CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Women, Politics, and Activism Since Suffrage Oral History Project

An Oral History with GLORIA MOLINA

Interviewed

By

Natalie M. Fousekis

On October 10, 2017

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NARRATOR: GLORIA MOLINA

INTERVIEWER: Natalie M. Fousekis

DATE: October 10, 2017

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PROJECT: Women, Politics, and Activism Since Suffrage

NF: Okay, this is an interview with Gloria Molina on October 10, 2017 for the Women, Politics, and Activism project. We are at the offices of LA Plaza in Los Angeles, California. The interview is being conducted by Natalie Fousekis. Good Morning!

GM: Good morning.

NF: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me.

GM: It's an honor.

NF: Can we start with when you were born?

GM: (laughs) *When* I was born? I was born May 31, 1948.

NF: Where were you born?

GM: I was born in Montebello, California.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about your childhood and family life growing up in Montebello and Los Angeles?

GM: I had a very traditional Mexican kind of upbringing. My parents are from Mexico, so I'm first generation. I'm the oldest of ten. I was brought up in a little barrio called Simons, in Montebello, where everyone spoke Spanish. And then, my parents were very comfortable there. My father was a construction worker; my mom stayed at home, raised all of the kids. I was always reminded that I was the oldest and so I had to set the example for the family. I started kindergarten, totally Spanish speaking. I had a wonderful kindergarten teacher, because I cried at least the first three months. I don't

know how she put up with me. I was reminded of it because I visited her when I was in the fifth grade and she loved telling those stories.

NF: And that was because you couldn't speak English?

GM: Because none of us spoke any English at all. We lived in a barrio and our family was totally Spanish speaking. And of course, you weren't allowed to speak Spanish in school. And so, finally, when my sisters joined us, we were stair-stepped one after another, we would run off to the playground in the corner so we could at least talk to each other. But eventually, by the third grade, I finally learned English, so I was able to teach all my brothers and sisters. And so from there we moved to Pico Rivera. My parents bought their first house. Attended El Rancho High School. I always enjoyed school but I was a pretty average student. But my upbringing was very, very traditional. My parents had an expectation that I would finish high school, work for a while, eventually get married, and continue the legacy of having many children in the community. (both laugh)

NF: Yeah, how many siblings do you have?

GM: I'm the oldest of ten, and they're all still around, my brothers and sisters.

NF: What is it like growing up in a family of ten kids?

GM: What is it like?

NF: Yeah.

GM: Well, you know, at the time, you wished they'd all disappear and you could be an only child (laughs), so you could have your own bedroom and all. But actually it was really quite wonderful. It was always a lot of activities, a lot going on. Somehow my mother made all of us feel very unique and special. My father paid a lot of attention to us in every way, and so we did a lot of things together. So it was crowded, and noisy all of the time, but at the same time it was a wonderful upbringing. And everyone we knew had large families. So nobody had just an only child. Everybody had six, seven, or eight, or whatever. It was sort of the tradition to have as many children as you were blessed to have. And so it was wonderful. I don't know if my mother loved it as much as she did but it was amazing how well she did taking care of all of us.

NF: What are some memories of your mother?

GM: My mother—at first I used to think she was so passive with my father. My father was a very, very strict, hard-working man. Yet, my mother I thought was so passive. Everything about her was so wonderful and pleasant. She was always teaching us something. It was important that we went to school, and it was important that we completed things, and helped her around the house and helped her cook. But at the end, as I grew up, I found out my mother would be *in charge* of the house. Even though she

wasn't up front about it, she was in charge of the money, she was in charge of making decisions, and she was in charge of all of these things, even though she did it very quietly and very subtly. My father was loud and he was the one in charge, but very frankly, my mother was very much in command of the household, and what we were doing, and what we were planning, and so on. So, a very loving woman who did wonderfully. She just loved having a family and her children and her grandchildren. And she just passed a couple of years ago.

NF: That's wonderful she had a nice, long life.

GM: Yes, a very long life.

NF: What's your family's religious background?

GM: We're Catholic. We were sent to Catechism as quickly as we could, and went to receive all of our sacraments. It was very important in our family. So I was raised a Catholic and had a Catholic upbringing. Didn't attend Catholic schools, but made sure that we went to Catechism every Saturday. And of course, it was a healthy experience and a good upbringing to be raised as a Catholic. We had a very Catholic household even though my parents weren't stern about everything that needed to be done, but we followed all of the rules that the church did and so on, and participated. And again, the church that we went to was all Spanish speaking. So again, it was a real community of families that attended the church, La Soledad in East Los Angeles.

NF: Wonderful. At what moment in your childhood did you realize that there were differences between ethnic groups?

GM: I think I realized it fairly early. Although, probably as a six or seven year old. Our neighbor who lived in front of us used to pass on all these *Life* and *Look* magazines, and *Time*, so I got to go through all of these wonderful pictures and look at all of them. And of course, we weren't there. We didn't exist in any of those. Obviously, there was another world out there that was different than the little barrio that I was brought up in. And of course, once I started going to school and realized—and there were other Latinos and Mexicanos that were going to school, and they spoke English. There were some like us, but for the most part we knew there was a different world. And of course, the day we got television then we were introduced to the whole entire other world. You know, "Father Knows Best" is something we used to watch. It was a family show, and yet there was no one like us. So we knew there was a different world, but at the same time it was those magazines that taught me that there was going to be an opportunity for much more, even though we didn't see our images in those things. So I learned very early. And of course, once you went to school and found that there was a whole different language, a whole different culture, a whole lot of activities that were different from my household, you start navigating between the two and trying to make due the best you can.

NF: What do you remember most about your high school years in Pico Rivera?

GM: Well, in high school, it was interesting. For some reason, I guess it was testing or whatever grade, some grade, I was put with all the smart kids in the class. I think I made the honor roll maybe once or twice. And it was mostly all white in those classes. There were a couple of Latinos, not many. And I really enjoyed high school. We had a group of friends and so on. My father was really conservative. He didn't allow me to date. I couldn't do a lot of things. I couldn't dress the way other girls dressed and so on, so I was sort of nerdy in that regard.

But at the same time, I enjoyed school. But I also realized that while everyone else was being prepared for college in the classes I was in, I was probably the only one that was not. And I don't know why. They never spoke to me. I had a counselor who never talked to me about college, or going on to school. Basically it was just to graduate. I was fortunate to work after school with the bookkeeper from the high school and she kept saying, "Where are you going to college? How are you going to get there? What are you going to do?" And I said, "Well, I'm not applying to college, I'm just going to go and work." She said, "No, no, no, you have to go to college." And she was someone who kept insisting that I apply for college. And then eventually I said, "I can't afford it. My parents cannot afford for me to go to school. I have to work and help the family."

So she said, "Here's a community college that is opening up," which was Rio Hondo College. It was just opening up the coming year. She got me an application, she showed different scholarships that I could apply for, and it was interesting. I ended up going to Rio Hondo Community College because of her kind of pushing me in that direction. Never had any assistance from the counselors, or the teachers, or anyone like that. But because of her, I was able to attend the college.

And it was interesting, my mother—financially we were in a difficult situation. My father had been involved in an industrial accident, and very frankly, he was laid up for awhile, so we were living on, basically, disability payments. And it was important that I went out to work and help the family. So my mother was against me attending the college. Not really against it. She just thought it was more of a priority to go out and work and help the family. I always kind of felt that that was a difficult thing, having to say to my mother, "No, I really want to attend school." And I did for awhile, but then after awhile I had to stop school and go to work full time.

But it *is* interesting, as much as she was opposed to me attending school at the time, she knew it was important. And later on when my sisters—the last two of my sisters are twins. And she worked very hard to make sure that they got into the university, that she was able to pay for their college tuition, *and* they had enough money so they didn't have to work while they were going to school, so they could finish up in their quick four years. And so, I know that my mother knew it was important, but at that time, as far as priorities were concerned, it was very important to go out and bring money into the household.

But high school I enjoyed. I had great friends, some of them that I still know today. Enjoyed that entire high school experience. It was a very, very different environment when I went to college, and a whole new world as well.

[00:10:40]

NF: Was politics discussed in your household when you were growing up at all? Did your parents talk about politics?

GM: Yes, they did.

NF: How?

GM: Well, my mother, even though she was not a citizen of this country, she listened to Spanish language radio. So she knew what was going on all of the time. She listened to the commentators, and to the news, so she was very interested. My father worked all of the time and didn't pay as much attention. But, he was a citizen, so it was my mother who would tell him how to vote, and who to vote for. So there were those discussions. And of course, when Kennedy was elected, it just created kind of a total change in our household. All of a sudden it was a very inspirational thing to be involved in politics, or at least to know of what was going on politically, and so on. My parents didn't really trust the political system. I know because I heard my father and mother talk about it all of the time. But at the same time, my father knew it was important to vote, and my mother certainly knew how to tell him how to vote. And so there was that discussion.

But most of my civic interests came from high school. I had a wonderful teacher, Mr. Walker. In tenth grade and eleventh grade, we had a civics class. I don't even know if they have them anymore, but he was a wonderful instructor. He used to play games with us all the time. He would come in and tell us things that were going on in the world, and most of the time they were not true. He always did this because he really believed that every single person in this country should read the newspaper every single day, and know what is going on, and be a part of civic life. So he always wanted to catch us on these stories from time to time. So most of us that were interested—and I loved that class—we would go to the library before we went to class to make sure we were reading what the headlines were and what was going on. Because we did not want him to stump us at all. And so, but he really brought—besides teaching us all about how government and the legislative work and how a bill is passed, all of those kinds of things, he really involved us in what was going on. And potentially saying, "Should that happen? Question what was going on. How could it change? Should you be a part of it? Is it important to you?" All of this. Important questions that we need to ask ourselves. So that really sparked the interest of what was going on.

I learned a little bit about our city elections in Pico Rivera, little things that were going on. Not great involvement in politics, but certainly issues of the day. I remember the issue of abortion coming up, and just the thought of it was pretty horrid. Not sure where I was on that side. Same thing as the death penalty. All of these issues—he would tell us—are very political issues. And at that time, it was, Well, we can't make an impact on that, other people make those decisions. But he peaked our curiosity, at least for myself. And I know that's something that I held onto right after that. And of course, went on to college with that kind of same interest, although not as political interest necessarily, but a civic interest.

NF: What values did you acquire from your family growing up?

GM: Well, in my family, my father really believed that we had to succeed, that it was our responsibility. To have command of the language, to go to school, and that we had a responsibility to be successful for ourselves and for our family. That was our duty, and so we had a responsibility to these significant duties. He owned up to his duties. He set everything by example, my mother reminded us continuously. Trust was very important. I would never think of lying to my parents, or saying an untruth to them. I'm not saying I didn't, but just the thought of it was pretty horrendous because that was something that they told us was very important.

And then taking care of each other as a family. The values of taking care of each other as a community, we had a lot of friends and others. So we had a lot of that. Now later on, I realized what my parents were teaching me, not only sense of responsibility but integrity. Because they didn't mention it, or say that word ever, but it was that kind of duty to themselves and their family. It was a tremendous amount of respect that really teaches you about having integrity and responsibility, so we had great values and important ones.

We also were a family that had great fun together and enjoyed life. Even though we were poor, I was never at home ever felt to be poor. And never told I was poor. Never told that I was not going to be able to do what I wanted to do. So there was a very uplifting, inspirational kind of upbringing and set of values.

NF: Who were your role models growing up?

GM: People have asked me that. I certainly didn't know, there weren't stories about—although I loved biographies when I was in junior high school and high school. So there were a lot of wonderful biographies that I used to enjoy reading, and particularly about women. But the role models for me that I had—besides my father, who was really important—I have a grandmother and now I think about it, I'm very much like her. She was a very stern woman. She wasn't really our grandmother. She was my father's aunt, but my dad was abandoned and returned to Mexico. He was born here and returned to Mexico and she raised him. We don't know what happened to his parents. And so, she was basically his mother. But she got up every day. She had a ranch that she ran. I don't know how many acres she had. She had workmen on the ranch, and she was responsible for raising the entire family. She was one of the oldest. Her parents had been killed by Apaches, the last Apache killing in Chihuahua. And so, she was responsible for raising all of her eight brothers and sisters. So she took charge of the ranch.

And so I used to watch her when I was young. She would get up at four in the morning. She had this long, gray hair that she put into a braid, roll it up, get dressed, go out and cut wood, get water from the well, start making the beans, and start making the tortillas. Get all of the workmen's lunches ready because they were going to go out into the fields. Every single day she had a set of things that she did. One day she was canning, the next day she was doing laundry, the next day she was fixing furniture or doing other kinds of—and she ran this entire ranch. I remember her being very organized and very, very commanding of the ranch itself. Everybody respected her. She was just very stern. She wanted everyone to follow rules. That's the way she operated in her life.

It's interesting that I really admire that about her because my mother was not like her at all. No one told her how to do anything. She was in charge. She was very

commanding, and I really respected that, but she did it by setting the example. It's not like she called around and asked people to do things. She started and filled her day doing things and taking care of things, and taking on her responsibilities and duties. I really admired her. So for the longest time my *Abuelita* Selza was my role model. Later on in life, I developed a whole different set of role models that were also equally as inspirational.

NF: And you went to visit her at the ranch a few times?

GM: Yeah, our traditions for us was that once we were out of school, we were sent to Mexico. My mom, she loved it. She was from Mexico. My dad, of course, was born there, but he had to work. So we would spend sometimes a month, sometimes three months in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. And it was wonderful because it was a wonderful experience for there.

NF: That's something that not everybody gets to do.

GM: No, no, and it was a great upbringing to be part of a ranch and have a very, very rural life. And of course, to be involved in that community, which was very different from our community here.

NF: When you were there did you all pitch in and help out?

GM: Oh, yeah. We had jobs to do every single day. She didn't make us do ranch work, or anything like that, but sometimes we were responsible for feeding the chickens, collecting the eggs. Sometimes you were involved in going to the well and getting the water, heating it up for laundry. She'd create a task for everyone. But she was a very smart woman. She just knew what she was doing all of the time. She could handle whatever issue or problem came at her. And everyone went to her for advice.

[00:20:15]

NF: That's wonderful. So when did you first get involved in politics?

GM: When did I first get involved? I got involved at East L.A. College, you could say, in politics. But it was *anti*-politics. (laughs) We were against the war in Vietnam. And I was involved—even though I went to school at night, there was an organization coming together called the Mexican American Student Association, known as MASA. And they would meet and get together. They had different speakers come in, so I would listen to Cesar Chavez, Raul Ruiz[1], Sal Castro[2] would come in. They would all speak to us. And I was really motivated by many of these people who were just wonderful and really firm about their feelings about what was going on, and talking about racism and discrimination and how things should change, and what we needed to do. So I got very

[1] Raul Ruiz, OH# 3906, Center for Oral and Public History.
[2] Sal Castro, OH# 3885, Center for Oral and Public History.

involved in the issues around the campus. And then later on, of course, participated in the Chicano Moratorium, the school walkouts.

I was a follower, never a leader. And so in those organizations, we were involved in making the menudo for our sales, making the coffee, mimeographing all of the flyers, doing that kind of work. And so, I got involved initially through that process. But it wasn't a very comforting one, because as much as we were fighting racism at the time and dealing with the issues and the political issues of the time, we still felt a lot of discrimination as women. And we would talk about it from time to time but none of us had much courage to speak up at the time. Even when we did, we would get shot down occasionally. I remember at a meeting once, I said a couple of things, that we should have an opportunity to do this. And someone quoted to me, he said, "Cesar Chavez said that we tackle one issue at a time. We are fighting racism, so we'll get to those eventually but not yet." So you got put down pretty regularly on that. And of course, that wasn't very comforting for me at all, or for many of the other women who were part of what we were doing. But it was important to all of us.

So that's how I got involved, through East L.A. College, through Chicano students, and through the Moratorium, the school walkouts, and eventually kind of confronting the political issues. And then, of course, eventually that led to getting involved more politically and making sure who was elected and getting involved in those kinds of issues. And then it became a whole new world for me. (both laugh)

NF: Can you talk about deciding to walkout when you were at East Los Angeles College, what that felt like, and what you thought about?

GM: Well, it's interesting. I was already at East L.A. College. Most of the school walkouts were in high school, and we knew they were going on. But I remember running up, I'd just gotten off the bus and I had a history test that day. Running up the stairs at East L.A. College to get to my class, and one of the other guys stopped me. I remember Al Juarez. He said, "We're not going to school today." I said, "I have a test." And he goes, "We're not going to school today." Of course, I wasn't assertive enough to say, "Look, I got a test. I'm movin' on." Instead I said, "Let me just go tell the instructor and I'll come back."

So I went and I told the professor that we were walking out. And he says, "Tough luck. If you're not here for the test, you'll get an F." And so, I had to make a decision and I decided to join the walkouts that evening, and we walked out and marched. And it was a bit painful to get the F, but I knew it was *so* important, what was going on and what we were doing.

While I was working fulltime downtown, I knew of the battles that were going on in the schools, and I really felt strongly about what was going on. I had heard the speakers and saw it. I didn't know if it could change anything really, but I really wanted to be supportive of what was going on because I knew the schools were really discriminating. I mean, I had been a part of the schools. I knew that I had not been prepared for college because I was a Latina, I was a Mexicana. You know, everybody thought we were not going to go on to college and so on. And certainly I had been involved in tutoring some of the young women when I was already in the college, and

finding very clearly that the teachers did not pay attention to their future. They thought, Well, they're going to get married; it doesn't matter if they don't graduate.

And so I was very involved, very supportive of those kinds of issues, but it was painful to see the violence. That was the most difficult part. I thought I would never have the courage to stand up, as many of them did, to the violence that was going on. And it was very disconcerting because that's not what it was supposed to be about. It was about a peaceful protest. It was about making demands. We weren't supposed to be treated that way. But later on, I found out that that was going to be our norm for awhile if we were going to challenge the system like we were challenging it.

NF: And then you participated in the Moratorium—

GM: The Moratorium as well.

NF: What do you remember about that?

GM: Well, it was interesting because a lot of it has come back to me. I've gone out and seen a lot of the photographs of the Moratorium and all that's gone on. And of course, we're going to be celebrating the anniversary of the Moratorium and the school walkouts in the coming year. The Moratorium was really a protest against the Vietnam War. There were protests going on at all the universities and the colleges, and this was standard. So the Chicano Moratorium was about what was going on in Vietnam. We knew the statistics. Latinos were on the front lines. And there were more deaths of Latinos in Vietnam than any others. Our kids were getting whisked away. The recruiters were right there in high schools, and they were just recruiting these kids, and they were going off to the front lines. So we were protesting the war and the discrimination of what was going on at the time.

And so, it started out to be a peaceful protest. I had a personal problem with the protest itself. I remember going early to East L.A. College. I got there around six thirty, seven o'clock, it was supposed to start at eight. It didn't start 'till ten. But once we did get started, what I found annoying—I had had an experience about a month and a half before, crossing the border with my parents, and watching or listening to the Mexican police, or whatever, the border patrol on the Mexican side, really being horrible with my parents. I mean, "What are you bringing?" "You're just going to sell these things," and "You're not allowed to do this." And they held us up at the border for almost four hours, really humiliated my parents. I was really opposed. Here we are just trying to go on vacation visiting, and we're so mistreated by these representatives of the Mexican government.

So when they started marching in the Moratorium, they started carrying the Mexican flag. And that bothered me because here we were protesting an American war. Here we are, Americans. And we're going to march behind a Mexican flag that doesn't recognize us? I mean, that calls us *pochos* when we go into their country and doesn't respect us either? So I decided I'm not marching behind a Mexican flag. So I went on to the park, to the Salazar Park. It was called Laguna Park at the time, actually, not Salazar Park. It was called Laguna. And went over to the park, and waited for the marchers.

There was a lot going on. They had wonderful speakers at the time. There were a lot of people that didn't march, that just went to the park, and we were *all* there.

And of course, little by little, we started hearing about the breaking of windows, and that the police were all over the place. And so, we were able to get away before all of that fighting broke out at the park itself. And it was frightening. I had taken my sister and a couple of other friends that were younger, in their early teens. And I thought we needed to get out of there. So driving away we saw the fires, we saw the breaking of windows, we heard all the noise. But I did not participate in all the violence. And it was very discouraging and disappointing for days after because again, here we were trying to do what you're supposed to do, protest something. There was no reason for them—and of course, it was horrible after the killing of Ruben Salazar. It was even more painful than ever. So I participated, but I did not march in the march for that reason. But it was important to be there and I'm glad I was there.

NF: At some point, I read that you saw the movie *Salt of the Earth*, and that gave you one place where you saw some hope. Do you remember when you saw it and what you thought when you saw it?

GM: I saw it as part of this MASA program. It was one of the films that they showed and spoke about afterwards. And I *loved* that film. Even though it was painful to watch, because of the strikers in Arizona, and what was going on. The fact that the women won the battle for them at that time, when they came together, and they stood up against their husbands and said that they would pick up—when they started jailing the men, the miners for protesting, the women picked up the banners and they started marching and protesting. That was an unbelievable inspiration for me. I have never forgotten that movie. I tell every young woman that they have to see that movie because it really motivated me, and I think it would motivate them as well.

And then, I started realizing that not everyone was like my mother, you know. That there were those women who were like my grandmother. Whatever the challenge was they were ready to take it on, and so on. My mother was just a different person. She had many children to raise, but I wanted to be more like one of these women. Like my grandmother, that no matter what the issue was, you would have a commanding space and you would take on the responsibilities and the duty to move forward. And that's what that movie motivated me to do.

NF: I show it in every class. Adam [cameraman] was in my class and he had to watch it. (both laugh)

GM: I don't know if it motivated him as much, but it motivated me. (laughs)

NF: I think it's kind of amazing considering the time in which the movie was made.

GM: Absolutely.

NF: When did you start talking with other Chicanas about the fact that maybe you needed to come up with something on your own?

[00:31:13]

GM: Well, it was after listening to the men tell us that it was not our place yet to raise our issues. I started looking for a group of women to start dialoguing with. I looked everywhere. I had been volunteering throughout the community on different things. I worked on East L.A. Rape Hotline. I worked and volunteered at Casa Maravilla, with young women, but it was hard to find a similar group. I went over to Cal State L.A. I was sort of attending classes at night there. And I wanted to talk to others, and so I found this small group of women that were meeting and talking. But they were talking about very socialist kinds of things. They were having us read all these books, and it was just very, very high minded, and really not talking about ourselves. And so I didn't find any interest in that.

Later on, I came across a group—the Chicana Service Action Center, was celebrating its open house. Now, the fact that there was a Chicana Service Action Center, that in itself was inspirational. So I thought I had to go. So, I attended and I found all these wonderful women. Besides the women who had organized the service center—it was a center that was dedicated to Chicanas, Latinas, to start training them in employment training so they could go off and get jobs and so on, and to better their skills. But, once I got there, I bumped into all these wonderful, independent, strong women. And we started talking to each other. Little by little, we said we need to start getting together and doing more of these kinds of things. Of course I wanted to find out how I could support the Chicana Service Action Center.

I met people like Francisca Flores, Amalia Camacho, Evelyn Velarde Benson. These were all, I say, older women. You know, we were in our twenties. They must have been, maybe, forty. (both laugh) And they were very commanding in their own way. And then, a group of women my age, they were in the university, Yolanda Nava and a whole bunch of us got together and started talking about, you know, we need to create our own network. Some of us had been involved in feminist networks and we had gone to consciousness raising events and those kinds of things. We were interested.

NF: Had you done that?

GM: Yes, I had done that, but also did not find it satisfying either.

NF: This was with mostly white feminists?

GM: Mostly white women. And, very frankly, they talked about important issues that I really cared about and I really enjoyed the dialogue, but there *was* an edge to it as well. I remember listening to the term "macho men," these "macho men." And that went counter to me because my father was a very proud macho. And a macho in Spanish means that you are a strong, independent, responsible man, right? And that was my father. Whereas they were taking the term and denigrating it to mean kind of a racist and sexist man. And that was very troubling to me. So it had a little bit of an edge, and yet I couldn't find a relationship with it as much. Even though I've built great relationships with many of the women themselves, which later on was very helpful as we started building bridges.

But I went back, we started getting together, and of course, we formed our organization, which was called Comisión Femenil Mexicana de Los Angeles. There was a national group, supposedly, that some of the older women—as I say older but not really older—had created but they wanted us to develop our own chapter. So we put it together and many of us came together. We called for our first meeting and over two hundred women came to that first meeting. There was a hunger out there from other women about getting together. And they were at colleges and universities all over. They had been attending, and been part of the Moratorium, the walkouts. They had been a part of this all along. All of a sudden, they realized it was important to get together and start talking about our issues.

Now, we didn't want to separate. We felt it was important to be supportive of the Chicano Movement in every way, but there *were* issues that were distinctive and important that needed to be addressed. I mean, women needed to work. And it wasn't just a secondary job. It was going to be a career path as well. They were going to be working all their lives, so why not get a better job? If they were going to work, they needed childcare, which was a separate issue. There were different issues that were going on. Our healthcare issues, the issues of choice and abortion were very important to us. So we needed to have those kinds of dialogues with one another. They weren't the kind of dialogues that we were having with the guys in the other meetings, and so they became very important.

And Comisión Femenil became an organization and a network of women that did a lot of wonderful things. We started getting involved in all of the issues, and as you do that, you start bumping into politics. And that led to more of a political involvement. But it started out with being a Chicana, a feminist, and wanting to change things in the community, and creating the kind of activism that would bring about those kinds of changes.

NF: Do you remember some of the things that you tried to do in the beginning?

GM: Absolutely. We had heard that there was going—there was a Commission on the Status of Women. They were going to have a hearing in Los Angeles, and we decided to participate and provide testimony at that first hearing. So, I was the president of the organization, so I was in charge of providing the testimony. The other women got together and they wrote it up for me, and it was really wonderful.

And then, one of the things that I was supposed to do at the meeting was to challenge them at the end. That here they serve as the Commission on the Status of Women, and I am looking at them as commissioners, and yet there's not one Latina amongst them. And I was to challenge them and say to them, "It is your duty and responsibility to get a Latina appointed to this commission." And so I did that. I was shaking in my boots but I did it. (both laugh) But at the same time, it was what we had decided I was going to do. And so, that was one of the first things that we did.

And of course, there was a friend or someone in the audience who came up to us afterwards and said, "You need to do that. You need to put a Latina on this." Well, how could we do that? I mean, we're asking them to do it. "No, *you* need to do it." And so he said, "You need to set up a meeting with some of the legislators. Go on up to Sacramento. Meet with the governor and ask for an appointment." And we thought, We

can't do that. But, we did it all. And a Latina was appointed, a Latina *Republican* because at that time it was Governor Reagan. And a Latina was appointed.

NF: So you actually met with Ronald Reagan?

GM: We met with him. We met with Richard Alatorre,[3] who was the assemblyman at the time, and we had asked if he'd set up a meeting. We got a short meeting with him, and he was very pleasant, very, very nice. We gave him our resumes, and of course, he didn't appoint either of us, but he did appoint a Latina. And so we were very grateful. And Carolyn Orona was the first commissioner on the Commission on the Status of Women that was a Latina. She joined Comisión after that and became a regular member.

NF: That's fantastic.

GM: Yeah.

NF: How did you start to make this transition from being an activist in the Chicano Movement and the Chicano Rights Movement to engaging in more political—

GM: It stemmed from that first appointment. We started doing other things. We started writing legislators about changing laws. We got involved in—Antonia Hernández[4] had come to us. I did not know she had just passed the bar and was a new lawyer. She was looking for a group to fill in the gap of being a class action plaintiff in a sterilization lawsuit that she was filing against Los Angeles County. She told us about this and we found it hard to believe that they were sterilizing Latinas at L.A. County. But she had the facts and the information, so we joined up and we provided testimony at the time, and participated in that. And we found it hard to believe that this could be going on, and that there were people who were allowing it to happen. There was a law prohibiting this, but unless it was enforced it meant nothing. So that also sparked our interest, and so we participated in that lawsuit.

But as we also had Carolyn Orona appointed to the commission, we felt we owed a debt of responsibility, a debt to Richard Alatorre, who was an assemblyman at the time. And so we thought, Well, what could we do for a politician? And so, of course, we could raise some money. So we did a little of that for him. Didn't raise much money but we did a little of that for him, to lend support. And then, little by little, they started asking to participate in their campaigns.

One of the things I was very good at was organizing women. And so, from that, I was able—every time they needed somebody for one of their campaigns, I could organize what I called *lickers and stickers* for a campaign. I organized a lot of women. We could come and make phone calls. We could do mail. We could do everything. I was starting to get involved as well with a group of basically not all Latinas, a group of political women, like Maxine Waters, Yvonne Burke,[5] a lot of people were involved. A lot of the Westside women were involved. They were very interested in having the same battle that

[3] Richard Alatorre, OH# 3999, Center for Oral and Public History.
[4] Antonia Hernández, OH# 5803, Center for Oral and Public History.
[5] Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, OH #5977, Center for Oral and Public History.

we were having with the men, about getting women elected to the legislature and to these positions. And so, I was meeting with them as well, so there was an interest. We were doing our thing and they were doing it, but we were participating and coalescing with one another from time to time. So I would get my lickers and stickers and we would go off—if they had a campaign going on—and help them. And so, I got involved with that and we supported the men in our community, in getting them elected to various offices and participating.

Once we helped Art Torres. I was working as a teacher at the time, so was able to get out early every day, so I walked door-to-door with him in his campaign. And then after that, he asked me to become his administrative assistant, which was a first as a Chicana. Mostly those positions went to men. So my first job in politics was working as his assistant when he joined the legislature. And so, that's how I started getting involved. Before it had always been as a volunteer, and now I was working in an actual political office.

[00:42:10]

NF: What did you learn working in Art Torres' office?

GM: Well, I learned an awful lot. First of all, dealing with constituents and so on. That was something that was very important. All of the sudden we had a bit of power. Not a lot of power, but he was a legislator. So, constituents would come to us telling us they were having these issues, having these problems. *Now* I could move forward. I have Art's name as an assemblyman, write a letter on their behalf to Consumer Affairs, or the city, or whatever was going on, and get some action and operate. So I knew that using that power that he had to help our constituents was a significantly important thing. And we needed to use it well. It was good organizing and doing all kinds of things I learned there.

I found that as I started working in this political environment, of course, was the absence of Latinas. I mean, I was the only one. And so, we started talking about—like the Westside women were talking about—getting a woman elected that was a Latina. We had worked on Yvonne Burke's campaign for attorney general. She didn't win at the time. We had seen her move on to congress. We worked on Maxine Waters' campaign when she ran for the legislature. So we knew it was happening. We worked on various races on the Westside. The women weren't getting elected there either. The men were just running over them on a regular basis. (laughs) So wherever they called us, we were working on those kinds of campaigns. But we started talking about how do we get a Latina elected? There was no Latina ever elected to the U.S. Congress, so that was our first goal.

I had been working on reapportionment issues when I was working with Art, but in between that time, I had wanted to work on women's campaigns. So Art was very gracious. He allowed me to work. I would take time off, and go and work on various campaigns. I worked for a campaign up in Sacramento, for a Chicana, Eliza Castillo, I think was her name, who ran for the legislature in Sacramento. Didn't win. I worked for Theresa in Fresno. She ran for the County Board of Supervisors. She didn't win. I went to San Diego and worked with a woman—I can't remember her name—that ran for the

legislature. She didn't win. But I was getting a lot of experience about how to run campaigns, how to raise money. And of course, working with the assemblyman at the time also helped me. I learned an awful lot about how to run a campaign, how to raise money, what not to do, what to do. At least I thought it was experience.

And so, we started organizing right after reapportionment because we knew there were two congressional seats coming into our community. And we thought, what a great opportunity, a Latino and a Latina could get elected to the U.S. Congress. And so, of course, we went to the men at that time. During that time, before, while I was working with Art, I had an opportunity to work in the campaign for Jimmy Carter. And so, I was in charge of organizing Latinos up and down the state for Jimmy Carter, and had a great experience working on that campaign, in that election.

Shortly thereafter, even though I wasn't looking for a job, I ended up being called and asked to see if I was interested in a job in the White House. And of course, "What?!" This was a great opportunity, so I ended up working in the Office of Presidential Personnel for Jimmy Carter, for a couple of years. So I went to Washington, D.C., never had been there, had a great experience, and then *also* realized when I was there that there was no one else. It was like looking at *Life* and *Look* magazine again. All of the sudden it was all white and we were non-existent. I had come from East L.A. where we were all Latinos, or many Latinos, and certainly there was discrimination going on, but we were in positions of power and we were doing different things. You go to Washington D.C. and there was—

NF: In the 1970s.

GM: Right. Congressman Roybal was the only one from here, and there were a couple from Texas, and that was it. So, while Jimmy Carter *did* appoint various Latinos—and that was my job as well—to various positions, we didn't have a cabinet secretary. We had commissioners and other kinds of things. So that was my job, recruiting from all across the country. And I learned an awful lot. But I also knew, at that point, that I needed to come home because we *needed* to get someone elected to the U.S. Congress.

And so, when this reapportionment opportunity came up, which was about 1981, '82, I was, at that time, working for Willie Brown. I was his assistant here in Los Angeles. They were working on reapportionment issues and I was helping with all of that. But I knew these two opportunities were coming. So we went to the men, as a group of women, and said, Here's a great opportunity, we'd like to see you support [it]. We'll find a candidate. Support a Latina for the U.S. Congress.

And of course, we weren't expecting what we were expecting. I don't know why we thought in our minds—because we had helped them all these years, that now, of course, they could help us get a Latina elected. They already had their candidates. And they told us very clearly that they had already decided, and certainly it wasn't time for a woman, and they would let us know when. After being dismissed like that, we just went back and kind of licked our wounds, and were so discouraged and disappointed. But we *knew* at that time we were strong enough and independent enough to say, We're not going to tolerate this. We're going to change this and we're going to challenge them.

So we thought about challenging them, and finding a candidate that would run for one of these seats. Very frankly, it was an uphill battle. They had everything. They had

the money. They had everything. It was too late to get started. Plus, we couldn't find a candidate at the time. We went to various women and they said, This is crazy, they're never going to support us. And so, at the end of the day, we had to give that up, but we didn't give up the idea that eventually we wanted to get a Latina elected.

NF: Is this your same group of women that you'd been organizing with since the Chicano Movement?

GM: Absolutely. It was the same group of Comisión Femenil women, women leaders. I mean, women who were still getting together. We were doing different things all of the time. And we had moved up in different roles now, and we were doing other kinds of things that. The Chicana Service Action Center developed the first bi-lingual, bi-cultural child development center. We needed to do that. We were creating other programming for women. So we were still involved in doing things, but we didn't have a hook into the political, and we really felt it was important to have women elected from our community. I mean, we realized very early that you had to be at the table. No matter where the power was, you had to be there. Our prospective was unique, and as important as anyone else's. And in order to have a say you had to have that bit of power. Otherwise you were in the back room or in the second set of chairs. And so we knew we needed to do that, and finally an opportunity presented itself.

NF: How did you all decide it was going to be *you* who ran for the assembly?

[00:49:38]

GM: That was the difficult part. The assemblyman that I had been working with, and now had decided he's going to challenge the state senator, so he's going to move off of his assembly seat. So he came to me. He knew of our interest, and he said, "Gloria, I'd be happy to support you if you run for my seat." And I said, "*Not* me. I'm the campaign manager, I'm the fundraiser. I've got a big mouth. I'm going to get in trouble if I run for this seat. I'm just not politically correct." So I said, "I'm going to go off and find us a candidate." So I went off and I talked—I thought a lawyer would be the best person so I went off and talked to about four or five women, including Antonia, and other women that I had talked to about running for this seat. And they're going, No, that's not what we want to do. And I couldn't find a candidate.

So we were talking amongst ourselves, and I went back to Art and said, "Art, I can't find a candidate." And he goes, "I'm only going to support *you* because the guys already have a candidate. I'm telling you that unless you run, I'm not going to support any other woman." And, while that was wonderful for me it was, "No, I'm not the person to be in front. I'm the person that's going to be behind the scenes." Love policy, love debating issues, love being forceful, all of those kinds of things, which really wasn't kind of the best role for the politician. But at the end of the day, we didn't have a choice, because the guys had already decided who their candidate was. They had all the money. They had all the endorsements. They had everything. All I had, at that time, if I decided to run, was my team of lickers and stickers—which was pretty powerful at that time—a lot of people I knew, who hopefully would help me raise money, and I had the

endorsement of the assemblyman at the time, which was a pretty significant endorsement. And so I decided to run.

We decided to put together a campaign. I no longer was the campaign manager or the fundraiser. I would now have to be the candidate and step into that role. And I was really very fortunate that all of the relationships that I had built in the past, of helping and working with women, paid off. And with other groups. I was able to raise competitive money, not as much as they did. I had endorsements from people that they did not have. I went to the unions. Even though they had all the endorsements in the unions, I think that I had an opportunity to be interviewed. I think they saw that I was no slouch, that I could do this. But they still endorsed against me at the end of the day. But I had Maxine Waters, I had Yvonne Burke. I had this wonderful person, Joy Picus,[6] who I did not even know, call me up and say, "I'm coming over to make phone calls, where do I show up?"

NF: That's awesome!

GM: It was wonderful people like that, that came together, and the relationships, and Westside women, who invited us to their home and raised money. Women from all over that got involved in these campaigns. I'd been involved in their campaigns, and now were helpful. So we were competitive. I think the other part of what happened is that they took it for granted that we didn't have a chance. They didn't work as hard. We walked every day. We walked door-to-door. We made phone calls. We did handwritten mailers. We did all the kinds of things that a poor campaign does. And we didn't win by a lot, but we eked it out.

I was very fortunate to be elected, way back in 1982, as the first Latina Chicana to the California State Legislature. It was intimidating. I think if we lost—were prepared to lose. We were going to win it, but we were prepared to lose. In other words, we needed to show that we did *all* that we could possibly do to be competitive, because if there was going to be another opportunity we were going to stand front and center, and let them know that we weren't going to wait around anymore for someone to tell us when. But, we were very fortunate that *all* that we did, *all* the campaigning, *all* the work, *all* of the people coming together led to our victory that night.

NF: How did this group of men who had been the leaders in Latino politics respond both to your candidacy and then when you won?

GM: They didn't take it well. (both laugh) It was interesting because, again, we were *so* victorious. We were so proud of ourselves, but at the same time we *knew* that we kind of violated one of the unspoken rules in the hierarchy of Chicano power, right? So we didn't want to just be in their face, but we wanted to let them know that we were equal. Not above them, not about attacking tem or criticizing them, but from now on, we had to be taken into account of whatever decision was going to be made in the future. So, we had to be careful as we proceeded.

I know that for me in the legislature, I joined up—even though I had worked for Willie Brown, Willie had stayed out of the election. But at the same time, he was mostly supporting Richard Alatorre's candidate and all the other members of the legislature. So

[6] Joy Picus, OH# 5578, Center for Oral and Public History.

I really wasn't all that welcomed in the legislature. Although, I came in with a freshman class that was unbelievable. I mean, Tom Hayden, Gray Davis. Gary Condit was my seatmate. A wonderful, large group—Burt Margolin. And they're all members and they were wonderful colleagues at the time. And so, there were a lot of new members that I joined up with. But I had to pay my responsibility, and I did.

I went to Richard Alatorre and said that I was now a member of the legislature, but I knew and honored his seniority. My duty and responsibility of knowing his leadership—and I was prepared to be his colleague and looked forward to any advice or anything he could offer me. I don't think he welcomed it all that much, because it was a painful loss for him, but I did really respect him as a legislator. I mean, he had done some amazing things that I was not going to dismiss. So, I knew what my role was, and that is to learn from my colleague, to appreciate his role in leadership, and so on.

But it was tough. I was never truly—the men in the community, still, were not willing to embrace us completely. They were nervous about us, and I had trouble every election thereafter, of getting support from the men then. And it was constant. I tried to play my role. Now, I was a legislator, so I wasn't just a Chicana activist anymore. I had to get to work at what I was doing, and yet, honor my role and responsibility, hopefully to bring other women into our political system.

NF: What do you remember about those first few days, weeks in the legislature?

GM: It was most intimidating. It was frightening and intimidating. I didn't show it. But just like that first time that I testified before the commission, I was just shaking in my boots every single step that I took. The first day when we were sworn in, I was very fortunate to take my parents. Here they were, from Mexico, Spanish speaking, they sat right next to me in the legislature as we were all sworn in. My mother, of course, I was sort of translating as we were going along. She knew what was going on. I mean, they thought it was beautiful and wonderful, but they didn't understand anything that was going on. (laughs) And so, the gentleman behind us, when we were in dialogue, said to my mother, "*Aye, señora, pura baja, pura baja.*" And I looked at this tall, blond man, and I'm sitting there going, "He speaks Spanish?" It turned out to be Assemblyman Sam Farr, who went on to Congress. He had been a part of a program that went to Latin America, so he spoke fluent Spanish. And *pura baja* means, like, it's just a bunch of hay. Don't listen to it, it's just a bunch of hay. And so my mother laughed at all of it, and then they started dialoguing in Spanish. It made me feel unbelievably welcomed, and of course, made my family feel very welcomed.

So that first day was like that. But after that it was a whirlwind. I mean, you'd think that I would know what I was doing, but I didn't. And so, I wanted to get involved in all these issues, had wonderful colleagues, I did all of it. But I didn't know the first day about anything. I knew my focus was going to be dealing with high school dropouts, that's really what I wanted to address, in the legislature, sort of fix that issue. I knew it was a huge issue in my Eastside community. So I got involved in authoring bills, and creating this, and doing that. And maybe not as attentive to the political hierarchy, not as effective as a politician. I thought the issues were all we all cared about, but in the end of the day, I was known as what's known in the legislature as a backbencher. In other words, didn't have a whole lot of power, but I participated. I was a colleague and I was

not going to be allowed to be treated as a second class citizen there at all. I moved forward and did the things that I needed to do and enjoyed my time in the legislature.

NF: What was the community of women like that were in the legislature at the time?

GM: Well, it was interesting. There was a women's caucus. I had had great support from Maxine Waters. I touted it all the time. I told everyone about Maxine Waters did this and Maxine Waters did that. Somehow that didn't sit well with some of the other women. And so, I remember when I went to my first caucus meeting, it was sort of mentioned that I should appreciate *all* of the women in the legislature, which I did. But at the same time, there was just this little bit of—they did not support me. Again, for no other reason than Richard Alatorre was their colleague, and so on. But I didn't have any animosity towards them. They were wonderful women, Theresa Hughes, Gwen Moore. I mean, all of the members at the time, they were wonderful Democratic colleagues.

Anyway, so I built a great relationship in the women's caucus, and we did wonderful things together. I really enjoyed all of it, but at the same time many of them were very, very effective in their relationships and working with their colleagues and so on. I was still kind of adamant about certain issues and wanted to be very independent. I didn't want to be locked up with anyone. I mean, I was a caucus member, but I still wanted to have my own independence and wasn't the good follower that I should have been in the legislature. Sometimes I really thought sometimes the women should challenge a little bit more than they did. But I was, again, a freshman member, so I had to be careful of where I was stepping and what I was doing. (laughs)
[01:01:36]

NF: In your time in the legislature, what do you see as your greatest accomplishment?

GM: (laughs) Well, I can't say that I legislated all of these bills, because I was the kind of person that got shut down in committee pretty regularly. (laughs) My bills didn't even pass sometimes in the committees. But by the second and third year, I authored a set of bills that we had been working on for a long time on high school dropouts. There was about twelve bills. And some of them included funding and some of them did not. But it really created a set of mandates that forced high schools to really take into account high school dropouts. Before, if you dropped out of school, you dropped out. It wasn't the high school's responsibility. Now, funding was going to be based on this, and there was a connection. You had a duty to bring those students back in and to find a way to graduate them. And so it was a series of bills.

I got called into the speaker's office one day and Willie said, "Great bills." And I said, "Thank you, I worked on them so long and I thought they were really good." And he said, "I'm going to ask you to give me at least five of these bills, and they're going to other members." And I'm going, "What do you mean?" And he said, "I'd like them to author these bills. There are other members who haven't come up and they need good legislative bills." And so, he asked me to give up my bills to other members. I was the co-author on those bills. And that was fine. I just wanted them to pass. I didn't care if they didn't have my name on them. And so, at the end of the day, I helped many of my colleagues pass those bills.

But they were very good bills, and they received bipartisan support in the legislature. And the way I got bipartisan support is that I went to all of the high schools and got statistics, particularly for the Republican members, because everybody always looked at high school dropouts to be a problem in Latino and black communities. And I wanted to show them that it was a statewide problem. So I got the high school dropout rates for the high schools in their districts and shared them with them. I was able to get unbelievable support for those bills, in the legislature and in the senate. So they all were passing and they did very well. So here I had these wonderful bills that were passing and I was the proud author of them, and they were going to *dramatically* change the whole issue of high school dropouts. A lot of the high school districts were not that supportive because they had more responsibility for them. Some of the teachers unions weren't all that happy because it brought more ownership to the teachers. But they did pass.

At the same time, within that framework of time, the governor and the legislature needed to build a new prison. And they had decided, regrettably, that they had to find where they were going to place it. Having been the backbencher that I was, not having much power, being the lowest registered district, the most Latino district, basically they decided to put it in my backyard. And what was interesting about that is I was called in, and I was told by the speaker that there was going to be a prison. And I said, "No, I don't think so. I mean, I don't think that's acceptable." And he said, "Gloria, it's already been decided."

And I went back—I was very discouraged. I mean, how could this happen? So I went back, came back into my community, and met with a lot of people. I knew I couldn't oppose the speaker. I mean, how was I going to do this? But I knew it was something that we could not have in our community. So, I decided to oppose it. And I created a coalition, and little by little, we had a community coalition here, the Mothers of East L.A. We joined up and we developed a coalition against the prison. I developed a small coalition with my colleagues in the legislature, people like Tom Hayden, people like Burt Margolin and others that also agreed that it was unfair to just place it in my district. And so, I got a lot of support from them. So I was able to hold off the building of that prison. Didn't make Willie happy, but I was able to stop it for the most part.

So, one day I got called into the governor's office. And my bills had passed in the legislature, so I was so excited. I wore my best suit. Here I am thinking I'm going into the governor's office to get all my bills signed, and I'd never been to such a ceremony so I was so excited. So I walk in, and the governor is there, and his assistant is there. They put a yellow pad in front of me, I remember, on the coffee table. I sat down, all the niceties, and so on. And then the governor asked me, which of my bills would I like signed? And I said, "Well, of course, all of them. They all passed. They had bipartisan support in the assembly and in the senate." I mean, I could talk about any one of the bills as to why they were so valuable. And he says, "I'm happy to sign all of the bills, but I also need you to accept a prison in East L.A." And I couldn't do it. I thought about it and I knew how important these bills were for poor high school dropouts and the future of education in California, but I had this very significant issue in the community that I also knew we couldn't accept a prison.

So that day the governor vetoed all of my bills. (laughs) So, when you say what was the most important thing that you did? I can't say I had tremendous legislative success, because I didn't. But I was able to stop them from building a prison in East L.A.

And I did. I mean, I had legislation that was passed, smaller bills, things that I did. But very frankly, those were the most significant bills that I had. And they were all vetoed. Hard lesson learned.

NF: Yeah, right.

GM: But it was important to the original point of how I was raised, about my responsibility, my duty, and my integrity. And it was more important than anything else, to have that, than anything else at that time.

NF: I know the prison story pretty well because we've interviewed some of the Mothers of East Los Angeles. We have them in our collection.[7] But how did you work with those women in the community? Why were they so angry?

GM: Well, first of all, I was surprised. I mean, I knew that we were going to have a group of activists that were going to join up on this coalition against the prison. I never thought I was going to have a group of women, who were like my mother, that all of a sudden said, No, we're not going to have a prison near our schools, and near our jobs, and near our homes. And they were willing to march and work, and stick and lick, and do all that they needed to do. I was so impressed by them. They had come together. They had been organized around the churches of East L.A., and they were prepared, and they were ready. They had the sense and feeling that they were no different than the mothers that had protected their children after the riots in Mexico when they had all those killings. And very similar to Latin America, how the women came together, the mothers came together, many of them disappeared at that time, through those kinds of dictatorships that they had in Latin America.

So they formed themselves very similar to those women, and it was impressive to have their support. And that's what gave me the motivation to keep going every single day. After that, serving in the legislature, not so much as an author of bills, but instead as someone who was fighting a prison every single day, *and* was able to effectively get it locked up in committee. They did not have the votes to get it out, and I was very proud of that.

NF: You should be.

GM: (laughs)

[01:10:10]

NF: Did you address any women's issues while you were in the legislature?

GM: Well, the issue of sterilization had been addressed before, which was good. I was very much a part of bilingual, bicultural, child development issues that we supported. Theresa Hughes was the author of a lot of those bills, and [I] joined with her on those kinds of things. Again, the Chicano caucus developed certain bills that we were all part of that we

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supported. But again, in the women's caucus, a lot of them were along the lines of many of those issues of health care and so on, employment training, juvenile justice, a lot of those issues. But it was just, like, all of a sudden my entire responsibility, it felt like, was just trying to build support and continue to not have a prison in East L.A. But yeah, I had to champion that. No one else was doing it and I had to do it. It took up my whole agenda.

NF: Your community was happy that you did that.

GM: (laughs) Yeah.

NF: So how was your perspective different from your mostly white male colleagues in the legislature? How did you perceive that difference when you were there?

GM: Well, you know, it's interesting. Being a Latina, and being a woman, really had a different perspective than my colleagues. My dad taught me to be strong and independent even though he didn't want me to be independent from *him*. I wanted to be very independent in the legislature, so I didn't want to build a relationship that I was locked into or anything. There was a whole group of us called the grizzlies in the legislature, and we were kind of the more progressive side of many of our colleagues. So we took on various issues from time to time, and it was a good group. But I also wanted to maintain my independence. I didn't want to be locked up with anyone else, including my caucus, which got me in trouble from time to time.

But I found that I just was sort of surprised that so many of them operated very differently than I did. Not as much on the issues. There were a couple of people who were just very dedicated to issues, and I built great relationships with them, like Art Agnos, and a lot of members who were very, very dedicated to a particular passion that they had on an issue, and I just loved that. But there were others that were very self-serving. In other words, special interests had given them money. That's where they lined up no matter what. And I found that very, very troubling. And I'm not going to mention names because I have lots of those names, but that was always a hard part for me. Because I felt like this is an issue that makes sense, why don't you get it?

I remember dealing with the red lining issue, which was a very important issue in our community. We were paying more for car insurance than anyone else because we were red-lined in the Latino community. Now, I could present facts, figures, and information to show how a drunk driver in Bakersfield or Fresno paid less than somebody with an immaculate driving record in East L.A., and how unfair the insurance companies were treating many of the Latinos and the inner-city communities.

And I couldn't get my colleagues—because the insurance companies were such a strong lobby. I would take that bill up every single year, and I knew I was going to lose, but I would make my case and I was proud to do it, and lose in committee regularly. I took up bills against liquor stores serving—and licenses being given to liquor stores that sold to underage people. And I lost them in committee every single year. But they were important. But it was interesting.

So to me, there were many of my colleagues that were very oriented towards special interests and fundraising, and so on. And that was more important to them than

some of the issues. And they've gone on to be very, very successful politicians. (both laugh)

NF: So you're in the assembly and you decide to run for the city council in Los Angeles. How did you go about making that decision?

GM: Well, it was very interesting. When we talk about our larger mission as Latinos and Chicanos, it wasn't *just* getting a woman in the legislature. It was about getting Latinos in the U.S. Congress, in the legislature, on the city council, on the board of supervisors, on the board of education. These were positions of power, in which our issues were *not* being addressed, so having a seat at the table. So we had our larger mission, not just of Chicanas, of women, but as Latinos. Because we were fighting the issues of racism and sexism at the same time. So we had more of a mission than they did, so that was our charge.

So we had looked at the city council in Los Angeles. Here were these seats, and we had a *large* Latino population, and not *one* Latino on the city council. So it was our mission to eventually get a Latino on the council. So there was a seat that potentially was going to be coming up, and we had decided—well, no one had decided. *I* just knew that it was something we needed to do. So, I don't know how it all—I can't remember how it worked out. But it was a seat, and either we were going to challenge the councilman or he was retiring. I can't remember how it worked, but I went to Richard Alatorre and Art Torres, who were, of course, my seniors in the legislature. And I told them that I had decided that should the seat become vacant I will run for that city council seat, and would welcome their support. And as quickly as I did that, Richard Alatorre said, "If that seat becomes available, *I'm* running for that seat." And so, I had to step back and say, "Of course!" And so, that's what happened.

So, Richard Alatorre ran for that seat and was elected. And finally we had—not the first—but finally a Latino in the city council. And so, I continued my work in the legislature. Then all of a sudden, reapportionment was happening. They started moving around the districts. I know that MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund] was very involved in challenging the city council and the board of supervisors at the time. And then one of the councilmembers died. So they rearranged all of the districts all of a sudden, and changed all the lines. And then there became this vacant seat, which was way out—San Fernando Valley had been the seat. They changed it. So now there was a vacant city council seat here in the Eastside, in Lincoln Heights and that whole area. And so, that seat opened up and then I decided—I went again to Richard and Art and all of the men, and told them that I was interested in running for that seat. And of course, same answer that I had gotten before: we have a candidate, so we're supporting a different candidate. And at this point in time—

NF: (laughs) You were used to that.

GM: So accustomed to that scenario, and I decided to challenge them. And of course, it was a little bit easier this time, even though, again, had to raise money. They had all the endorsements and so on. But I had developed credibility in the community. I had

championed the no prison in East L.A., and I had good support, and still had my team of supporters. So I ran for the city council race, and I won, in the primary.

And so now I was serving as a colleague again with Richard Alatorre, on the city council, and joined a whole new group of colleagues. Joy Picus was my seatmate, and Joel Wachs was my other seatmate, and it was just a wonderful environment. What I enjoyed about the legislature is the range of issues. There were many issues. I served and chaired the subcommittee on mental health, and that became a very prominent issue that was really important to me. But I just didn't have as much hands-on in the community, and I really wanted that.

And so, the city council really gave me an opportunity to be very hands-on, and be close to the community, involved in issues. Unfortunately, the range of issues was very limiting. It was more city council issues. Whether a sewer or trash issues, development issues and things of that sort. So the range of issues wasn't as great, but I really enjoyed being in the community and being involved in the city council. And dealing with a smaller number of politicians. (laughs)

NF: Right. When you ran for the city council, besides the people in your district, did you have support and help from women's organizations?

GM: Absolutely. Again, I was able to go to many of the women that I had counted on before and the networks that I had before. NWPC [National Women's Political Caucus] was a big, big group at the time. It had a lot of support from women from all over. So it was easier, much easier. And they had more confidence that I had the ability to win than maybe they did the first time, even though many of them supported me way back then.

NF: Right. So what was the culture like for women on the city council when you were there?

GM: Well, again, there were other women. I mean, they were forceful women that were on the city council, and they had important roles. So there wasn't as much—I'm not going to say there was discrimination. They were powerful. They were on good committees. They had good support, and they were effective, and they were very issue-oriented. I really enjoyed city council and working with many of the women there. So it was a great experience. Although I didn't serve for a long time. The issues weren't as sexy or interesting.

I asked John Ferraro to develop a—I was interested in housing at that time, affordable housing. Many of the housing issues went into the development committee, land use committee, so I thought we should have a separate committee. And I asked John Ferraro to set up a committee, and he was just a good person to work with, and a great leader on the city council. So, he had no problem setting up that whole committee on housing. So, that was a wonderful committee and I'm glad that that happened.

Those are the kinds of issues I worked on. And, as women, we worked on all of the issues. There wasn't so much gender issues and so on. But we loved celebrating each other and working with each other, and supporting each other.

[01:21:49]

NF: You were lucky you were on at one of the heydays for women on the city council.

GM: I thought so. (laughs) And they were all strong, great women to work with. And they knew their issues inside out. They played forceful roles and aggressive roles. We were equal to all the men there. I mean, there was a hierarchy like any leadership role, but at the same time many of those women were on key committees, and had key responsibilities and duties. They took ownership of them and were very commanding.

NF: Right. Did you have priorities that you fought for in your district while you were on the city council?

GM: Again, for me, once I started working on local issues, the biggest issue to me was how to make our community safer? How to make our parks safer? How to build our libraries? These public places were very, very important for us. Having grown up in a family of ten, in a small house, I knew how important a park was to a community, and to a family, and how important a library was to a kid and to a student. When I saw that our communities weren't as clean, the streets were not as clean, our parks were not as well maintained, or equipped, our libraries got the lowest amount of funding and they were scarce. Those were the kinds of issues I cared about.

And so, public safety issues were very important. I wanted to get drug dealers off of our streets. I had MacArthur Park—there was an unbelievable amount of drug dealers all over MacArthur Park. Trying to clean that up at the time. So those were my priorities. I would spend a lot of time cleaning up the streets. My staff thought that they were going to be working for a councilwoman that was going to do all these powerful things, and instead they were monitoring streets and whether the street sweepers came through and cleaned or not. But that was as important to me as was passing any ordinance or anything that was going on, was maintaining the community and making sure resources were actually distributed in our district, in our community. And they weren't at the time, and I had to fight for that all the time. But I became very hands-on on those kinds of municipal issues, safety issues. Challenging at that time, Daryl Gates, to make sure that we had as much police coverage in our community as they did in other parts of town.

So that's what I did all the time. I was very involved in implementing and monitoring things, as compared to building ordinances, or creating legislation here and there. I was more involved in managing some of those important issues, those important resources to making a neighborhood safe and livable, and trying to challenge it all of the time. And so, I spent a lot of time on that, and I enjoyed that work tremendously.

NF: I'm going to shift away from politics. Somewhere in here you met your husband, right?

GM: Somewhere along the line?

NF: Yeah, somewhere between the assembly or early city council, you met your husband.

GM: Well, what happened is I enjoyed being a single woman. And, in fact, my father was very nervous. I remember when I was twenty-four or twenty-five, he sat me down and

said how important it was. All my sisters had gotten married—that I should get married. And I said, "But dad I'm doing very well. You know, I have my own account. I have my own car. Really." And he was nervous for me. It was very traditional for a Mexican girl to be married and to be taken care of—sort of—and so on.

But anyway, I went on, and I was very proud. I was going to be the Auntie Mame, I always said, of my family and have all my nieces and nephews to take care of. But I don't know. All of a sudden I was thirty-six and the thought of—it just all happened. I had met my husband right at a time when, I guess, I just all of the sudden changed my point of view. I wanted to have a child and I certainly wanted to be married, and it all worked together. I met Ron and we hit it off.

NF: How did you meet?

GM: How did we meet? Well, it's very awkward. Because I don't really know how we met.

NF: (laughs)

GM: He would come up to me and do strange things. He would come up to me at receptions and things, and he said, "You know, you got to return my phone calls." And I'd say, "Who are you? I don't even know you." And he would walk away. He has an odd sense of humor. So, I would say, "Who is that?" Later on I found out who he was, but whenever I'd go to a reception he'd come back and say, "You know, it'd be good if you would return my phone calls." And I finally went up to him and challenged him, "Hey, who are you, and why do you keep saying this?" And then we got to know each other. He had, like I said, an odd sense of humor. And we started dating. And then eventually, we decided to get married.

I was in the legislature. At that time, all that was going on in L.A. was going on, and then we had decided to get married sometime in—I think it was, like, April. And then, all of these things were going on in the city council, and all these changes were going on. And then, I was going to run for that seat, then Richard ran, and then I'm not. At the same time, all of a sudden, I said, "No, we've got to postpone that. I can't get married now because I've got all this other stuff to do." And so, then before you knew it, we kept postponing it. Anyway. So at that same time, we decided to get married in August. Then we changed it again because I was doing things in the legislature, and it's a very busy time getting your bills through and all that. So we had to postpone it. So then we decided to get married in November, then the seat came up in the city council.

NF: (laughs)

GM: And so, we decided not to change it. Went ahead and we got married in November, at the same time, *while* I was running for the city council race. So, we had a very, very brief honeymoon, a whole two days to take off from the campaign, because I was walking door-to-door, serving in the legislature, running for the city council at the same time. So that's what happened. We ended up getting married November of that year, and the following year I was elected to the city council.

NF: And you had your daughter *while* you were in the city council.

GM: Yes, I did.

NF: What was that like? Getting pregnant and having a child while being a member of the city council?

GM: Well, that's interesting, because I always thought it would be so difficult to be pregnant and work. I mean, how do you do that? I had found a burst of energy when I was pregnant. I could do anything I wanted to do, had no problem. I was working and had just been elected to the city council, and had no problem. I was able—I don't know why I had so much energy while I was pregnant, but it was a good thing because I had a lot to do. And then it was interesting, I had my staff over for a retreat at my house, and all of a sudden, the next day I started getting my labor pains. I'm going, "It's not supposed to be for another four weeks." Anyway, it turns out that I had my daughter that day.

And it was interesting because it was, like, a Wednesday or a Thursday. I can't remember exactly. All I know is John Ferraro called me. I got out of the hospital that Saturday or Sunday. John Ferraro called me and he said, "Gloria, Tuesday's our election for a new president." Somebody had challenged him and I don't know who. He was little nervous, "I need your vote." I said, "But I just had my baby." (both laugh) And so, I showed up that Tuesday. I had had my child the week before, and went in with my daughter and voted.

Little by little, I realized that all I had to do was bring a crib. I was still breast feeding. Luckily, I had my own office and so on. I brought my childcare person, who could take care of her in my office, while I was running around on the city council. And, had no problem, had plenty of energy, and so on. So, I had her one week and the following Tuesday I was on the city council voting for John Ferraro, making sure that he continued as president pro tem of the city council.

And so, I had to get right back, but it was a good experience. And so, Valentina joined me on the city council. I could still breastfeed her. I could run to committee, come back, do all the things. Every so often she would create a little commotion where the babysitter couldn't take care of her, so she'd bring her in. So, occasionally I sat there with her on the city council while I voted, but it was very rare. Most of the time she was in my office. We did that for a couple of weeks until I was ready to have her stay at home with the babysitter. But, she joined me on her very first day—her first week she was on the city council with me voting. (both laugh) So now you were juggling everything, right? It worked out.

[01:31:11]

NF: What made you decide to run for the newly created supervisor district in the mid-1990s? The seat that started in 1991.

GM: Well, if you remember, I said there was a larger issue. I was involved in 1980 and 1981, in *Californios*, which was a Chicano reapportionment group. And we were a bunch of—I'm going to say I was just a follower, a group of radicals that wanted more members in

the legislature, more members in the U.S. Congress, and so on. And they were challenging and they knew how to do all the numbers and all. We used to go over to the Rose Institute that, at that time, had all these wonderful computers. And we would work at night and rearrange the numbers to hopefully present testimony to the legislature and to city council. We knew, at that time, that the way the reapportionment was set up in L.A. County was totally discriminatory. They had taken our community and basically divided it five ways, so we never had the opportunity to elect one of our own. So there was a larger agenda way back then in the early eighties. And so, we needed to change those seats.

Luckily, what happened is MALDEF filed a lawsuit against Los Angeles County, against the gerrymandering that they did. And it's interesting because here it is, what, 1991? And they finally win that lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court. It went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. So, the board of supervisors had to change their reapportionment lines. And that created a district that included my city council seat in that larger supervisorial district.

Now, I went to two people to talk about that. One was Congressman Ed Roybal. The congressman had *run* for this seat decades before. And there are many people that believe he won, and that there was a lot of messing around with the ballot box, and so on. That he was robbed of that opportunity. Again, whether the facts were there or not, there are many in the community that believe it. So I went to Congressman Roybal and I said, "Here's an opportunity for you to run. All of us will coalesce around you to become supervisor of Los Angeles County, the first Latino *ever* elected." The congressman said, "I enjoy my time in congress. I've developed seniority. I'm very, very comfortable here, but I would support you." And I said, "Well, I'm not going to run because I love being on the city council and I just got there."

So I went to the other person, Congressman Esteban Torres, who I had, again, not supported initially. He was one of the two men that got elected when those two seats opened up, and we wanted to get a woman elected. But he became a wonderful congressman that I was so supportive of. So anyway, I went to him and I said, "Congressman Torres, again, this supervisorial seat is coming up. We won in the U.S. Supreme Court. They're re-drawing the lines. We're going to have an opportunity and you represent a good portion of the Eastside. So I hope you will run." He, too, said, "I will think about it, but no."

So at that time, I knew that Richard Alatorre was interested in running for the supervisorial district. I went to Richard at the time, and I said that I didn't think he could win. I certainly knew the numbers in the district, so I did not think he could win, but that I was hoping he might be supportive of me if I could build some support. And he didn't make any commitment at all. So then, later on, as it evolved, the congressman *really* wanted me to run for this, Congressman Roybal. We had one of these meetings where all of us come together. Art Torres was a senator; Richard Alatorre was a councilmember; Congressman Roybal, and Esteban Torres were members of congress, and I was a city councilwoman. And so, while the guys had their own meeting somewhere else, this was the meeting of the electeds at the time. And we really were going to decide who was going to run for this seat, or at least who, for the most part, would decide would run for the seat.

So we got together. And it was interesting that before I got to this meeting, Congressman Roybal and Congressman Esteban Torres called me and said, "Gloria, we're going to support you." And I was very honored to have their support. I said, "Well, Richard is going to run," and so on. And, "I don't think he can win, particularly in the San Gabriel Valley, and all of those areas. It's going to be tough, and we may lose this seat to a non-Latino if Richard runs. Just because there was an opportunity in a district didn't mean you were guaranteed the potential of winning it." So both congressmen felt very strongly that I should run. When we went to that meeting and we put our cards on the table, as they say—and at that point in time, instead of Richard running for the seat, they told us—Richard and Art—that Art was going to be running for the seat. So I was, like, totally blown away because he could run and he could win. But the two congressional members said, "Let's all back off. We didn't know this. Let's decide what we're going to do." So everybody backed off, went back to our meeting after we got that announcement.

The two congressional members called me and said, "Gloria, we want to support you for the seat." And I said, "Well, I'm really honored but how can I run against Art, my former boss? I mean, he really could win. He's so articulate and smart and all that. He can raise money." And they felt very strongly. And there had been a little bit of disenchantment with Art and Richard, at the time, from the congressional members. I don't know what the battle was. I wasn't involved in it at the time. But they supported me. And I certainly was interested in it and the idea. But, it was going to be a tough race.

Anyway, so then we went back and huddled again with them. Now it was very clear that Art was going to run for this seat, and I had to challenge my old former boss, who was *so* supportive of me before. But we decided to do it. And that's when I decided, and had the support of the two congressional members for the seat. Both of them representing a majority part of the supervisorial district. I being on the city council, you know, representing it, I thought we had a very good chance. And, of course I ran with, what, eleven other candidates. We weren't the only two running. There were eleven of us, so that was our campaign. I was very fortunate to run, and it was a tough campaign, and a bitter campaign, at the end.

NF: At the end it ended up being just you and Art running against each other.

GM: That's right, yeah. And then we had the run-off, right. It was tough.

NF: How did you distinguish yourself from him?

GM: Well, one of the things that, of course, distinguished me from him—and we built that up—is the issue of the prison in East L.A. Having fought for that issue and having been an advocate, and having the mothers of East L.A. was a campaign that we built on, and about championing and protecting our rights as constituents, and being a champion on those issues. And that's the campaign we built up. And luckily, I mean, Art had a lot of support from the labor unions and I didn't have it. I had some, but did not have as much support, so it was a tough race. He had a lot of money, but now I had very competitive money. And I think being a woman also helped at that point. Initially, in 1982, there

were a lot of men who were never going to support a woman. There were a lot of women who were never going to support a woman. They just didn't think we would be forceful enough to be their advocate, strong enough, that we'd get watered down. All of a sudden there was a real *change* of more and more people seeing women in positions of power in elected office, and having more confidence. So, I had a good record, and we presented that. So being a woman, I think, was a big plus at that time. We played that up as well.

NF: Women's organizations were really taking on the issue of trying to get more women into these kinds of powerful, elected office.

GM: Absolutely, more women elected, right. And there was just many, many more of us. And, of course, the largest electorate in any of these races are the women. And so we worked all of that, and played all of that out. As someone that cared about the issues in the community—libraries, parks, and safe places for their children were all issues I had worked on when I was on the city council and very hands-on. So, all of that played out, and I think that being a legislator is very, very hard. It's harder to explain what you do and how it relates to the community in a position like this, so I think in our campaign we were very forceful in that regard and played up all those issues. So we had a different style of a campaign that worked very well from my experience.

[01:41:07]

NF: That's great. Do you want to take a little break and stretch your legs? [recording pauses] All right, we are back after stretching our legs. You had just won a tough race for the supervisors.

GM: Uh-hm.

NF: What was it like to be the first Latina on the board of supervisors?

GM: Well, it seemed like every time I'd get there I'm not really all that welcomed. That was the first part. (both laugh) Here's, again, I'm joining four other colleagues who have been forced by the U.S. Supreme Court to renegotiate all of their lines. So they all have new districts; they're not happy about it at all. And here is a Latina, a woman amongst these four men, so it was hard. And I was clearly put in my place from the very beginning, intentionally, by design, by plan. And I didn't care. Because I had learned to be strong and independent all the way through. I no longer had to acknowledge their seniority or their leadership. They had intentionally discriminated against my community. I didn't *see* them as my opposition, per se, but I did see them as someone who not necessarily was supportive of my community. So, I thought it was, again, my responsibility, my duty to my district, and carried [it] out and was very forceful about how and what I was going to work on, and what I was going to do, and how I was going to function and work. Which was really distressing to many of them. I could tell they were uncomfortable with some of the issues that I took on and started taking up.

NF: Such as?

GM: Well, for example, I like to ask questions. The board of supervisors is a very ceremonial kind of thing. They would spend an hour, an hour and a half, giving awards to people in the community, presenting resolutions, commendations, which were good things, but very frankly—and then they would have this calendar that they would not talk about. There was no committee process, per se. So then you had forty-five to sixty-five decisions we were making that day, and they were voted on. "Item 1 through 42, all in favor?" And I'm going, "But—" And I would pull out certain items that I wanted to ask questions about. And that was troublesome to my colleagues because instead of the meeting lasting maybe two or three hours, it was now going four and five hours.

So I wanted to find out how it all worked. I wanted to find out how the budget worked. This place, supervisors and the way it's set up, is really managed by a CAO, who really runs the budget. And the budget is everything. That is your determination as to what you're doing and what your issues are. So I started asking questions about how they do contracts, how they send money, how is this reviewed. I asked a lot of basic how-to questions. And that became *very troublesome* to my colleagues. They were annoyed by it, visibly annoyed. I would be cut *off*. One would say, "Well, how many questions are you going to ask?" And I would say, "As many as I need in order to get the answers that I want." "Well, how long will you take?" And I said, "Well, it depends on what the answers are." They were so accustomed to doing it their way, and so on.

I remember once I was asking a series of questions on an item, and the CAO and the people who were presenting were visibly frustrated, answering my questions, or *not* answering my questions. And so one of my colleagues said to me, "Supervisor, one of your first responsibilities as a member of this board is to come prepared to a meeting." And so I said to him, "Well, I am prepared, sir. Why don't *you* answer my questions?" Of course, after that he never bothered me again. (both laugh)

And so, that was the first part of the discomfort for them. And then afterwards, I probably challenged some of the sacred cows that they had—of how they did business—but I found it to be part of my responsibility and duty. Budget to me is everything. I mean, you cannot function in state legislature, on the city council, or on the board of supervisors if you *can't* fund a program, if you can't fund what you have. Whether you're maintaining a park, cleaning a street, police, whatever. So I knew the budget was everything, and I wanted to learn how to work the budget, and how to understand the budget. And if you looked at a budget, that at that time, I think, was something like $18-billion, I'm sitting there going, "Whoa, how is this money spent? How is it done? How are these decisions made?" So I had asked a lot of questions. It was very, very troubling for them.

And we were having a very tough time because, very frankly, the legislature was not funding many of the programs that we had. We had health responsibilities, and we had law enforcement responsibilities, and we had our jails that we had to maintain, we had all our mental health to maintain. We had just an *unbelievable* set of responsibilities and duties. We were more implementers than we were legislators because we were an executive *and* legislative, but for the most part we were implementing state and federal laws. And sometimes the money didn't come with it. So, monitoring where it was going was very important.

I found that I was getting a lot of information, somebody was sending it to me. I read *all* of my letters. By the way, as an elected official, I insisted on reading all my

mail. I had it organized for me all of the time. I wanted to know what people were asking and talking to me about. Then I would shuffle it out to staff. A lot of elected officials don't read their own mail, but I did. So, I was getting these letters anonymously about, "If you really care, you should look at what's going on in the retirement fund." And I didn't know what that meant. And so, as I started looking at it, I asked one of my staff to do some research on it. I started finding that the supervisors had created a pretty nice little cushion for themselves as far as their retirement, *and* for their executives, to the point where it was, I wouldn't say illegal, but it was padded. And so, I started challenging that retirement system.

I remember the CAO, who hadn't been all that friendly, all of a sudden was in my office, and all of a sudden said, "Okay, supervisor, tell me what you want in the budget." And I'm going, "When it comes to it—" "Oh no, just, I'll put these things in there for you on the budget." And I said, "No, that's not the way I operate." So all of a sudden they wanted me to back off of that retirement issue. I decided to take it on and it became an issue that was *very* contentious for my colleagues, because they didn't want to change it as it was. But they were, what is known as pension spiking. So that, in many instances, you had executives and supervisors who were retiring with more money than they were making, while serving in these positions. And that was inappropriate. Not the rank and file, not the lowly county workers, just the top echelon.

So I was able to challenge that, and, of course, it took them awhile to get accustom to my style. It's not a style that I think any of them ever became accustomed to. I still question a lot of things. I don't buy everything the CAO says. I have to trust a lot of the information, but at the same time, I had my staff unearthing things. I remember once that I said I wanted to review all the contracts before the board of supervisors. We approve contracts, I mean, 3-million here, 12-million here, 42-million there. And sometimes we were approving ten and twelve contracts at every meeting. And I said, "Who's reviewed these things? How do I know? I'd like to review them all."

So, in order to put me in my place, they delivered over 120 Xeroxed boxes filled with Xeroxed contracts. That was their way of trying to tie me in. I said, "Fine." So we started. We didn't *need* to look at them, but we held them all up for months. I said, "I have to read them, you haven't read them, so I have to read them. So we can't pass this this contract until we read them." And I started asking questions. Anyway, they stopped messing with me after those kinds of things. I mean, they would challenge me in their own way and I would challenge back. It just was a very different style. I wasn't welcomed. It was very clear that I wasn't welcomed, and I had a very different style. It took awhile to get accommodated into it, but I carried on.

NF: Do you think any of this was gender related?

[01:50:30]

GM: There was some of that. Of course there was some of that. I mean, if you look at what happened to the *first* woman—who wasn't elected to the board of supervisors, but appointed—Yvonne Burke. Yvonne Burke had been appointed by Jerry Brown, to fill a position on the board of supervisors. She had served very honorably in that role, but when it came to reelection she wasn't supported. Her colleagues didn't support her and

so she didn't win that election. I was the first woman *elected* to that board, then later on, of course, Yvonne did join me when she was rightfully elected to that seat. So there was that going on. You don't want to say it, but it was. It was that kind of discrimination going on. And it's fascinating today. We have so many women on the board of supervisors. I'm elated, and excited about it. (laughs)

NF: Right. I know one of the things that happened earlier in your time with the supervisors, was the debate over rebuilding L.A. County-USC Medical Center.

GM: That's right.

NF: Can we talk a little bit about the debate and the issues?

GM: Well, you know, one of the things that has happened all the way through, in every role that I have served, is I have had to deal with discrimination. Whether I was in the White House, whether I was in the legislature, the city council, and now the board of supervisors. For whatever reason, it's always treated this district and this community—and myself—as not as important as the next person.

I remember my boss when I was at the White House. I said, "We need to get a Latino to cabinet secretary." And, "Why?" That wasn't important to him. He just didn't see it as important. I said, "It's very significant. The president has asked for diversity. We should present names." It was my boss who presented them and hesitated putting those names forth. I always found people that were credible, capable of getting appointed to these things, but they were never presented to the president because my boss thought there were other priorities at that time. So there's a lot of discrimination that has always gone on, that I have noticed, and it isn't subtle. It's right in your face pretty regularly. And that happened all the time. The citing of the prison in East L.A. Who's going to fight less? It's not going to be a problem. We will tell her and she will do it. So they bumped into a different kind of Latina and woman, who just didn't *just do it.* But they just thought they could get away with it.

And so, the issue of the rebuilding the hospital was totally discriminatory, too. Here is a county who is having struggles financially, and there was no doubt. We had all the responsibility for health care, and regrettably, not the money that we needed to carry it out. I would applaud my colleagues in being very effective, in trying to cover as many people as possible, and maintaining an emergency room, and a healthcare system that was really quite good, in light of financially not having the money to run it. So it was a tough time. And here, the issue was that it had been on the books for a long time to rebuild L.A. County General Hospital. It had been in violation of earthquake standards. It had been in violation of various standards for a long time, and it needed to be rebuilt. So I got involved in the very ambitious responsibility now of rebuilding this hospital. We did focus groups, we did studies, we did reviews, we did all that we could do, and then we presented the plan. And the plan was very clear.

It was a hospital that was originally built, I think, for 1600 patients, and now we needed to build the hospital for at least 900. So we had to cut it down, but it still, with efficiencies and all that it had, we could rebuild this hospital for at least 900. It had to have 900 beds. But when it came to the board of supervisors, they started asking

questions about why so big? No other hospital was this large. It should have, like our other hospitals, 340, you know. Instead I would present reports, and I remember it was Ed Edelman, initially, who started asking questions and thought that that was too many beds, and then my colleagues weren't supportive of it. So then we did more studies to show—and then we could cut it down to, maybe 700 beds. But at the same time we had to build a hospital with a possibility of expanding. I mean, it's the only hospital, basically, on the Eastside, and it was just the key emergency room and so on. Anyway, it was a battle.

After Ed Edelman retired, then Zev Yaroslavsky started challenging me about the needing to build that hospital, to be that large. And no matter what statistics I showed, no matter what I did—I had reports left and right that validated that number. At the end of the day, my colleagues did not support the rebuilding of the hospital to the extent that it should be built. Instead they authorized it to be built for only 350 beds, or 360 beds, at the end of the day, which was *half* of what was needed. And a lot of it had to do with—there was no doubt—this was a hospital that was providing our emergency room with taking care of a lot of the undocumented. People would go there if they didn't have the ability to pay for a doctor. That's where they went for their health care. There was no doubt our emergency room was one of the most crowded in the county, and was providing a lot of care for a lot of people, and so there was a discriminatory aspect of it. It was unfortunate I lost that battle. It wasn't the only battle. I lost many other battles according to discrimination that was there. And while we did rebuild the hospital, today it is over-crowded. We now still have contracts that we buy with private hospitals in order to deal with the overage. And they're in the process now of evaluating and looking at building more onto the hospital. So, at the end of the day, I lost that particular battle but I'm not losing the war. Eventually it will be built according to need.

NF: What are some of the other key issues, in your mind, that you focused on? You were on the board for twenty-three years.

GM: I was on there, and I did an awful lot, again, to deal with the responsibility of the budget. When we did the pension-spiking issue that brought in new revenue. I was responsible for trying to save the healthcare system. I mean, at that time, Bill Clinton—I had been a supporter of Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Our system was going under, and we started working and trying to figure out what we could do in trying to get a waiver from the feds in order to get more money into our healthcare system. Having had the good relationship with the president and the vice-president, I was able to work with them. We had worked on the welfare issues in the past, and the welfare to work contracts, and things of that sort. So I had a good relationship with them. I went to them, and through the help of the president, Leon Panetta, and many others, we were able to get the waiver and *save* our healthcare system when it was sinking. And it was very, very significant, and very important to keep it and to now flourish in the way that it's flourishing today. But at that time it was sinking, and it was sinking fast. And it was the emergency room and acute care for so many people that was really important. So that was a big part of what I did.

I had also worked on—besides all of the issues that I was very hands-on—building our libraries. I looked at every one of our libraries. I wanted to know if they needed to be rebuilt, trying to set aside money for that. Looking at law enforcement,

sheriff's coverage, looking at our juvenile halls, and the fact that there were so many kids that were in our program that didn't need to be there, shouldn't be there. Trying to find an alternative to make sure that they weren't attending or going to our juvenile halls. But once they were there, hopefully educating them, and dealing with their mental health issues.

Children's Services, which was an endless, endless battle—I don't know how to get my arms around it. Was such a tough issue to deal with. It was so harsh to see so many children abandoned by their parents, and orphaned by their parents, and now in our childcare system. A lot of it dealing with drugs and problems that the parents had. They were no longer able to take care of their own children. It was a tough system to work on.

Transportation, I was also on the MTA Board, and transportation had a lot of money and it was coming into the district. Regrettably had the same battle. At that time it was Zev Yaroslavsky, with again discrimination. We had planned and were hoping to build a subway to the Eastside. It had been something that had been on the drawing board for a long time. Then, all of a sudden, the feds were just going broke as well, and they couldn't support the entire program. Congress decided to pull back some of those dollars, and so we lost our opportunity to build our subway to East L.A. And so, in getting back into that system, putting in our own bond initiatives, and all that we needed to do to start continuing to build our transportation grid across L.A. County, when it came back that we're going to have some money, all of a sudden Zev Yaroslavsky put together an initiative of no building of subways in L.A. County. Because we were going with the subway toward East L.A. It is expensive. It costs more money. It won. The initiative passed. So I was no longer permitted to build a subway to East L.A. There was a little bit of money left over and they started building plans of busses and everything else, which was a good thing, but I finally put together a plan to build the above ground system that we have to East L.A., the gold line to the Eastside. I worked on those issues, and I championed that.

[02:00:58]

I went to then Congressman Roybal, and the other members of congress to support it. And even though it was a hard fought battle on the MTA board, because everybody was fighting for the same money and everybody wanted lines going in their direction. This is something that had been planned. Congressman Roybal had planned it initially. We had the money before, but because of Zev's initiative, and because we won, we lost the money at the end of the day. And didn't have enough money to build it all anyway. So we did the above ground thing and I was glad. And, of course, once we started getting money again, had other bond initiatives, all of a sudden they rescinded the no subways in L.A. County, once they started going to the Westside. So, clearly discriminatory.

That's what I had to live with the entire time I was on the board of supervisors, and there were constant issues from time to time that were clearly discriminatory that we had to deal with. I mean, simple things, like sometimes the legislature had appropriated money for dealing with gang problems. So it came into the county, and there was really a push to try and deal with gang intervention, gang problems, and so on. So here I thought, Thank goodness, we're going to get some money for all the gang problems that we have on the Eastside. So, here we thought that more of the money would be focused in our district and Yvonne Burke's district, which had the highest problems with gangs. Instead

the board of supervisors divided by five. They took the money and divided by five. And so we couldn't stop that. And now, again, *they* didn't have as much a problem in some of their districts as the intensity that we had in our districts, but we were out voted, so we lost that money.

And so, there were a lot of battles like that that dealt with the issues of discrimination. But again, I was a supervisor and I enjoyed my role as kind of a watchdog on the budget. I was very good at knowing where the money was being spent, how it was being spent, how it was to challenge it. And after surviving that 1994 crisis where we didn't have enough money even to fund lifeguards for our beaches, even though I didn't represent the beaches, it was still really important for me to have lifeguards at our beaches, this wasn't just about my district. It was about the entire ten million residents that we represented, and the budget was for everybody.

I just watched money like a hawk. Contracts, I watched all of that. And we did very well financially. I also made sure that we had budget principles in place, which my colleagues supported. But Zev Yaroslavsky, a real champion as well on those budget issues, he felt like I did, that we had to watch every single penny and ask questions about overspending in every department. And so, it was good to have a colleague that really watched the dollars as well, because I think that has led to unbelievable sustainability for L.A. County. There's probably other issues that have been focused on more than others, but that was a really consuming one besides my district issues.

I was very involved in the district, and parks, and libraries were my love. Public safety was very important. Building our infrastructure out there with my colleagues on city council was important. And also maintaining the integrity of the role that we had, and the duty and the responsibility to serve all of our constituents. So I enjoyed that role, and loved it. I enjoyed doing all of that work.

And I got back into the issues I cared about: mental health, healthcare, everything, housing. We had a whole array of different responsibilities because now you're sort of the executive branch, not just a legislator. You're actually implementing, so it was the *best* of all worlds. Other than not having the money that you needed to do everything, but you also had the ownership of the budget to make those decisions.

NF: Do you think some of your attention to the budget came from the fact that when you took your seat it was during economic crisis of the early 1990s?

GM: Absolutely. It was terrible. It was horrible having to make decisions to say we're going to close the beach. We have to give away our parks. In my district, I gave away three parks to the cities because we couldn't afford to maintain them. We were going to close them. Library hours, were opened for only like fifteen hours a week in some of our libraries. These are essential services to people in our community, and we didn't have the money. Not having enough money to take care of every emergency room visit, I mean, that was a *real* financial crisis. So, I guess it's like when I was growing up. I grew up poor. My parents showed me how to save money and how to prepare for tough times. I'm a saver and I'm someone who's always prepared, and know that I have to save for financial tough times. I started doing the same thing on the board of supervisors, making tough decisions when the times were well, and making sure that we weren't giving away—not giving away, but we weren't making decisions that in the long run were going

to cost us a lot of money. And that sometimes led to my problems, particularly with law enforcement and with the unions. Because they were just more, more, more, we want this, we want that. And we said we can't afford it. And, of course, they look at this huge budget and say of course you can afford it. But, we wanted to be on par with other cities and other municipalities, and we were very, very careful as to how we were making these decisions.

And asking a lot of tough questions that unions just expected you—I remember getting a call from one labor leader once. I was making a decision on something, and he says, "I really need you to support this." And I said, "I really would like to, but I have a lot of questions, like for example—" this, this and that, and what about this and what about that? And then he stopped me and said, "Excuse me. I'm not, I'm not *asking* you, I am *telling* you." And I said, "You know what? I think you're talking to the wrong person." And I hung up on him. But that is the attitude that they had about some of their issues, and my concerns were, we need to create worthwhile contracts with our labor unions, with our employees. We wanted to be as equitable as anyone else, but we weren't going to be overly generous.

I watched other counties and other cities do something called 3 percent at fifty. Nobody knows what that is except someone like myself who watches every detail and reads everything that they get. Three percent at fifty, which operates in Orange County, San Bernardino, a lot of our cities in L.A., except for the City of L.A. At fifty years of age, you can retire from public service and get 3 percent for every year that you served. That means that if you served for twenty years, you get 3 percent for every year. You'd get almost 90 percent of your salary at the age of fifty and retire. You look at that—and the state is doing it now and they're going to get in trouble for it because they did it as well. When you retire at fifty, not only are you losing some of your best experienced personnel, you are going to *pay* them in retirement for the next thirty years, at least, right? So the costs are going to escalate tremendously.

So I took it out and I didn't multiply it. I asked my staff, "Tell me what this is going to cost me in ten years, twenty years, thirty-five years." And so, when my colleagues were ready to support 3 percent at fifty—and of course fire fighters, law enforcement, and everybody was, Yay! I'm saying, "We can't do this, it'll break us." And we are one of *the few* counties that didn't do it. When my colleagues were going to do it, I said to them, "Okay, go ahead. I'm voting against this. I got news for you, I'm up for re-election. I'm campaigning on this issue." Nobody really knows what it is, and it passed in the state, it passed in many counties. And today Stockton is bankrupt because of it. It cannot afford to pay for itself. El Monte right now is in the process of going bankrupt because it can't afford to pay 3 percent at fifty. You have police officers who have retired from El Monte, who are still now working for other departments and creating a new retirement for themselves. Again, wonderful for the retiree, wonderful for that individual, but not good for the rest of us who rely on that. So that's the kind of detail-oriented person I was, and the fanatic that I was on some of these issues, and challenged my colleagues in the same way. It led to probably someone that they couldn't count on "to go along to get along" kind of person, but that's okay. I was very comfortable with myself and the work that I did. And that was all right.

NF: I know one of the things you mentioned was law enforcement. I know you and the board had a lot of conflicts with Sheriff Lee Baca over the years while you were there.

GM: Constant.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about your relationship and what you were trying to do vis-à-vis the sheriff?

[02:10:30]

GM: Sure. Well, you know, it's interesting, when I started working on the sheriff issue, I started working with Sheriff Block. And there had been a lot of unfair sheriff issues on the Eastside, police brutality issues, a lot of unfair treatment, so I challenged the sheriff at that time. I got support from my colleagues. We did a wonderful report. And the sheriff, again, he's a good guy. He wasn't sending his guys out there to beat up people in the community, but we worked collectively and tried to make sure that wasn't happening. So there was more of a supportive kind of a thing.

I expected that same kind of situation to go on when Lee Baca was elected, and kind of was glad that he was elected. I mean, here was a Latino and I thought he would understand those issues. But unfortunately, we had a very different role. Lee, as an advocate for his department, as he should be, wanted a bunch of money that we didn't have to give him. "I need this for that, and this for that." And I'd say, "Well, we don't have that kind of money." So we had to reject his first budget and get him more into reality. It didn't build for a great relationship right away. And then when I started, again, with my usual monitoring of every dollar, that didn't help him any either. And I was. I wanted to know how every bit was spent.

Then we started hearing about a lot of issues in our jails. I just felt that he needed to take more ownership of what was going on. As we got closer, I started looking at all the lawsuits and the amount of money we were paying out to settle many of these lawsuits from private lawyers, from the ACLU, and others. And when I started reading the cases they were pretty horrific. I mean, we couldn't even defend ourselves in court. We were settling these things for 3-million, 7-million, 12-million, on and on. Every year we had at least ten to twelve of these lawsuits. That was a chunk of change that instead of paying out these lawsuits could be invested in law enforcement. And so, I started doing a lot more accountability of that, and putting it on the sheriff. "You got to prevent this from happening." And that didn't go well. In fact, I was told very clearly by Lee Baca, to remind me, "I'm a law enforcement professional. You are not." (laughs)

So I was put in my place pretty regularly. We did have battles, and many of the time they were private. They weren't public. But after a while, unfortunately they became very public because he was just not taking ownership of these liabilities. I mean, I saw one man—and I couldn't believe it. I saw the pictures afterwards. I saw what happened. He was beaten up in our jail reception center for having a cell phone. He was visiting his brother. He had a cell phone. They told him he could not have a cell phone, and instead of taking it away, they beat the living daylights out of him. I couldn't believe that this was carried out. And then, when I said, "Okay, you did this. He's going to file a lawsuit. Where's the discipline for these three cops?" And they said, Well, they were

just doing their job. I said, "No they weren't." We had information they had handcuffed him to a chair and they had beat the living daylights out of him. And yet, I couldn't get Lee Baca to take ownership of discipline of these officers.

And that's been going on. Now it's widespread across the country. It's going on everywhere. It's one of the toughest things to deal with. And unfortunately there's a lot of people in law enforcement that shouldn't be there. There's a lot of wonderful law enforcement professionals that I think need to be there every single day. But unfortunately there's those bad eggs that really bring down the entire system. I'm very supportive of law enforcement, but again, there are mental health issues in our jails, and people who would act out because of mental health issues. And instead of being treated, they were beaten up pretty regularly. And so, it's painful to watch.

At the end of the day, it was unfortunate because we found out that Lee really wasn't running the place. They had a lot of underlings who were just doing it instead, and regrettably it led to all of his problems that he's facing today. That's unfortunate because he had a position of power that was unbelievable. I think it's one of the things that reminds me of my upbringing. My parents, when you have to have a stake in responsibility and ownership, you have to take it seriously. You have to *deal* with all the conflicts. You can't just go along to get along. And isn't just about the glory and the power that you have, and showcasing it, but actually doing the work. And doing the work sometimes is so much harder, and you have to make tough decisions, and he just didn't make them, and he just didn't do it. And at the end of the day, he's paying the ultimate price.

NF: Yes, he is. Much of the time you were the only woman, but Yvonne Burke joined you. What was it like to have a second woman on the board of supervisors with you?

GM: Well, it was welcomed. (laughs) She really knew her way around the block. She had been there before I was, so she had a very good command of lots of issues. She was, of course, a lawyer as well, and so it was nice to have her. Of course, she came in and we got along really well, and we had a good relationship. I had supported her when she ran for congress, and way, way back when she supported me. She did a fundraiser at her home, when I ran in 1982, so we had a good relationship, and that was good. We didn't always agree on every issue. I didn't expect her to and she didn't expect me, but there were wonderful things. I mean, we did as much as we could in really trying to be supportive of women's issues and our colleagues, trying to find those ways that we could be more supportive of women in our community. And, of course, our colleagues supported those issues as well. And so, it was good. But it was nice to have her, and to have someone on there that was another woman. I would love to—

NF: And a woman of color.

GM: And a woman of color, absolutely. And someone with so much experience. I mean, she had served in congress, and she had served on the board of supervisors. She was a lawyer. She had an awful lot of integrity and credibility coming into that seat, and into that office. So she was truly welcomed. And so it was good.

NF: I know when you're on the board of supervisors you're not particularly taking a laser focus to women's issues, per se, but were there things that you got the board to pay attention to that maybe only a Latina could point them to?

GM: Well, again, they were hard things to do because—I'm not saying that they discriminated—I wanted to see more women as department heads. I think Yvonne did, too, and people of color. We really tried to push that, but it was a hard thing to do. It's not that they discriminated against them, it's just hard to find folks that we really needed, and then when we did find them, in many instances, they were very cherished in their own departments. We had people from San Jose, people from Santa Barbara, people from San Francisco that we always tried to lure to L.A. County. But they were paid very well in their own counties, and they saw the immensity of the responsibilities in L.A. County, that didn't even pay as much. And sometimes we didn't get those people to come into our district. But we did try to champion that as much as possible, to get more women and people of color to our department heads. We did, again, a lot of the issues that we cared about: in sponsoring programs like juvenile hall; making sure we were attentive to the young women that were also part of our juvenile halls. Again, trying to be as we could in making sure that we were protecting women who were in our jails, and things of that sort. But also trying to find any way that we could promote women into various roles and responsibilities. It wasn't something that we said every day we're going to do this. But they were there, protecting employment rights and those kinds of things we did all the time. As we did trying to take care of everything else that we were doing at the same time.

NF: I know you played a key role in the proliferation of adult businesses in unincorporated cities.

GM: Right.

NF: How did that come about?

GM: Well, it came about because when I was in the legislature, I found out that there was a massage parlor across the way that was really a prostitution ring. I found out, what? How could this exist? And they were very, very elaborate. They advertised in these Chinese newspapers while the rest of us couldn't read what it was, it was clearly advertising the names of the people who were very capable of providing massages for men, and other add-ons. Anyway, it really bothered me that these were going on *in* neighborhoods that we didn't even notice were going on. So I started championing that issue and protecting ordinances, and having more law enforcement and more enforcement on that. And it was something that was important in our communities. It was tough to deal with. Prostitution is a *very* hard thing to deal with in our communities, and it goes on all of the time. And yet, I couldn't eliminate it or get rid of it completely but I was able—[recording pauses]

[02:20:19]

NF: We're back. We were talking about taking a stand on prostitution and how difficult that is.

GM: It is difficult, yeah, 'because it's a real problem, and it really creates secondary problems in the community as well. So all you can do is move them along, get it out of your district, get it out of your area—and I did that a lot—and try and create some ordinances with these motels and other kinds of things. It was tough but we pushed on it, and insisted on it. And it's like anything else, you just have to really work hard. Those kinds of details, and that kind of stuff is tough to deal with, but, again, in a responsibility creating safer neighborhoods, you really have to reach down and look at how to get at those issues and find those ways. And we found some solutions. It didn't protect everything and it didn't change everything, but it was in a direction to protect our neighborhoods.

NF: What do you see as your—I mean, you had a lot of accomplishments since you were on the supervisors for quite a while. But what do you see as one of your greatest accomplishments?

GM: (laughs) Well, I've done a whole lot of things. Like I said, I prevented a lot of things and I've done a lot of things, and I don't know that I can champion them. But certainly, the rebuilding of L.A. County Hospital was really important. I would love to have built it to the full amount. Protecting our healthcare system, and fighting for that waiver at the time, and making sure that we had financial stability. Those are very important things that probably nobody notices. I mean, I don't have great things named after me, and that's not as important. But building the Eastside gold line is very important as a transportation system. I fought for those things.

Building affordable housing in my district was really significant. We did a lot of infill in challenging the status quo. Everybody thought you had to have huge, big developments, but there's a lot of things you can build and do as affordability. There's a lot of projects that we created. Creating and building and maintaining social service programs, as well as mental health, which was really an important delivery system for me. And maintaining it financially, putting it in place. So all of that leads to financial stability.

But at the end of the day, there were a lot of things that I did. Everything from running and challenging the way we run our juvenile halls, and trying to bring more education into their system. Again, they're not greatly noticeable things but they were change makers for many of the kids there and the programs there.

Sometimes fighting a department to change a system is a very hard thing to do. They're so accustomed to doing things their way they don't want to change anything. I did little things, like changing consumer laws, which I was able to do, through a small department called Weights and Measures that I could do. I found all kinds of ways that you can bring about change. When you can't do it one way, you can find another way to get *at* many of the things you need to do.

But I did some building as well. I mean, a lot of our libraries and a lot of our parks in the communities were upgraded. I'm very proud of that. The East L.A. Civic Center, which is really a jewel in the Eastside community. I'm very proud of the work

that I've done on Grand Park, making that happen. Everybody challenged me at the time and said it can't be done, it's just going to be a big homeless encampment, why are we doing it? And so on. I was able to get that done without any public funds. That was all done with private funds. I basically was able to leverage a development that wanted to go in right next door to Disney Hall, and from that, I was able to get the $50-million that I needed in order to rebuild Grand Park. Now it's a jewel in downtown.

I'm very proud of LA Plaza De Culturas Y Artes. We had always wanted to create a museum, a Latino museum here in Los Angeles, in L.A. County. So now we have LA Plaza De Culturas Y Artes, which is a place that we celebrate and we showcase the contributions of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Latinos to the building of this great megalopolis known as Los Angeles County. And it's flourishing and doing well. We have so much little things that I did that maybe were little seedlings along the way. I'm sure there are other things that people could point to.

But I think that for me, just operating every single day with integrity and responsibility, taking care of my duties and responsibility. That is watching the budget, managing for the entire L.A. County. Looking at fairness and equality, and trying to operate every single day. I was never comfortable with the word politician. It always had like a negative connotation for me. But at the end of the day, I was really proud to serve the district and to serve L.A. County, and all the roles and responsibilities that I had. So there are accomplishments here and there, but a lot of it was—and people know me and the department heads knew me—that I was going to ask a lot of questions and challenge the budget here and there. But I think at the end of the day, I also built a reputation of a partnership with them. That if we didn't have a stable financial situation in L.A. County, we aren't going to do all that we can do. Today I'm very proud of L.A. County, and the kind of financial stability that it has compared to other counties across the state.

NF: If you had to think of what was your most challenging moment for you while you were on the board of supervisors?

GM: I think it was dealing with my colleagues on the issue of the hospital. Reports, information, everything they needed, everything pointed to the need, and they denied that need. It was a criticism of *me* personally, of my district, it was a payback probably for some of the things I did earlier, like challenging their pensions, and so on. I don't think they forget that at all. There is that payback that happens in any kind of political situation, whether you like it or not, so you have to live with it. But it was one of the most painful things for me because it was the saddest moment to not get my colleagues to support something that was well founded, that was essential, that wasn't just for one district, it was for the whole. At the end of the day, to have cheated themselves, of not building the 900 beds that today they now need, they contract out for, so that bad vote has come back to sting them. Hopefully, eventually they will rebuild, and build the additional beds that we need at L.A. County-USC. It is one of the most important things that I did, and even though I lost, I don't have a problem with that, because everything was about the battle and the fight, and whether it was worth it and had the integrity and responsibility. That was my duty, and it wasn't just about winning. It was about making sure that you were an advocate for the community, and I felt very comfortable about that

even though we didn't win at the end of the day. But I've done many a battle that I didn't win, but at the end of the day it was very significant that that battle was fought.

NF: What motivated you as a political leader during your three-plus decades in public service?

GM: You know, I have to say that I have been very blessed as far as timing. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. I mean, even my own personal goal was to be—I don't want to say a puppeteer—but I wanted to be the political consultant. I wanted to be the issues-oriented person. I wanted to be above the fray as far as the politics were concerned. I wanted to play a very different role. I wanted to see more women elected. I really wanted to champion that. But the minute that I was elected, I was involved in doing a job, and I had a job before me and I couldn't do all the things that I wanted to do anymore. I had this job to do and it was full time.

But what motivated me, and had continued to motivate me, is really the very reason that I got involved. When somebody says *no* to you, the fight is even bigger and more important. When I did the school walkouts and the board of education didn't listen, they said no to us, then there was more of a fight. The Moratorium was a perfect example. I mean, here we wanted to make a case and point, and they said no to us, and hurt and killed one of our leaders. It just made me stronger and more dedicated to it.

So every time I heard a no, it just made me stronger and more forceful. And also knowing that I had the reinforcement from a community that needed somebody to be their champion. It was tough, and it was always easier to say yes, and go along and get along, than having to fight them. But at the end of the day, I got elected to do that. And that is what motivated me every single day. I would go in to city council, board of supervisors, the legislature, knowing full well that I wasn't liked by many, that they didn't respect my point of view, that I was an annoyance, but who cares? It was very important that *I* went in with a confidence that *I* was doing the job I was elected to do, that I was taking on the responsibilities, the duties that were entrusted in me. And then, every single day, I was an honest advocate on behalf of my communities. So I enjoyed my day every single day. I might have been annoying to all of them (laughs) but I was really very proud of the work that I did. And, like I said, didn't win every single battle, you can't win them all the time in politics, but at the end of the day I really enjoyed championing every one of those battles and serving honorably in the roles that I did.

And I still think politics is one of the most important things we need to do, whether you're elected or not. Just like Mr. Walker, every single day reminding us of our civic responsibility and duty. That was ingrained in me, through him, and it's something I believe in every single day. So even as a retiree, I'm still involved in lots of issues that I care about, that are important to me, and want to champion and mentor *other* particularly young women to get involved and be a champion. Don't be a part of a go-along-get-along, because who needs you if you're just going to be one of those women who are just going to cater to special interest and follow the lead of whoever it is. Let's be independent, let's be strong. There are a whole bunch of us that need that kind of advocacy still today.

[02:31:33]

NF: You're terming out on the board of supervisors and you decided you wanted to throw your hat in the ring one last time and run for city council.

GM: Yeah. What a mistake, huh? Some people said—including my former campaign manager, and I won every single race because of her. I know, had she had not passed, she would have told me, "Gloria, don't do it." But there was everything in me because of the community that I represented. People were asking me to run for this seat. We had a councilman who was just not as responsive to the community. There were a lot of issues in the community that needed attention. Everything from gentrification issues to basic services to maybe catering too much to development. So they kept asking me to run and I kept saying, "Oh, no, I'm done, I'm retired, let's support someone else." Well, no one would run against him, and we needed a change. At the end of the day, I decided to take on an incumbent. Everyone I knew said, What a mistake! This is not a good thing. It's hard to raise money. It was hard to even get a political consultant to work with me, all of it, even though I had been a champion in all the other kinds of things. I was not as competitive, and it was really a tough race. At the end of the day, we had one third the money that he had. He had all of the endorsements and everybody said, I can't go against an incumbent, you know, that's just the silent rule that you don't break.

And so, it was a tough thing to do. At the end of the day, even though it was so important and there were many of us in the community that really wanted to see a change, and regrettably we didn't get it. And I lost. It was the only race I ever lost, but it goes back to those basics of not running against an incumbent, coming in too late, and really not prepared to raise the kind of money that I knew it was going to take. And when you have so much special interests, like development interests—I was someone who was a little bit more conservative on the development issues. I wanted more checks and balances. I really wanted more affordable housing. I wanted a whole lot of regulations when it came to over-development. These are the kinds of things that brought a lot of money into his campaign against me. Even simple things, like billboards, I took a strong position on a lot of billboards. Even though I didn't have a problem with most billboards, but again, the proliferation of billboards and the kind of billboards that they have in our community—which of course gave him a lot of money from the billboard companies. So issues like that. Regrettably I lost and it's unfortunate.

I really wish someone else would have run and am still trying to encourage people to run for those seats. I really want to get the kind of person that is not going to be so dedicated to the special interests because then you forget about the people in the community. And when you look at communities like Boyle Heights, that is facing an unbelievable challenge on gentrification, affordable housing, people are losing their businesses. The inner city is being changed dramatically. It really needs a champion. And unfortunately, there is so much money from the special interests that want to develop those areas, so it's tough for anyone who's going to stand in their way to get elected nowadays. Because money is everything in politics. I guess it always has been. No longer stickers and lickers are the way to get (laughs) your message out there. It's a very, very different way, so consequently it's going to be a very, very tough battle.

And so, I'm still hoping that we're going to get the kind of champions that we need on the city council, that are going to look at affordable housing issues, look at limits on development. Not that you don't want to develop, because there's nothing wrong with

what's going on. It's just you have to be careful of those interests overpowering the interests of many people who are going to be gentrified and moved out of neighborhoods and communities that they've lived in all their lives. I'm concerned about those issues, and I think there's a way to do both. That's what I was trying to challenge, not just one way, but ways that we could work to limit gentrification and to find those ways for people who've been renting for fifteen or twenty years to be able to buy the very unit that they're renting. There's ways of doing it. We did it when I was on the board of supervisors. It can be done here. But it was tough in that campaign and regrettably I didn't win to carry that out.

NF: Political loss has to be tough, how did you recover?

GM: It wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be. My biggest concern was what was I going to do with my time? I'd been running for decades. I had my daughter running alongside and my husband being supportive. How was I going to be able to now sit home? I mean, I knew I was going to be doing different things. I have found myself to be as busy as ever as a retired supervisor. Not because I'm doing political things every single day, but because I'm doing the kinds of things I want to do. I'm being very involved in the arts, which I've always wanted to do. I serve on boards that are doing grants to arts initiatives. Plaza, I'm serving on this board. I serve on the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Board. I serve on the California Community Foundation. I love the work that they do. I'm real hands-on with stuff that they do. I'm developing a leadership class at Whittier College. I'm working with my colleagues on other things. I'm taking a painting class.

And of course, my first love, I've always had hobby the entire time while I was working, and maybe not as an assemblywoman, but I fell in love with this hobby called quilting. I'm a quilter and I love quilting. I've been doing it now—it was my mental health. I didn't need a therapist. I would go home after I was angry about what happened at the board of supervisors or the city council, and I would spend two or three hours in my sewing room quilting. It was relaxing and comfortable and it brought me back the kind of peace of mind that I needed to go in and slay the dragon the next day. So it's always been a good thing. And now I have—with others—developed a whole Latina quilting group. We're doing wonderful things. We're creating Latina themed quilts, which is kind of a new thing because quilting is a very American tradition. We're joining with Latina quilters in Mexico. We've been doing a lot of joint projects together. Even today we're making quilts for the earthquake victims in Mexico that we're going to be sending out there before Christmas. So it's something that I do. It's something that I love doing. I'm going to be teaching a quilting class to senior citizens in East L.A. soon. I'm a senior citizen now, believe it or not. I don't feel like one or act like one, but I am.

So I'm doing those kinds of things. Every single day I have a schedule. I don't have a staff. I don't have assistants. I don't have a secretary. I always wanted to have a secretary. So I have to organize myself and I don't do it as well. But I'm very busy and I still want to champion the issues of women. I mentor women who call me and ask me for advice. And not just women, young men as well, Latinos who are running for office.

I just supported a wonderful young man, Gabriel Sandoval, who just ran, didn't win for the legislature. But he is the kind of person that should be elected. I love people

like Monica Garcia, who's on the school board, and calls me from time to time for advice. I love talking to her, or anyone else who will call upon me. So I'm available to them. I want to make myself available to them and I want to continue to champion Latinos and Latinas to be involved in the community, more importantly to vote and know how important that is. And so I'm still out there. I'm very active and very involved, and so I'm keeping myself busy.

[02:40:08]

NF: That's wonderful. So I have some questions about women in politics. But I'm curious because this moment had a big impact on me. As a Latina, in 1991, when the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings happened, I just would love to hear what your perspective on that was, as a Latina and as a feminist, and you were just beginning your time on the board of supervisors.

GM: It had a *huge* impact. Even though I was on board of supervisors—it was like, you know, men watch the World Series when they're on, even though they're working, somehow they've got the TV on. We had the Anita Hill hearings on (laughs) every single moment. We needed to know everything and hear everything, and were just shocked to see what was going on, just shocked. It had a huge impact. I had a lot of women on staff, and we would all watch this and have this dialogue, and found it so hard to believe. And how we were going to lose this situation, when it was so evident to most of us—and it was painful. And it was hard as well because it was African Americans, and thought that we're challenging an African American on the Supreme Court. But he was challenged by a woman. And we believed her. I mean, we were right there with her, every moment of the day, so it was like sitting there, listening and taking the abuse that she was taking, for standing up for all the rest of us. It was a hard thing to watch, and painful, and it reminded us of why we're feminists. It reminded us why we had to champion what we had to do. We still had a long way to go, even though we were sitting there in positions of power. There was still much that had to be done. It was unfortunate that it was happening.

Anita Hill is one of my champions, and she sort of receded back and hardly anyone ever heard from her again. But she is a powerful, and I mean, courageous woman to take the abuse that she took, and to champion all of us as she did. And it's a hard thing to do. It's like every single woman who faces sexual harassment, to stand up and to be firm and strong. It's happening every day. We see it every single day. A hard thing to do. And so we need to be champions on behalf of those women.

NF: Right. Do you see a difference between how men and women lead?

GM: Absolutely. There's dramatic difference.

NF: How would you describe that difference?

GM: I find that most, not all, women talk about *we*. We have a tendency to talk about us. And when we are looking at issues, we look at them as we and us. Men look at issues, and

again, I debated men on this, [they] look at it as I. And they are not as focused about the whole, instead of the *I*. There's a difference. And it isn't as obvious and it's not true for everyone, okay, because I have found many a man that I met in the legislature that did understand the *we* and all of us, collectively. And I have women as well who are very focused on the special interests, and also just getting along and going along. So I'm not talking about every single person, but there is a difference.

I have found it is so much easier to talk to a woman on an issue that affects all of us, and to start from that point of view. There's more understanding, but it's a shortcut. A clear shortcut, as far as convincing them on some of these issues. I find it different with men. You have to work, really work hard at convincing them how it's going to affect the whole. And they may not be as interested. They're more interested in what is it, and how does it affect them and their own self interests? Now, that has been my experience up to now. So there is a difference. And, of course, we have a whole different indoctrination, we're brought up differently, we are different. The issues that we care about are different. So when we legislate, when we are in powerful positions, making decisions, we think differently about these things, and why not? It should be part of decision-making. That's why it's fair and equitable when you're in table of decision makers, whether it's the board of supervisors, or city council, it should be equitable. There should be as many women with as much diversity as possible coming to the table because you're going to make the best decisions for the whole. And that's what we want at the end of the day. Not for *some*, but for the entire whole. And that's our responsibility when we're elected and we're sworn into office, is to represent those interests. Not just your constituents, not just your political party, not just your community, but the whole. And that's our duty and responsibility. I find that women have a tremendous comfort with that kind of responsibility and duty. Not saying that men don't, some men don't. There's just a different way that we operate. I found that to be a shortcut with women. And I like legislating amongst women. I find it easier to do and so much more worthwhile. (laughs)

NF: In what ways are women judged differently from men when they're in political office?

GM: Well, first of all, we're not supposed to be there even today. We're just not supposed to be part of it. It's still, "Oh, a woman elected?" "Oh, well, a woman for president?" Oh, my! You know, it's still not our role. It's supposed to be unusual. In some places, it's still considered unusual, a woman in these roles, so you have to overcome that. There are some people—and I have found that the press, for example, *still* discriminates against women. I mean, when you've looked at decisions that women are making, there's always so many adjectives that go ahead of describing that elected official as compared to men.

I used to watch the decisions that Jackie Goldberg[8] would make, and they always had so many adjectives in front of her name, "the liberal," blah, blah, blah, blah blah. You know, and the men didn't have those kinds of labels. They had labels in front of me every time. So I see that happening. Even though they don't think they discriminate, they're looking at women differently as decision makers and as elected officials. I think goes on consciously and subconsciously, so it's there, it's ever-present, and you just deal with it. You don't let it stop you from doing anything once you're in that position, but

[8] Jackie Goldberg, OH# 5961, Center for Oral and Public History.

very frankly, you're still, quote, a woman in that position. And it's going to take a long time for it to become gender neutral as we'd like it to be.

There's nothing wrong with it. I don't mind being a woman in politics and promoting women in politics, and moving women forward. Later on, it's not going to be something that's important, but it *is* important today. And we saw that in the last race as well, where a lot of women didn't even know the kind of history that Hillary Clinton had in advancing the rights of women and girls, through all of the decades of service. They just saw her in that presidential race, and had not looked at her background and her history, and it was really, really unfortunate because she has quite a legacy in those areas, and it's unfortunate. We always wanted it to be equitable. We always said we don't want our daughters to slay the same dragons. We want to pat down the grass for them, but at the same time it's important to know their own history and some of the champions that came before them that has lead to, hopefully, an environment that's more equitable and greater opportunities for them.

NF: Since you brought it up I'm going to ask you, what impact do you think it would have made, had Hillary been elected president, for women in politics?

GM: (laughs) Well, as we know today, besides the fact that she's an unbelievably experienced, capable woman, who is a great international leader—I mean, this is a woman who knows international politics and foreign service. I mean, she's done it all, a little bit of everything, a lawyer, so very capable. Of course, it would have been a very different world today. I think that today the DACA kids wouldn't have to be in jeopardy every single day. Our healthcare system would have been stronger than ever because she would have moved forward the important changes to upgrade the Affordable Care Act. Our environment would not be under the kind of attack that it's under. We wouldn't be selling public lands today. Regulations would have been different. Cleaner air, cleaner water. We would have had the kind of international reputation that was maintained for decades, and continue to be an international, world leader in this country, with the kind of integrity and respect from other countries. We don't have that today.

I know that she knows how to handle the budget and the economy. I think she would have continued to build jobs as Obama did. She would have been looking at opportunities to probably look at green jobs in a whole different perspective, and probably create better opportunities. So much would have been different. And of course, the kind of hostility that we have in the congress might have still been there somewhat. But I think she would have built partnerships and found ways to work as a colleague, as she'd been in the senate, to work with members of both parties, and to find those ways to make and build the kind of legislative reforms that we need.

It would have been a very different world. The Hillary world would have been different than the world we have today. And foremost, I think she would of brought the kind of respect and integrity that we needed *in* our elected officials. What we're seeing now, it's unbelievable what is coming out of the White House, and how we are operating, the racism, the pettiness, the sexism. All of that coming right back up and slapping us in the face that we all have to resist and we have to protect what's going on. It's a shame that we're having to fight those battles today. But it is re-energizing our children, young people that might have laid low and been out of politics for a long time. But it's a

different world today and it's quite a challenge. It's really unfortunate that we lost our opportunity to see this country elect its first woman that would have been powerful, that would have been more experienced, that would have been prepared to lead, and that would have taken us to becoming really a great America, instead of what we have today.

[02:52:00]

NF: What do you think the effect of her loss would be on the future of women in politics? Is there a silver lining in this for women in politics?

GM: Well, I think that again, yeah. Well, it was a wakeup call for a lot of us. There were a lot of us that took it for granted. Not that we didn't see her as a woman in politics, but she was experienced, ready, prepared, had the money, had the endorsements, had everything. We were ready to have a victory that day. Not because she was a woman but because she was ready and prepared, and all the things that we've ever *wanted* in a candidate. She had it all, and at the end of the day we weren't victorious. It was a very painful loss, but it did reinforce for *many* of us what we need to continue to do.

I mean, we had seen not as many women running for the legislature, not as many women in our city councils, so we needed to continue to get back to our roots and start championing young women to start running for office, to start challenging the status quo, to get *in* there, and to be supportive and to fight those battles. So, there are many of us that are still doing that and we want to mentor others. You know, our time has passed. I don't want to say our time has passed, but we are now the elders, and we have to go back and start mentoring other young women, and promoting them, and helping them, and being supportive of them. Because their loss, *our* loss of Hillary is a wakeup call for a lot of us, but at the same time it really tells us that there's still a long way to go. We *still* have that duty and responsibility to elect the first woman president of this country. So that is something that's not going away. There's so many of us that want to champion that. I don't know who our candidate will be, but I am hopeful that we will have a woman that will have the sponsorship and support of our political parties. Of course, our parties have to still—there's a lot going on there as well that we need to address. But hopefully, we're going to be in a position to elect our first woman. It's important to *all* of us. I hope it's something I will see in my lifetime.

NF: What advice would you give, or do you give to young women who want to run for office today?

GM: Well, you know, (sighs) I hate to lecture them but I need to because both women and Latinos, we talk to these things. There was a time where the thought of a Latino running for congress, or a Latino running for the state legislature was unheard of. And it was an uphill battle, and the same thing for a woman. *I know*. And the worst thing that could happen is for you to become part of the wallpaper, just become a go-along-to-get-along. We are still a minority when it comes to Latinos and Latinas in office. We're still a minority when it comes to women in office. So we still have a duty and responsibility to bring others on to champion those causes, to stand up and be vocal about it, to *fight* those issues. And there are so many people, both women and men, who are elected, as Latinos

or as women, who are listening to the special interests, going along, and saying, "Oh, well, we don't really need an environmental review of that." All of a sudden all these NFL people are giving you all this money, so you don't need to support those environmental causes. "Oh, we don't need to do this." But because of special interests, you know, we don't need to do it.

I would love to see the Latinos that are getting elected every single day to remember where they come from, and how hard it was to fight, and how our community still needs those advocates. We have environmental issues in our community, our education system is still in need, we have affordable housing issues, we need economic development in our communities. When I look at women and they're running for office, there are *still* issues in our community. We still are not on par when it comes to pay equity. We *still* don't have women in positions of power that should be there. We *still* have sexual harassment going on every single day and *not* being addressed and dealt with. We *still* have inequality in our educational system and in our economic system. So consequently, because we're still the minority in those roles, Latinos, Latinas, *and* women, we still have a big job to do. And so, to dismiss it and think, Oh, you know, I'm just here, I've just got elected and I can address it, go-along-to-get-along, and I don't have to be that champion. You're wrong! It's your job, it's your duty, it's your responsibility.

NF: Agreed.

GM: (laughs)

NF: Why do you think we still have so few women in elected office?

GM: Because it's not a pretty place to be. You know, I've never wanted my daughter to go into politics. I mean, a lot of people ask. *No!* It's not a pretty place to be. It's tough. It's uncomfortable sometimes. You have to really, really want to do this kind of work, and there are many of those places where women are still not on—they're tough places to be. And sometimes you just would like to create a better comfort for them, and there's other kinds of opportunities. But I think that's true across the board.

I really do think that more and more women should look at running for office. I hope they do it with the kind of integrity and responsibility to do it independently. There are too many that are falling into the traps of becoming darlings of special interests, whether it be insurance interests, or whatever lobby it is out there, development interests. It's just so few of us. We'd love to see more and more women, who really care about the issues, care about communities, who look on their duties and responsibilities, to lift the whole, to talk and operate as *we* and *us*, instead of I. It isn't about you. It's about us, and that's a hard thing to do. It can be a lonely place, and sometimes you don't have the kind of support system that you need of other women. Because once you're elected they think, Oh, it's a cakewalk, you're there, you got everything. No, it's still tough. It's still tough, but you still need to have that support system going in, and sometimes the advice and the mentors still need to be out there for you.

NF: Last couple questions. What are you most proud of?

GM: What am I most proud of? Well, I have a daughter, I'm so proud of her. And you know, before I wouldn't say that. I would say it was the work I did. But I'm really proud of my daughter. I'm so proud of what she does every day because she's not me. She's different than I am, but she's strong, she's independent, she's powerful, she has self-confidence, and she's doing what she wants to be doing, which is wonderful, which is what I wanted to raise, is a daughter who had all of those qualities. And she has all of those things and I'm so proud of her. She's going to do great things, and she's going to raise great children, and she's going to mentor other women, and she's going to be powerful on her own. So, that's one of the *best* things I've ever done. I never thought I would say that. I was supposed to be the Auntie Mame of my community. I was going to be a single women.

But actually, I'm very proud of the kind of legacy that I have. Probably not as glamorous and shiny as other people would do it because I don't have a lot of things named after me. But I am very proud of the legacy that I have had, and what I did for the county, the kinds of things I championed on the city council and the legislature, the kind of organizing that I did in the community, the kinds of things that I provided leadership to, the kind of people that I mentored, the kind of *standards* and the qualities that I brought to how you govern. I think that they're important. Hardly noticed, but there. I'd like to see them maintained and getting new champions to care about those things. They're not as important and sexy. I mean, who cares if you're monitoring the budget, or looking at contracts, or looking at the financial stability of the county. Those are not as important as being an environmental leader, or being the leader of transportation, or building more housing, or any of those kinds of things. But I do think that that kind of leadership is essential as well. I'm glad that in all the years that I've served, I really served in the comfort of knowing that I did it with the kind of integrity and responsibility that was entrusted in me. From the values that I learned from my parents, and my grandmother, and my community, I'm very proud of all of that. It's important to me.

[03:01:29]

NF: As you should be. Is there anything else that I didn't ask that I should have asked?

GM: (laughs) Well, I don't know why I'm tearing up, but I'm looking back and saying, "Wow, that was a lot." But no, I just think that it's really wonderful that we have these kinds of opportunities to talk about ourselves. Like I said, it's not anything to be written up in the *L.A. Times*, and it's not anything that anybody would write a book about, but at the same time, hopefully, as young people look back at our advice and our experiences, it will help them along the way. Because decision making, particularly for a woman, is tough because we think about so many more things. We don't look at the easy way. So having this available—and to people is a good thing. They'll look back and hopefully it'll help them because I think that we are born leaders; we really are, women. And whether we're leaders in politics or leaders in academia, or the arts, there's a lot of places. We are leaders in our homes every single day, we manage—just like my mother did, even though I didn't notice it when I was little. She was in charge of that household, and she had a command of it in a whole different way than I thought. And so, we're just born leaders, so we're very fortunate that we have these kinds of histories, and that they can look back

on [it]. Hopefully it might help them, inspire them, motivate them, or maybe giving them a helping hand as they make their tough decisions.

NF: Thank you so, so much for taking the time to share your story with me today.

GM: Thank you. Certainly, thank you.

NF: Okay, we're done!

END OF INTERVIEW