM: No.

DG: See, that's really sad. This guy, he was Australian. Big, you know. So out—I mean, just out. I mean the ruffles and, “When my baby, when my baby” on the piano. Filled Radio City Music Hall like for a week. He was a wonderful songwriter. He wrote some beautiful, beautiful songs. I met him only once, at a party out in the Hamptons. And he died of AIDS. His dubious honor is that he was one of Liza's husbands, Liza Minnelli's husbands. He was married to her for a minute. He was kind of discovered by Judy Garland, because I think she was on tour and she saw him or something. He was very big in the '70s, Peter Allen. He was great.

And he was such a showman and such a fantastic performer. And just, I mean, jumping on the piano and playing. To see this man who was so flamboyant fill the Radio City Music Hall . . . We're not talking the little hundred-seat [theater] full of gay people. [This] was huge. That was—and I still love him. I have a lot of his CDs. I love Peter Allen. My opening number is by him, in *iGaytino!*

If you were wondering who I am  
I am a man, just like any other man  
Unlike any other man  
If you were wondering who I was  
I was a boy, just an ordinary boy  
Starting out on some great mystery  
On the road, when I had no choice,  
I waited out a century, took a load until I found my voice.  
There's nothing wrong with being me.  
That's a Peter Allen song.

CM: Oh, wow.

DG: I love him. Yeah.

CM: So you—but you also saw Bette Middler at the bathhouse.

DG: I saw her at the baths, but that—like *Boys in the Band*—because *Boys in the Band* was not saying, “Yes, it was like, oh my God, no.” Because it was still very early. It was the year before Stonewall, *Boys in the Band*. But I sat there in the audience, “Omgod, all these people in here”—because there were obviously gay people, but it was a regular, straight off-Broadway house at Theatre Four—“and they're going to know that I'm like him. Oh my God. It's just terrible. I'm being outed here. They're going to know that I'm one of those people.” And all the characters were so self-loathing. These were not positive portrayals of gay men.

It was not a good experience, [watching *Boys in the Band*.] It was not celebratory because “Yay, finally.” Yeah, no. At all. And, as a matter of fact, one of the original stars, he's a straight man who played a straight man in the show, was Laurence Luckinbill, a marvelous, marvelous actor, who is married to Lucie Arnaz. They've been married for a good many years. And I was just with them in Palm Springs about a month ago. And through my friend Mark Sendroff in New York, I meet all these people through Mark. And so we were with Larry and with Lucie. And he brought up *Boys in the Band*, and we started—I don't know how we got into it, but he brought it up.

And he said, “So many people come up to me, you know, young gay men—not gay *young*, gay men my age, and say, ‘I want to thank you so much for that portrayal.’” I said, “Well, I'm sorry, I had quite the opposite.” “Really?” And I told him, basically, and he said, “Oh, that is so interesting.” He said, “I never thought about that. I'd like to talk to you more about that.” I said, “Well, yeah, okay.” But it was not a happy time at all, because it was not a good portrait of us. So I did not find it, “Oh great, at least they're finally seeing our stories.” No.

CM: What about regarding its—I mean, but it was a pioneering work—

- DG: Absolutely.
- CM: Of art.
- DG: It was the first mainstream play with a full cast of gay characters. Absolutely. Extremely important. Extremely important piece in our history.
- CM: Did you recognize that at the time that you saw it?
- DG: Sure, just like when I saw my first gay porn movie, *Song of the Loon*. That was also inspirational. There was a little theater around the corner on like Forty . . . I don't know. [Forty-] Fifth or something. I was with Darwin at the time. We were together, and there was this, a porn film, gay porn. We were like, "You're kidding. In a movie theater?" So, like, we apparently snuck in, and you were scared that somebody would recognize you, and you were in there. And there on this huge screen, it was—I don't remember even if there was talkie, to tell you the truth. I don't remember any sound. But it was a young Indian fellow. *Song of the Loon*. They were out in the lake and out with loons . . . I don't know whatever the hell it was.
- CM: Like American Indian?
- DG: Yes, yes, Native American. I don't even remember a plot. I don't remember if there was a cowboy and an Indian, but I remember it was an Indian. But in terms of—I mean, it was what you would really call soft porn, because they never got hard. I mean, they just didn't, and they never touched there. But at least you would see a nude man. So that's the very first gay porn movie that I'm aware ever existed. *Song of the Loon*. I've never even read about it, heard about it. I should Google it, because I know, I remember, we were like, "There's a gay one."  
 "You're kidding!"  
 "At a movie theater?"  
 "You're kidding."  
 I'm not talking going in on Forty-Second Street and putting a quarter in. That was always around. I'm talking about a big-screen movie. *Song of the Loon*. That had a more positive effect on me than the *Boys in the Band*.
- CM: I think—I don't know. I think *Song of the Loon* might merit documentary treatment.
- DG: I want to know—
- CM: It would be fascinating.
- DG: I'm interested now. I forgot all about *Song of the Loon*, and I'm going to Google it and see if anything comes up. And that had to be—Darwin and I met in the mid-, late '60s, and we broke up in '73. So, yeah.
- CM: So it was this really historic thing to go see a film.
- DG: Yes—for gay men. That's all it was for. You know? Yeah.
- CM: As you saw more—
- DG: And then came *Boys in the Sand*. Now that was porn, and it was all shot on Fire Island, and that was like, "Yes, we'll pay for that." And that was serious. Calvin—what was his name? Calvin Culver was the star. He did a series of those. *Boys in the Sand*, something, *Bijou*. That's when gay porn was first starting.
- CM: That was in the '60s?
- DG: But you'd go to the movies. By then, maybe '70, '71, or late '60s, yeah.
- CM: Late '60s, early '70s is when it's starting to—
- DG: Yeah.
- CM: And that's when you went to the cinema and you saw a film.
- DG: That's right. You'd pay at the box office and walk in and see a movie. We're not talking a quarter watching somebody—you know. Yeah. Yeah, that was fun.
- CM: As you saw *Boys in the Band*, did its importance, in terms of its pioneering status, strike you immediately? Or you were just not—
- DG: I was just too freaked out it. No, I did look at—no.
- CM: Has your opinion changed of it over time?
- DG: Oh sure, oh sure.

CM: How?

DG: Well, recognizing that it was groundbreaking that we were there at all. But look, it's not that different from seeing, you know, Mexicans on stage with big mustaches and well, "Oh good, we're on the stage." No, that's not how I want to see us. You know? It's the same thing. I was not happy about that. But I do—I'll tell you what's more groundbreaking for me, and I recently met the men who wrote it, is *An Early Frost*, which was about the AIDS crisis. I mean Gena Rowlands and Aidan Quinn, serious, fabulous actors on network television? *That* was groundbreaking, and that was groundbreaking in a very positive way.

A movie called *Longtime Companion* about the AIDS crisis, a beautiful film with Bruce . . . What is that actor's name? Bruce Davies, Bruce Davison, whatever. [Bruce Davison—ed.] Wonderful actor. Still out there doing stuff. Those were groundbreaking and gave a positive portrayal. *Boys in the Band* didn't, though I appreciate it and respect it for what it did do. It started to break down the barriers where straight people were going to—but that's why my show, when I talk about *Boys in the Band* and Bette at the baths, I say "straight America starts to peek at gay America." That's the first time they're starting to look at us.

CM: And *Boys in the Band*, you were in the audience for that first run.

DG: Yes, at Theatre Four. Yeah, off-Broadway.

CM: Now tell me about seeing Bette, Bette Midler.

DG: Well, that was fabulous and it was fun, but it was spooky because at that time I'd never been to bathhouses, and so there you go. And you literally were sitting [on what] I would call benches. They weren't even chairs. You were kind of on benches, and there was this teeny stage. And Barry Manilow was her accompanist. But, to your right was the indoor swimming pool. And so guys would come out wrapped in towels, and they—I don't remember them taking towels off to get in the water at all. So either they were—you'd see them, because they'd be going from this side of the bathhouse to that side, but you'd see guys with a towel walking. So you're, like, watching the show, and it was just surreal. It was just kind of surreal. It was bizarre more than anything. It was bizarre.

CM: How did you hear about—were you at the bathhouse because you were just at the bathhouse and it happened to be her performance?

DG: No, I went to see her. Of course it was—are you kidding? Everybody was talking about it. Bette Midler was in the bathhouse. She was just starting to get a little bit of a name, but, oh my God, it was like everybody was talking about it.

CM: And so were you there in your towel, too?

DG: No. No, no, no. I went and paid. I went to see Bette. And I went and sat down and watched Bette, and then I left. No, no, no. I was too scared to go to [the] bath. Yeah.

CM: Do you remember anything that she sang? I mean, how did this performance strike you?

DG: I don't remember that much. I was too freaked by the audience and all that. Really, I don't remember her that much.

CM: But what an amazing thing to see. I mean, I feel like that's one of those things about Bette Midler and that period in New York.

DG: Oh God, yes.

CM: And, like, it just captures so many—

DG: Well, I mean, the '70s in New York, after the uptight '50s. And then free love in the '60s and Civil Rights. And then to settle into the '70s, pre-AIDS, was awesome. Then there was the discos, and there were the back rooms, and there was the—everything. It was, omigod, it was . . . Fire Island bouncing. It was fantastic. It was not a long period, but it was, really, anything went. Anything. Yeah, yeah.

CM: And then in terms of, you know, you mentioned being concerned about—being perceived as too gay during auditions.

DG: Right.

CM: But how—

DG: Not in my private life.

CM: But not in your private life.

DG: No. I mean, everyone knew. I mean all my friends, even when I worked at the bank, everybody knew. I don't even know that we talked about it, but everybody knew. You know? So I was never closeted as an individual, except for my family. *[laughs]*

CM: That's another story.

DG: Well, you know, I was three thousand miles away. Who cares? What difference did it make? I'm fine. I'm living fine. I just go for a week and I come back, and after four or five years, they stopped saying, "Now when are you going to settle down and get married?" They just stopped. So then it was easier. It was fine.

CM: And it seemed like more of a time when—

DG: And I didn't have this need. You know, a lot of guys are, "I've got to tell. That's who I am. That's who . . ." I didn't have that need. I just was, and no big deal. I didn't really—you know? It just was that, too.

CM: Plus, I mean . . . Correct me if I'm wrong, but I get the sense that this was an era also in which people knew, and the whole idea of coming out was, like, you're not—

DG: That's right. At all. Correct. Yeah.

CM: Okay. So, that was just sort of part of the dynamics. It wasn't like, "Okay, now I'm going to tell the family over Thanksgiving."

DG: Yeah. I don't—yeah, that was a little later. Yeah.

CM: Okay. And then one more question, sort of going back to the Cole Porter revue at the White House. Could you just tell me a little story about that? Because I understand you—didn't you have to have the lyrics vetted?

DG: Oh my God, we had to rewrite Cole Porter. Because, you know, he was very double entendre. You know, his sexual innuendo was—that's what he was famous for.

CM: What song of his were you singing?

DG: The song I sang was not the one we had to rewrite. There was a song called "Farmin'"—as in "farming." Because it was . . . During that time that Cole Porter wrote this, in the '40s, it became very chic for people with money to buy a little farm. But meanwhile, they were Broadway stars, and they didn't know from . . . They weren't plowing, but they all had farms. And it was becoming so chic, everybody had a farm. Like gentlemen farmers, you know? And so this song—I don't remember all the lyrics—but it was, "Farmin', it's the latest rage," and, like, everyone's doing whatever. But then it says, "even Mae West has one, and old Mae West is at her best in the hay." Oh no, we couldn't say that. We could not say the line, "Old Mae West is at her best in the hay," at the Nixon White House dinner. So I think we just said something like, "Old Mae West is just the best, hey!" I mean it still had to rhyme, you know.

But literally, it was before—because we rehearsed that afternoon in the White House, and we were doing our thing on the stage. Two things happened. The stage was there, and we're rehearsing on it. And they're vacuuming and they're setting things, whatever, and we're doing our rehearsal. We have our pianist. And okay, it went fine. And then we go back to our hotel, and we get all dressed up. And they send—our director, pianist, and I guess there's six of us—they send three limos, two per limo. So Darwin and I are in one limo, and the two girls in another limo. I mean, excessive. They pick us up at the theater. Because they're literally going to hold the curtain while we do the White House. People paid for that night to come see us. So what they did was, as people arrived, they handed them champagne and said, "The cast is a little delayed because they're at the White House." "Oh, oh." So nobody was—you know. "They'll be here. We're starting a half hour later." Because we just did, like, twenty-five minutes. So people were fine. And when we came back, we came in, everyone applauded [when we entered the theater right from the White House]. So it was great.

But anyway, so now they pick us up. Now we're done, in our tuxes and the whole thing. And we get there. And now the Secret Service is, "Please come in over here," and they take us into the Presidential Library, I think it is. And then they say, "Okay, recite the lyrics. Not sing it, let's just hear what you're going to say." So we start, "Farmin'," we start to say the lyrics. And that's when they're stopping, "No, you can't say it."

And we're going out, like, in ten minutes, and we're rewriting lyrics that we all have to remember together. So that's bad enough. Then we go out there. And between rehearsal and now, they have put some sort of a black cloth over the stage to look pretty, which is slippery. Yeah! And so the entrance, we come out to some music that's playing. We come out and we're all holding champagne glasses, and I come out, and I do a little turn, and then I would say, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," each night in the show. "Tonight we're going to," blah blah, whatever. So now I was the one that had to say, "Good evening, Mr. President." So, of course, I come out, I'm slipping, and I catch myself, and I say, "Good evening, Mr. President." I'm half falling off the goddamn stage. So now, for the rest of the show, we're making up—lyrics we just made up, and we're being careful not to slip. It was really ridiculous. But it was fun. It was still very, very fun.

CM: Do you remember what room in the White House you were in?

DG: Where they talked to us?

CM: No, where you did the performance.

DG: Oh, the East Room, the East dining—that's where *all* the dinner parties are, dear. *Everyone* knows that.

CM: Sorry, I don't get invited to those.

DG: [*laughs*] Well, I'm then at a dinner in the East Room as well, when my dad gets the National Medal of Arts. So that time I didn't have to sing and dance. So yeah, I've been in there a couple times in my day. Yeah, the East Room.

CM: What was Nixon's reaction in all of this?

DG: He was a turd. What an odd word. I never use that word. He was so . . . She was very charming. Pat Nixon was quite charming. But he just—because I even said, you know, because as they came up to shake each of our hands to thank us, and then we posed for the photo, which is right there on the wall. I just put that up about six months ago. I'm thinking, what's that doing in a drawer? How many people have a picture of them wearing a bow tie the size of a helicopter at a Nixon dinner?

But—and I was all ready to say, "I'm from East LA, which is not that far from Whittier." You know? And I'm all ready, I'm all ready, and blah blah blah. He didn't even hear me. I mean he was just shaking hands because he was supposed to. Plus he had the biggest head I ever saw on a human. He had this huge head. I'm, like, "What's with the head?" And he had on, I remember, a lot of pancake makeup—this was not a televised event—that was quite orangey.

CM: Did he come from a press conference or something?

DG: I don't think so. He could have washed, if that's the case. He looked like a jack-o'-lantern. He had this big orange head. That's all I remember about him. But she was very, very sweet.

CM: Were there any other notable people in that room?

DG: Yeah, the whole room. Are you kidding me? We're peeking out from wherever we were. We could kind of . . . And, "Omigod, there's Dean Rusk, and there's . . ." They were all the big—this was the retiring chairman of the Federal Reserve Board at a White House dinner. There were heavy-duty people there. It was funny.

CM: So you've got like Henry Kissinger and H. R. Haldeman?

DG: Yeah, all the gang. All the kids were there.

CM: Watergate planning meeting number?

DG: Yeah, no they probably weren't there, because they were busy planning it. You know? Now this was '70, 1970.

CM: Wow. And please, if you could just say one more time, the name of the revue that you were working on.

DG: It's a long name. It's called *The Rise and Fall of the Entire World as Seen Through the Eyes of Cole Porter*. Ben Bagley is a man who did a whole bunch of these very chic revues, and he did this. Everyone just called it "The Cole Porter Revue," but that was the full name.

CM: And that was the revue you were starring in when you were invited to perform at the White House.

DG: Correct, at the Washington Theater Club.

CM: Okay, fantastic.

DG: In DC.

**JULY 18, 2013**

*In the following segment, Dan Guerrero is showing Carolina Miranda his photographs and art in his West Hollywood home.*

**DG:** And I have a couple things up just because I think they're too fun to keep in a drawer. This is one. What do you think of that?

**CM:** That's incredible, what is it?

**DG:** When I performed at the Nixon White House, in the Cole Porter revue, this is a photo after the show. So it's the Nixons, including Pat Nixon, and the one, two, three, four, five of us in the show: two men, three women. And this is the retiring chairman of the board, William McChesney Martin. That's who the dinner was for, in the East Room of the White House. That's his wife over there. That's our pianist, [Salli Parker].

And anyway I love it because, first of all, I have this Bobby Goldsboro hair going on. Well it was the era, 1970, don't you know. But what cracks me up is that bow tie. It's like I could leave the ground in that. I can go fifty feet in the air if that thing twirled. I love it. And of course, as I recall, it was velvet. So come on, how could you not have a photo like that on your wall, right?

**CM:** Exactly.

**DG:** Oh, I like this. Tito Puente signed that drumstick for me. And it wasn't an easy task, by the way, trying to sign a drumstick. So a few just little fun things. Celia Cruz, who I adored. We worked together many, many, many times. I love that woman. Everyone loved her. So I did this big Christmas, bilingual TV Christmas special I produced for Disney International . . . And so, anyway, she signed the sheet music. She did "Arbolito," which is a very traditional Cuban holiday song.

Oh, this is fun. I had to put up one of Dad's posters—vintage posters from the 1950s. Watsonville, he was very big in Watsonville. He would tour a couple times a year. He'd pile all his musicians in a new Pontiac station wagon, pull a little trailer full of all the instruments and luggage, and off they'd go. But the graphics are so fantastic. They're 1950-ish, you know. And, PS, this is what inspired the graphics that I used in the documentary that I did on him with Nancy de los Santos: *Lalo Guerrero: The Original Chicano*, that aired nationally on PBS stations, screened at film festivals. And I used that as a template. So a lot of them, [the animated graphics,] have that feeling.

And then I had to—there's only one poster of me and *iGaytino!* and that's at the Kennedy Center. I thought that was wall-worthy as well. *iGaytino!* at the Kennedy Center, that's deep. I gotta tell you, being on that stage and singing about my dad, and Carlos, and César Chávez, and Dolores Huerta, and Luis Valdez. I don't know if it's something that's not happened too often there.

**CM:** All right, so what are we looking at here?

**DG:** We're in our television room. Our den, as it were. And as you see the walls are dripping with Carlos Almaraz. There's other Chicano artists and there's some [AI] Hirschfelds, which shows my bi-cultural experience. I got three Hirschfelds, and being a gay man, it's Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand, ah, and Fred Astaire. I love my Fred Astaire Hirschfeld.

But Carlos—these two are interesting pieces, because they're collages and really rather unusual and very early on for him. He was in New York. Not when we went together, but some time a few years later, and he had an exhibition in a gallery. I don't recall the name, but it was down in the Village, I know.

**CM:** And this would have been at some point in the 1960s?

**DG:** I'm thinking late '60s, yeah. And they're white on white collages. And I remember that the entire gallery was white. He had had the floor painted white. I would assume the walls and ceiling already were, but he had the floor painted. And all the work in there were white-on-whites. And he sold everything, as I recall. But he was then coming back to LA and he had these two left, and as you see they're quite heavy. They're painted, I think, on Masonite, and then they're framed. And that's glass. This is pre-acrylic, you know, so there's glass holding them in. So they're rather heavy, and he didn't wanna schlepp them back to LA. So, lucky for me, he said, "Hang on to these." And that was in the late '60s, right?

CM: And these are unusual works because it's, like, they're—it's not what he's known for.

DG: No, no, you would never say that—look at that and go, “Oh, that's an Almaraz,” at all. It's a very different kind of piece.

And this is sweet. This is a little watercolor that I believe is probably from when we were going to Garfield. I'm sure it was. I was gonna say it could have been our first year, when I was at East LA College and he was at Cal State, but I'm pretty sure that was in—when we were in high school. And it's beautiful. It's very delicate. And, in fact, it was in the exhibition, as were one of these two collages, that I loaned to the Vincent Price [Art Museum].

CM: What's the watercolor of?

DG: It looks like it's a little church. But it looks like a village, right. It's like there's some arches there, like an aqueduct type thing. And maybe it was a little Mexican village somewhere, is what it looks like to me. But the colors are very delicate, and it's just a sweet piece. And it got a lot of attention at [the Vincent Price Art Museum]. Which surprised me, because I was surprised she picked it as one of the pieces to hang. [Museum director] Karen Rapp—she, Elsa—Carlos's widow—and myself, we curated the exhibition. And Karen loved it, and it got—everyone liked it, it was just such a delicate little piece, so I'm glad.

CM: And this was the retrospective of his work at the Vincent Price Museum.

DG: They didn't call it a retrospective.

CM: It was just an exhibition.

DG: Yeah, but it traced, certainly, chronologically his career and his life, because we had ephemeral material. Which was something I—I went to her with the idea in the first place, when I heard the museum was going to be built, because all these pieces had never been seen. They went directly from his artistic hands to my wall or under my bed, which is where most of the pieces . . . In fact, my partner, Richard, he was in New York when it opened, and I sent him photographs. He said, “Omigod, someone's been under our bed,” because some of the things which were unframed were under the bed in folders, and, you know, that paper, the acid-free, blah blah. So, yeah, it was great.

And then this piece I love.

CM: Tell me a little bit about this piece. What's in it, why do you like it?

DG: This is 1979. I love it because I love the piece itself and I also love the story. And that is that in 1979 I came out to LA—well, I would come out to LA at least once a year from New York. And he was living in Echo Park at that time. He was having a particularly hard time in his career and his personal life. He was madly in love with this woman. They had just broken up. He was trying to learn to play the guitar, and he couldn't quite do it. In fact, I think my brother—he called my brother to help him out, and I have a postcard that says, “Oh, that Mark is so fantastic. I can't play.”

So, anyway, he was in need of rent, and I went over to see him. And he said, “Hey, this pastel, it's—you know, I'll give it to you for seventy-five dollars,” which of course sounds like a joke, but I was also in my early career, so I was making fifty bucks a week on unemployment. So spending seventy-five dollars on a piece of art seemed a little extravagant. But I was so in love with it, I did buy it. And to this day I'm thrilled that I did. It is a gorgeous pastel. There're two horses in motion, and with two winged figures on them. And everything is in kind of—it's nighttime. You can see a moon and some green clouds against a deep blue, many colors—shades of blue sky. And there's the reflection, so maybe they're running near a lake. But it's really one of my very, very favorite pieces. And I guess I knew what I was talking about, because when I had my work appraised, that . . . His pastels go for a lot, but that particular one got a good price. Not that I expect to sell it any time soon.

CM: Okay, so tell me a little bit about this photo.

DG: This is a favorite photo. I love this, and it was only discovered in the last, I don't know, ten, maybe five, six, seven, eight years. My mom one day said, “Oh,” because I have so many. But this one was kind of new to me. And it's my dad sitting on the porch on Marianna, when we lived on Marianna Avenue in East LA. And I'm wearing—look at that, look. Tell me I don't look chic. He's in his suit and tie, holding a cigarette.

Nobody knew about second-hand smoke in those days, and they were even denying first-hand smoke. And I'm in a smart little sport jacket of some kind with a little striped shirt under and slacks, and I love it. But it also cracks me up because it looks like he's holding a—what do you call—it's like a marionette. I look like a puppet. It's, like, "Lalo Guerrero and his wooden dummy, Dan." But I love it because look at how we're looking at each other so intently. Look at that connection. We're both smiling and really just looking at each other, and it looks to me like they're enjoying each other, these two. So I love this photo, yeah.

CM: It's a dapper old man you had there.

DG: Oh, he was always dapper. I mean, there's photos of him in Tucson in the late '30s. And he's with friends, and they're wearing trousers and shirts. And he's wearing pointed shoes, and, you know, suspenders, and the shirtsleeves rolled up and his hair slicked back.

No, he always had a good sense of style, although it was my mother who dressed him when they were married. She would have his suits tailor-made because, as she said, "He has one shoulder lower than the other." So all his suits were tailor-made. She'd pick it out—he literally would be in the shower getting ready to go to the club, and she would get out his suit, she would get out a handkerchief. "One for show and one for blow," is what she'd say. One for the inside pocket and one for the outside pocket. Shine his shoes, put out his socks, his clean underwear. Come on, that was a 1950s housewife. He was very spoiled, my dad. But I love this photo. It's my favorite.

CM: It's beautiful. All right, I'm gonna get ten seconds of room tone.

DG: Okay.

[break in audio]

CM: All right. Dan Guerrero, day 2. So, picking up in New York in the 1960s and '70s, you are—

DG: It sounds so long ago all of a sudden.

CM: You are working in show business, going on auditions, starring in revues . . .

DG: And making the transition into being an agent toward the end of all that.

CM: Yeah, we will get to that. So, were you active in any social causes?

DG: No, I was just all about show business. It was really pathetic, because I started to write my solo show and I'm, like, "Oh my God, you were so dingy." I mean, the first half of my life, it was just singing and dancing and being in shows and auditions. And that was it. And going to opening nights and going to soirees. That was it. It wasn't until I moved back to Los Angeles in the early '80s that I became so socially conscious, first about the Latino issue, which had already been brewing. Which is one of the reasons I moved back at that time, you know, because I could see how little had changed in all my years away. And I felt at that time, in particular, there were not a lot of Chicanos or Latinos with my background. And I thought, "There's gonna be a big Latino market, and there won't be that many people who really know the area and had expertise in my particular area."

So that was one of the reasons I came back. That's when that started. But all those years [in New York], no, it was just about shows and having fun and going to parties and finding new clients once I became an agent, and trying to get jobs when I was not performing. That's all it was.

CM: Great. Hold on, I need to adjust this. [pause] Okay, there we go. I was getting too much. I was getting the other speakers, too.

DG: I will qualify [that] that's all there was. It was not that it was a bad thing, you know, but I had no . . . That's why the whole thing even with Carlos. He was out here during all the Chicano movement starting up, and he would send me postcards about meeting César Chávez and doing stuff at the UFW [United Farm Workers]. And I would read them, but it didn't mean a whole lot to me. I mean, I would come out here for a visit, and I'd meet all these writers and all these people that were active, and I would totally get it and I would get into it. I'd go, "Omigod, this is really happening. This is really important, but, gee, I have to get to the opening of . . ." And I went back to my New York. It's not that I was oblivious to it happening, but it was on the other side of the country and it just wasn't in my world at that time, you know.

CM: What kinds of things were you reading and watching? I mean this is the '60s and the '70s. Did you have favorite TV shows, novels?

DG: Omigod. Who could—did they have TV in the '60s? I always was a big television fan and still am, and I think that's because I was around when it first was invented. And I have happy memories of it all. We were the first on our block on McDonnell to have a TV set. It was all blond wood. We had modern furniture. You know, my mom was very, very chic. And so I remember my—I guess Mark was really small, so he'd be already in bed. But I would always be on the floor, stretched out on the floor watching TV, usually *I Love Lucy*. And my mom would be sitting on the sofa, and my dad would be laying on it with his head in her lap, and she'd be stroking his hair, and they'd be watching TV. And that's what I remember about TV watching in the '50s. Yeah, that was good.

My brother was sleeping because I don't remember him in that picture. I'm sure he was in bed. I was, whatever, maybe ten, eleven, twelve. He was a year old, two years old, three years old, so he was in bed for TV time. So I watched a lot of TV. Big sitcom person. So whatever was on at that time. But, again, even—and I'm kind of embarrassed to say this, really—but you know, even with all that was going on, the sexual revolution and the civil rights and all that, I was really—I knew what was going on. I'd read it, but I was in no way involved, even as I look back and see that there were already things happening in the gay community in NYC. And I'm, like, I'm really embarrassed. I just, oh my God, I just . . . You know, it just wasn't in my psyche. I just was somewhere else at that time. I wasn't out marching. I wasn't doing any of that.

CM: What was your perception of something like Stonewall? Because that would've been close to you geographically.

DG: It was. It was. But, you know, it was just like Woodstock, you know. I was coming back from summer stock with my fabulous clippings of being a smash in Mountandale [New York] and "better than the original Broadway cast" clippings. I'm sure that now, you know, this was really gonna break through for me. And we're riding, I'm in the backseat. There are a bunch of us going back to New York, and there is this—we see on this other freeway, highway, whatever, this massive headlights. And I'm, like, "Omigod, what is that?" One of the drivers said, "Oh, they had a music festival this weekend. Woodstock." And I'm like, "Did you see here when they said I was the best [*inaudible*] ever?" I mean, I was just . . .

With the Stonewall, I was off doing summer stock when it happened. And I remember it happening. But see, even though I was comfortable as a gay man and it was never a real issue for me personally, that doesn't mean that I wanted to run around with a flag. I wasn't ready for that. As a matter of fact, get this. You're gonna love this. There was a guy when—I know we're getting away from New York, but can I just stream of consciousness here? So, when I was in high school, Garfield . . . His name was Robert Estrada. Sandy. Major queen, but completely out. I mean, you know. So I would avoid him like the plague because . . . I think my back fence, he was like the next house. So you know . . . But I would kind of be—because I didn't need any, you know, anything else, like making it bigger than it already was, with me, you know. So I don't remember him much other than he was very, very smart. He was like the valedictorian and he held public office and he was just very out there.

Now, PS, he comes back into my life through Facebook or whatever a couple of years ago. And plus he was very handsome. I had kind of a crush on him. But I didn't wanna go there, I didn't want to. We meet for lunch, and he rattles off, "Remember we did this and we went to there, and I remember the time we went there . . ." And I'm like, "You're kidding." He had this whole—apparently we did hang out quite a bit, of which I had not any memory. But he said they had a gay club at Garfield. That's exactly what I did. My eyes got big as saucers. Because his best friend was Ralph Cruz, who made Sandy look butch. Ralph Cruz was wild. They had a gay club—at Garfield! And I said, "How come you never told me?" And he said, "Ralph said that you weren't ready," which I thought was a really interesting, because of course I was not. Had they asked me, I would've said, "No way." I wasn't even ready in the '60s.

CM: Was this an informal club or like an officially sanctioned—

DG: He said that they would . . . The teacher—some teacher, I forget who—would give him a classroom. There were a few others. I said, “Who?” He told me some names. I don’t remember now. But I said, “What did you do? Did you keep minutes? What the hell did you do?” Oh, it sounded like it was more social. Meaning on Friday nights, while I was with Charles [Carlos Almaraz] and Renee [Santellanes] and Don [Busche]—we were going to Kelbo’s and going to Dino’s Lodge—they were going to this little gay bar in downtown LA. They were really in that, you know.

And I was completely nowhere. That’s why I’ve said for years and it’s, I say it jokingly, but it is true, that until I did *iGaytino!* I was just, you know, I was a Latino who’s gay “on the side.” It just was part of me, but it wasn’t my mantra, you know. And because of my show, and because, finally, obviously, I got ready, [or] I wouldn’t have written a show called *iGaytino!* Now, I am, you know, very much an activist in that community in addition to continuing my activism in the Latino community. But I just thought it was fabulous.

Interesting thing is, there are two lines, ten pages apart, in my script where I talk about, oh, that I go out to LA and Carlos introduces me to Chicano writers, and I saw something was going on and I knew it was important, but I wasn’t ready. That was already in my script before he told me that. And then this one other place, I don’t remember right now. Oh, I know, when I come back to LA from New York, I say, “I’ve been here, I’ve done this, I’ve done that, and, you know, I’m ready.” Meaning, to go back to LA and get into that world. So that was already a recurring theme in my show. So when he said, “Ralph Cruz said you weren’t ready,” I just thought that was pithy, don’t you?

CM: Very observant on the part of a teenager.

DG: Yeah.

CM: In the 1950s.

DG: Right. But that they had a gay club in the ‘50s. So a couple of months ago, I have a new friend, Christopher Freeman, who’s a professor at USC [University of Southern California]. I met him because he came to see *iGaytino!* and we became friends. He teaches two courses. One is Queer LA, which is looking at the LGBTQ history in Los Angeles. And one called LGBT in the Media. And he asked me to speak in his class, which I did. So I email Sandy, who’s now retired and lives in Lake Chapala, you know, outside of Guadalajara, to ask him about those times, because he really knew what it was like. I didn’t. I was gay in the ‘50s, but I was not in the gay life and he was. So he gave me a whole list of stuff. And of course when I spoke to the class, I said, “My friend Sandy.” I didn’t pretend it was me. “You know my friend Sandy was,” and blah, blah, blah. And as a matter of fact, one of the students later was writing a big dissertation, and she asked if she could get in contact with him. So I hooked them up and she said he was extremely helpful. So I was just shocked there was this whole thing going on at Garfield in 1959. Robert Estrada, Sandy.

CM: That’s pretty amazing. What was the hardest thing about being an actor?

DG: Getting work. What else? Just, but here’s the funny thing. After all these years, I’m in the same place as an independent producer and director. Blah, blah, you know. I’m looking for the next gig, always the next gig, so it’s just part of the business. It just is. It doesn’t mean you’ll like it. It doesn’t mean it’s always easy. But I wouldn’t change it for anything, even when I hear friends from high school who have been forty years with the phone company, or they’ve been here and they’re retiring. They have pensions and 401Ks. I don’t have any of that stuff, and I go, “Gee, I should have stayed at United Parcel Service.” But I wouldn’t change. Nah. I wouldn’t change one single thing. Nah.

CM: How did the switch to talent management come? How exactly did that happen?

DG: By accident, really. A couple of times, things have happened by accident for me which was a running theme with my dad. Some of the biggest things that happened to him were totally by accident. But we’ll talk about that later. Let’s talk about me! [*laughs*] I came back from summer stock and, as usual, you come back with all your clippings and, you know, and see what other gig you can get. And getting on unemployment in the meantime. It’s just what you did, and I’m sure people still do.

CM: What year would this have been?

DG: I would say about '70, '71. Around there, because I did the Nixon thing in '70. And my relationship with Darwin, that ended in '73, and I had already been working in an agency, but just part time. And after we broke up is when I went into it full.

CM: And you were working at a talent agency?

DG: Yes. She was my agent.

CM: Oh, she was your agent.

DG: Yeah, her name was Beverly Anderson and she—

CM: What were you doing for them? Like office—

DG: You know, her assistant, yeah. You know, just somebody taking calls, blah blah blah. But she was my agent, and one day she mentioned that she really needed an assistant, could be an actor, he could go on auditions, do jobs, and just work in between. I thought, "Hey, that sounds good." So I started working for her. I think it was fifty bucks a week I was making. And I was doing it, kind of doing it, but I did like it, surprisingly. And then when Darwin and I broke up, I was like, "Okay." So my rent doubled you know, and I thought, "Wow, so I better get serious about this." And I did like it, and it moved very quickly. Because pretty soon all the clients wanted to talk to me, you know, and I really, really liked it.

I was with her a good many years. I would say, I don't know, five, six, seven years. And then I went to another agency. There was a big, big commercial agency called the Ann Wright [Representatives] agency. She was widely respected because she was the first one to start using actors in commercials. In the beginning, when commercials were first being done in the '60s and '50s, it was always models. And she was the first to start using actors in commercials. And so she was quite well liked and well respected. And she kept hearing about me, and she started realizing a lot of her clients she had for commercials were starring on Broadway and doing big Broadway musicals. And she knew I was—that's what I specialized in, especially musicals. So through a series of things, too boring to go into, I started her legit department. She didn't have one until I came.

CM: A commercial department?

DG: I started a legit department for her. She was already doing commercials. She didn't need me for that. She needed me to start the legitimate end. When you—the "legit" means musicals, Broadway, theater. Not commercials. Film, TV, that's the legit arena. So I started her theatrical department.

CM: And what year would that have been, when you went to—

DG: I don't know, maybe '75, '76, because I was with her, also, maybe five, six, seven years until I left for Los Angeles in '82. So, around there I guess. And you know I started it, because she's the only one that had an office and her husband had an office. He was doing film.

CM: Where were their offices?

DG: Fifty-seventh and Lexington. Two blocks from Bloomingdale's! I had hit pay dirt. Penthouse. And then there were four agents. There were three, and I became the fourth one in this bullpen type thing. We each had our desks, but we're all in one thing. And within a couple of years her husband got moved to the back thing, and I got his office because it [the legit department] built so quickly. And it worked very well.

CM: What about the work was it that appealed to you or that you just felt you were good at? What aspect?

DG: Everything appealed to me. Two things appealed to me. First of all, it felt good to get a check every week. And after the breakup with Darwin, "What am I gonna do? Oh my God." You know. I needed an anchor, really, and it anchored me, you know. So I liked that I really was actually—and I wasn't going to work every day in a department store. Not that there was anything wrong with that, but you know, I *loved* finding talent.

I mean I was one of those agents that would go down and see some crappy little show in the Village. And, "Oh, I love this person," and I'd sign them. And then they get their first Broadway show and I loved it. I loved discovering new talent. I'd pick their—I'd work as a manager, really. I would pick what they should wear on auditions, what they should sing. I'd be at the audition with them, and I liked it. I was not one

of those agents that's going, "Well, I could've done that." And there's quite a few of those, believe me. I wasn't one of those. I really, really liked it, and it went very well.

But then I started to get, finally, a little over New York after twenty years. At the same time, I was getting a little burnt out on being an agent, because it was a small boutique agency—which is what appealed to me. I didn't wanna work at an ICM or those huge agencies who work only by numbers. They have their client list, and each year, how much did they bring in? Okay, less than X amount. Okay, out. I didn't look at it that way. It was like a marriage. You have talent, I represent you. You're gonna have lousy years. You're gonna have good years. But most don't work that way.

So it was clear to me I was never gonna get rich doing it this way. Not that I had to be rich, but you've got to make money to live in New York. And, also, I was losing clients sometimes because they would get a big series. The minute they did, off they go to the giants. Which I could understand, and I didn't wanna work over there. So I'm thinking, "You know what, the subways are killing me. The summers and winters are killing me here. And I'm getting a little over this." And Richard [Read] and I had just been together a couple of years by that time.

And I was coming out quite a bit to see clients who were either playing LA in a Broadway musical or they were doing a TV pilot. And I would see all these former agents, and they were now head of casting at NBC. And they were here and they were at the Spago. And I was like, "What the hell am I doing in a four-flight walk-up in Brooklyn Heights? You know, maybe I should think about it." So Richard and I came out for the taping of—I think it was NBC. They did a special of the musical *Ain't Misbehavin'*, which was a five-person revue about Fats Waller music. Huge Broadway hit, and I had three of the five actors. So he and I flew out for the taping.

Well, it was one of those weekends where you fly out and we were at Spago and we were at the Academy and we drove out to Malibu for lunch with this one. We went to the taping. We were in the front row. So, "Hey this is cool," and Richard had never been here. So literally, on the flight back, I said, "What do you think if we moved out?" Because he'd only been in New York about a year when we met, and by this time we'd been together three years. We met in '79. And he said, "Yeah, I really liked it." Of course he liked it. Look what a fabulous weekend it was. Plus, I promised him that we would have a two-bedroom apartment with two bathrooms. Well, instead of sharing a bathroom four flights up, two bathrooms. I think that's what put him over the edge. And so, sure enough—and literally, one month later, I was gone. After twenty years. Sometimes it takes a minute to make up my mind because I look at all sides. I think for a long time, but once I make the decision . . .

CM: That's it.

DG: Yeah. And so I came out, I flew out. He stayed in New York. And I found a place. I stayed at my mom's. I found an apartment, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, big terrace, elevator, in West Hollywood. So then he drove out with a little trailer with some of our stuff. We gave everything—sold—but you know, personal things, yeah. I know I came back.

CM: How did you make—so you started at Anderson's office as an assistant.

DG: Yes.

CM: How did you make the jump to agent?

DG: Well, it just happened on its own. I mean, pretty soon you're taking calls, and pretty soon they're asking for me, and pretty soon I'm saying "Hey, I found this person. He's really great." And they'd get a show and it just evolved. It just evolved.

CM: You said you used to go to shows and look for people and talent scout. Tell me one of the earliest—

DG: I'll tell you my favorite.

CM: Okay, tell me your favorite.

DG: And it was probably an early one. And it's my favorite one, anyway, and it's actually *Ain't Misbehavin'*, as a matter of fact. I had a friend who said he had this friend who said she was doing some little musical in some church somewhere, so I went to see it. The musical was okay, but she was adorable. Adorable. Her

name's Armelia McQueen—adorable. And so I signed her. But I didn't have a lot for her. She was a young black actress, musical, sang fabulously. But you know, this was, you know what, '70s, the mid-'70s. And there wasn't a lot for people of color. She'd call every once in a while and say, "Oh, I went to an open call and I gave your name with the agent in case they call." I go, "Okay, honey, that's fine." And then I wouldn't hear. So we were in touch and she was doing little things on her own, and then I get a call one day—and I like this story also because it really was the perfect storm, where everybody did their job. Meaning, I got a call from the Manhattan Theatre Club, which was—it's still around, I think. It was, what would you call it? They would do workshops there, but highly respected, you know. Everyone. Big stars even did things at the Manhattan Theatre Club.

And that they were doing a revue of Fats Waller music, and they were just missing one person and they wanted a Lena Horne. You know, gorgeous. I said, "I only represent one black actress. She's not Lena Horne." I said, "She's heavy set. She sings great. She's adorable, but she's not Lena Horne. But she's fantastic. You really will love her." And I talked the casting director into it. So he did his job by seeing someone even though they weren't what they were looking for. Then she went to audition, and then she did her job, because she gave a fabulous audition. And they hired her.

But now they call me to say they want her on [*inaudible*] because it was Richard Maltby. It was really great people doing this. It wasn't just—you know, it was really heavyweight people attached. And, oh, it was Arthur Faria choreographing. It was just really good people who I knew, and so I called. But because it's workshopy, it was . . . Whatever the money was stunk, nothing you could live on. And she said, "Oh, that's great. But, you know, I'm working right now where we set type for printing." Whatever that is. "And you know, it's really, I can't afford to do it." And I said, "Armelia, I'm not the one who's paying your rent. I understand that, but if you can possibly figure out a way. Borrow some money, you really should do this. Manhattan Theatre Club, everyone's gonna see you. This isn't something out in—well, maybe—everybody goes there. Everybody. Great people involved, it's only five people in this revue." She says, "Well, okay, let me think." She calls me the next day, "Okay, I talked to my brother. He'll lend me some money." And she quit her job and she did it. It was a [hit]. I mean Jackie Kennedy was coming. People in limos. It was an instant sensation, this little teeny Manhattan Theatre Club. The show moved to Broadway.

Big hit on Broadway! So now she's starring on Broadway. And then, it went to Paris where it was called *Harlem Swing*. And Richard and I were celebrating our first anniversary, so this would've been 1980. So we went to Paris for the opening. And Ken Page, a darling friend, who I did not represent originally there, who was [years later] the original Old Deuteronomy in *Cats*—a stellar career on Broadway. So the cabs are teeny tiny in Paris. You know, the little Fiats, or whatever they are. So we see *Harlem Swing*, and now we're going to the party afterwards. And Ken and Richard get in one cab, and McQueen and I get in the other. She's wearing this white fox fur, and she's got the jewels and her hair is done. And I'm sitting there and we're zapping down the Champs-Élysées. Oh my God, I love this story! And I said, "Look it McQueen, all because you quit that job at the print-setting place." It's a great moment for me. I could just see it. And she's still—she's my sister. We're still very close, close. She's family. We're still good friends. She lives out here as well. But that moment in that cab, I was so happy for her. Yeah, that's my favorite agent story.

CM: She must've been thrilled, too.

DG: Yeah, and I knew she appreciated it, you know. So, oh yes, that's my favorite story.

Sarah Jessica Parker is a good story, too.

CM: Yeah, let's talk about her. How did you meet her? How did she come to be your client?

DG: That's a good story, too. Because a very good friend of mine was a casting director, and he used to cast all the Pinter plays that came to Broadway. John Handy. He called me and he said *The Innocents* was on Broadway with Claire Bloom. And he called me and said, "Oh my God, these two kids just came in from Ohio for Easter break. And they auditioned, and they're understudying the little boy and the little girl in the show." He said, "They are fantastic and they have no agent, they don't know anybody." I said, "Well, I'm not a children's agent." We had a children's agent. I said, "But I'll bring Jean Walton," who I adore.

We're still friends. I said, "I'll bring Jean and we'll see it." And I don't know what happened, but he said, "They'll both be on at the matinee."

So I don't know if he gave tainted tuna to the kids, or they just do matinees. That's possible. I don't really know. But it wasn't the matinee. It was an evening performance. That's why I was suspect. But, nonetheless, we were even late. I remember Jean and I were late, and they held the curtain. So we get there, and the two of them are fabulous. Toby was her brother, her older brother. And Sarah, she was maybe ten, eleven, I guess. And then we went to dinner afterward. Her mom—Barbara—Toby, Sarah, me, and Jean. And they both signed with us. And Jean, I love her. We're still friends. But Sarah and I also connected, so even though I was not the children's agent, we very much worked together a lot of the time. This is way before *Annie*. This is before *Annie*. She wound up doing along the way some sort of a revue for Charles Strouse, who later wrote *Annie*. And he's the one that put her into *Annie*, originally as one of the orphans, before she took over as Annie herself.

She didn't have the greatest voice in the world. But she was a fabulous actress, even as a little girl, always. I remember she did a short film. I think she had already done it before we met. Maybe we saw that along with signing her, with her brother. She was, something about a little match girl, I don't know. But she was just a terrific actress. But I was thinking, "Such great irony," because she would sometimes lose jobs because she's not one of the traditionally pretty little girls, especially for little girls. You know, they want the little turned up nose, the little—you know, that's what they were looking for. So she would sometimes lose jobs because she's not traditional looking. And that's why I love that she turns out to be this big fashion icon, you know. And she's the same girl, because we see each other in New York and stuff, and she's just the same. She's so down and she's not at all . . . Cut-off jeans, no make-up, one little gold band, no jewelry, you know. When she's not being Sarah Jessica Parker, she's just a real—she's just the same really sweet, sweet girl, yeah.

And so I remember when she got *Square Pegs*, which was her first TV series, I flew out here, went to the set with her, we had lunch. And you know, so, yeah, I love Sarah. She's a good egg. So I'm really happy for her success. She worked hard and she's a good, good talented lady. I love her. Yeah, so I loved it. What's not to love?

CM: What about Fran Drescher? How did that come about?

DG: That's funny, too. Fran Drescher. They were casting a little movie called *Saturday Night Fever*, and they were seeing everyone. Because as an agent, part of your reputation, obviously, is on the people you represent, so you don't send in crappy people to see big casting directors, because then they don't see your people again. So you're very careful. Credits and what have they done. And if they're brand new with no real credits—like Armelia had no credits but I knew she was fabulous—you know, you just don't work with people like that.

But *Saturday Night Fever* was different. Shirley Rich, I believe, was casting it. Shirley Rich was like one of the divas of the casting world. But they were—and maybe it wasn't her, but I think it was. Ah, well. They were seeing everybody. I mean I knew they were going to discos in Brooklyn and, "Oh, he looks interesting, let's . . ." So they were seeing *everybody* for *every* role. This was not your kind of traditional casting. So I get pictures and résumés every day, mostly throw them away. And I open this one, and there was this really pretty girl. And she had just been Miss Brooklyn, like a year before or something. She was nineteen years old.

Her name was Francine Drescher. I thought, "She's done nothing, but she's from Brooklyn. She's pretty. Who the hell knows?" I met with her, and I liked her because she's just what you see on television. She's very outgoing and adorable. She was nineteen years old. I said, "You know what?" And I literally had an envelope sealed, ready to go off to the casting person for *Saturday Night Fever*. I said, "You know what? You haven't really done a lot, but there's a lot of small roles and it's worth a shot." And I opened the thing and I looked at the picture and I said, "Francine Drescher. That sounds like an old character actress, not a young pretty girl."

[in squeaky voice] “But that’s my name!”

I said, “Well, let’s just make it Fran.”

“Okay!”

And I crossed out, yeah, the *C-I-N-E* with a pen, and shoved it in the thing [envelope]. I wrote her name at the bottom. She got a role in *Saturday Night Fever*. That was her very first job. She had a good scene and that started her career. And again, still Francine is great. She’s real down, and every time I see her somewhere in a party, “This is Danny, he changed my name.” She always brings that up. She’s a doll, sweet, sweet, good egg. Again, I’m really happy for her success, yeah.

CM: What agency were you at when you worked with her?

DG: That was Ann Wright. No, I lie. That was Beverly Anderson. That was still Beverly Anderson.

CM: And what about—

DG: Armelia was Ann Wright.

CM: Armelia was Ann Wright and—

DG: And Sarah was Ann Wright. I’m almost positive Beverly Anderson, I was still there with *Saturday Night Fever*.

CM: So you didn’t end up working with Drescher that long, because then you left after four years, right?

DG: No, no, no. She was where I—well, yeah. I guess that’s true. Yeah, probably a few years.

CM: Probably a couple years, three years. Okay, just to get a sense of—

DG: And then when I came out here, of course, I was not gonna be an agent. I wasn’t sure what I was gonna do. So not like I could say, “Hey, I’m gonna be at the,” blah, blah, “agency in LA. Stick with me.” Because I knew my agenting years were over. I wasn’t sure what I was gonna do, but I wasn’t gonna agent.

CM: *Cats*.

DG: *Cats*.

CM: That was your last, right?

DG: Actually, yes, I actually cast—worked on it as an agent. Ken Page from *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, the original Old Deuteronomy. But we moved to LA even before it opened, so I flew back for the opening. So it was really just before I left. That was like the last show that I worked on as an agent, and I moved out here and then flew back for the opening night to see Ken.

CM: What was your role in that production? What did you do, exactly?

DG: I’m an agent. I was representing the actors.

CM: Yeah but who specifically?

DG: Ken Page.

CM: Oh, Ken Page. Was there anyone else?

DG: No.

CM: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I got it.

DG: Yeah. Old Deuteronomy was one of the lead roles. He is the big guy that does the—you know who he is.

CM: I played in a pit orchestra in high school and we did *Cats*.

DG: Oh, he was my client and I got him the part. I didn’t get him the part. His talent, you know. But I negotiated the contract. That was my—

CM: What was he like?

DG: Still a good friend. Ken is still a very, very good friend because he and McQueen remained brother and sister from *Ain’t Misbehavin’*. Nell Carter—he was very close to Nell. Because Nell was the other *Ain’t Misbehavin’* person. It was Charlayne Woodard who has gone on to be a fabulous solo artist. Oh my God, she’s done solo shows. She has a trilogy. Charlayne Woodard. I love her, very gifted. Nell Carter, who of course had a big series, [*Gimme a Break*]. McQueen, Ken Page, and André De Shields, who is still doing Broadway musicals and stuff. Those were the original five.

Ken and Armelia stayed very, very close, and are still close. But Ken—he was living in New York and then he lived here and then he lived back in New York. Then eventually he went back to St. Louis, where

he grew up. And he works from there. He's known enough that he does things from there. But he's still a good friend. I just got an email from him.

CM: How did you come to represent him to begin with? Do you remember?

DG: Probably because I knew him through McQueen, you know, and we knew each other socially. And then, I guess, he became available at some point. He knew about what kind of an agent I was from McQueen, so, yeah. It's all about your reputation.

And being an agent is what got me started in my first work when I moved out to LA, because I didn't know what I was gonna do. I had some money saved. I thought, "Well, let's see what happens, what the hell." I've done that many times in life where, "Okay, time to reinvent and *que sera, sera*," as Doris Day would say. And so I wasn't sure it was gonna happen. And so I rented this apartment and I'm unpacking, and I get a phone call from a casting director [friend] in New York. He goes, "What are you doing?" I go, "I'm unpacking my Streisand albums. What are you doing?" He says, "You wanna cast *Nine* for Tommy Tune out there?" I'm like, "Okay." So they knew. Casting directors knew me as an agent, so they knew how I work. They knew that I knew talent. They knew the kind of person I was, and that kicked it off. So the first three years out here, I was living in LA but I was casting Broadway musicals.

Two things. Number one, there was money in those days, so not only would I cast who's gonna be at the Ahmanson—this tour, and the auditions are in LA—but Broadway musicals. They would call me. I'd see that what—all the characters. I would spend three weeks or a month casting. And I'd see hundreds of people, and I would boil it down to the best five for each of the roles. And then the producers and director would fly out from New York. We'd have two or three days of auditions. And then if they liked those people, they'd fly back to New York for finals with those. So it was fabulous.

So I was sitting with Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents and Harvey Fierstein—you know, everybody—but I was in LA. It was cool. I knew I didn't wanna do that forever, but I liked it for that kind of transition period. And I also started doing a couple of TV things, you know. But I knew I didn't wanna do that, but it was fine while I was getting settled and stuff, yeah, so it served me well. That's my point when we talked about moving forward. It's just transition. It's always a step forward, nothing back, even if I'm not sure what it's gonna be. I know it's gonna be better in the end and each transition was well-served by the prior incarnation. I started casting because I was a very good agent. I think I was a very good agent because I've been a performer and I know what it feels like. You know, so each thing kind of fed each one—even when I started my producing career.

You know, because while I was casting, I was very, very involved in the Latino community, and I was with the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts doing fundraisers for them. And I would . . . [coughs] I used to write for a trade paper called *Dramalogue*. I would always feature a Latino, and we're talking, you know, 1982. There was no Latino market. There were a handful of actors, you know. It wasn't a huge community as it is today. Certainly, producers, directors, Latino casting. There was one Latino casting director, Bob Morones. But he would do different kinds of things than I did. So, I was doing lots of things. But it started to get to me because I was, like . . . And, oh, once in a while I'd cast commercials, though not often, and sometimes Latinos. And I was appalled at how ill-prepared Latinos were when they'd come in. I'm, like—

CM: How so?

DG: They were lousy. They didn't know how to deal with a camera. I'm like, "Come on." You know? "This is real."

CM: Was it lack of formal training?

DG: Yes. So, I decided to open the first bilingual TV commercial workshop. I was well known as a casting person. It wasn't like I was unknown. I was well known because I had a weekly column in *Dramalogue* and I would write. I did Jimmy Smits—one of his first interviews—when he was just barely starting to film *LA Law*. It hadn't even started airing yet when I interviewed Jimmy.

You know, so I was not an unknown person. I thought, "Slam dunk. Dan Guerrero teaching a bilingual TV commercial workshop." It was like pulling teeth to get people to sign up. I was really very disappointed.

It was really, really hard. All I needed was ten to twelve people to make it worthwhile. I had to rent a space, you know, and it was kind of disappointing to me. So, I was doing all these things. I was writing the column for fifty cents, and I was teaching for fifty cents. And I was making—

CM: Where were you teaching?

DG: The Actors' something. It was in Studio City right near Laurel Canyon and Ventura. The Actors' . . . I have photographs, but I don't remember the name of the place now. It's not the Actors' Studio. The Actors' Place, or something. And they would do commercial auditions there and everything, so I would rent one of their spaces and teach in the evening. So I was teaching commercial work, bilingual commercial workshops. I was doing fundraising for free, for the UFW and for the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts, and I was casting. I was totally making a dollar and I needed two dollars. And I'm like, "What the hell? This is killing me."

Again, I made my decision. I said, "Okay." I don't do New Year's resolutions, but it happened to be over a New Year's. And I thought, "I can't do this anymore. I just got to sell them my casting. That's the obvious one to make serious money." So in one day, I came back and I said, "I'm not gonna teach that thing anymore." I said, "I'm not gonna write a column anymore." And I just cut everything in one day. I said, "Well, I better do a casting résumé." I hadn't even done one because I didn't need one and then, "I'm gonna do it." I come, I go out, and whatever I do, I come home. And there's a message on my machine. We had voice machines in those days. And, "Hello, my name is Kieren Fisher and we're doing a Spanish-language talk show and we understand you know everyone Latino in town, so could you call me at," blah, blah, blah. Spanish language, she said, although her name was Kieren Fisher. And I thought, "Spanish-language, I know what that means. A nickel!" But I return every call, always. So I return the call, and I hear, "Guber Peters Television." Gigantic. Guber Peters Television. I'm like, "Wow." Now my eyes perk.

CM: What year is this?

DG: We're talking probably 1989 or '90. I think it was that '89 into '90 that New Year's Eve, because all during the '80s I was casting and doing all those things. So that's a long time doing that. It wasn't five minutes. So she comes on the phone and she starts picking my brain, which I'm used to and I was happy to do in those days. Because, really, the Latino community was this big, a handful of actors. Really nobody else, network, blah, blah, blah. So, we all wanted to support each other, you know. But it was getting old.

And so she said, "Well, you know, we need this and we need a writer and do you know . . ." I said, "What about me?" She said, "Well, you're a casting director." "Yes." She says, "And we already have a talent executive." I said, "Yes, but I've been an agent, so I know talent, I know how to negotiate. I write columns. I've done interviews from—I've interviewed everybody from Lucille Ball to Raquel Welch to everybody I wrote about. A talk show. You need people to pre-interview for the guest. And also, I've been a casting director," blah blah blah. "Well, maybe we should meet," she says. Okay!

I met the next day. Three days later, I was the head writer on the Paul Rodriguez Show for Univision. We did the first thirteen shows. They picked it up, and I became co-producer. And that's how I started my producing career. Because see, here's the other good news, as I do these transitions, I don't have to start at square one at each one. First thing in television, I was a head writer and then a co-producer, then producer, executive producer. I didn't have to be a PA because I've already paid my dues.

CM: And you already knew the business.

DG: Yeah. But my point is that you do pay your dues on the way, but I didn't have to keep paying the same ones. And that's how I started producing, directing. And that's been that—all during the '90s. I produced for PBS, for HBO. Ninety percent of the time in English, but Latino themed, because there was nobody doing that and they kind of wanted more of it in the '90s than they do today. So I was very well positioned for a while there.

CM: So stepping back a little bit, when you left LA to move to New York, you changed your name. From what to what did you change it to, and why?

DG: It was very simple and kind of silly. I never liked Eddie. My name is Edward Daniel Guerrero. That's the name on my birth certificate. Not Eduardo. It's Edward Daniel Guerrero. So I grew up Eddie, which I never liked. I don't know why. I just didn't like it. Fine name, I just didn't feel like an Eddie, reminded me of a skinny bowler, I don't know why. Or the guy that sets the pins. It just—Eddie wasn't me. So I decided when I moved to New York, since I was really starting my life, really, that I should pick a name that I liked. And so I just took my middle name, Dan. I liked Dan.

In fact, my mom said I was supposed to be named David Daniel Guerrero. That was what I was supposed to be. Remember I told you about her brother Dave, who she loved? I don't know if that had anything to do with it, but I was supposed to be David Daniel, which I liked very much. But then my dad's father, my *tata*, who was Eduardo. My dad was Eduardo. "What! You must call him . . ." No, he didn't have an accent. He didn't even speak English. "No, tiene que ser Eduardo." So I became Edward Daniel Guerrero. So I took my middle name. And of course all my friends [in NYC], they're all gringos. They were like, "Okay, you're gonna change to Dan, but you're keeping Guerrero?" They just didn't get it. I'm like, "Well, yeah." Although for a minute—and I totally forgot, I saw a couple of things from early New York where I was "Guerin," because I saw that name somewhere. It turns out it was an Irish name. I thought, "Well, I am Irish on my mom's [side], and Guerin's close to Guerrero, so Eddie Guerin. I used Eddie Guerin for a little bit there, before I became Dan Guerrero. [*laughs*] Yeah, Eddie Guerin, and I forgot about that. I just ran across, going, "Omigod, yeah, I forgot about that." I might have been Eddie Guerin at Town Hall with Flower Hujer. That's maybe is where I saw it. Yeah.

CM: Flower Hujer. Poor Flower.

DG: Poor little Flower. Dead as a doornail, I'm sure. So, yeah, so then I became Dan Guerrero later.

CM: So, New York, '60s, '70s, your personal . . . I wanted to get in a few questions about your personal life for good.

DG: You're gonna need a good bit of time for that.

CM: Okay, we can change tape. We can switch out right now?

[*break in audio*]

CM: So, I wanted to get in a little bit of your dating life, your personal life after you landed in New York. Who were you going . . . You described in *iGaytino!* . . . You talked a little bit about how the performance community was a quote-unquote sex pit. So, tell me—

DG: Summer stock was—not the entire performance community. Summer stock was the sex pit. Because you would have this group of people you know. Mostly everybody in their twenties. There was always a couple of lecherous old, you know, character men. And in an environment for ten weeks, where you're eating together, sleeping together, you're just—nothing exists outside of that little theater. Especially in ones where we're rehearsing all day *Oklahoma*, and doing *Kiss Me Kate* at night. And then the following week, you're doing *Oklahoma* at night and rehearsing *L'il Abner*. And it's intense, and you're just like this. So that's what I'm saying. Because this one was having an affair with that one. And there was always the girl who was sure she could change that gay boy. All it would take is one little roll in the hay, you know. So there was always that stuff. So it was just really, it was hilarious, a lot of that going on.

But I was always looking for a relationship, always. That was my big thing, so to the point it was really, it's really kind of . . . Hmm, how do I put this? Not because I'm censoring it, but I'm trying to explain it the right way. I always appeared to be very confident, but I wasn't *at all*. I had major self-esteem issues. I had major issues about my looks. I didn't think I was attractive at all. No, I know. Because I look in pictures, I'm like, "What the fuck, look at you!" But you know, it's that way. You always see those—usually it's a girl. She's gorgeous and going, "What are you talking about?" But that had to do with my being Chicano. That's what that had to do with—because Mexicans, and dirty Mexicans. And so it wasn't whether I was handsome or not, really. So to me—and I didn't look like most other people. So you know, so everything. I was so desperate, really, not only to fall in love but more than that, to be loved. It was all about that.

So every twit that picked me up on the street, “Ah! Maybe this is it.” I mean really. It was like that. It was really sad. And so there was that anonymous sex, which was very common in the ’60s. But very early on I met Larry Tiernan. He was from Philadelphia. I’m talking about when I moved on to West Seventy-Fifth Street with Michael Emory. I met Larry. I don’t even know how. I don’t remember. It could’ve been on the street, it could’ve been someone introduced us. I don’t know. I don’t remember. And we got together. And for a while, Larry and Michael and I all lived together, until Michael could find a place. Then Larry and I kept that apartment. So Larry and I were together three years.

CM: And this was in your early twenties?

DG: Oh, yeah, this was on Seventy-Fifth Street, so this was—well, maybe I’ve been there a year, a year and a half, you know. So I was with Larry Tiernan. But that poor child. He was the sweetest guy, but he brought out the worst in me. You know how some people just push every button. And not because he was mean or . . . He just—everything he did pissed me off. I was fierce in those years, or I mean I just had my mother’s temper. I had it. So everything was—I was always pissed at him and he was the nicest guy in the world. He adored me.

But I really didn’t love him. I didn’t think I could love. I thought I had some, you know . . . I say in my show, there was a missing piece. And I thought, “Well, that’s fine. As long as they love me, that’s good.” You know, so he loved me so, and I liked him. He was a good guy, so he moved in. So that went on for a few years and I was faithful to him. Although years later I found out he was not faithful to me. But that’s a whole other—let him do that in his oral history. Except, oh yeah, he’s important to talk about because we remained friends after the break-up. And he also died of AIDS the same year I lost Carlos. That was a big ugly year, to find out both of them were infected, and they both died the same year. Larry, who went back since my first “lover”—because we stayed friends until he died—and Carlos, at that same time. It was not a good year.

CM: Did you ever introduce your family to Larry?

DG: My dad knew Larry because he had come to New York a couple of times. I don’t remember if he came out to LA. I don’t think during that period, because we were only together three years at that time, so I don’t think he did. Years and years later, when Richard and I were together, I think he came out so my mom probably met him then. But Darwin she met. But anyway, so we were together three years and that’s when I do Mountindale and summer stock and blah, blah, blah. And there’s a little things and trysts and stuff. But I was with Larry. In summer stock, there’d be trysts.

And then there was this director who hired me for something and then he hired me for something else. And his name was Darwin Knight. He was married to a woman named Harriett. Lovely woman, a dancer. And then one time I was over at his place. Harriett was not there, and we were going over lines for something he was doing, and he made his move. And I was so shocked, because I had no idea. He was married. He was a director. He’d hired me a couple of times and now I’m thinking, “Oh, so I wasn’t so talented.” No, he wouldn’t hire somebody *just* to hire them, but obviously, he had something for me. So I was just so shocked and I didn’t say no because I’m, like, I was really mostly shocked. So that evolved and I’m living with Larry. And now Darwin’s in the picture. So I’m living with Larry. He’s married [Darwin Knight]. God knows where we met. I guess when she’d be out of town because I remember—

CM: This is the director?

DG: Yeah. I remember being at his place down in the Village, but I don’t remember that many times we were together physically because it couldn’t be easy. And then I get a call from him one day, that Harriett had found out about us. He’d left something in his wallet with my name. I don’t know what it was, but she found out about it. He says, “So I have to leave here, of course, so let’s get an apartment.” And I’m, like, “Get an apartment?” I never intended to leave Larry. He was a good guy. I loved our apartment. Oh my God. But, I’m thinking, “His wife is leaving him. What am I gonna do?” Okay, so I left Larry for Darwin. Mostly for guilt because I didn’t love him, either.

CM: And how old were you when this happened?

DG: Well, mid-'60s, so I'm still in my twenties. Maybe twenty-four, twenty-five, something like that. He was older. I didn't realize how much older until after we're living together, maybe we were like eight, nine years older. I thought we were like four, five years older. Something like that. He was ten years older.

CM: What's Darwin's full name again?

DG: Knight. Talented man. He was very talented. He had a kind of hot career going for him for a minute there after this, after we were together. He directed the Cole Porter thing I did for the Nixon White House and—

CM: How long were you together total?

DG: About eight years. And so there I was. And that's how I wound up in Brooklyn Heights in the frigging four-flight walk-up, because he found that apartment. He loved Brooklyn Heights. I hated it because I liked being in mid-Manhattan. And because he was older, he was perfectly content to stay home and have dinner at home every night. And I'm, like, "Uh . . ." I mean, I didn't wanna go out bars and dancing, but I wanted to be out. I was young you know. But we stayed together. We worked together many times, and it went well for a good while. Until the end, which was bad.

CM: How did that relationship come to a close?

DG: Well, it was in Kansas City. They were opening a new dinner theater there. Dinner theater was very big in the '70s, very big. And I mean, you know, Joan Fontaine would do *Forty Carats* at Chateau de Ville Dinner Theatre. And blah blah blah. It was a good place for big names who were no longer hot, but they were still—she was still Joan Fontaine, for God's sake. Or you know, Hugh O'Brian would do *Destry Rides Again*. And so they were very big, and they were gonna open a big one in Kansas City, Missouri. And they were gonna open with *Forum—A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

So, he directed and I went to play Hero. The only Latino Hero ever in that role, because it was always a blond white guy, right? And so we had a good time, and then I came back afterward. Then he went back to do another show for them, and while he was there, one of the little chorines who'd been—I don't think he was in our show—but one of the little chorines, they started to have an affair. And I didn't know at first, but I don't remember how I started to suspect something was going on. And this was like, I swear to God, this was a movie. I suspected it, but I didn't know for sure, and I thought it was him. I don't even know how. This has gone on for a while. So I'm sitting at Beverly Anderson's office, which was at Forty-Second [and] Broadway. And it's the end of the work day, and she'd left, and I'm sitting there thinking, "I know something's going on. How am I gonna find out?" And I thought, "I'm gonna call Jim LeVaggi." Jim LeVaggi was his [Darwin's] best friend. And I knew Jim very well, because he even went through the whole thing with Harriet because he was very good friends with Darwin and Harriett. And he still stayed friends with both of them.

So, I called Jim. And the oldest trick in the world. I'm like, "Jim, I don't know what I'm gonna do. What is Darwin thinking?" "I know. I mean Tommy is this and how could it . . ." And he just spills everything assuming I knew—which I did not know at all. Now I know. I can't remember if I said to him, "Thanks for the info." I don't remember. I might have just left it like I had already known. I hung up. I thought, "What am I gonna do?" I stood up. I crossed the street, went down to the subway, took the train out to the airport. I did have a credit card because I lied. "I work for Beverly Anderson and I make a hundred thousand dollars a year." American Express card. And I booked a flight to Kansas City. And I flew to Kansas City, and I knew they had to be staying at the same hotel we stayed at, because that's where the actors stayed. So I show up. I call a friend who had been in the chorus with us. I told him I was in town, and that I'd check in with him later. I go to the hotel. I walked in the hotel and the guy at the desk says, "Oh, Danny. I thought you were Tommy at first." I said, "No, but I'm here to surprise them. Are they here?" He goes, "No, they're out." I said, "Oh, I wanna surprise them."

He gives me a key to their room. I go up there. There's Tommy's things. There's Darwin's things. I'm not happy. So I leave a note. "Dear Darwin, I came to see if I could fix things up with us, but I see I'm too late." And I leave the note and I leave. And I call my friend who picks me up. I go to his house and I wait until like midnight. I let him stew! [laughs] It's like something out of a Bette Davis movie, isn't it? Totally. So, I call him. He goes, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm here in Kansas City." "We got to talk." I said, "What

is there to talk about?” Make a long story short, I went back. I spent the night, which to this day—people ask me about regrets. I said I have no regrets in life. I do regret that. I did stay the night because we were gonna fix it up, never happened. Got worse eventually. I stayed alone in Brooklyn Heights and he stayed in Kansas City, which ended his career.

I guess he wanted something different. He was with Tommy. He liked having a house and a dog and a yard, and that’s great. Eventually they both move back to New York, but his career was gone, you know. That was his choice, and I’m not saying he made a mistake. But here’s the good-news part: I never would have met Richard had Darwin and I not broken up. Richard and I, together thirty-four years.

CM: How did you meet Richard?

DG: I’ll get to that in a minute. Tommy and Darwin were together the rest of their lives as well, and Darwin only passed away last year.

CM: Did you stay in touch with him?

DG: No. We never spoke again. First of all, I didn’t want to for years. Because he’d done me wrong big time, even to the point where we were talking on the phone, still trying to patch things up. This is what killed it. He was there, I was in New York, and I said, you know—I was getting to be a successful agent. I said, “I’m going to Europe with three friends.” They were going. I said, “I’ll go with you.” We were gonna go, and I’m gonna be gone that time. He said, “Oh.” He said, “Well, I may have to go to New York during that time. Is it okay if I stay at the apartment?” I said, “Of course. It’s still your home.” You know, we’re just trying to patch this up. I go to Europe. I come back and I find out that he had come there with Tommy. So that’s when I said, “No.” So I called to say, “I’m changing the locks.” “You can’t throw me out of my home.” I said, “No, you spoke to him again.” But as I got older, I started to say, “He must have sensed after a while that I didn’t love him.” And obviously he really fell in love with Tommy, because they stayed together as long as Richard and me. Because he actually met Tommy before Richard and I were together.

It was five years until I met Richard. So it turned out as it was supposed to. But as I got older, I started to look at that thinking, “You know what, I see why it happened and I wonder how he’s doing.” I Face-booked . . . No, I Googled. I couldn’t find him. That’s doing—I knew he hadn’t done anything else in the business because nothing would come up when I Googled him. Then, as recent as two or three years ago, through a whole series of events that’s too long to go into, somebody who was at that theater was, well, who was Tommy’s best friend. So she had lived through the whole thing, hearing that end of it. And then I gave my story, because both sides were true. I don’t say that. But there was a different version, obviously, for each of us. And we pieced it together. And she said she hadn’t talked to him in a long time. She tracked him down for me, and she did. And she said Darwin was very ill. He’d had cancer for a while. Basically his life was going from the wheelchair to the sofa. It really broke my heart. It really did. I said, “I would really like to talk to him.” She said, “I don’t know if they’d wanna talk.” And I stupidly listened to her. And then she called me about a year later that he had passed, and I was really, really sad that we didn’t ever connect again.

CM: There must have been some fondness there. I mean you were together for eight years. It’s not like—

DG: Yeah, and I learned so much from him. I learned a lot.

CM: Like what?

DG: Well, just about the business, let alone . . . Because when I was doing the Cole Porter thing, there were three women, five of us in the show, me and four others. We were replacing four at one point, and the producers asked me to put them all in. And I’m like, “I don’t know how to do this.” True, Darwin was directing this, but I was really good.

“That doesn’t work for us.”

“Well, let’s try this.”

“You can’t do that step. Why don’t you come this way?”

And I’d *never* done anything like that at all, and it became very easy for me. So I had learned a lot from him through osmosis, you know. I had learned a lot. And just overall about how to, you know . . . He

was an adult and he was a very, very smart guy, very talented, and I learned a lot from him and I am sorry. That's two regrets. I thought I had no regrets. I do have two right off the bat. And I'm always proud of myself. "I don't believe in regrets. I believe it's a waste of time." But I do have a couple.

CM: I don't think anybody goes through life without some.

DG: I thought I did. I guess I was wrong, wasn't I? Yeah, Darwin and I, I was very sad when he died.

CM: Now, tell me about—it was Charles, Carlos [Almaraz] who outed you to your father.

DG: That bitch, yes, he did.

CM: Tell me a little bit about how that happened.

DG: Well, I was glad, as it turns out, the way it happened, because it is a great big laugh in my show when I tell that story. I was living in Brooklyn Heights. Was I with Darwin or was I already alone? I'm not sure, but I was in Brooklyn Heights. And I wish I had it—and I, who saves everything— that I don't have. I literally got a piece of drawing paper in an envelope in the mail and, in artist's charcoal, this scribbled note: "The cat is out of the bag, the frijoles had been spilled. Your dad took me to lunch and I told him you're gay." Something like that. The first two lines are verbatim and the rest is what had happened.

But it's on artist—he must have just torn it out and mailed it off, which was cheaper than picking up the phone, right? So I'm like, "Oh my God." Now, I was fine about it, you know. And so I think I called my dad. I said, "Well, I hear you had an interesting lunch." "Well, yeah," blah blah. So, we were fine. He'd always kind of suspected, and he seemed fine about it. But in the end, nobody's really fine about it. I don't think . . . You know, a parent can accept and continue to love that child, and I was lucky enough that both my parents did, but that doesn't mean they liked it. That doesn't mean they were happy about it or okay about it, you know? And I found that out years later, through a letter I'll tell you about later, if you're a very good girl.

So he was fine about it, and we decided not to tell my mom. "She doesn't need to know." "Okay." So we just didn't. And this went on another fifteen years, until I moved out here, with Richard. And then one day my mother's cooking and my brother's sitting there, and she goes, "I just don't understand. They have two bedrooms, and one is a TV room. Why won't they each have their own bedroom?" And Mark says, "Ma, Baba is gay." "What?" She's all shocked, then she's all pissed off because Dad knew and Mark knew and she didn't.

CM: She really had no idea.

DG: I guess mothers don't wanna know what they don't . . . Richard's mother was similar. She never wanted to discuss it, because my mom once wrote her about how happy she was that we were together because Richard was such a wonderful, wonderful guy. And she was happy that I'd found somebody to share my life. She never even answered my mother. And Richard's mother had—who passed a couple of years ago— she had one sister only, Ginger, who has a gay son. And when Ginger had tried to talk about Tom, [her gay son,] and Richard, his mother would not discuss it. And yet, when I was with his mother, she could not have been more marvelous, more warm. They just didn't want to talk about it. They know it. They don't want to talk about it. So I assume that's where my mom . . . How could she not know?

CM: What did your dad say over the phone when you spoke?

DG: Just said he understood. He might have said he had already known. I don't really remember the actual gist of the conversation, other than it was not about, "You should have told me." Nothing. It was perfectly, perfectly fine.

But fast forward and this was maybe about four, five years ago. Had he already passed? Maybe it was before he passed. I'm not sure. But he has an autobiography—my dad does—and it was written by a woman named Sherilyn Mentos, because she did kind of what we're doing here. She simply interviewed him for months and then she edited, you know. So a story that was four pages became a one page, or whatever. And she did a fabulous job because the book is—I'll give you a copy, you'll love it. It's—you can hear my dad talking, because they are his words, you know. It's marvelous.

And so she—I think he was still alive. You know what? I don't think so. I think he'd already passed. I think that's what prompted her to do it. She said that because my dad was gonna do this book, he called and he asked me, "Hey, I'm gonna do this book," blah, blah, blah. "Is it okay if I say you're gay?" I said, "Yeah, sure. I don't care." As it turned out, it never came out [in the book, my being gay]. I'm all through the book, of course—many places—but it had nothing to do with anything [about my being gay]. So, and by the way, it had nothing to do with it. So, fine. Just like I don't say anything in my show about my parents divorcing, because it's really not relevant to the arc of my story. So it just takes it to a whole other place I don't need. So it's not in there. But she emailed me to say that they had talked about it. But they had, in the end, decided it wasn't relevant and so it was cut, "but I thought you'd like to have it" and she sent me the transcription of that page.

CM: And?

DG: Oh my God. [pause] It was hilarious. It was hilarious. It was touching. Of course it made me cry, and it brought back a memory. Because, in this he says—I'm paraphrasing here—but he says, "Did you know that my son is gay?" He's talking to Sherilyn. "Have I told you my son is gay?" She knew me, and whatever, she said yes or no. And he—I think he said something about he always thought so, because even when I was little . . . He talks a little bit about that. But here's the thing: he says, "But I didn't know until I went to New York." And I was with Larry. "I went to New York." And I remember, I think one time he came to perform at Yale and he stayed with us overnight, and I went up to Connecticut, right? Isn't it Connecticut?

CM: Mm-hmm, New Haven.

DG: Yeah, that's right. And he was staying the night. He said, "I was staying with Sonny . . ." Those are all my names by the way, just so you know. My family nickname was Sonny since I was an infant. Then I became Baba with my brother, because when he was little, he couldn't say "brother" and the closest he could manage was "Baba." So to this day, I am Baba to my brother. My mom and dad, "Have you talked to Ba? Have you talked to Ba?" So, sometimes Sonny, but I was now Ba, or Baba. Now my niece—my brother's daughter who's now eighteen, Maya—we have a very nice, good relationship. She doesn't call me uncle. She doesn't call me Uncle Danny. She calls me Baba, which I love, because it keeps it going. So I have all these names, I'm Baba, I'm Sonny. I was Eddie. I'm Dan.

Anyway, so he said he was in New York and that I was living with Larry, and we gave him the bedroom and we slept on the sofa bed in the living room, and that he got up in the middle of the night to pee and he saw us in each other's arms, asleep. And that he didn't know what to do or how to deal with it, so he just left. And I remembered! I thought, "Oh, I remember." Because we woke up the next morning, he was gone!

He had like a two o'clock [p.m.] flight. We were gonna go to the airport. He was gone. And when I talked to him in LA, I said, "Dad!" He goes, "Well, I woke up early. I had nothing to do and you were asleep so I thought, oh . . ." He just dismissed it. I remembered after I saw it written there. And in it he says that it was just upsetting to him. So, like, even though he knew, but seeing it, that makes it real. Like me in the mirror. I totally understood. I totally understood. I've never talked about this, by the way, except to a couple of friends. And I've been trying to think of a way to integrate the letter into the show, but I haven't come up with it yet. Because it's really beautiful.

Then he says that he went back and he went to talk to our family doctor, which is what you would've done in the '60s. You go to your priest, you go to your doctor. And my dad told the doctor what had happened. I guess it was upsetting to him and that Dr. Udkoff—that was his name—Dr. Udkoff had said to my dad, "Well, do you love him?" And my dad said, "I always loved him." And then she describes that he starts, he's talking about this, and he's like cradling a baby. And he said, "Even when he was a baby, he was so cute." He starts talking about me as a baby and that he's cradling. The doctor said, "Well, does this change it?" And he was crying by then. As he's telling the story, he's crying. And he says, "No, it doesn't change it at all." And the doctor says, "Well, then there you are, just leave it alone." But what makes it funny . . . And so my dad . . . Is that as you're reading this, it's really—because she says that, "Well, as he's

talking, tears were streaming down his face.” He’s seeing young Dan or Eddie or whoever the hell I was. He’s cradling, and then he goes, “Hey, it’s lunch time. You wanna go to Jack in the Box?” He just—right out! That is so him, and I do that in my show. I use that device many times.

I don’t know if you remember, you only saw it the one time on tape. But if I’m in a very [“hmmm . . .”] moment, I pull them out with the one-line, you know. I do that a lot, because I don’t wanna leave them there. I need to get on with it. And to get on with it, I just pull them up with one line that is funny and they all laugh and then we’re back to the show. And I thought, “Omigod, that is exactly what I do in my show.” He just—just from the tears, “Hey it’s lunch. Wanna go Jack in the Box?”

And it’s just all on a one-page transcript. And it’s really beautiful. So either I have to put it in my book which I expect to write one day or I don’t know. I’d like to integrate it with the show but I’ve got nowhere to put it. I’ve looked at it and it doesn’t really go anywhere but—

CM: It might be better, you know—it would be really interesting in a book where you can just simply read the transcript because that cut in the end is what makes it funny and powerful at the same time.

DG: Yes, and so *him*. Because he’d just change you know.

CM: That’s hilarious.

DG: But to go back, I totally remembered when he was there that he was gone the next morning and we couldn’t figure it out. When I talked to him, he was, you know. But that’s what had happened. Good story, huh?

CM: Yeah.

DG: And never before had been told.

CM: Wow. Now how did you meet Richard? Where and when did you—

DG: I met him at a party. Just like in the movies.

CM: What kind of party was it? Was it—

DG: A mixed theater party, you know. He’d only been in New York a year.

CM: Was he in theater as well?

DG: Yes, he’s actually a fabulous actor. Richard Read, Richard Read. He came from a very Irish Catholic family. Both his mom and dad serious Catholics. His dad George, his mom Marie. And her maiden name was . . . Oh my God, I know it. I can’t remember in the moment. But it’s something like Murphy. It’s something real Irish. [Reilly is the correct name.] And they were [seven] kids, and he’s the middle one. And he went—he graduated from Notre Dame, and then from there he went to the Goodman Theater in New York—in Chicago. And then he went to New York. And he’d only been there a year when we met, and it was just, like, instant.

Now he claims that I asked him for his phone number. But I remember vividly him asking me for my phone number. So to this day we’re not sure. But after thirty-four years, I guess it’s not that important. But I remember him because I remember thinking, “Oh, wow.” And I must admit he’s got the memory. He will remember what we had for lunch on that island in Greece twelve years ago and we had just been to that shop where I bought that . . . You know. But anyway—

CM: So you meet at a party.

DG: Yes, but it’s instant. I mean we go out, like, you know, right away. Every night. And I give him the key to my apartment about a month later, and three months later he moves in. It was really fast, and now it’s thirty-four years.

CM: Wow, congratulations.

DG: Well, he always says, “Well, it’s not thirty-four yet, because it’s in November.” So we’re still at thirty-three in a few months.

CM: Yeah, and all kinds of things could . . .

DG: Yes, life is full of surprises.

CM: Now when you moved here to LA, he worked as a studio assistant for Carlos [Almaraz]. Tell me a little bit about how that job came about.

- DG: Well, he's very gifted. He's one of those people that could do anything. And he's a wonderful artist. He's a wonderful actor, but he couldn't quite find the niche where he could make a living, you know. Like it's very common for a lot of us. And one day, Carlos mentioned that he needed someone to help him out, and Richard started. And they had a really—they had their own very special friendship going on. So he was Carlos's assistant for several years. I mean, quite a few years.
- CM: And what kind of things did he do for Carlos?
- DG: Everything. You know, he was there helping him stretch canvasses and picking up this at the gallery and doing the . . . You know, just somebody to do all the stuff that you don't wanna do because you're busy painting, you know. And it especially was something when Carlos became ill, because Richard would be there when Carlos would suddenly collapse while painting, and he'd help Elsa get him into the car and rush him to the hospital and, you know, he'd have to clean up. He was there in the really, really hard time, yeah. He loved Carlos. Everybody loved Carlos.
- CM: He sounds like such a charismatic—
- DG: He was also stubborn as a mule. But, yeah, yeah, he was something.
- CM: Incredible. So he worked with him. So, shortly after arriving in LA until Carlos's death.
- DG: Yes. I can't tell you exactly how many years, but we moved here in '82. Carlos died in '89, and he was with him at least five, six, seven . . . You know, he—it was pretty soon after.
- CM: Cool. Now, switching back to your own professional career track—
- DG: In fact, this painting . . . See this little painting?
- CM: Yes.
- DG: *Dancing Devils*. I love that oil, and it was—Carlos hated it. He did it, obviously, and he didn't like it. And it was just on the floor in the studio and Richard always liked it. And Carlos always said, "Nah, I don't really . . ." But he didn't throw it away, and, as I recall, after Carlos died, Elsa knew the story, so she gave it to Richard. I don't think it's even signed. But that is an Almaraz and it's very cool and Richard always loved it.
- CM: Two male figures in devil masks—
- DG: Dancing, yeah.
- CM: In front of a nightscape—
- DG: Right. It's very cool. And what is it? Six by eight [inches]. It's very small, but it's . . . Yeah.
- CM: I'd even say five by seven. It's pretty small.
- DG: It's little.
- CM: It's little. Now switching on to your own professional track in LA. So you're a casting agent—
- DG: Casting director.
- CM: Casting director, excuse me.
- DG: Everybody—it's casting director, theatrical agent.
- CM: Theatrical agent. I'm confusing my words.
- DG: Everybody does.
- CM: Then you begin to switch into production. You worked at Paul Rodriguez—
- DG: Right.
- CM: So tell me a little bit about what are some of the most significant projects that you've worked on as producer since being in LA. Like, you've done live events, televised specials, anniversary concerts.
- DG: There were some in particular. Basically during the '90s, I produced for television. Lots and lots of specials: HBO, PBS, blah blah blah. And in between, live fundraising events. But it's interesting, because the first time I really produced something. And it's weird, I don't know why she tracked me down and asked me to do it because—I guess I had helped put things together for the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts and their events, so I had done production things, let's say, live, no money, strictly as a volunteer in the community. And I got a call from Cynthia Telles who—very prominent, glamorous family, because her father was the first Latino mayor in the country. He was the mayor of San Antonio back—or El Paso. He was from El Paso. It might have been El Paso, not San Antonio.

CM: Of a Texas city.

DG: A Texas city, back in the days of, like, I guess the '60s, early '60s. Because he later served in the Kennedy administration as ambassador to Costa Rica, I think. [Raymond L. Telles was the mayor of El Paso from 1975 to 1961 and ambassador to Costa Rica from 1961 to 1967—ed.] So Cynthia knew these Kennedy kids and all that. She's fabulous, very elegant lady, and she herself, she's like a, oh gosh, some sort of psychology thing, but in Spanish at UCLA at the time. Lovely lady. And she had been, I believe, on the board of APLA [AIDS Project Los Angeles]—the AIDS fundraising organization, which was one of the first and the biggest, and still probably the biggest, and . . . But she was noticing that monies were never being funneled to the Latino communities specifically, which was having its own issues. We're talking 1988.

CM: With the AIDS crisis.

DG: With the AIDS crisis. And especially it was difficult because in the Spanish language, they wouldn't even write the word *SIDA*. That was the word, *S-I-D-A*. I don't know what it stood for, but it was rarely talked about because it was too much associated with being gay. And that's another subject that was not talked about. And so she decided she would put on an event to raise money to go specifically to the Latino AIDS crisis, whether it was for counseling or whatever the heck it was for, and she heard about me. I don't know how. Because I hadn't even started producing for Paul and all that yet at all. She tracked me down. I said I'd do it. And it turned out to be a very big-time affair because Armand Hammer—as in the Hammer Museum, etcetera, was co-chairing it with Edward Roybal, a legendary man in politics. Latino pioneer. They were co-chairs. So once I got on board—

CM: What year is this?

DG: Nineteen eighty-eight, I believe. That's what it says right here, because I just found this book, which is why it came to mind. And so she called me—yes, June 3, 1988, the Biltmore Hotel. "The Hispanic Coalition on AIDS presents 'A La Vida, A Toast to Life'" is what I called it. And I got Ricardo Montalban, Rita Moreno, and Edward James Olmos to emcee, to host. And the woman who was the events person for Armand Hammer asked about my dad performing. And I'm, like, "How the hell does she know Lalo Guerrero?" I was shocked. Turns out she lived in Palm Springs and she used to go hear him sing all the time in Palm Springs. Because after my parents divorced, my dad moved out there, re-married, raised Lidia's two children. And he lived out there for the rest of his life. She knew him from that.

So, okay. Then we decided to not only have Dad perform, but we put together a revue of three or four people who did three of his songs first. So that was the entertainment for the night. And it was a very elegant black tie affair, and it was a big thing. So I was very proud of that, because I think as far as I know, that was the first fundraiser major event about AIDS crisis in the Latino community. I remember we honored Monica Lozano, who is a dear friend. I love that woman.

CM: The publisher of *La Opinión*?

DG: Her family founded *La Opinión*. She's still a major, major force in our community and in the city. I love Monica Lozano and we honored—I think we gave a community award, a media award, because *La Opinión* had been the first to write about SIDA. Other papers wouldn't touch it. And so we honored Monica. So it was really—that I'm particularly proud of, but that's before I was, quote, officially a producer.

I was very proud of a lot of what I did on television because they . . . My idea, my mission, was to celebrate our culture and to educate people about our culture, you know. And so one I did, which I loved very much, was our friend Vikki Carr. Because I did a bilingual concert event for PBS and Vikki was the star. It was a happy coincidence. I'd been talking to KCET here in LA, which was our PBS station in Los Angeles, about doing something separately. Separately, they had been talking to Vikki about doing something. And when I came up with this idea for them, they said how about Vikki Carr? I said, "I love Vikki. We've worked together many times." When they said to Vikki, "How about Dan Guerrero?" "Oh, I love Dan." And that's how it happened. And—

CM: When was this, approximately?

DG: This was later. This was '98, '99 maybe. I'd done *The Paul Rodriguez Show* and a lot of the specials. I'd done the Concert of the Americas with—boy, that was a biggie—with Quincy Jones for the Summit of the Americas. I'll get back to Vikki because this is really big. President Clinton was hosting the Summit of the Americas in Miami. That meant that—I think it was thirty-seven world leaders from Western hemisphere countries were all meeting in Miami, and he decided he wanted to have a big concert to celebrate that. So he called Quincy Jones.

Then Quincy Jones called the Kennedy Center and said, “You gotta raise fifty million dollars,” or whatever the hell it was. I don't know what it was. To put on this concert event. So it was the Kennedy Center event that took place in Miami. Then I always fantasized that Quincy Jones went to the world atlas and saw that most of the western hemisphere speaks Spanish and he tracked me down. I have no idea how. And so I co-produced. At that point, I had formed a company called *There Goes the Neighborhood* with two of my *Paul Rodriguez* cohorts. Because after *Paul Rodriguez* ended, we decided to stay together.

It was Lisa Rosales, Michael Dagnery. He was a *cubano*, she was a *chicana*. We were a good team because he was the edit person. He liked—knew the edits, the cameras, that's what he did. She was the crew—the hiring the crew, the budgets. And then I was kind of the creative, you know. I would come up—and I was the front man, meaning I was the one that could go out and could sell. So it was a really good trio. But it ended badly because the balance started to get a little off for them.

So, anyway, I said, “Well, but I'm not alone.” I said, “I have a company now.” “Well, we have a line item for co-producer. If you want to split it with your company, that's up to you.” And I said okay. I had to. What was I gonna do? But we had just finished this Disney concert, so they were kind of wrapping that. So I really moved over [to the Concert of the Americas] while they finished that, because now they were in post. And that was where Michael did well, and I didn't do that. So I started it, and then they kind of dovetailed at the end of that.

But I'm really the one that worked with Quincy the most. And the idea was that we had to celebrate all the cultures of the world. Now you couldn't do every damn country, so we broke it into South America. And of course we put Brazil and Argentina, the two biggest. So we had those two countries. Now we had the Caribbean and we had Central America. We pulled Costa Rica and then we had Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. And we had the biggest stars from all of those countries. It was hard to come up with someone from Costa Rica, I don't mind telling you. No offense to my Costa Rican brothers and sisters. But I think we had Rubén Blades from Panama. We did have Rubén and we had somebody else I think from Costa Rica.

But anyway, so it was—it made the Oscars look like a backyard barbecue. We had everybody from Maya Angelou to Ana Gabriel to Michael Douglas to Liza Minnelli to the Mexico thing. I had Vikki Carr. And Paul Rodriguez intro'd the Ballet Folklorico de México de Amalia Hernandez—her troupe—and Ana Gabriel who sang with a symphony. And I added mariachi musicians behind her. So it was this mix.

It was just huge. It was at the James Knight auditorium, which is like a five-thousand-seat arena in Miami. It was deep, because you got all that—imagine the security and all that. But it was so huge, we never even got through a full run through. Because about four o'clock, in came the security, the FBI, the CIA, the dog sniffers. And, “Out, everybody out! You go to the . . .” Because we were in the hotel where the place was. We had to go to our rooms. We could not leave our rooms. We had to be escorted back there. We had only gotten through, I think, act I. We never even got to the second act. We were like, “Oh my. This is huge.” The whole downstairs of this whole auditorium, we had put up, you know, pipe and drape. So here was Celia Cruz rehearsing. Over here was the dance troupe from Buenos Aires, and over here was the Argentine *pampa*, and there was Maya Angelou chatting with Liza, and over here was Jimmy Smits, and over here . . . It was gigantic. That was the best ever. That was a biggie, that was a biggie. So anyway, I did stuff like that.

CM: And then Vikki Carr, coming back to—

DG: That one I love, because we picked a dozen American standards. “Magic Is the Moonlight,” “What a Difference a Day Makes.” All these romantic songs of the '40s and '50s that were Spanish- language songs who

then got English lyrics, English-language lyrics. Nobody knows that. And that's what we did. So Vikki had three male guests. We did it in three acts, because it was designed as a pledge special. So in the first act, she had Jack Jones. So he would sing—he sang “Frenesi” in English. No, they did “Frenesi” as a duet. And he did an English-language version of a famous Mexican song.

And then in the second one, I brought Pepe Aguilar because I wanted him to sing in English. He speaks perfect English, he never gets to—so he sang “Reloj,” “El Reloj.” Although it never had an English translation, I liked that song, and I wanted to hear him sing it. So he sang, and in her dialogue, she said, “This one did not have, you know, but it was hugely popular in the U.S. among . . .” And that's how we skirted that one. But I wanted “El Reloj.” He sang that and then he did a duet with her: “Acercate más y más y más, come closer to me . . .” They did a duet of that. And then the third act was Arturo Sandoval.

But this shows you what people would still think of a Latino when you hear *Latino*. I said to the set designer at KCET . . . We're talking 1999. We were gonna tape it at the Beverly Hilton in the International Ballroom. That's where they do the Golden Globes and all those, with a black-tie, invited audience. I said to the guy, “I want you to do an elegant nightclub of the '50s like the Mocambo, Ciro's, all those chic night clubs of that era. That's the set, because that's the feeling I want to portray, like they're out at a supper club.” “Perfect.” I go to meet him, and he's got the model there. It looked like Taco Bell. I mean there was like the mission thing, and there was . . . I'm, like, I was so pissed. Of course I didn't seem pissed, but I was. I said, “You know, this is not gonna work—at all!” I said, “I want you to completely forget that we're doing anything in Spanish on that stage. I want you to do this like a nightclub, a supper club, like I said, if Natalie Cole was gonna be in it, if Celine Dion was gonna be in it. Forget the Spanish language altogether.” And he had to start from scratch, and he did a gorgeous set. But that I would have to say that. I'm like, “Come on, is this still 1950?” You deal with that a lot. You still do. You still do.

CM: That preconceived notion that what's something Latino should look like?

DG: Yes, I don't need a *carreta*.

CM: I mean, do you find that in your production stuff—you know, because that—I find that a lot of—when they cast Latinos on TV, in mainstream shows, so often they want that character who's got the Ricky Ricardo accent and this and that. How have you run into that sort of thing?

DG: All the time, but the more annoying than that to me is they still can't tell the difference between an Argentine and a Puerto Rican, or a Mexican. We're all just Latino, so they will do a set that takes place in Buenos Aires and there'll be a serape and a sombrero on the wall. You're like, “Really? You know the difference between Japanese and Chinese. Why can't you see there's a difference between you know, a Caribbean Latino or a *mexicano*, or . . .,” you know. That amazes me the most.

People who will . . . And I just heard the other day on the news. Oh, during this Trayvon [Martin] thing going on, they say, “Well, no, it wasn't racism because it was a Spanish person.” Oh, from Madrid? They didn't mean Spanish, they meant someone who speaks Spanish, a Latino. “Don't you know that Spanish means they're from Spain?” They don't—and it's 2013. I just can't get over it. It's just amazing to me. And you get so tired of being pissed, and you get so tired of talking to your casting director friends or my producer friends who do a huge . . . A friend recently—no, I lied—about three years ago, who was doing a pilot for ABC and had this screening. An hour [program] that takes place in LA. Not a single Latino.

And I'm sitting there watching it with about a dozen friends in his screening room. I couldn't help it. When it was over, I said, “Now let me ask you this, did you not see a single Latino actor? Not one?” “What do you mean?” I said, “It takes place in Los Angeles today and there's no Latino? I'm just curious, honestly. Did you see them and they weren't good enough? Did you not even think of bringing one in? I'm fascinated.” There was this silence in the room. And I love this guy, but I'm just so amazed. I'm still amazed because what is the—how does that happen? Which of those is it?

I dug up a *Time* magazine from the '80s during this archival search. Eddie [Edward James] Olmos is on the cover, you know: Latino explosion. We've had about four since I've been around. They last five minutes. Ricky Martin was a Latino explosion. The floodgates are open. Yeah, only Ricky got in. And then

Jennifer Lopez, “Oh, Latino explosion.” You know we’ve had three or four. But this one, they devoted a good deal of the magazine to the Latino thing. There was a whole thing on film, a whole thing—not theater, probably—but a whole thing on film and on television and on marketing. And a huge article. And I was casting at the time. That’s why I know it was late ’80s, because I’m quoted in the magazine.

And I read the quote, I thought, “I could’ve given this interview last week because it asks why aren’t there more Latinos on the screen,” blah blah blah, “according to casting director Dan Guerrero.” And I said something like, “The agent says to the Latino actor, ‘I would submit you but they’re not seeing any Latinos.’ And the casting person said ‘Well, I would see them, but the agents don’t submit them.’ And then the producer says, ‘I would see them but the casting people don’t show us any.’ And the writer says, ‘Well, I don’t write them because producers never ask for it.’” And while everybody’s doing this, we’re standing out here picking our nose. I could’ve given that quote yesterday. And things have gotten better, I’m not saying they haven’t. Of course they have, much better. But when you go from zero to zero point five, you don’t buy balloons. I don’t know how I got into all that. That had nothing to do with—

CM: No, but this brings me exactly to my next question.

DG: You see, even when I don’t know what I’m doing, I know what I’m doing. *[laughs]*

CM: You’re predicting my next question, which is, while you were working in New York, things like Chicano issues, Latino issues, activism, was not a part of your life.

DG: No.

CM: But when you came back here, you kind of dove back into that—or into it, to begin with. Why?

DG: Well, it was a-brewing for a while. It was a-brewing. Because—and I don’t say it started with *Zoot Suit*. Because when *Zoot Suit* came to New York, late ’70s—that was, like, in my show, as you may recall. I say, “It was when my worlds collide. East meets west.” Because they were compartmentalized you know. In New York, I was—everybody knew I was Chicano. I mean my Christmas parties had tamales and, you know, because by then I could buy them or my mom would send them or I’d bring them back, you know.

So everybody knew. My Christmas tree was nothing but Mexican handmade [ornaments]. There was only one store down [in] the village that used to sell the Mexican decorations in the early ’60s. I went down there, bought them for my first tree so I was totally—everybody knew. But in my life, I was completely gringo, really, nothing to do with anything. I didn’t know Latinos, I didn’t go up to Spanish Harlem. I was just completely not in that world.

And so when *Zoot Suit* came, it was so bizarre. Because there, you know, I’m, like, at Sardi’s, where I’ve been to a million opening night parties. But instead of there being Gwen Verdon and Zero Mostel and Ethel Merman, there was Eddie Olmos, Lupe Ontiveros, and Rose Portillo. It was, like, “Okay, wait. Okay, wait.” Because my Latino world was just when I came out to visit family and see Carlos. And then out here I was with nothing but Chicanos. But that was West Coast Danny. No, that was Eddie—maybe—and then there was Danny. And they were completely, you know, separate.

But it started, as I would come out [to LA] and I would see—I remember vividly picking up newspapers and seeing whole full-page ads for Macy’s, having a big sale. There’d never be a Latino wearing the clothes, ever. There’d be black and there’d be white. You never saw a brown face. And I go, “It’s LA.” I didn’t necessarily expect it in New York, although there’s a lot of *puertorriqueños* at that time. But in LA, I just couldn’t believe it. So, it was seeping in.

And then with the *Zoot Suit* thing, when people—because our story was so foreign [in New York City], you know. It didn’t make it there. It closed after a handful of performances. I think it was wrong to put it in the Winter Garden Theater, which is a gigantic theater where there’s always big musicals. This is a play with music, you know, so I think people had a different idea of what it was going to be. And then when they saw it, they were just not ready for it. And sometimes when that happens, you never get into it. Sometimes you can get rid of it. You go, “I thought this was gonna be in it.” Pretty soon, it swallows you up. For whatever reasons, that did not happen.

So the two worlds started to kind of . . . And then I started to—just thinking as a business person, “You know what, these numbers are getting bigger, and there’s gonna be a big Latino market. And there’s not a lot of Chicanos with my background.” We’re talking, you know, early ’80s. We’re talking late ’70s, early ’80s. And since I’d been thinking about coming back to LA. My parents—I was now the age that they were when I left, you know. And that other family, too, that whole Chicano thing was kind of starting to fester, if that’s the right word. So it all kind of—was, again, the perfect storm, you know. Where I was getting burned out on being an agent and New York. Another winter, another subway ride. And by then I was forty, but I’ve always looked younger. So I looked—I could’ve been thirty, early thirties. I thought, “Well, if I’m gonna make a move and start from scratch, I better do it,” before I look like I do today. So all those things came at the same time. But I very definitely came to jump into that community, and was I shocked at how little it was—[the “Latino market”]—once I actually got out here.

But it was wonderful, too, because it was so small that we all knew each other. And I love to this day—how many years we’re talking about, ’82, ’92 to, what, almost thirty years? Something like that, out here now? That there’s that little core group that is still there, you know. Jose Luis Valenzuela, Evelina Fernandez, his wife—you know Los Angeles Theater Center. I was on their board in 1989, you know. I love—they’re my family. Diane Rodriguez, who’s now like number two or number three at the Center Theatre Group. She’s like the highest-ranking Latina, I think, in commercial theater in the country. Diane started [with] the Teatro Campesino. She directed *iGaytino!* I met her, actually, through Dad, when I had been here five minutes. She and her husband, Jose Delgado, in 1982 were trying to get a musical revue using Dad’s music, and I met them through Dad. We’re still, by the way, waiting to do that revue. I’m gonna do it before I die.

And so they’re all still out there, that little core group. Rose Portillo, who was in *Zoot Suit*. Sal Lopez. That core still out there in *la lucha*, you know. But, like, the thrilling thing is, behind this, there’s a whole new wave of young smart Latinos, talented Latinos. And that is, like, thank God, because our asses are dragging, you know. But yeah, it’s exciting. But there was nobody behind us when we were all doing this. I’m not saying Ricardo Montalban, Rita Moreno—they were beacons. But in terms of movements and of real community, they really stood alone.

CM: Yeah, in terms of also that whole support mechanisms of people who were producers and cinematographers.

DG: That’s right. Those were actors. They’re “only actors.” Now we’ve got writers and producers and directors and we’re still—the fight is still serious, believe me. But, there’s at least an army now.

CM: What was it like to see *Zoot Suit* on stage?

DG: It was so thrilling. Because I first saw it out here. Because I flew out—I don’t remember if I flew out for the opening, or if I just flew out and saw it because that’s Dad’s music that Luis Valdez used in the show. Dad did not write it for *Zoot Suit*. He wrote those songs and recorded them in the ’40s, in the real zoot suit era, because he loved swing and boogie and he was not gonna get to do that in English. So he brought it to Spanish, and he wrote all these *pachuco* songs back in the ’40s. So when Luis went to do *Zoot Suit* and wanted music, he used Dad’s music.

So, to see our story, to see—it was the opposite of *Boys in the Band*. It was so thrilling to see a whole cast of Latinos. A whole cast of them, and they were all fabulous. They all danced and they were singing and they were acting and [telling] our stories. And omigod, it was really it was thrilling. Yeah, thrilling.

[break in audio]

CM: All right. So, exploring this idea of your activism. Were there any events that helped inspire your activism or that were formative in making you want to get involved in Latino issues?

DG: Well, my wanting to get involved came from the things we talked about, with—my still seeing the lack of—like everybody does. That’s not unusual. But I think it’s in my DNA, too, because both of my parents were very big on being proud of the culture and always to be proud to be Mexican. Very big on that. Because

even though my mom was half Mexican, half Irish-American, she was raised by her mom because her dad died when she was only five. So she grew up very, very proud of her Mexican culture.

And I remember there is a story. I don't remember it, but the story is, when we were living in San Diego during the war—that's War World II, not I—and I guess I was going to preschool, and I think my mom might've been volunteering. It was the war, she wasn't working. I don't recall she ever worked during their marriage. I know she didn't, but even when I was little and I couldn't remember, I don't think she did. She literally went from her mother's house to being married to my dad. And she—they had two good friends, Chita and Chayo. Isn't that cool? Like a singing group, right? Chita and Chayo. I remember them well, and I loved them. They were cool, and they had this great son, Dukie. [Duke, but we all called him Dukie.] And you know, recently I was remembering them for whatever reason. I think that they must have been farm workers by the time I knew them.

I'm saying "at this time," because I thought he was in music or something. But I remember they lived in Colton by the time I was maybe eleven or something, or ten. I was still little. Certainly after San Diego. And we went to visit them, and they had a little boy, Duke—Dukie—who was my age. And we used to play. And I liked Dukie, and I remember I had never seen an icebox. It was an icebox. They had an icebox, and I was so shocked because it was something that I heard about. I had never really seen one. And they had a big block of ice, and I remember there were strawberries in it. And now I'm thinking back and I remember putting things together. I think they might have been field workers and traveling around. I don't know if there's fields out near Colton.

But anyway, it's San Diego, and I was in this preschool and my mother said to Chita, who was working, "You should put Dukie in there because it's marvelous. They really take good care of him," blah, blah, blah. So Chita who was very *morena* and very *mexicana*—my mother looked completely *gringa*, and I was very much lighter when I was little—Chita takes Dukie, and they turn them away. And when Chita tells my mother, my mother goes down there and she pulls me out of school and she tells them off. "And what do you think we are? We're Mexican!" And they were like, "Well, we thought maybe you were married to a Mexican, but you're not and your son doesn't look it and that's why we were able to get through." Because obviously she [Mom] was a *gringa* and I was only half, and so we were able to go there. But my mother pulled me out of that school after telling them off.

So I think I come by my activism through DNA. And then my dad, of course, who never considered himself political, though he clearly was with a lot of his music. "No Chicanos on TV," songs about getting out to vote. And he was very, very big about his culture. So they were both really activists. They didn't march the streets. Although my dad, every time César [Chávez] would call him, "Oh yeah, yeah." Dad would go and sing up at a rally or—as a matter of fact, even when there were some UCLA sit-downs. Sit-downs?

CM: Sit-ins.

DG: Sit-ins. As you see, I never did one. Sit-ins. I don't know, sometime in the '90s . . . I don't remember. And then Dad called me. "*M'hijo*, we should go there." And it must've been later, because I knew already it was too late for him to do that. He was too frail, so it must've been later. Maybe it was in the 2000. And he wanted to go down there. "I think we should go down there. Maybe I should write a song." And he was all riled up to go down there to support the young people who were doing the sit-in for whatever reason. But they were all Latinos. It was all Latinos who were doing it. So I come by it naturally. It took me a while to have it kick in, but, you know, I had to find out who I was before everything was able to seep into my pea brain, I guess. I don't know.

CM: I think a lot of people go through that experience.

DG: I guess.

CM: They need to find themselves first.

DG: I think so. Regardless of what your cultural roots are. Because I remember my early days of doing *iGay-tino!* people would come up and say, "I'm Polish and I felt the same thing. I hated Polish music." And so I think it's that cultural assimilation and that whole thing is a common—a universal theme, as it were.

CM: Exactly. Now this gets at the idea of your family had a long-term friendship with César Chávez. Could you tell me a little bit about that? How did it come about, and what role did Chávez play in your lives?

DG: None in my life. Our connection was completely separate. Dad used to travel with his band, with the Pontiac and the trailer, blah, blah, blah, right? And every time he'd go up through Central California, César would come to the dances. We're talking the '50s, so this is way before the UFW [United Farm Workers]. César loved it. My dad would say he [César] wouldn't dance, but he would hang around the bandstand and he'd talk to my dad on breaks and blah, blah, blah. But he loved the music, but Dad doesn't remember him actually dancing. But they kind of became friendly. And it was César that used to give Dad the advice and say, "Lalo, Tulare strawberries in April. Or the Central Valley, tomatoes this time." And so Dad booked his tour where the farm workers would've been working all week and they'd have a couple of bucks and needed to have a good time after working so hard. And they'd go to his dances.

So he started to book his tour to follow the crops. So he used to say, "I guess you could say César was my booking agent through fruits and vegetables." And so he had a long friendship. So, in fact, Dad wrote the very first corrido ever about César, "El Corrido de Delano." He later wrote ["El Corrido de] César Chávez," a specific one [about César]. But the first one was about the movement and César. Dolores Huerta talks about it in the documentary I did on Dad, [*Lalo Guerrero: The Original Chicano*]. She says to this day a farmworker can sing that song from beginning to end. That's how important that song was to them. Especially when he did it, it was in those early dark days, and it gave such a lift to them all, that somebody noticed them and somebody—as she said, "Your father was the only one writing things about us and for us." Because the others were Mexicans writing Mexican songs. There were no Chicanos. There were others. But my dad was clearly the most prominent. And that he would write a song about them was very uplifting. And also I remember she said it was the way he dignified César's leadership. So that song was very important. So he was with them for years.

Now, of course I am in New York during all this time. So I come out to LA in the '80s now. And it wasn't really until I started the *Paul Rodriguez Show*, because even though all during the '80s I was already [volunteering] for the BFA [Bilingual Foundation of the Arts] and I was writing about Latinos [in *Dramalogue* and other publications] and I was still in that Hollywood environment and that entertainment arena. When I started doing Paul's show, then it expanded all that, and it fired up my activism even more.

And I always wanted to get César on the show, and I couldn't get him on. His people always said, "Not available." And I just couldn't get him on. And finally there's a young lady named Jocelyn Sherman, and we're still very good friends. She's been with the UFW for a thousand years. Now I think she does all the computer online stuff for them. And somehow I met her, and I said, "Oh, I can never get him." She's like, "We'll get him on, we'll get him on." And sure enough, all of a sudden César was going to do our show, and I'm, like, "Whoa, finally!" We'd been on the air for two years and I couldn't get César. So I remember she said that he said they were ready now, because they had just put in new trunk lines for phones and blah, blah, blah. Because he wanted to—I believe he and I actually spoke on the phone.

He called me. We did not know each other, we hadn't met. He only knows I'm Dan Guerrero producing the *Paul Rodriguez Show*. And he wanted to know if it was okay to do a 1-800 number on the screen, because they wanted to give away this video tape, VHS: *No Grapes/No Uvas*. They had it in both English and Spanish. And I said, "Oh, absolutely." I said, "But are you sure you want to give them away?"

"I want that to be accessible to everyone."

I said, "Well, I understand that, but that can really get expensive—you've got a lot of people. At least maybe [have viewers pay for the] postage."

"No, no."

"Okay, fine."

So he does the show and during that time is when I say, "I know you know my dad . . ."

"Lalo Guerrero's your father?!"

So that's how we met. So a lot of people think that all my contacts in the Latino world came through Dad, but they didn't. They completely were my own, and he was icing on the cake. So as I would meet people through my own thing and they would find out and . . .

CM: And what was that—how was that television appearance when he showed up to do the *Paul Rodriguez Show*?

DG: Oh God, it was like, he was just . . . I always tell people, César had some whole other thing going on, he was completely—he insisted on being called César. I called him Mr. Chávez. He said, “Call me César.” And I just couldn't. So in subsequent years every time I'd run into him, he'd go, “Hey Dan!” I'd go, “Hey! “I never called him anything, because he said to call him César, which I could not do. Which means I couldn't call him Mr. Chávez. And so I never called him anything again. But I was just in awe of him. He just had some sort of aura, even though I say he was a very down guy. But there was just something going on with him. So I was very thrilled.

So, PS, he does the appearance. And we would do—it was, get this: the show was an hour long. We always had two guests and a music guest. We would shoot six shows on a weekend once a month. We do three on Saturday, three on Sunday. So, Paul would be off doing his thing on his tour, blah, blah, blah. We'd be working and booking guests and writing sketches and doing this and that, blah blah blah. And the [weekend] would come, and it was fantastic. Imagine! The first show we'd have Santana and Jack Lemmon and Daniela Romo. Because we had English-language guests who would speak English on this show, [in] 1990. And then Paul would do an instant translation. So he would say, “Jack, you have a grandson.”

“Yes, I have.”

“Ah, le pregunte porque si tiene una niña nueva de su hijo.”

And then he'd go back and forth.

Three years we were on the air. Worked with everybody. Jean-Claude Van Damme, Joan Rivers, everybody would do this show. And then the second show, we'd have Celia Cruz with a salsa band, and then the third show we'd have Crosby, Stills, and Nash, and then the next morning we'd have . . . It was fabulous. Everybody did this show and so that was a great time.

So, César calls me after it aired, like a week later. All their phone lines exploded. He was shocked. I, of course, knew the kind of response he'd get. They ran out of tapes. It blew the phone lines. He said, “The minute it aired we started getting calls from back East early.” And then, “Can you get me on some other talk shows?” [laughter]

CM: He wanted to be on a few other talk shows?

DG: Yes. And I had friends who booked Dennis Miller, whatever other talk shows were at time. I didn't know anybody at [Johnny] Carson. But I did get him on a few other talk shows. English-language, I'm talking about. And I would go with him. So, yeah, I had my own little friendship with him. And I did a few events for him, and I'm still very, very close to Dolores Huerta. We're very close. And we had more time to be close, because I only met him about '90, '91, and he died in '93. So I knew him a very short time. But Dolores I knew since that time, and we're very still close friends. She even came down for my seventieth birthday party.

CM: She did? Oh, that's great.

DG: I was honored to have that.

CM: That's great. In terms of moving back to LA, how did this serve to reconnect you with your family and your friends?

DG: There was a B story to the César story I thought I would get back to, which works with that, but now of course is out of my head. Oh, yeah, it had to do with my dad or maybe we'll do that . . . Well, whatever.

CM: Just do it now.

DG: I think it's part of it because . . . My dad said this, I didn't say it. He said it. But, in a way, my coming out here resurrected his career. Because his big days were the '40s and the '50s. My parents divorced in '62. My mother ran the club. My dad would arrive, he'd sing, he'd go home. My mother hired, fired, checked

the bills, wrote the bills. She really ran everything, my mom. Neither of my parents graduated from high school—neither. But my mom was very street smart and my dad was very intelligent. But he was off in the clouds somewhere. He just didn't do it, and my mother did all the stuff. It was the reverse, because it's usually the woman who just, "I just wanna cook and shopping." No, it was the reverse. My dad sang, and that's all he did. And she did everything else.

And so then the '60s came, and things kind of quieted and by, whatever, late '60s, '70s or whatever, he married Lidia, who is a lovely, lovely woman. A year younger than me, I believe. Maybe two, one or two. And she had two small children. And he moved out to Palm Springs. He started singing at Las Casuelas [Nuevas in Rancho Mirage], where he stayed for, like, twenty-three years. And that is what his life was. He raised her two kids, [Jose and Patricia], he went to sing at Las Casuelas, and that was pretty much it. So he kind of lay dormant and people kind of forgot about him. And then when I came back in the early '80s. And I was so in that world and TV specials and, like Paul: "Your dad's Lalo? You're kidding. We should have him on the show sometime."

And it reminded people about him. He had done his work—I did not make him Lalo Guerrero—but my coming back reminded people. And he's the one that said, "*M'hijo*, you're coming back has resurrected my career." And it is so. And then things sort of snowballed, and he'd get this award and he'd get that award and . . . And then by the time he got the National Medal of Arts at the Clinton White House he was in what I call his "papal phase." Because he always—in his bows he used to kind of do this, and he did that. And then all of a sudden he was doing this. And then I said to him, "What the hell, what are you the Pope?" All of a sudden he started bowing, then he's doing this. And so I called that his papal phase.

CM: Was—he's gesturing with his hands?

DG: Yes, like they do at the Vatican. So, that was his papal phase. And so I wanted to make that little thing that—and my point is that this was my peer group then. Because growing up I didn't like Mexican music, I didn't like sports and so it was my brother, he and my brother were thick as thieves and it was more me and my mom. But then when I came back that's when he and I had our period.

CM: And we are going to get to that but I wanted to cover a couple of more things in your life, too. So, you moved back—oh, one quick question. When you moved back was he already in Palm Springs, or was he still in LA?

DG: Oh, no, he was in Palm Springs by the mid-'60s or something. Oh yeah.

CM: Okay, great, just wanted to get that clear. So, yes, do we—alright, so I'd love to talk a little bit about how moving back, how did that—you mentioned a little bit about how when you moved back you reconnected with your dad, but how did this reconnect you with your family, with your friends like Carlos [Almaraz]?

DG: Well, that was kind of the best part, Carlos and me, of course. That we were just like the old days, you know. We had been—we were always best friends, rough times like when he was a communist and I was at Saks or whatever. But he was my best friend always. He was my brother. He was a family person, and so there was never a, we didn't talk for three years and then we made up. Never that. But it was sporadic. And now all of a sudden we could see each other all the time. We could talk on the phone all the time. And so that was cool because we had . . .

We didn't have a whole lot of time because he died in '89. But at least we did have those few years and I saw him. He married, he had his baby, which I knew he'd always wanted. And you know how you have those snapshots in your mind? I remember they were in Highland Park at the time, he and Elsa. And they—she was pregnant, and so they had a baby shower. And I remember there were maybe ten friends, twelve of them. Not huge. And I was sitting on the floor, and she and Carlos were opening presents. And I remember watching that and going, "Omigod, he finally got it, he finally got what he wanted: his family, his wife, he's got a baby, his career is really clicking. He finally got what he'd always been after." It was short-lived, as it turned out, but he did get it before he left.

CM: Were you here for the Los Four exhibit at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]?

DG: It wasn't actually Los Four. It was "Hispanic Art in the US," unless you mean something I don't know about. There's a huge catalog. The show was called "Hispanics in the Art," or something about that. [*Hispanic Art in the United States*, which opened in 1987.]

CM: No, there was one later, but I think it was—it may have been in the '70s. I think you may have still been in New York.

DG: Yeah, but the "Hispanics in Art," there's a huge big thick thing, and a lot of people were in that. John Valadez. I think Gronk. Was it Gronk? It might have been pre-Gronk. But I know John [Valadez] was, and Magu [Gilbert Lujan]. I knew what he [Carlos] meant to me, but I didn't know what he thought [about me].

But in that "Hispanics in the Arts"—if that's what it was called—it was huge. I believe it was the first huge exhibit of Hispanic art—Hispanic—Latino art. But it was "Hispanic" at LACMA, I believe. And in the catalog each artist had a page, page and a half of text and then a couple of pages of their work. And in his [Almaraz's], it said something like, "Born in Mexico, lived in Chicago, grew up at East LA where Almaraz says he was 'saved'"—in quotes—"saved" by his friendship with Eddie Guerrero." And then it goes on from there. "He was saved during those high school years by his friendship . . ." And then of course, I always believed "thank God for Carlos," because I wouldn't have been . . . And I was very touched that he felt the same way. Yeah, I liked that, I liked that. That was exciting.

CM: How in—other than professionally, how did your life change when you moved out here to LA. What changed about it?

DG: It felt—it really was coming home. They said you can't go home again. Well, I think that's a lie. I think if you're in some crappy little town in the Midwest maybe you don't want to, so you say you can't go home again, but I . . . And PS, I've never been a fan of LA. I've never really liked LA. I didn't like it growing up. Now, did I not like it because I felt as a Chicano it was not a friendly place to be? I don't know what place was at that time, but I only knew about LA. And I believe that had a lot to do with coloring, why I did not like LA. But even today, I have friends that go, "I just love LA." I love the weather, I love Southern California, I love being able to go to Santa Barbara, to the beach or up to the mountains or the desert in Palm Springs. But I'm not an LA fan. Just—for me there's no pulse. New York has something. San Francisco, Paris, London—these cities have . . . This is so diverse and so spread out I can't find that core. But that's just me.

So, it wasn't that I was thrilled to be back home and that, but that it was good to be back home with family, with Carlos. I discovered this little Latino community that was little at that time. Diane and JD and Jose Luis and I very quickly . . . Because there weren't a whole lot of us, you felt you were really a part of somebody. So mostly that it really felt good to be surrounded by family, both blood and stand-in.

CM: Metaphorical.

DG: Yes. And those are still family to me. Jose Luis, Evelina, Diane, JD—they're like my family and I love them. I love them. That was a big thing, I think. And I was here with Richard. We'd only been together for three years at that time, so it was really still new, the relationship. It was thrilling to kind of start all over again, like when I got to New York. "Okay, now what?" And here I was, forty, when most people are really settled and I'm, like, "Now what?" So it was that excitement of what's next and a blank slate, let's see what happens. And so it was great. It was really great. It was great.

I hadn't really thought about how great it was coming back. It was. It was really, really—to see Dad again. My dad at the time was married with Lidia. And I would go out to Palm Springs to visit them, and she was marvelous. And for that alone I loved her. She's a wonderful woman. Very, very loving and very—she's just great. I love her. She speaks no English, so she always speaks Spanish, which I love.

But the first time I went to visit out there and she had her two little kids—Patricia and Jose—and she said to me in Spanish that this was my home. That's my father, this is your home whenever you visit. And not a lot of stepmothers feel that way, and she—first time we met. And she and I were always—still are . . . I'll still see her, I talk to her, I'd call her on Mother's Day. And she's a nice lady. So—

CM: It sounds like you—when you went to New York it must've been a crazy year for you because you not only moved to New York but your parents also got a divorce.

DG: Oh, what a trauma that was.

CM: I mean, did you see that one coming?

DG: No. Because he was always weak with women, and she'd [Mom] threaten a couple of times. Once we were in Montebello, as a matter of fact, that's the only time I ever really remember a particular person as opposed to just a one-night fling. Another person, I believe. I think that they came close then. But this one was big, and she just was over it. The sad thing is that they still loved each other to the day they died. Dad felt guilty to the day he died. My mother regretted having done the divorce. He didn't want the divorce and so they came close [to reconciliation]. But he was ready and she wasn't. Then he wasn't, [and] she was. And hey, he was liking being single. And I am watching it all.

It was very hard. And I would fly out and try to, quote, "talk sense" into her. My dad would say, "Come, come." And I would fly out. And in fact I found a card that I wrote. It was dated 1962, because it was their anniversary. I was born on October 14, '40. They were married October 16, '39. So I sent them an anniversary card. There were two hands in gold, like, touching. That was the cover. And I read it—I just found it a year ago—and I'm, like, "Well, you sound like you're just fabulous," because I was only twenty-one, and I'm, like, "You know you have been joined and just as you're getting to the place where you can really"—because I was out of the home [and] Mark was already twelve—"you must enjoy this time together."

It was really, really very well written—I was surprised—but it didn't work. And I had to do what I had to do, and I remember it would be very difficult to come out here trying to do all that and then go back to New York. Because I kept thinking, "My mom needs me." And I remember, I think it must've been Carlos who was driving me to the airport, and she was on the porch at McDonnell [Avenue] and she waved good-bye and stuff. And as I looked I thought, "Oh God, I really should be here, she needs me." And at the same time I'm thinking, "I have to live my life. This is their life, and I have to live my . . ." And maybe that sounds selfish, but I had to do what I had to do. It wasn't easy. And she never once said, "You should be here with me because . . ." No, just like with Dad, [she knew] he had to have his music.

CM: She got it.

DG: She got it. She knew, she knew.

CM: And then you reconnected when you came back?

DG: Who?

CM: You and your mother.

DG: Omigod. Well, we never disconnected.

CM: No, but I mean you get to see each other and—

DG: Oh, yeah. And as I say, she was now a different woman. Very warm and loving and a very different woman. No, we were very close. I would take her places. But even when I was living in New York I'd fly her to New York. One time, when I was doing that dinner theater in Kansas City and I was gonna be there like three months and she'd never been anywhere. So I flew her to Kansas City. She spent a week there. We went out to apple farms. And once I was back here, every [year], between Christmas and New Year's—because Christmas Eve was my dad's birthday, and so I'd always spend Christmas there. Richard would go home to his family for Christmas, I would stay here with Christmas with my dad. And then that week between Christmas and New Year's, I'd take my mom somewhere.

We'd go up to San Francisco, we'd drive to Vegas. I'd take her to Tucson. And then I'd be here for New Year's and Richard would come back, or I would fly to New York and meet him there because his family was in Jersey. So, that was our thing. And so I'd always . . . In 1998, '99, I was VP of talent for Telemundo, when Sony bought Telemundo that year. So I was really hired by Sony, but it was Sony Telemundo. And during that time I took two weeks, and I took my mother to Mexico City. I hired a driver to take us to Pachuca where her father was buried, because she had not been there in forever. So, we were close. Yeah, but it was just different than when I was growing up.

- CM: I'm sure. Well, when you come back as an adult, it's a whole different relationship. Tell me a little bit—let me see how we are on time because I want to make sure—okay, we got time. Tell me about how *iGaytino!* came about.
- DG: Oh, *iGaytino!* *iGaytino!* came about in a very good way, interesting way, because I started to be more aware of the gay—because there was now more and more gay community, gay stuff going on in the community. As you know.
- CM: And give me a sense of the timing of this. Like, what year? Two thousands?
- DG: Well, I was about sixty-four or sixty-five, so I guess 2004 or 2005, something like that. Yeah, because I think the premiere was in '06, [so it started] about 2004. So there's more and more about the gay community in the news. People were coming out, blah, blah, blah. And I'm looking at that and then all of a sudden on TV, I'm seeing a gay character on every TV show. Every show had a gay character. And I'm sitting there going, "Who'd have thought there'd be gays on television before Latinos?" I never would have thought that . . . I was thinking, "Why aren't there Latinos [on TV]?" I never thought, "Why aren't there gays on TV?" I was always, "Why aren't there Latinos?" And then, all of a sudden, every show had a gay, and there were still no Latinos. And I'm, like, "Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish." So—
- CM: Like *Will and Grace* and *Ellen*?
- DG: Yeah, but even before all of that. On this show the receptionist was a gay guy, or this show . . . There was just a lot of—they weren't necessarily the leads, this was . . . Well, maybe it was *Will and Grace*, maybe. I don't know how soon that started.
- CM: *Will and Grace* would've been '90s. [*Ellen* was broadcast 1994–1998; *Will and Grace* was broadcast 1998–2006—ed.]
- DG: Really?
- CM: Um-hum.
- DG: Okay. So all that crap was on, and—
- CM: At least I believe so.
- DG: And so then I started looking at both of our communities and how far we have traveled and yet how far we have yet to go. And how, at one point, we were about the same: about 10 percent of the nation is gay, about 10 percent of the nation is Latino. Some of the statistics are still unknown because not everybody is out and there's still so many illegals. And so there were just all these similarities. We both face discrimination. And so there were so many similarities, and I started to look at the two communities. And actually, the word *gaytino* was the first thing that hit me. I thought of the word *gaytino*. I thought, "Well, that's a very good word, maybe I should write a book or do a show. Maybe I'll do something." But what I first did is, I trademarked it. So, I called my attorney friend Mark Sendroff in New York, and I trademarked "*iGaytino!*"—it is still trademarked. And then, as things happened, we had just bought this place a year or so prior, I think.
- CM: The apartment that we're sitting in.
- DG: The condo, they're called condos. If you rent, you're in an apartment, if you own it you're in a condo. [*laughs*] And, lo and behold, my producing career came to a screeching halt. It's like I [died]. I mean I never sent out a résumé. People knew me, and I was, like, the only one doing the kind of stuff I was doing at that time really, especially in the live event arena. And I'm, like, "What the hell happened?" And then I thought to myself, you know, I always figured one day when I was an old fart and all crotchety and all shriveled, I'd go back to performing, because I figured I'd be this funny cranky next door neighbor [character]. And I was never able to do the comedy roles that I wanted. And so, someday—I thought, "Maybe this is the day."
- What am I gonna do? And it was obvious to me that I had gone much later or longer than a lot of people, because in this town you don't hire sixty-five-year-old producers unless it's Levitan—legends. But in terms of just, I'm a guy who's had a very nice career. But, you know, it's fine. But I'm not at the end of the world. And so I thought, "Who's gonna hire a sixty-five-year-old producer? I better check out." And Hollywood? Forget about it. And I thought, "Maybe I will start performing again," and I thought, "I'm not

gonna wait for a [casting] breakdown to come out, 'Looking for a funny old Chicano.' Because then I'll rot on [the vine.]"

[So] then I thought, "I'm gonna write a solo show." Everybody in the world does a solo show and not just famous people. Everybody's got a solo show. So one of the first people I tell is my friend in New York, Mark, who's so supportive of everything. And I mean he's just been beyond. Thirty-five years. He's just—you want a best friend? It's Mark. And I tell him, and he goes, "Well, that's great. A solo show. But who's gonna go see it? I mean, it's not like you're Billy Crystal or Elaine Stritch." I mean, those people had just done solo shows on Broadway.

I said, "There's a whole world besides Broadway and Hollywood. There are universities. The point is that I've had a very interesting life because of the gay history and the Chicano history, who my dad was, who Carlos was. I just think there's something to say that's gonna be important to some people. I'm not gonna say it's gonna play on Broadway, but, hey, I don't need to be a millionaire. I just need to keep paying my mortgage on my condo in West Hollywood." (Not to be confused with an apartment.) And so I did. I set up writing the show. I had never written a show in my life, ever. I hadn't been on stage since *Hark!* in 1973, off-Broadway in New York, and now it's 2005. But I started—

CM: So, thirty-five years.

DG: Yeah. So, I started to write. I started to write, and I tried to be a good boy, and I signed up for a "How to write a solo show" [classes]. It only confused me. And then I took another course. And then, believe it or not, I still had those old [issues], like when I was auditioning back in the day. And I remember specifically—and this one class I took with a lovely teacher, Laurel Olstein. And what I got from her the most is that she created a very safe space, you know. And so the first time I did "Spanish Rose," that little bit of the song that Chita [Rivera] does in *Bye Bye Birdie*, which is in my show, it was so scary for me to do it. Even in that class and to do like she does, like a woman. Me? When I had to do auditions, it was really very, very difficult. And I'm going, "How am I gonna do a solo show? I can barely get through this?"

But I just kept doing it. And then I thought, "Well . . ." I got to a point—even Richard never heard one word. I was at my computer for months. Now, it wasn't like I was working eight hours a day. I'd work and then I wouldn't go to it for a couple of weeks. It was very sporadic. But I wasn't working, I was taking money out of the bank, the little bit that I had, getting rid of these stocks, the few I had, to keep going. I had nothing, I had nothing.

And so finally I had this thing written out. I thought it was pretty much what it was. I thought, "Well"—I mean for that first draft thing—I thought, "Well, I'm just gonna do it for like six or eight friends." And so I rented a rehearsal space and I invited Diane Rodriguez and I invited JD, her husband, obviously Richard, my friend Nancy de los Santos, Armelia McQueen from *Ain't Misbehavin'* Ken Page from *Ain't Misbehavin'*, Kay Cole, who was in the original *A Chorus Line*. She's now a choreographer out here.

I think that's about it. There were just about eight of them, and I invited them because they were friends and they were in the business. Not because "Oh, Kay's a choreographer." It wasn't really that. It was just people who were in the business and I knew. And I just sat in the director's chair and I opened this script and I started to read. And the reaction was shockingly positive. And I wanted it real. I didn't want "oh that's great" if it was shitty. I really had no idea. And Diane in particular—Diane at that time was head of the Latino theater lab with Luis Alfaro at the Mark Taper. I really had no interest in "maybe she'll do it in that." Because, to tell you the truth, everyone I know who was in that lab, it took nine years to get anything going. You do the first draft, then it's six months and then they give you a showcase . . . I'm too old, I don't have time for all that crap, you know. I just gotta . . . So, I wasn't really interested into having that happen, really, but I invited her because I knew she was a theater person. And she got it right away: "There's really something there." And so then I said, "I'm gonna start doing readings."

And so somebody told me about Casita del Campo, which is a Mexican restaurant in Silver Lake. I had never heard of it, and it's got a *great* story. The guy's name was Rudy del Campo. He was a dancer who was in Mexico somewhere, little town, in the era of the movie musicals and he wanted to be a dancer.

You know, '40s, '50s, whatever. And he got to the US and indeed did, and he was in [the] *West Side Story* movie. He's one of the dancers in *West Side Story*, the Puerto Rican gang. And with the money he made from *West Side Story* he bought a casita, a little house in Silver Lake, that he turned into a Mexican restaurant. And all the dancers from the movie came and helped paint, helped put it together. I think even Rita Moreno did. And he started this little Casita del Campo. We're talking 1962, is when it opened—when I moved to New York.

CM: Wow!

DG: And as the years went on this restaurant got really popular and it got bigger and bigger, and now it's a really big—it's still there. They just celebrated their fiftieth anniversary a couple of years ago. And at Casita del Campo on Hyperion in Silver Lake there's a tiny theater downstairs called the Cavern Club Theatre. It seats like sixty people. And I don't mean theater seats, there are chairs and a couple of [cocktail tables]. It's just funky, but it's this sweet little space. And somebody said, "You can rent that really cheap," and I thought, "Oh, great. A little theater." And I thought, "I'm gonna do it on Cinco de Mayo, and then I'm gonna give everybody margaritas as they come in and that way they'll really like the show!" So that's what I did for the first reading. And I invited thirty friends and I asked each of them to bring somebody that didn't know me.

I didn't want people to go "Oh, I love Danny, he's such fun." I wanted—so, I said, "Bring somebody that doesn't know me." And so I filled the place. And when I told Diane I was doing that, she said, "Well, why don't I facilitate the Q&A afterward for you?" Because that was the idea, that afterward, "Well, was something missing, were you able to follow?" I was going through how many decades. That was my big thing, were people [going to go], "I got lost when you went to . . ." All that kind of stuff. So I want—

CM: Kind of feedback? Looking for audience feedback?

DG: Yes, yes.

CM: I think this went off.

DG: It went off?

CM: It says the time remaining is two minutes.

[break in audio]

CM: You're at Casita del Campo, you've done the read through.

DG: So, I did the read through, and it was very inspiring for me because I started to believe that I did have something there. Because as a matter of fact, God bless him, the man who was the editor and publisher of *Drama-Logue* [Lee Melville], that I used to write columns for back in the day, who always let me scoot in Latinos every second or third column. We stayed friends through the years. I don't mean we hung out and had pizza and stuff, but we knew each other and we'd run to each other at the theater. And I always had a very special place in my heart for him. And so I invited him for this because he was a [theater] critic and then he ran the paper.

Afterwards, the Q&A, he was the first one with his hand up. And I'm paraphrasing—but not the first line—because I was so blown away. He goes, "Well, I know Danny, so I expected it to be good. I did not expect it to be brilliant." I was like—and I knew he meant it. Otherwise he would've said, "I thought it was really well done." And I knew he meant it. And then he went to talking about things. But that was the first comment, so I really felt, "Maybe I do have something." And it was very helpful because I . . . "When did you first come out to your dad or your parents?" And it's like, "Yeah, I don't address that at all." There were a few things. And then I thought, "Well, I better do another one." So a month later—I worked on it, and then I had a second [reading] and then I had a third. I did three readings there at Casita del Campo, each a month apart.

And lucky for me, Diane Rodriguez . . . During this period and shortly thereafter, Gordon Davidson left the Mark Taper and the Center Theatre Group, which is the Mark Taper and the Ahmanson and the Kirk Douglas, and Michael Ritchie came on and they . . . I did not know this, but every year they have

something called—they did, I don't know if they still do—the Mark Taper [New] Theatre for Now festival, and it would last two weeks, three weeks. And every night there'd be a different show that had never been produced. And they were gonna do it this year at the Kirk Douglas, which had just opened at Culver City, the Kirk Douglas Theater. It was fairly new.

And Diane called and asked if I wanted *iGaytino!* to be a part of that, and I'm like, "Are you kidding?" I had done it only once after those readings, [at] the Eighteenth—it's not called the Eighteenth Street Playhouse. Oh God . . . Highways Performance Space, Highways Performance Space. Leo Garcia. He just heard about my show—he hadn't even seen it, he heard about the readings—and he said, "Would you do a weekend here?" And I thought, [*gasps*]. But see, again, they know who I am, they know the kind of stuff I do. They're going, "How bad can it be?" I mean, that's what I'm thinking. Because he didn't even say, "I'd like to read the script." He called and offered me a weekend and he said . . . And it's a hundred-seat space there. They do experimental stuff, blah, blah, blah. And I said, "I've only done readings," and he said, "Well this would have to be off book." And I'm like, I thought—I wasn't even sure I could memorize it. I mean, we're talking seventy-five minutes alone. I hadn't memorized a script since *Hark!* I thought, "Well, I assume I can still do it." I'm sixty-five at the time, and I'm thinking, "Well, okay." And so I booked a weekend.

And that first night, of all things, Mark Sendroff—again, it's his birthday weekend and he was gonna fly out here—he said, "Perfect, and I'll bring friends!" There I am doing it off book for the first time ever. I have somebody in the front row with my script, and I did a little curtain speech. I said, "If I have to call out for a line, I'm gonna call out." (I never did, by the way.) But I look out there, and there's my friend Mark Sendroff with Fran Drescher, Michael Feinstein, the casting director from *Friends*, our friend David Rubin . . . Who else? I can't even . . . Everybody! About a dozen people. I'm like, "Oh my God." They don't really know me except "hi" at parties, they know I do Latino producing, but they don't really know anything about me. And then I'm like, "What the fuck." So I just did my show best I could, and it was a tremendous reaction. I gotta say, unbelievable.

CM: Do you get super nervous before going on stage?

DG: No, I don't get nervous. Depending on the venue I might get—have a little apprehension. I tend to do the opposite, like instead of getting real nervous, instead I get extremely calm. Like the [John F.] Kennedy Center should've totally freaked me, but I was very calm. But here's a funny thing. I had two shows at the Kennedy Center: Friday night and Saturday night, five-hundred-seat venue, both nights packed. The next morning after the show, which was tremendous hit—standing ovation, the *Washington Post* gave it a fantastic review—I hadn't seen the review yet. But they did.

And there was a champagne reception afterwards that my darling Alicia Adams, VP of international programming there—that's how I did it. I had produced many times there and when I was going to do my show at the [Kirk] Douglas [in Culver City], she flew out to see it just as a friend. And then, about another year later, she calls, "Hey, would you like to do the *iGaytino!* at the Kennedy Center?" [*mock sarcastically*] "No, I don't want to!" [*laughs*] I said, "Really?!" "Yes, we do this thing called Under the Radar [the Etc. series] and we do kind of quirky, interesting pieces, and they do three or four a year. It's not like a weekend, it's just scattered throughout and I thought it might be good . . ." And I said, "Yeah!" And that's how I wound up doing it.

CM: Wow.

DG: Yeah.

CM: Now, what did your friends and family think about you taking the stage again and talking about your life in very personal ways?

DG: Well, my dad's story is the funniest—and we're leaving some other story I was in the middle of, but I guess it doesn't matter. My dad's the funny one because we're driving to Tucson. We had to go to Tucson two or three times a year or he wasn't happy. Same thing with my mom. And they both lived in Palm Springs by that time, because my niece Maya had been born. My mom was driving out [from Monterey Park] every weekend to babysit. And eventually she just moved out there to be near Maya.

And so I would drive to Palm Springs, pick up my dad, take him to Tucson, drop him back off in Palm Springs, and come back. Sometimes it would be my mom. A couple of times it was the two of them, because they eventually became very, very good friends. And eventually Lidia and my mom also became good friends. That's a whole other story that I did, because they had never—in all those years they had never met. And I came back in '82. That's another thing I was very busy doing.

CM: Omigod.

DG: Huh?

CM: But this is a side story.

DG: Well, you know, you gotta keep up, honey!

CM: Well, let's go, let's go!

DG: No, because, you know what, then we forget. So just make a note, because I already forgot the other one.

CM: No, I haven't forgotten the other one.

DG: So, what do you want to do?

CM: Let's focus on *jGaytino!* because we're gonna come to your dad next. So, what does your family think about this?

DG: So, my dad—I don't remember what I told my mom, but my dad, it was like a movie scene. We're driving to Tucson. So ahead of us, it's that horrible area after you get out of Blythe and there's like nothing, right? Just nothing. And so in front of us there is this road, never ending. We're driving, and as usual there's a Lalo Guerrero CD playing in the car. And he's leaning back in the passenger seat and just listening and just enjoying himself tremendously. And I'm driving, and we're chatting, blah, blah, blah. And finally one CD ends, and before he could put another one in, I said, "Hey! I've decided—guess what—I'm gonna write a solo show, I'm gonna write a solo show for myself." He's like, "Really? Oh." I said, "Yes. And you'll be very happy because you're all through it, and it's autobiographical," and blah, blah, blah, blah. "And it's called *jGaytino!*"

He sits straight up. He turns to me, and he grabs my shoulder and he goes, "*M'hijo*, that's a great idea! That is your future." It was like a papal blessing. "That's your future." It's like he saw it all. He didn't say, "Oh, that's great *m'hijo*, you should be back on . . . No. "That's a great idea, it's your future." And he said, "Don't let that go." That's what he said. And I'm like, "Okay then!"

CM: Very supportive.

DG: Oh, both of my parents were supportive of everything, everything always. Both always would tell me how proud they were of me, and every time I would do a big live event like the Vikki Carr [TV special], Richard would take my mom and she'd be there. They went to the—oh yeah, always, they were always telling me how proud they were of me. Very, very, very supportive, both of them.

CM: Great. But let's go back to that half-finished story from before, which is you're doing your first off-book—off-book performance. All these people are sitting there watching you, including your lawyer from New York.

DG: Yeah, with Fran and Michael Feinstein.

CM: So, Fran Drescher and Michael Feinstein are in the audience?

DG: Yeah, and other people. I can't remember. And I got my standing ovation and they all come up and—because they of course, they were like, "Oh my gosh, we didn't know." They thought it was fascinating, because they knew nothing. Because they maybe knew my dad was a singer. But when you see the story, they just were blown away. And, oh my God, "You performed!" And blah, blah, blah, blah. And up went Mark Sendroff, and he can't talk because he's crying, he's crying, he's crying. And he goes, "Omigod, omigod!" He was all—and then he says, "You gotta have visuals for this show someday." And I said, "Well, I expect to, yes there will be, but that's way down the line."

So, now fast-forward to New Theatre for Now. And I go, "Yeah, yeah, I wanna do it." Of course, so I'd only done the readings, and that one thing [at Highways Performance Space]. And now, this is big. God bless Diane Rodriguez. Most people can't even get their plays read. But, remember, I told you each

preceding career fed the next one, so I didn't have to start at square one in each one. I'd already done a lot of homework, I'd already paid my dues. And so I call Mark Sendroff and I say, "Guess what," blah, blah, blah. And he goes, "Well, you need to have those projection visuals, you need to have . . ." [And I'm] like, "They're, like, thousands of . . ." "I'll pay for them!" And he paid to have my projection visuals designed, which were not cheap. They were thousands. I still use them. And he paid for me to have the projection visuals done. So then I go about designing, and then I work with Diane. We go with the script to see—and I have a visual artist that I love because I had seen a play at some little theater, some of them had projections. I hadn't even written *iGaytino!* It was in my head. And I was so impressed. I asked somebody in the cast who did the projections. And I called him, I said, "I don't have it now, but in a couple of years I'm gonna want projections." And sure enough, when I did the readings, I invited him.

So, by the time I said "I want the projections" we were ready to go. So, we found out where they should be, and I think there's twelve in there. And so now I'm all ready and I'm memorizing it and I'm honing it and I'm working with a set. And they usually . . . It's about a three-hundred or three-hundred-fifty seat house. What they did was, they had it—a drape here, so it was only a hundred seats for every night. Well, about a week before I'm supposed to do it, Dad dies. So, that's another story. And I am—I get a call from Diane, who first as a friend, "Omigod." Because we're really close. And so she says, "We're gonna cancel." And I say, "We're not gonna cancel it. Of course we're gonna do it." She said, "Really?" I said, "Honey, if I died this morning and my dad had a show tonight he would do the show. Yes, I'm doing the show."

CM: The show goes on.

DG: It does and civilians don't get that, but you just do. You have a responsibility. It's your job. And people are shocked. They go, "You're kidding." I don't know. Anyway, so my show, the night comes, they have to open up the whole [venue]. People are standing in the back, it is packed to the gills. I'm sure a lot had to do with Dad had just died or people knew who I was. Anyway, I—a combo. I don't know. But all I knew was there were no hundred people. It was packed and—

CM: What theater was this again?

DG: The Kirk Douglas.

CM: The Kirk Douglas Theater

DG: In Culver City. That's part of the Center Theatre Group. Ahmanson, Kirk Douglas, and [Mark] Taper. And so I knew—of course, everybody knew Dad had died. And I didn't want them all night thinking, "Oh, what is he going to say in this show?" So I came out before the show, and I said, "As many of you know, we all lost someone recently. My dad," blah, blah, blah. "It is not addressed in this show, but I thank you for coming," blah, blah, blah. And so that way I didn't want them sitting there thinking when am I gonna talk about it, you know? And then I did the show and it went very well. And then a few months later Diane calls me again: "We're going to be doing something at the Kirk Douglas, we're calling it "Solomania." And there's gonna be four solo shows in rep and Michael Ritchie wants to read your script."

I said, "Really?" And I thought, "Oh, I'm not really a writer, a lot really has to do with my personality. "Are you sure you don't want to see a videotape, because I had videotaped it?"

"No, he wants to read the script."

Okay, so I send it. Next thing I know: "Do you want to be part of Solomania?"

And that was the world premiere at the Center Theatre Group. And I was like, "Omigod people" for years, trying to get something read even. And so *iGaytino!* moved really quickly, really quickly.

CM: That must've been tremendously exciting and rewarding.

DG: It was ridiculous. I'm, like, I just felt so blessed. I just thought, "Wow!" I'm just so—I use the word "lucky" with quotes because I do feel I've been very blessed in my life. I've been very blessed. But I have worked fucking hard for every single thing I have, believe me. But at the same time I do think you reap what you sow and I try to be a good person and I'm sure I—I'm certainly no angel, you know. I'm certain I have

enemies. But I've been very lucky really. Diane happened to be a friend for twenty-five years, but she had moved up and, boom! How could that have happened if it hadn't been for Diane? It would not.

CM: Providence. Sometimes all the pieces align.

DG: Yeah, of course. It's all puzzle pieces. And then it went on from there because—but here's the other thing: before Solomania and after, same thing. What you've done before catches up with you, and for me in good ways. Before that—because when they called, it was like a year away, nine months away. No, a chunk. I said, "I've only done it twice. I've only done it there and there." And I said when there's a premiere you're not supposed to be doing it anywhere otherwise it's not a premiere. I said [to Diane] see if Ritchie will at least let me do it out of town, like tryouts. And they said absolutely, and so I can hone it. And again, ring: "Hello." "Hey, this is," blah blah "at San Antonio. I heard you have a show called *iGaytino!* Would you do it here at the Esperanza?" People started [calling], just booked it. Never even seen a script, nothing, but because they knew me as a producer they knew they just—I guess they all assumed . . .

CM: And it must have had good word of mouth from people who'd seen it.

DG: I guess, I guess.

CM: Because if it had been a dud, word would've spread.

DG: In a bad way, too. Correct, correct. So, I wound up playing San Francisco, San Antonio. I don't know—five or six cities over those few months, and I was still writing it and changing it. And I'll tell you, when I was nervous was San Francisco. Omigod. And here's the thing, it's called the Brava Theater. It's a beautiful little kind of deco house in the Mission District. But it was freaking Halloween weekend. Nobody is going to the theater Halloween weekend. They're out in the streets. I think it was thirty-five people sitting in that three-hundred-seat theater. But the point was, there was no Diane, there was no Richard, there was nothing familiar. It's not friends that are supportive. I was just naked, and I was really, really nervous that night. It was scary. It was very scary.

CM: Did your mom see it?

DG: Isn't this funny? No, nobody ever saw it live. My dad died in '05, and my mom died in '06.

CM: Oh, and so she died before you had the premiere.

DG: They both died. But—yes, but they both saw a videotape. They both saw that, because I don't know which video tape it was. It obviously wasn't the—it must've been at Casita del Campo, the first place I did it. Because all I had was a VHS tape. Because then it was hard for them to travel, because I remember my mom sent flowers to Casita del Campo, a big bouquet. "*M'hijo*, I'm so proud of you." So she would've come in, but I guess they already couldn't drive. It's hard to piece that together. But they never saw it live. But they both watched it on video and were both very full of praise. And my mom said, "We had to keep shutting you father up! All they kept saying was, 'It's like watching me, it's like watching me, it's like watching me.'" Yeah, which I thought was very funny—which is like . . .

And I thought this was hilarious. I have a good friend, Luther [Orrick] Guzmán. He's my official photographer, and he's photographed almost every *iGaytino!* performance, including Casita del Campo. And the first time I was going to be doing it there—the reading—he watched the show that rehearsal so he'd know what to shoot during performance. And after watching the run-through he comes up to me and he goes, "Wow, it's like watching your dad, gay!" [laughs] I thought that was hilarious, like I was a gay Lalo. But he was very serious and he goes, "Sometimes the way the light hits you is like watching Lalo, gay." I loved that line. Luther.

CM: That's great. Which actually, this is a perfect transition to talk about Lalo, because you did a lot of work for him as well.

DG: Yes I did!

CM: So, I would love it if we could just start with a very broad question, which is, if you had to put your dad's career in stages—every performer goes through different stages—what would those stages be?

DG: Well, there were, quote, the early years, which is in Tucson with Los Carlistas. And then it went to LA when his career started to pick up slowly and when he was signed to Imperial Records. And with a trio. They

were a trio called the Trio Imperial, and it was Dad, center, and two guys whose names I've written [down somewhere], but I don't know what they are. And I vaguely remember meeting them and they were really, really nice guys. And they had a lot of—they had quite a few hits as Trio Imperial. And they would often—they would record more traditional music, but they would also record some of Dad's compositions. So sometimes he'd be Trio Imperial, *canción de Lalo Guerrero*. So—they are really the Trio Imperial, [and it] is the first time he was writing a couple of the *pachuco* songs. He wrote a song, "La Pachuquilla," "My Little Pachuca Girlfriend." So he wrote a couple of those with Trio Imperial.

CM: So, this was like '40s? He's in LA?

DG: Early, mid-'40's. Then he was asked by Imperial Records to go solo, and legend has it Dad didn't want to. He was too nervous. And it was Mom that said, "You can do it, you can do it." And he recorded solo, and his first solo recording was a huge hit. It was an Agustín Lara song. "Pecadora." That was like in 1949, and that was his first hit as a solo. And so that was all one chunk. The Carlistas, Trio Imperial, and Lupe Fernandez, when they sang on Olvera Street. But that was just local, but in terms of—

CM: Big steps.

DG: Big steps. Yes, that was just a gig. But the big step was Los Carlistas, the beginning; Trio Imperial, solo artist; and then by the '50s is when as a solo artist he started really singing only his songs. And then he had just hit after hit after hit after hit. And the '50s were the big years—his biggest years. And in the middle, the mid-'50s, is when he wrote "Pancho Lopez" [in Spanish] and then in English. He had never written in English. He could but he just never did, he always wrote in Spanish. And so the '50s were big. And that's when I was in junior high and high school, and that's when it was so embarrassing because he would come and everyone . . . Because he was a big star, "Omgod, he lives in East LA, and his son goes to school here." Hateful, hateful. Oh God, oh God. Anyway—

CM: Was that period when he opened Lalo's [night club in East LA]?

DG: He opened Lalo's twice actually. The first time he opened it was with a partner, a Spaniard, because he had owned nightclubs before and Dad never had. And they opened a club, and he turned out to be a maniac and got so bad that eventually Dad just said, "Forget it." And Dad just left—I guess he bought him out. I don't really know. But he left. But Dad [said], "I don't care if you still call it Lalo's." It was still called Lalo's, but there was no Lalo Guerrero. So of course without Dad there, (a) not only did it die, but it became a joint. So a couple of times I run into people and they go, "Oh yeah, a little bar." It wasn't a little bar, it was a beautiful nightclub. When the big stars came up from Mexico they'd all go to Lalo's. And [Edward] Roybal used to go there. Women wearing cocktail dresses. My mom was the hostess greeting people. It was fabulous, but during that in-between period, when it was still called Lalo's.

And eventually he [the Spaniard] lost it altogether. I think they had bought it early '50s and then when "Pancho Lopez" hit, Dad made some good money. And then he rebought the club by himself, and that's when Lalo's became Lalo's. I mean from the day they opened the door it was, you couldn't get in there. It was *the* place. Because all the other places were ballrooms—this was a nightclub. And it had that big Carlos Almaraz mural, don't forget, which is a big draw. [chuckles]

CM: What kind of celebrities would you get from Mexico, do you remember?

DG: Not really. I didn't know who they were. I didn't know who they were.

CM: Or any significant musicians who may have come and gigged with him or . . .

DG: No, I couldn't tell you. I'm a poor, poor archivist. But I want to back up a little bit to another period of the '40s, when he used to sing at La Bamba. La Bamba was a nightclub in downtown LA. I think it was near Olvera Street, somewhere around there. But that's where Ann Sheridan, Ricardo Montalban, Robert Taylor—a lot of movie stars used to go to La Bamba. And I have a—it's one of my favorite pictures. It's a great eight-by-ten of Dad. He's like the featured person. It's not "Lalo Guerrero." He's just the featured singer, and there's a band—not his band—some band. And he's there playing maracas, and he has the Ricky Ricardo thing. I loved that picture.

CM: The puffy sleeves?

DG: Yeah, yes. No, the frilled.

CM: The ruffles.

DG: Ruffles, ruffles, yeah. La Bamba, that was like the early '40s, '44. But that's where he said all the movie stars used to go. To La Bamba. That must've been pre-Trio Imperial.

CM: Okay and then Lalo's . . . What did Lalo's look like. besides the stellar Carlos Almaraz mural?

DG: You would walk in—I have a postcard that's in my archives and it's a regular-sized postcard, but it's in three photos. And in fact I just scanned it and sent it to Louie Perez of Los Lobos because we were somewhere together and he said, "Oh man, I used to live near there. And I used to go on my bike and I used to cut right through Lalo's parking lot because there was this hot dog stand that I loved, and they had the best fries. And my *jefa* would be asleep and I'd sneak out and I'd go get those French fries and I'd scoot through your dad's parking lot." So, I sent him [a scan of the postcard]. He said, "I remember the sign said 'Lalo's.'" So the postcard, one of them, is the neon sign that says Lalo's, like in writing, and I said, "Does this bring back memories?" And he says, "Yeah, yeah, that's the parking lot!"

It was kind of L-shaped and you would walk in the long part of the L. So, as you would go in there'd be a woman in there in a little thing, and I guess that's where—I guess it was a cover charge to go in. Maybe, because I think you had to pay to go in. A cover charge, I guess. Then you were in the bar, which was this long, long, long bar, and then that would open up this part of the L. That's where the dance floor was, and here was the bandstand. And then to the left of that is that little area that's where the Carlos Almaraz mural was. I couldn't even guess capacity. Maybe two hundred, three hundred. I don't really know.

CM: Was it like a classic 1960s décor like—

DG: Oh, there were the palm trees, like the Coconut Grove. Yes, very fancy. Oh yeah, yeah. The tables and the palm trees, because there were pillars and where there were pillars there were the palm trees. The bandstand was small because Dad's group was only five or six guys and him, and it was only open Friday night, Saturday night and *tardeadas* on Sunday. That's it, it was closed during the week. Just weekends.

CM: How long was it open?

DG: Well, quite a few years I'm guessing. Because if it opened around '55, my parents divorced in '62.

CM: And that's when they finally—

DG: Well, he kept it for a while, but he was losing money. It was still packed, but he was not a businessman.

CM: Your mother—

DG: She did everything. So he forgot to pay this bill, and he didn't know that was due, and, "What, I didn't buy the whiskey?" He just couldn't run it, and so he eventually sold it.

CM: Was it your mother that figured out the décor for that place or—

DG: Knowing my mother, probably. Or they did it together. Maybe they liked the Coconut Grove and they said, "Why don't we do coconut trees so instead of the pillars being there . . ." Who knows. But, yeah. So my mother, all she had was cocktail dresses. But she dressed her whole life that way anyway, because that's what their life was. And my mom never drank.

CM: Never?

DG: I used to get her pissed on bloody mary's in her old age, but she never drank. She'd maybe have a rum and Coke, but she never smoked and she never drank. So by the time I'd say, "Mom, we're at brunch, have a bloody mary, one bloody mary." She was like flying because she didn't drink. So yeah, she was an easy drunk. So she never drank. My dad drank only at the club. There was never liquor at the house. They'd buy liquor if they were having a party, but it's not like, "Oh let's have cocktails." Like Richard and me: six o'clock martini, it's cocktail time.

CM: Hell, four-thirty.

DG: Yeah. But no, no. And because I think my dad realized he drank all weekend so he'd dry out during the week, as it were.

CM: Got it. Did you guys have good parties growing up, like musicians and—

DG: You know, they did, but not a whole lot honestly. Home was family.

- CM: And the club was the club.
- DG: And the club was the club, and the entertainment world out there. So rarely. Really, it was all family stuff.
- CM: And you didn't go to the club till you were twenty-one.
- DG: Yeah, yeah. So that was completely separate. And for a while there, there was a back room at the club which they kind of fixed up as a bedroom so that Mark and I could be there. We would come in through the back door and just be back there, not in the club, rather than have us be alone. When I got to be a little bigger, fifteen or sixteen, then I would babysit Mark. But up until then they had babysitters. But I also think my mother wanted to make sure we were okay and that we were right there where she could see us.
- CM: A good Latina mother.
- DG: Oh, yeah.
- CM: Now, what's it like . . . You said your [father's] music used to drive you kind of crazy, but what's it like to grow up with this well-known man. You also mentioned the story of, "He looks like me. He's like a mini Lalo." Obviously—
- DG: Well, when you grow up with somewhat of a public guy, that's what you know. I don't know what it's like to have a dad that's not. There were certainly perks, but I'd like the idea that whenever we went, we were special because we were Dad's kids, you know, when it was a Latino place or event. So that was cool. But it was the school—I didn't like him coming to my school most of all. That, I didn't care for.
- CM: Was it a little overwhelming sometimes? To have this personality that kind of—
- DG: Not really. Because honestly, he—his persona of course was huge, but he was such a nice guy. I mean he was, he was just this nice guy, you know. I think if I saw him angry—I mean like *angry*—two times in my whole life, that's probably too much. Two or three times. He was exactly like his mother, my *nana*. I never saw that woman, Concepción, that she wasn't smiling, laughing, singing. She was just this—that's who she was. Now, her husband, my grandpa, was the old curmudgeon. That's a very common thing, have you noticed?
- CM: Yeah, that's usually how people pair up.
- DG: Yeah. And so my dad was my *nana*, he was just so . . . So he wasn't bigger than life in that way. My mother was actually bigger than life to me than my father, because she—
- CM: Because she was so tough?
- DG: She was strong and she was no nonsense and, you know. So she to me was a bigger figure. He was a glamorous fun figure, and she was like, whoa, don't mess with that one. And so she was the bigger figure in my life.
- CM: Got it. Tell me a little bit about the event at the Million Dollar Theatre, where you kind of come to realize that it's like, "Oh, people know who Dad is."
- DG: You know what, it was more—it was more that I realized he belonged to a bigger audience. He wasn't just my dad. And I wasn't always happy about it because, believe me, he loved my mother, he loved my brother, and me, but it was his audience. That was the main deal.
- CM: That was his first love?
- DG: I think so, and I think that's true of all performers. That is their—it's like a calling, it's a calling.
- CM: Do you remember his process as a singer-songwriter?
- DG: Well, he could not read music. He did not read music.
- CM: What instruments did he play?
- DG: Guitar.
- CM: Just guitar?
- DG: And maracas. And he himself [said], "Not that great." He was okay, but he was never a great guitar player. He was a great singer and a great composer. Music and lyrics. And he wrote everything: comedy, heartfelt corridos, love songs. He was a genius in that. But he could not read music and he was just an okay guitar player. My brother is a fantastic guitar player.
- CM: So, going back to musical process.

DG: Yeah, so he—just anything would inspire him, anything could inspire him. He'd see something or he'd hear something. He always composed, and I think that's all I ever saw him do. Always in his shorts and his T-shirt, and I mean shorts with the thing open so you could pee. No, I don't mean Bermuda shorts. No, I mean shorts, underwear.

CM: His *chones*.

DG: His *chones*. His *chones*, barefoot, his T-shirt, and sitting on the edge of his bed with a guitar and a pad and a pencil. And he'd be humming along, and then he'd hum and he would write his song. And then he would take whatever he had written, he'd go to his partner, [Manuel] Acuña, who was quite a renowned—I really kind of knew more after the fact—a musician himself. He never became a star, but from what I understand he was really a fabulous musician and he had composed things. But never really, whatever . . . Although I think he was this kind of known, respected man. So he and Dad partnered and they had a label, their own record label together, called Real. And then later it was L & M Records (Lalo & Manuel), and so he was just partnered for a million years. And he [Acuña], of course, would do the arrangements for everything. So Dad would then go to his house, he'd sing him the song, and I guess Manuel would then write them out in notes and do arrangements. And that's what they did. So, he was kind of the business end for Dad, and Dad was the creator.

CM: But it was very informally creative, because like you said, he didn't read or write music.

DG: No.

CM: That's amazing. Did he—was he the kind of person who maybe kept a little notebook, and if an idea of a lyric came he wrote it down? Or was it just more like those sessions at home?

DG: No, I think he just kept it in his head. I don't remember a journal or notebooks. No, I think he just—I do that now. Not that I write songs, but I'm still writing *iGaytino!* I'm still—as I've gotten older, as some things have changed, I'm still writing. Because it's always going on in your head, your head never turns off. I don't think his ever did either.

So if I'm driving, I'm thinking of a scene, I'm thinking of that transition I've never been comfortable with, what is that one word, hiding in the shadows, no it's not hiding. "Lurking!" Omigod, "lurking" and I'll scribble while driving—"lurking"—and I'll come home and I'll run it in my computer. That's the word I've been looking for, for two weeks. And so I think that's how he worked, he'd just keep things in his head.

But he just—he always used to say that's what people would say, that he was—I was gonna say atheist, an activist. He was not an atheist, an activist, or he was this and is political, or how he'd capture the culture through . . . Especially when academics write about it. He would always say, "I was just writing about what I saw." But in doing that he kept our history, he kept—he was our musical historian, as it were.

CM: Those songs are so evocative. How did *Zoot Suit* come about?

DG: Well, Luis—I think, actually, rumor has it, and it turned out for years my dad always said, "I don't think so"—but that we're related, Luis Valdez.

CM: Oh, you guys are related?

DG: Yeah, not that we hung out at family reunions, but we were somehow related—some connection with my grandmother, my dad's mother and Luis's I-don't-know-what. There was that connection somewhere, I believe. So, maybe Dad and Luis were third cousins or fourth cousins. But there was some sort of . . . So, you know what, this is funny. I should know this, but I don't. I think I should ask Luis. I think they knew each other over the years. And so I don't think Luis suddenly said, "Oh, who are these songs by someone called Lalo Guerrero?" He couldn't. There's no way he couldn't have known who Dad was. But whether they were actually friends or hung out, I don't think so, I don't think so.

I think they might have been aware of each other, but I don't know. I really must ask Luis that question. So I don't know. But all I know is that when Luis decided to write the play and he was looking for music, that's when he found all these *pachuco* songs. And the original *Zoot Suit* had "Los Chucos Suaves," "Vamos a Bailar" and "Chicas Patas Boogie," which actually is a Louie Prima song and Dad did [Spanish-language] lyrics to it. The other two were songs—music and lyrics—that was the song he recorded that he just liked,

that Louie Prima had done—I forgot what it was called in English—[“Oh, Babe!”]—and he wrote a Spanish lyric to it. But since then, because I just saw a production at San Diego Rep, they’ve added two or three other little bits for breaks, for transitions. It seems they’ve added sixteen bars, thirty-two bars. There’s just a couple of other Dad’s songs in it now. Yeah, but [there’s still the] big production numbers in the show [that are Dad’s songs].

CM: Were you with your father on Broadway when it premiered? Did you see it with him?

DG: Of course.

CM: What was that like for him?

DG: I can’t speak for him, but for me it was weird. Oh yeah, in fact he stayed with me, he stayed with me. And Mark Sendroff helped me with the contract. Because I did the contracts for Dad’s music, because by then I was an agent [in New York]. So, I negotiated with the Mark Taper people and then [Sendroff] was my lawyer. He always does the final things, or he negotiates on my deals, but that—yeah, I did those contracts for *Zoot Suit* for New York. That’s weird, huh?

CM: Were you sitting next to him at the premiere?

DG: Yeah.

CM: Was he elated?

DG: Oh, yeah. Yeah, and I remember there was some kind of a “scandal”—I put in quotes—because there was a big party at Sardi’s but not everyone was invited. It’s not a huge restaurant, but still it seems strange. So I think maybe the leads—like just Eddie [Edward James Olmos]—or two or three of the leads and of course Dad and Luis. But not everybody got invited, which is really kind of—that’s weird, because a Broadway musical that opens up on Broadway, everyone. You have chorus people, everybody. But I think not everybody was invited, so those that were not were all pissed off. And they somehow, they were either staying at the Taft Hotel—my guess is that they were staying there and they got some ballroom there and they decided to have their own party. And so I remember at one point, Luis, Dad, maybe Lupe Ontiveros—there were four or five of us walking up the street, because it was late by then, there was not a whole lot of traffic, we were walking up the street from Sardi’s to go to the party at the Taft.

I should ask Rose Portillo—I just saw her the other day—because I know she was there. So there was some rift—there were the dueling parties. There was Sardi’s, and then there was the one at the Taft. But it was thrilling when—and I use the photo that I took in projection visuals in *iGaytino!* of the Winter Garden sign. It said “Zoot Suit” and then with Eddie as “El Pachuco.” I kept thinking, “Unbelievable, I can’t believe it.” It was one thing to see it in LA. And I didn’t see it at the Taper. But by then it had moved—it had moved to what is now Nickelodeon Studios on Sunset. It was called the Aquarius Theater, and that’s where it moved because it had to. I think they extended it—it was such a sensation at the Mark Taper and it had to close, where everything was set because you had another play coming in. And so it was moved to the Aquarius, and it sat there for a long time, a long time. I saw [it] there at the Aquarius, where I had gone for my sixteenth birthday when it was the Moulin Rouge. Very fancy supper club. And my parents took me to the Moulin Rouge for my sixteenth birthday to see the Crosby Brothers.

CM: And what was the Moulin Rouge like?

DG: Oh, it was like the set I wanted for Vikki’s [Vikki Carr’s] show. That’s what it was like.

CM: A supper club?

DG: Yeah, like Vegas, a super club. See, because those kinds of supper clubs a minor could go into but couldn’t drink. But I’d always have a Shirley Temple. See, we’d go to Vegas to see Sinatra, Peggy Lee, and we could go in, but we couldn’t drink because I guess it was different than a nightclub.

CM: Yeah, a little more like a restaurant. That’s what I think the difference is. There is a wider—

DG: Supper club as in restaurant. Yeah, probably.

CM: Did *Zoot Suit* help reignite his career?

DG: No, I think that might’ve been kind of the beginning of that because that was late ’70s. Yes, I never thought about it . . . Yeah, you’re right. I think that probably first started, especially what Dad said, too, when all

the Chicano studies departments started to be created and they started to look at their pioneers and there was no one like him. So Chicano studies, *Zoot Suit*, and then I come back and I'm doing television. And so then all that had to do—yeah, good point.

CM: And that was one of the earliest times—was that one of the earliest times you had quote-unquote managed your father because you—

DG: Yes, yes, that probably was the first time.

CM: And then after—did you do any things like that for him after New York? Or was it really when you came back to LA that you started to—

DG: When I came back, when I came back. My mother always said—because my dad, he'd sign anything. Which believe me, my brother and I are still dealing with because, "Well, yeah, I'll sign it." He was just not a good businessman. So, my mom, when I moved out of here, she'd go, "Well, Sonny [my family nickname] did that deal, so he's getting paid really well." Because she knew that if I did it, he'd have to have his hotel and we need mileage if we're gonna drive and, you know. I'd been an agent. But for him, "I'll pay you, oh . . ." Okay, he'd sign—that's what he would do.

CM: And you're like, don't do that.

DG: Yeah, I say, "Don't sign anything." "Okay, *m'hijo*." Okay, well, he said—oh, he was exhausting, that man.

CM: So, what was it like to manage him? So you started putting him—and what happened? So how did it happen when you first came back to LA? So you did the paperwork for him at *Zoot Suit*, and then you mentioned a little bit, like—

DG: Well, it kind of started with Paul's [Paul Rodriguez's] show. Although that wasn't negotiating, but that's when we first started, because he would guest hither and thither. He would guest here and he would guest there. And we'd been on the air for three years, and then Univision just said the show was too expensive. So they didn't care about the music, they didn't care about the music acts. And so they wanted more comedy from Paul. Which really made more work for us, because that meant a lot more writing and no more money, just more work. And so they decided to order just twelve to see if it would work. But they then paid so much less than what they had been paying, that the only way to advertise it, make it look good—we did twelve in three days. Twelve one-hour [shows]. It was a nightmare.

So, as we were preparing for those, Paul says, "Your dad should be my Ed McMahon, he should be my co-host." I said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." And, of course, Dad was thrilled. So, he came into town. We would put him up in a hotel and we would send a limo for him as we sent for all our guests. But he would always make the limo stop at the McDonalds before coming to [the studio] and I'd say, "Dad, we have craft services." You know how a TV [show is], there's everything. No, he liked his little Egg McMuffin. And he said, "I always enjoy it, too, because the limo pulls up and everybody cranes their necks and they [peek] in and they go, 'Who's that?'" So, then more TV appearances and then mostly—it's not that I got him jobs, he would get jobs. They would come to him, but then I would handle them to make sure that he got everything he was supposed to get.

CM: The paperwork was kosher.

DG: I would do the contract and say, "Okay, he's coming, he'll arrive this day, we have to do airfare, and this, and he has to be picked up at the hotel, he has to be . . ." I would [do it all]. He wouldn't do any of that. So, I would do all those things, negotiate the money and—and then as he got older, then I couldn't let him go alone anymore. So then I would travel with him, which was really exhausting, you know. But it would usually work out because I happen to be—because I'm not working that day. Or I would be having a dry period and well, what the hell, I might as well go with it. So yeah. But it did get to be much more difficult.

CM: Why, because he was just getting older?

DG: He actually started to get dementia. I don't think it was Alzheimer's. It wasn't that far, but he definitely had dementia and it was escalating. So as we'd be driving to Tucson for something he'd go, "Oh, my song list."

“Dad, I did it for you, you’re gonna open with ‘Nunca Jamás.’ Here, see, I did it in the computer, big letters, you can see it. It says ‘Nunca Jamás.’”

“Oh, okay.”

Ten minutes later: “Oh, I gotta figure out what I’m gonna sing.”

“Dad . . .”

So, it really—I was driving, so, it got very difficult.

CM: Did he respect your role sort of as agent-manager, or was there always like—

DG: I believe he did. I think at the beginning maybe not, because it was like, “I’ve been doing this fifty years, you’re telling me how I’m gonna . . .” I think there was that. But I think in the end he really knew I was really a good producer. He saw all the kinds of things I was doing. So yes. And he, too, like my mom, a million times, “Oh, *m’hijo*, everybody loves you. Everywhere I go they go, ‘Hey, I know your son Dan, he’s crazy.’” Which I am. But he loved that, he loved—just like when people would come to me, “Oh, your dad’s Lalo?” And I love that—everybody has a Lalo story.

CM: Well, tell me, what’s the craziest Lalo story you heard?

DG: Omigod. That I’ve heard from strangers?

CM: Yes.

DG: No, the best ones are the ones I would hear from him. He’d call me one day, and I don’t know—or I saw him—and I’m talking to him, and he had just played at some school somewhere out in Palm Springs. Because he’d go anywhere. I mean if a gas station in Pacoima called and said, “We’re putting in a new pump, would you come and . . .” “Oh, yeah sure.” I mean, he’d go anywhere, it was all the same to him.

CM: He just got to play.

DG: He got to play, he got to entertain people, that’s what he was about. He didn’t care if it was the White House, a fabulous theater, or a school classroom, it was all the same to him: making people happy, making them enjoy it, and having a good time.

And so he was—so he told me, “And I was doing this thing, and halfway through . . .” And the guitar, no, I guess the mic, his vocals [mic] kind of—his mic fell off or something, and so there was one clipped for the guitar, you know those clip things?

CM: Um-hum.

DG: He said, “And just as a joke I put it on my lip and I started to sing a song and I got a big laugh and so I did three numbers like that.” I said, “Didn’t that hurt?”

“Well, yeah. But they were laughing, they were enjoying it.”

So he left that thing with the little damn teeth. I said, “Wait, didn’t that hurt and he said, “Oh yeah.” Oh God.

And then one time I was in Tucson and we always stayed with my cousin Alice, my uncle Dave’s—my mother’s brother Dave’s daughter. And we always stayed with Alice. Because the only one there [on the Guerrero side] was Connie, my dad’s sister and she drove him crazy. So no, he didn’t wanna stay with Connie and so we would stay with Alice. And somehow—I didn’t go on this trip, so they were with him and somebody. He was there and then they dropped him off at some 7-Eleven and then he called Alice and John, her husband to pick him up, “Hey I’m at this . . .”

“Oh, yeah. Okay Uncle, I’ll come and pick you up right now.”

“And it’s right on . . .” Whatever. So he says, “I’ll be waiting outside.”

“Fine.”

And they drive there and she says they get to the 7-Eleven and there’s no Lalo. But he said the one on Speedway or whatever, and they go inside, and he’s inside playing for five customers. I mean I’m telling you, he just didn’t care, he just wanted to sing for people. Oh God.

CM: How did the presidential medal of the arts [National Medal of Arts] come about?

DG: Well . . . I gotta write some of these names down because this beautiful man deserves it. You have to be nominated. You’re nominated—I guess nominations, ballots are sent all over the country to educators or

whatever it is. And then I guess it's narrowed down by panels and then finally the President, whoever it is, makes the final twelve [decision]. And dad got his in '97. I wanna say it was Arturo Madrid who did it, I hope it was him. I gotta look it up. Dad got it in '97. They had been around, I think, since early '80s. I don't remember, but I seem to remember what I Googled, they'd been around for twelve or fourteen years, something like that.

CM: Sorry.

[break in audio]

CM: So, we were talking about the presidential medal of the arts and you were saying that you have to—

DG: It's called the National Medal of Arts.

CM: Yeah, the National Medal of Arts, excuse me. And that you have to be nominated for it.

DG: Yes, and it's not Arturo Madrid, who is a wonderful, wonderful educator. I've got to find out the name of that man [the one who nominated Lalo Guerrero for the National Medal of Arts]. God bless him. But I remember he was an educator.

CM: Who nominated your father?

DG: Who nominated my father. And he came up to me after the ceremony and said, "I'm [pause] and I'm the one that nominated your father." I said, "Oh, bless you," blah blah blah. And he said, "I've nominated him every year for nine years," or something like that. Yeah, because Dad's was in '97 and—it was for 1997—but it had been an election year, so the ceremony was not until January of '98, but it was for '97.

And at that time the National Medal of Arts had been around—because I remember I Googled everything—it was like ten, twelve, fifteen years. And I went [to check] as usual, and there had only been three Latinos. Twelve a year are given out. Over all those years and there'd only been three Latinos. And it was Celia Cruz, *cubana*; Mel Ferrer, fabulous actor, *puertorriqueno*; and Tito Puente, *puertorriqueño*. That was it. So Dad was the first Chicano, and that made only four Latinos in all those years.

CM: What was that ceremony like?

DG: Well, it was unbelievable, but there were two parts to it. Usually—I'm told they used to do it, I think, on the White House lawn because it was usually done in the summer, so it was that. But this was winter, dead of winter, and they couldn't wait too long. And so it was in two parts.

The ceremony was that morning in the Mellon Auditorium, this huge—you know, like you expect in Washington: high ceilings and all the carvings and the pillars, etcetera, gigantic flags—in the morning. And then there was the dinner at the White House that night, the celebration part. So it was in two things. And my dad called me one day and said, "Hey *m'hijo*, you wanna go to DC? I'm going to get the National Medal of Arts. They just called me, but I'm not supposed to tell anybody, except I can tell you."

I said—and it was like a year off. I mean they tell them way in advance, but they do tell them. You can't tell anyone, because they like to make the official announcement of the winners—recipients, I should say. So he couldn't tell anybody. And I said, "What about Lidia?" And, "She's afraid to fly." I said, "Yes!" So she's afraid to fly, so I was gonna go with him. And then I thought, omigod. Well, Mark knows that this is true. I'm not making it up.

And so then I started to deal with the White House because there was a lot of stuff involved. So it was back and forth. And so Ann Stock was the first lady's social secretary. So Ann Stock and I became very friendly. I kept saying, "I gotta take my brother." I said, "Unless you wanna see fisticuffs on the White House lawn," I said, "We need two tickets." She said, "I'm so sorry," she says, "But the dinner at the White House—the East Room—is only [so] big." You know, like the Nixon place. And of course I knew from experience that it wasn't huge, so there's nothing you can do. So every recipient: one guest. End of story.

But I kept [at it], and then it became a joke. "Hey Ann, you sure no one's dropped dead or anything?" "No." And so it became part of our story. So—and Mark accepted it. [He reasoned that it was] because I'm the eldest, and that's why Dad asked me, okay. And so this goes on and on and finally they said, "Well, we do have, for the White House, following the dinner, we have a kind of dance and entertainment, and there

we do have additional guests.” So they have another wave of invited guests that are not invited to the dinner, but they’re invited to that part. So they said, “Your brother can come to that.” And I thought, well that’s—at least he’s in the White House, you know. So that’s how it’s left.

So now we all go and we’re at the hotel. So we’re on our way in the morning to the Mellon Auditorium, and, as usual, Dad’s getting ready, I’m getting ready, my brother’s ready, fine, fine, fine. We’re going and we go down to the elevator and I look down, I go, “You’ve got the wrong pants on!” He had like put his tuxedo pants on with a navy blue jacket. “Oh!” “Dad, the car’s coming.” There we are, last minute, he’s changing his clothes. Finally we get to the Mellon Auditorium and they take us—this is funny. Do we have time—I guess, what the hell.

CM: Yes, we have time.

DG: So, there’s this anteroom before you’re gonna go out there, and they say, “Okay, only the winners.” And I guess my brother was in that part, too—or did he have to go in the front part? I don’t remember. Anyway, we have to go to this anteroom because that’s where you get your instructions. So we’re in there and whoever’s in charge—maybe it was Ann—and she goes, “Okay, so what’s gonna happen, you’re all seated, and then the President will say your name. When he says your name, you stand in place. Then the president and the first lady will cross to you, they will put the medal on, you will turn, photo-op, you sit, they go back to the podium.”

So I’m watching Dad, who’s, like, [looking around distractedly]. I went, “Dad, did you hear what she . . .”

“Yeah, yeah. I heard.”

“But did you hear the . . .”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I heard.”

“Okay.”

So now, thank God, I had this friend—and I won’t say the network—but a friend of mine worked—a cameraperson—worked for a network [affiliate] in DC. And I had done a big award show, the Vida awards that aired on that network. And it was Eddie Olmos, Celia, it was a big. It was, like, a Hispanic Heritage Awards and I produced that in Washington. And so I told him, “Oh, I’m gonna be there, let’s meet for dinner,” because I had friends in DC after all these years. “Oh, that’s great,” blah, blah, blah. And he said, “Hey, you know what,” he said, “I’m not doing the National Medal of Arts coverage, but my friend is. I’ll make sure that he leaves the camera on your dad most of the awards.” I said, “Great, thanks.” So now we’re back in that room and Dad is [looking distracted] while they’re giving [instructions]. And then the president and first lady come in to this small room. The other awards recipients that year were Robert Redford, Edward Albee, Sarah Caldwell, the opera conductor, Lionel Hampton, Maurice—that cartoonist who recently died—illustrator.

CM: Maurice Sendak.

DG: Yes, Maurice. Stephen Sondheim, my idol. I just recently found a picture of Dad with Stephen Sondheim [that I took]. I said, “What are the chances those two would ever be in the same room, right?” And I didn’t take a picture with Stephen Sondheim, though I worked with him. Anyway, so we’re there, and now they said, “Okay.” The president and first lady come in, they meet us all, blah, blah, blah, fine, fine, fine. Then they go and then they say, “Okay.” Then the recipients stay there and then we guests, “Okay, you’re gonna go out through here. and you’re gonna sit in the front row.”

Fine, so we come out and, omigod, there’s this gigantic, impressive—like a cathedral. And this wall of photographers to the left. I mean, they’re like on levels. [makes camera noises] You know, photographers and cameras. And we walk past and I went, “Holy shit, this is serious.” And we go and we sit down, and I’m dead center of the front row. I’m always dead center. I find it so interesting. I look at photographs of thirty years ago and there’s twenty people, who’s center? I swear I don’t—I have to look at that. Yeah, I must do it, even subconsciously. Why am I always in the center?

CM: It’s subliminal.

DG: I don't think it's that subliminal. I don't know. I just find it amusing. Every photograph I look at, there I am. I'm like, "What the hell's that about?" So I'm dead center, sitting there, and I got my little camera and there's the president and then they all come out. They're all seated in chairs, all of them. And at the podium, blah blah, "Sarah Caldwell," blah blah blah. And then I hear "Lincoln." Lincoln!? [laughs] I hear Clinton, who is a big Lincoln fan. I hear Clinton say, "Eduardo 'Lalo' Guerrero, this man," blah, blah, blah. Dad's sitting down, of course, and I'm like . . . [makes hand gestures] I'm in the front row.

CM: You're trying to signal him.

DG: Yeah. Clinton and the first lady are twenty feet away, if that, and I'm like . . . [makes hand gestures]. Nothing! He's looking around, he's listening, and he's supposed to be . . . Finally, whoever's sitting next to him, I don't remember, it was a male though, sees me. And so he nudges Dad and I go—and just as they go, "We are proud to honor him," just as they go across, he stands up. So, it's fine. At least he stood there. So he stands up and they go over and they put the thing and then, you suddenly see Dad grab Hillary's arm—because it's like he thought they were gonna leave and he wanted a photo.

Of course, he had not heard that they said there would be one. And he just grabs her by the arm and poses like that and the two of them laugh—they [the Clintons] start laughing. And they take the photograph and then as they're walking back to the seat, Hillary Clinton who's seen me taking pictures all this time, as she crosses she looks down at me and she goes, "Did you get that?" [laughs] Then I went, "Uh-huh." Because he thought they were gonna leave without a photo. And so then Clinton gets to the podium and he goes, "Well, you see the man still has his salsa." I thought, okay, there was one laugh that entire time at this solemn ceremony, of course it was Lalo.

CM: Did he perform at that?

DG: No.

CM: Was there any performance?

DG: No, no. No performances.

CM: No one performed.

DG: There was a performance after dinner [at the White House], but it was Jennifer Holliday.

CM: So it was somebody—none of the recipients.

DG: No, nobody does anything. Nope. So that was the morning, and then that evening was the White House dinner. But how times have changed. When I did the Nixon White House, they sent a limo for two of us; three limos for six people. National Medal of Arts, twelve people, I just told you who they were—they sent, like, a van, like a mini-bus van. And there we are. I'm like, "Omigod, Stephen Sondheim, Robert Redford." And we're on this bus? And we had gone in limos, us six nobodies. I thought, "Whoa!" Which is not as shocking as it was when afterwards—thank God my friend from the network—because then the next morning he says, "Here's the tape," he handed me the tape. It's what I use in the documentary, because when I called the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] to say, "Well, will we be getting a tape?" "Oh, we don't video tape them anymore because of budget cuts." I said, "You don't video tape the . . . Ah, come on." How much does it cost to video and send out twelve tapes of this? They didn't have—they don't tape them anymore. I thought that was really stupid. So I really was grateful to my friend. I'd have no footage whatsoever, except for my little camera, which is pre-digital camera. But yeah, and then the White House was funny as shit. Omigod, yeah. It was great.

CM: Your dad had a good time that night, I imagine.

DG: He got pickled. Because, of course, they're constantly walking [around offering] champagne. Oh no, I'll tell you when my blood first froze. You get to the White House and you go in, and then you check your coat. And then they say—and then they announce you: "Lalo Guerrero, Dan Guerrero." And we're walking like that and then we get to the front and they go, "Ah, Mr. Guerrero this way, Mr. Guerrero that way," they separate everyone, even husbands and wives because they want people to mingle. So you do not sit with who you're going to—who you came with. So I'm like, "Omigod, he's going to be on his own. Omigod."

So I'm looking the whole time. And what's he doing over there, and he's off talking to Robert Redford. He's having a fabulous time. I mean, he's doing—but I'm the one that's "Omigod, omigod, what's gonna happen?" And so fine, so then the dinner's over and then we go out to the party thing. [Folk singer] Tish Hinojosa's there, that wonderful—she came to that second wave and we wound up dancing, there's a . . .

And now the champagne is flowing and Dad, every time, hey wouldn't you . . . The man's, what, eighty, he's at the White House, go for it. But I was just watching him because I was afraid he might fall or slip or . . . And then he kept going up to—what's her name, that wonderful actress—Jane Alexander. She was the president of the NEA or the head of something. [Alexander was the director of the NEA from 1993 to 1997—ed.] And he kept going up to her, "I just wanna thank you so much," and he was like right here. And then she'd take a step back, "I'm so glad," and then he'd take a step forward, and he would get—and she would, "Oh, no it's our honor," and then step back, and he'd step . . . And I'm watching this and I am howling. I'm [going], "This is the best." He—girl—he was just . . . And then he went up to Marine Band and told them how fabulous they were playing. They're the worst—a Marine band playing from *A Chorus Line*? It was horrible. He thought they were fabulous, but he had a good, good time. Yeah, it was a great night.

And then you're dancing and it's very small, that area. You stop, you applaud, you turn, "Oh, it's the Clintons." And you have to say something, so I go, "You know, I've always admired your hands," because he does, he has beautiful hands. I love hands. And I did, I said, "I've always loved your hands." He goes, "Really?" I said, "You play instruments?" This is—I know he played the—what was it?

CM: The sax.

DG: Sax. And then he said, "Well, I did play sax in school." I said, "Really." I said, "You should have a sculpture done of your hands like Lincoln did." I knew he was a big fan of Lincoln and there are Lincoln's hands, which are a bronze thing. And he went, "Really?" And I often wondered, I wonder if he ever had that done. Because he was a big fan of Lincoln's and Lincoln did have his hands done in bronze. Because he's got those long fingers, Lincoln does. But, like, "I've always admired your hands," what are you gonna say? "How are the kids?" I mean, you know. It was really a great night.

CM: Sounds fantastic. What about your dad's final years, do you remember his last concert?

DG: Of course, I was there. And at the end—as I finally got him on stage, I was out in the audience going, "I can't do this anymore. This is it. I can't, it's too hard." And it did turn out to be his last concert.

CM: Where was it?

DG: Where should it be? Tucson. Tucson—like October, and he died the following March, yeah. And that was fitting that his last concert would be in Tucson.

CM: And after that his health just declined too much?

DG: Yes, and I knew that the mind was really—because he loved his audiences and his people, blah, blah, blah, and crowds. But they had us get to the theater really early; it was an amphitheater. It was a fundraiser for Los Changuitos Feos, which is little kids mariachi, but many of them have grown to have—the Mariachi Cobre, they were Changuitos Feos and they are, like, primo. So it was a fundraiser for them. And I think he did three songs with them, but it was very difficult, very difficult. And we were there a long time in the dressing room because they called him way too early. And he was getting very antsy and then he was starting to get upset, and that was just not him.

But in those last years, it was—he never—he was, "Yeah, whatever." Oh, you know, just—he was easygoing, he really was. But I could see—and at one point we were sitting there, I said, "Dad, there's a big reception." I said, "Why don't we go out and you can see people. We can't just sit here." "Okay, okay. Yeah, good." So we went out there. Two minutes later, "*M'hijo*, I gotta go back in the dressing room. There's too many people." It's like he couldn't deal with them. That's when I said, "Oh, this is no good," because he's [generally] in heaven there with everybody.

CM: He was feeling anxious.

DG: Yes, he was getting anxious and so it was difficult. And that one, really, that one nearly killed me. I thought, "Omigod." We even had a fight. We never ever fight, and I got so angry. I forgot what he did, and he goes

[*random noises*], ["Stop] yelling at me." And I said, "I'm not yelling at you. I'm yelling at the situation." And we never—I can't remember our ever having a fight. And that's when I thought, "I can't do this, this is—I can't do this anymore." And then it turned out to be his last concert.

Not his last time in Tucson, because by December: "Hey *m'hijo*, let's go to Tucson."

"We were just there."

"Yeah, but I was working, this one we'll just go and have fun. You know we'll hang . . ."

So off I go. And as I'm driving there my cell phone rings and it's a friend from there. She goes, "Hey Dan, I heard you guys are coming to Tucson." I go, "Yeah, we're on the road right now." She goes, "Well, tomorrow's the big Christmas parade, do you think your dad would wanna ride in the parade?" Would he wanna ride in a parade? I said—I looked over and he was sitting there looking off to—when I said, "He'd love to." You know, I'm sure he would, of course he would.

So there's a funny story about peeing, but you don't wanna hear that. So anyway he did ride in the parade, so that turned out to be his last time in Tucson. Because then Lidia said—because it was getting too hard for her. God bless her, she kept him a long time because it becomes—they need care around the clock, and nobody wanted to put him in assisted living. But she had already had a hospital bed put in [the house], because he would get up in the middle of the night, she's afraid he'd fall, and it was just impossible. And she said, "I just want him to have his birthday [Christmas Eve] here." I said, "Believe me, you have to—you can't . . ." She was ready to have a nervous breakdown.

CM: It's a lot.

DG: A lot. And I have friends that are going through it now. I said, "Honey, there's gonna come a time. You're gonna have to do it, and it's not fun, but you're gonna have to do it." And so, thank God, he was in there a short time. He went in like the beginning of January, and he passed St. Patrick's Day.

CM: So it was just three months, really.

DG: Yeah. And I used to go out every weekend, but it was not fun. It was not fun. And, in fact, I just added a little five-sentence thing that happened once there to *iGaytino!*, that I'm gonna do at the end when I say he's passed. And then when I say that—and then I go to the mirror for the ending. And now in between there, there's the five lines about . . . Because it was really a very sweet scene, and I thought, "I think I'm gonna add that there," because it wraps it up nicely, you know.

CM: What was his funeral like?

DG: Huge! I did two of them. What do you think? You think I'm gonna send him out in a paper bag? [*laughs*] They were shows. That was a thing I tell people too, and I don't know that I've digested either parent going yet. I know they're gone, but it's just too big, it's too big. And it's even easier with my dad because I'm still doing Lalo things all the time, so it's easier with him. But I don't think I've really accepted either one. But especially with him, because when you lose a parent who's a public figure, you go into your professional mode. I go into "Lalo Guerrero died," not "my dad died." It's very odd.

I knew he was gonna go any day now, the last time I saw him in Palm Springs. It was that weekend. And I think that Tuesday, or a few days later, I was going to Albuquerque just for the day, on meetings at the National Hispanic Cultural Center there. I had produced the opening of their big Disney performing arts hall, blah, blah, blah—and they wanted some stuff. So anyway, I knew I was going there. But I just had a feeling the last time I saw him that it was any day, and so I went into producer mode. And I called my friend Nancy De Los Santos, who co-produced the docu with me. I said, "Nancy, I think it can happen any day, and I wanna just call you and you'll know who to call of our friends." And she said, "Got it." Then I call my friend Gabriel Reyes, who's a PR guy. He said, "Send anything to me." And then I wrote out an obituary with facts, I scanned some photos that I would have liked used, I sent them to Gabriel, I did all that stuff. And I went to Albuquerque. And I was in the meeting in the conference room and then my cell phone rings. It's my brother saying that Dad had passed.

So I went back and I told them, and they said, "Oh, you wanna fly right back." I said, "No, there's nothing I can do today," I said. So we finished our meeting and I flew back that evening as planned, and by the

time I got to the airport—oh, I lie. Literally, within a half-hour after that [call], my cell phone rang. It was Eddie [Edward James] Olmos. Nancy had called Eddie. That was the very first phone call I got, was from Eddie Olmos. And by the time I got home and I checked my phone after the plane ride, I sat in the parking lot, in the dark. I did like three magazine interviews in my car before I even got home. And I got home and there were all these emails; my phone at that time didn't have emails. Luis Valdez, you know.

And then I just went into producer mode and that there would be two masses, memorial masses. He was cremated, as was my mom. And there would be one in Palm Springs, where he'd lived the last thirty-five years, and then three days later in Tucson at the cathedral. And then it was producing two big shows, is what it was. So there was never a time to mourn my dad. I was busy burying Lalo Guerrero. It was very, very strange, yeah.

CM: I'm sure. A parental death is surreal enough as it is.

DG: Totally, who've you known longer than your parents? They're always there, for better or for worse. It's too big, I just really don't think . . . In fact, I once saw Liza Minnelli on some TV show and they were talking about her father, not her mother Judy, but about Vincente Minnelli. And he had been gone twenty years, if not more by that time. And they said something about, "Oh, how hard was it when you had to accept . . ." She goes, "Oh, I haven't, I don't intend to." So she decided he was not dead, that's all there was to that.

And I thought two things. At first I thought, "Oh, get a grip, get some therapy." And the other part of me said, "Well, fuck it, why not? You don't wanna accept it, don't accept it. Who cares? If he's still alive for you, go for it." So I'm kind of in that place, too. I know he's gone, but I don't think I've accepted either parent being gone yet. It's just too big.

CM: It's a lot. You mentioned earlier, and I wanted to come back to this story that towards the end you had helped bring together your mom, your dad, and Lidia.

DG: Yes, I was very proud of that.

CM: And how did that happen and how did that change family dynamics as a result?

DG: I'm proud that I did that. You have to remember that my mom had been a Guerrero forever. I mean, when she married Dad, my aunt Terry [Teresa] and my aunt Mona [Ramona], they were kids. You know, they were kids. And Connie [Concepcion] was maybe in her teens. They were young, so she grew up with that family. She [my mom] told the girls about their periods because Nana wasn't gonna do that, you know, in those days. She showed them how to do their checkbooks. She really—she was a part of that family. And after the divorce, [at] family reunions it was Dad and Lidia, Dad and Lidia, and Dad and Lidia, and my mom was just not there.

And while I was living in New York, I guess I must have known, or I didn't know, but when I got back to California and I got an invitation from my cousin Catalina—Cata, who I adored. I just lost her less than a year ago. Cata. My favorites were my aunt Terry, my dad's sister; my cousin Cata, who was the same age as Terry. My uncle Frank, Dad's brother's daughter [Cata]. They were just my favorites. And from Cata—that they were having—or maybe her kids, that they were having a thirtieth anniversary party, maybe it was thirty-five, whatever the hell it was. It was some big family event in Phoenix. And I thought, again, "I'm going and mom's not there? And I'm not taking mom? Well, that's just not right." I thought, "This is not right."

So I called Cata. I said, "Cata, I've not talked to Mom, or Dad, or Lidia, or anybody, so whatever you feel is what we'll do." I said, "But I'm not happy that Mom is not part of all this," blah blah blah. I said, "And I would like to bring Mom, after I talk to Dad and Lidia, but even before that, I want . . ."

"Absolutely, we love your mother. We miss her, but we don't know what to do. We have reunions if Lidia's there, you know."

I said, "Okay, great, so you're cool with it."

"Absolutely."

"Great."

So then I called Dad. Blah blah blah, Dad. “Well, it’s okay with me, but you know I don’t want Lidia uncomfortable and I’m . . .” And I’m going, “Let me talk to Lidia.” I said, “We’re friends.” We have been friends, and he knew that. He puts Lidia on, and I said what I said to Cata, “My mother knows nothing about this call, so if you’re not comfortable with it, [it’s] not gonna happen. But this is how I feel.” And Lidia: “It would be perfectly fine with me.” She said, “Absolutely.” So then I tell my mom, and she’s like “Well what about . . .” I said, “Everybody’s fine. I talked to Cata, I talked . . .”

“Really, are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

So off we go, my mom and me, to Phoenix. And we get there and there’s this summit, you know, there’s this summit. Lidia’s already over there with Dad. And my mom—I go, “Mom this is Lidia.”

“¿Cómo estás?”

“¿Cómo estás?”

And they became good friends. And by the time my mom was in her last days—and hers was more swift, it was horrible—who was at the hospital everyday with my mom? Lidia.

CM: And you’re still friends with Lidia?

DG: Um-hum.

CM: She’s still family?

DG: But I’m saying, that spoke volumes about both women, both women. They both loved the same man, they were both good women, they—yeah. I just thought that was amazing, yeah.

CM: That’s a good way to go out.

DG: No.

CM: Well, good for you for bringing them together.

DG: Well . . .

CM: Bringing the family back together, really.

DG: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: So let’s talk about something a little happier.

DG: Well, that was happy. I mean happy-sad. Yeah.

CM: The documentary on your dad, you produced it I believe, right?

DG: Yes, begrudgingly, but I did.

CM: But how was that process of going through all of your dad’s life and building this story about him?

DG: It was easy for me, very easy. First of all, when I first moved [back to LA] in ’82, I met with KCET about a docu on my dad. That’s how long I wanted to get a documentary done on him. Not unlike *iGaytino!* It was bigger than him and his career, but it was Chicano history through him and through his career. So all this, through the ’80s and ’90s, I would talk to every major Latino documentary filmmaker. And there are some great ones out there, and they were all interested. And “Yes, he should have it and we should do it,” but it wasn’t happening.

So my friend Nancy De Los Santos, she says to me one day, “You know, someone will do the documentary.” I was probably saying, “I can’t believe it. I’ve talked to this one, this one, that one . . .” And I don’t wanna say their names, because I don’t want it to reflect badly on them. Because it wasn’t bad, they were genuine. They just had other projects, for twenty years! [*laughs*] See I get my point across anyway! Anyway, so Nancy says to me, “You know what,” she says, “someone’s going to do it one day. We should at least get your dad on tape.” She said, “Let’s at least videotape him really well and we’ll get someone”—la la la la—“and get him on telling his story.” Like we’re doing here. And I said, “Good idea.”

So Dad came to my apartment, because we were renting then. Not to be confused with my condo here, which we own. [*laughs*] Well, along with Wells Fargo, you know how that goes. To my apartment two blocks from here, where we lived. And Dad came in three times over a year, year and a half. You know, it wasn’t like this big project to be done. And we did two to three hours each time. And I’m where you are now. “So Dad, tell about the Walt Disney story, when you met him.” “Okay, tell about the Carlistas.” “Now,

tell when Luis [Valdez] called you.” Because I knew all the stories, I knew what stories I wanted to make sure were preserved. “Tell me what it was like . . .” You know: “What was the music scene in the ’30s in LA?”

“Oh man, you walked down the street, every other store was a cantina, a bar with live musicians.”

And he was painting the [whole picture]. It’s *gold*. So up at the archives in Santa Barbara we’ve got seven, eight hours of him talking about it all. And about when they went to Mexico during the repatriation, and when he first discovered Agustín Lara’s music and how it changed him with Los Carlistas. So that’s really serious great stuff. We used maybe ten minutes of him in the show, in the program. So we did that, and then I put the tapes away. And I keep asking people, asking people. So finally, Nancy says, again, “You know, we’re gonna have to do this.”

“Oh God, I don’t wanna do a documentary, because I know what that means. It means ten years of trying to raise money.”

“It’s not gonna happen if we don’t do it.”

So we did, so we did. And it wasn’t easy to raise the money. I thought it’d be a slam-dunk. Was not easy. But we did. And I knew as I looked at it, I thought—again, we’re doing a sixty-, seventy-year career in an hour. I said, “I think we should divide it in chapters.” Because see, to me, what I wanted the documentary—I wanted people to get the whole Lalo picture, because I had all these generational things. I had the older people who remembered him for “*Nunca Jamás*” at the Million Dollar, and the ballads, and when he sang, blah blah blah. Then you had the kids, “Oh, ‘No Chicanos on TV’ and that funny stuff, and ‘There’s no Tortillas,’” and they just knew that.

Then I knew the people that knew him for his—and all these. But nobody seemed to have the whole picture. I said, “I think we should do it in chapters. This one’s gonna deal with his early years and growing up in Tucson. This will deal with his comedy songs, his activism, this will deal . . .” And I divided—a whole chapter on *Zoot Suit* because of what—not just the show, but what the zoot suit thing was for the entire culture. And so that’s a whole chapter. And then that’s what we set about. So then we went to the tapes, [our interviews with him]. We thought, “We should—as long as we have it, let’s pull a couple of bites, so they do see him at least at some point.” As we’re watching, we’re like, “What the hell? Are we’re gonna write a script, get a voice-over narrator, when we’ve got him telling his own story?” And it—he’s well shot. It’s not like—yeah, I probably would’ve hidden the mic had I ever dreamed that we were gonna use it, but it was really [shot] for research. And it’s well shot, and he’s in front of this Carlos Almaraz serigraph. And so that’s what happened.

And we did it. And of course, everyone I asked—I knew who I wanted to ask. I wanted Luis Valdez and Eddie Olmos because of *Zoot Suit*. I wanted Dolores Huerta because of the [United] Farm Workers. I had footage of César from when I put on this big event in Palm Springs, and César was one of the people who honored Dad. And I had that footage, and I owned it. So César was in there. I wanted Linda Ronstadt. And everybody said yes. And so we’d get fifty cents, and then we’d run and we’d tape Eddie, and then we’d put it on the shelf. And then five months later, we’d get two dollars, and we’d go tape Luis, you know. And we’d just piece it together. And I was stunned at how well it came out, because it was so nicked and dimed. It should have cost three times what it cost, but people loved Dad and they wanted to be a part of it and they wanted to help. And they did it for free, or they did it for very little money, or, you know. We really just patched it together. But I’m proud of it. It came out quite well, and it did what I wanted it to do.

CM: It aired on PBS, right?

DG: Yes! Thank God, because we got seed money from Latino Public Broadcasting. And about, I don’t know—oh, we weren’t done with it yet, we weren’t done with it yet. And they called me and they said, “Hey, we’ve just sold an idea to PBS of a series called *Voces*. And each week over thirteen weeks”—I think it was, or maybe it was eight, I don’t remember—“we’re gonna have a different documentary, and each will look at a different Latino culture: Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, whatever. And Eddie Olmos is gonna do a little intro

each week introducing them. And we would love yours to be a part of it.” No license fee, but they gave us seed money, that was fine.

And so I thought, “Okay, I can either give it to them and it sees the light of day on PBS, or I can try and sell it myself for the next ten years for a license fee. I want it out there.” That was the whole point. So we gave it to *Voces*, and that’s how it got on PBS. So it was not a PBS docu, but it did air on PBS.

**CM:** Okay, great. This brings me—this is a . . . Thinking about your dad’s life, you produced this special on his work. I think this is a great transition to talk about your own life. And so I wanted to end with some general questions in which you reflect sort of broadly on some aspects of your life. So my first question is, what do you think, like if you had to pick two or three moments, what do you think your life’s most important turning points have been? Somebody’s going to sift through these eight or nine hours of tape and there’s a lot of detail, but what have been the key moments?

**DG:** Well, I would have to say, obviously, the coast-to-coast trips. I mean, obviously moving to New York was a huge moment and returning to Los Angeles at the time I did. Those were very, very, very important moments. I think meeting Richard. I was thirty-nine, he was—and still is—younger than me, not by ten, twelve years, but I think it’s seven, eight years, something like that. And falling in love for the first time at age thirty-nine, when I didn’t think I could fall in love. That came out of nowhere. It certainly took its time, but you know. And we’re still together, so nearing thirty-four years.

And we’ve been through it—and in terms of even looking at the gay community as a couple. When we went to the rally the day the Supreme Court—recently, weeks ago—on the Proposition 8 thing. And we went to what we thought was a . . . Because the day before, our mayor—because West Hollywood, where I live is—we’re our own city. So even though it’s only, I don’t know, 1.7 mi—we’re really a small community. But there’s a lot of money in it because of the Sunset Strip, you know. So it’s a great community, I love it. We have our own police department, our own fire department, our own—and to say that it’s gay friendly is an understatement. I think two-thirds of the city council are gay, the mayor’s gay. So it’s very gay friendly.

And so they said there would be a rally the following evening, regardless. So it was either gonna be a protest or a celebration, right? So we thought, “Well, we gotta go.” And so we did. And it turned out, of course, to be a celebration. So we’re expecting the mayor to talk and the council, blah blah blah, but we’re waiting and . . . Of course, we get there a little early, because I’m not gonna be standing way in the back and was pissed off because I don’t know anybody there to be able to get into the sections where I’m usually standing. So I better get there and fight my way through. So we’re right in front and it’s delayed and we’re waiting, we’re waiting. I’m getting more pissed off, and I’m like, “Come on, how long does it take them to get ready?” Well, then this big kinda Hummer thing drives up and we thought, “Oh, who’s that? I guess VIPs, whatever.” And out walks, on the stage, direct from the steps of the Supreme Court, the two attorneys, the gay couple, and the lesbian couple, that had just won us this case, were there. It took your breath away. It just did.

And as a couple—because when I was a young gay man, who could think of, “Will they ever have gay marriage?” It was not even in your—there was just no way. Or adopting children. People say to me, “Didn’t you ever want children?” Yeah, but when I was a young man, I could have, would have adopted, or whatever—it just wasn’t. So sharing it with a partner of all these years, as we’ve seen so much of that arc, you know, that was really something. That was really, really, something. I gotta say, yeah. So I don’t know. I’d have to put that as a big moment, I think. I don’t know what, was it a . . .

**CM:** Like a turning point.

**DG:** Yeah. And then I came home and I added something to *iGaytino!* I thought, you know, I think I said it earlier about the mirror scene. I had to add to that you know. But I’d say the two biggies have to be the coast-to-coast things.

**CM:** And then in terms of personal relationships, what were your transformative—besides Richard, obviously.

**DG:** You mean personal relationships?

CM: Yeah, those personal relationships that have just shaped—

DG: Friends or lovers?

CM: It could be parents, friends, lovers, that really shaped your life. Because we have a lot of relationships over the course of our life, they don't all shape our lives.

DG: No. I think that's a very small batch. As much as Mom was great and I respected her and she was amazing, it was really, I think my dad and [painter] Carlos [Almaraz], which is why I write the show about them. And I feel a little guilty my Mom's not in it now. Because this is not to say she wasn't a huge influence. This is not to say that twenty times a day I'm going, "Oh my God, I sound like my mother." And I'm doing, "Ah, just like Mom used to." You become your parents, like it or not. So it's not that I'm not as much my mother as I am my father, I am very much both of them. But it was my dad and Carlos. Yeah, they really are the biggest influences, I think.

I mean, there have been people I met along the way. I learned a lot from Darwin [Knight]. I've learned a great deal from my Richard. But in terms of the real . . . It'd have to be those two. I really think so. I hope I don't piss off leaving somebody. There've been other people influence you along the way, but if we're talking massive, I don't know anybody else who could be in that group.

CM: That kind of transformative, life-changing—

DG: And especially because of the time. I mean there's other people that I adore and love and respect tremendously, and I've learned from them. But when I was a kid, when you're really getting formed, it was Carlos. It was seeing my dad and how he was with people.

I remember Carlos once said to me—because Carlos—so many artists aren't good with . . . They're just into their art, but Carlos was fabulous. I mean, he could talk to crowds, and he could give interviews, and he was great at it. And he once said, "I learned that by watching you." And I said, "Yeah, I learned that by watching my dad." So there's definitely a connection between the three of us. Very much so. Because Carlos was very influenced by my family, but by Dad as well, just watching him. And I—omigod, especially after *iGaytino!* After I do a performance and I'm at a reception and people are coming up, I am my dad. I can see him, "Oh, hi, how are you?" He was nice to everybody.

CM: Do you do the Pope thing?

DG: No, I don't do my papal thing yet, that's a few years in the future. But I—because he was lovely to anybody that came up to him or stopped him—smile, even though he didn't know who the hell they were. "Lalo, remember we met?"

"Of course."

He didn't know who they were. And made them feel good. They were happy. "Hey, I ran into Lalo, he really knew me, you know." And I do the same thing. I forever—people [come up to me and we'll have a long talk], and I'll leave and my friend will say, "Who was that?" I go, "I haven't a clue."

"You're kidding?"

"No, but you know you gotta be nice to them."

That's Lalo. And it's not being phony. You're just making them feel good. They're happy that, "Wow, yeah, he remembered. I only met him once and he . . ." So, yeah.

CM: Now if you had to go back to any—

DG: Oh God, I couldn't. I barely got through it the first time.

CM: No, no, no. But if you had to go back . . .

DG: I mean the life itself.

CM: But if you could travel back in time, right now, as who you are . . .

DG: Wait, as who I am today?

CM: Yes, who are you today. You could travel back in time and give your younger self some advice.

DG: Well, I'd say, "Get out of show business!" Nah, I wouldn't.

CM: What point would you travel back to and what would you say?

DG: Oh, I would certainly travel back to those first early years in New York. Yeah, because as they were as exciting, and thrilling, and adventuresome, they were very painful. They were very painful. I told you, because of this wanting to love. And plus I didn't think I could do anything. I really—I've thought about this, and I've thought I should use this as a title or something.

There was a part of me that is very much a 1950s housewife, where I was gonna meet somebody and they were gonna kinda take care of me. It wasn't that I thought, "I'm never gonna work." But I didn't know how to do anything. I didn't know how to do anything. I knew I had a sense of humor, and people enjoyed being with me, and I was fun, but what is that? I mean, I—as it turned out, it worked quite well. But, you know . . . And I did learn to support that with real stuff, but I mean, at that time. Honestly, at the same time that I was thinking, "I'm gonna be something fabulous," I had no idea how I was gonna do it, because I didn't know how to do anything. And I think that was part of my looking for that Prince Charming. Because I didn't know how to do anything.

That's why I went with Darwin. He was older, he already had—he was a director. "Okay, good, he'll . . ." Because I didn't know how to do anything. And that's also why, when the break up came, it was so horrifying. Because not only was it painful and abandonment, but I was panicked because, "What am I going to do? I don't know how to do anything. Who's going to take care of me?" Even though I was paying my own bills and working. But in the grand sense of things, I felt very lost. So there was a lot of pain in those early years. Scary times. I pressed forward. Remember I told you that—

CM: What would you tell that young Dan?

DG: I would tell that Dan, "Lighten up, honey!" [chuckles] I would tell that Dan that "you do have something to offer, you do know what you're doing, and it is all gonna be fine." But the cool thing is that I do that to a lot of young *gaytinos* today. I have a lot of young friends that I love. I learn from them. I learn from them, and I also hope that I can . . . Because they're going through some of those things different ways, because it's different being a gay man today than it was in the '50s. And yet, it's not. And so I try and do that. So that's the younger Dan I talk to quite often.

CM: That's great.

DG: And I say—yeah, I don't know. What do I know?

CM: You say, "One day at a time."

DG: Yes! And you know what, that's one thing about getting old that ain't so bad, is that it does seem to always work out. You do calm down in many areas because you're like, "You know what, I've been here before and it works out fine at the end." And you realize that you always spend so much time worrying about, "What if that?" And then "that" never happens, and you wasted all that time worrying. They seem like such obvious things, and some people know it early. I didn't, took me forever to learn a lot of things. So, yeah.

CM: What would you do different?

DG: I don't know what I would do different. What would I do different, in what way? I really, as I said, I have no real regrets, in terms of my life choices. Yeah, those are isolated things. Yeah I'm sorry I stayed with Darwin that night. Those are little things. But in terms of the real [deal], no. I wish we'd bought our condo when I first moved out here, because we'd be paying it off by now, instead of having bought it ten years ago. That would have been good, but I bought it when I bought it. But I don't know that I would do anything different, honestly. And I know a lot of people say that, but . . .

And you know, I guess also you don't because it's what's familiar to you. You know it. I don't know what. "Gee, maybe I should've stayed in LA." No. Maybe—now, what if I had stayed in LA? I have no idea, so how could I say "I think I would have stayed in LA" because, then what? I wouldn't trade those New York years for anything. Would I have stayed fewer years? No, because I *loved* it. It was only the last two or three years that I'm like, "No, I gotta get out of here." But no, omigod. I still love New York, but after three days, I'm like, "Okay, get me back to my car—and traffic."

No, no, honestly. I wish I could say that I'd do something different, but . . . I wish my brother and I had a better relationship, but I don't know how that's gonna happen or how that could have been. But it is what it is. It is what it is. I got no complaints. I feel very blessed and lucky, and, as I said before, nothing was handed to me. I sometimes feel that a lot of people think, "Oh well, of course, you know his dad. He'd grown up with a famous dad and . . ." *Everybody* has to work like a dog, you know. Yeah, you gotta work hard. You have to work hard.

CM: But it's been a good run.

DG: Huh?

CM: But it's been a good run.

DG: I think it's been a great run. Honestly, I'm like—I wish I'd made more money along the way, because I'll have to work 'til I drop. But you know what? I would have anyway. So yeah, I've had a great time, I really have. And I'm still having a great time, even though there are those days, we all have 'em. But no. No complaints. That's what you're gonna call my little oral history here: "No Complaints." [*laughs*]

CM: I want to end on that note.

DG: Okay.

CM: That's a good one.

DG: Okay. Oh God. [*chuckles*]





## INTERVIEW WITH DAN GUERRERO

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### RELATED RESOURCES

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*The Latino Theatre Initiative/Center Theatre Group Papers, 1980–2005*. Essay by Chantal Rodriguez. The Chicano Archives, volume 4, 2010.

#### **Special Collections at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, California**

Dan Guerrero Research Collection, 1930–2003

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