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Interview no. 307

Rodolfo Hernandez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Rodolfo Hernandez (1932-)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martinez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 15, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Former Bishop in the Chicano Mormon congregation.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; Chicano Mormons in El Paso and relations with Anglo Mormons.

2 hours, 50 pages.

(Oral History interview with Mr. Rodolfo Hernandez of 501 Robinson St., El Paso. Interviewing is Oscar Martinez from U. T. El Paso)

M: Mr. Hernandez, could you first tell me where and when you were born?

H: I was born January the 30th, 1932, here in El Paso.

M: Were your parents from El Paso?

H: They're immigrants from México, residents of El Paso. My dad is from Jiménez, Chihuahua; my mother from Sombrerete, Zacatecas. They met here in El Paso and married.

M: Why did your parents come here from México?

H: I think it was the Revolution of 1910. I know that that's what brought my grandmother over here; they were looking for food. Jimenez had a lack of food then.

M: What did your father do when he came to El Paso?

H: He was a barber, learned barbering in México.

M: Did you go to school locally, then?

H: Yes.

M: All the way through?

H: All the way through.

M: Which schools did you attend?

H: I went to elementary school at Zavala School, Burleson, Jefferson, El Paso High, U. T. El Paso, and U. T. Austin.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about experiences or incidents that stand out in your mind from elementary school years, things that you remember the most about those years?

H: I tried to stay out of trouble, I was afraid about being reprimanded, being punished, so I never stood up to the teachers or anything. In a sense, I guess I was very sensitive about punishment and I say

this for what follows, because it seems to be my nature when I was a kid. I didn't want to be punished, I didn't want to go to detention, I didn't want to be in any way chastised or reprimanded. That stands out in my mind; I tried to do everything that they told me.

M: What neighborhood did you grow up in?

H: En la calle Alameda, I don't know that the neighborhood had any name, like Barrio del Diablo and other neighborhoods around there. So I don't know that my neighborhood had had a name, just Calle Alameda. The houses have been destroyed; the highway goes by there now. So the neighborhood isn't there anymore.

M: Was it a tough neighborhood, gangs and things like that?

H: Well, no, not really. The businesses there made it a little bit different, so it wasn't really tough. Around the neighborhood were tough neighborhoods like el Barrio del Diablo and Lincoln Park, but it wasn't really a tough neighborhood. As I said, I really didn't go with gangs or anything like that, because since I was very young, the church was an influence in my life; I tried to be different. The fact that I was Protestant, that's what they called me, because I wasn't Catholic, I kind of stayed away from El Barrio. I am very glad though that I didn't completely get away from the influences of El Barrio, because I think they were very positive. At the time I didn't see the influences of El Barrio being positive; I saw them as being very negative and very harmful and I tried to stay away from them. But I guess I didn't completely stay away from them. They did touch my life, and I am glad they did. When looking back, in

retrospect, I think they were very positive influences; very human, natural, real kinds of influences. Later I was to try to get away from this reality of life, and I think with time, as I've grown older, I realized that they were very important to me. I tried to compare the people in the community with the people in church, and I always found that people in the church were lacking something, I couldn't quite detect it. The people in the community, even those people that were as sinners by the church people, had a warmth, a reality about them that's very good and I couldn't understand what it was.

M: Have you pinned it down?

H: Well, I think it's an acceptance of the conflicts of life. I think that the church and the church group in a sense rejects the realities of life, the conflicts of life and tries to go more in an illusion--illusions of being better than other people, good; I don't know, all sorts of illusions. We go there to be told how good we are, seeking salvation, and we have better chances of being saved. So I always felt something lacking in church and felt that coldness about it. Nevertheless the doctrines, the teachings drew me very close to the church. I like the teachings even though I felt a certain coldness there. With time, it kind of lost the difference. With time, I became one of the leaders and I guess I assumed the same coldness, until I tried to come to reality and make a real effort at developing my life and developing the lives of other people. When you really want to try you have to accept the realities of life, you have to accept the economic situation of the members, their lack of

political power, their lack of involvement really in the church. When you start to see these things, you say, "How can we get them more economic help?" Education was one of the means. Or, "How can we help them get more education?" Well, by helping them get an attitude of wanting to learn, wanting to go to school. When I tried to see the reality of trying to help people, I think this brought me back to the reality of life; and when you start pushing these realities, you find obstacles. It's ironic, that the church presented a group of the greatest obstacles to helping the people, economically mostly. We say that in the church, "We help our own." I found as a bishop this was not true, that we didn't really want to help them. We didn't want to help the people economically, which is one of the harshest realities--the economic situation of the people. I think that Mormonism, main stream Mormonism, is geared to middle class Anglo culture. I didn't realize it at the time, so naturally I thought that if they would only realize our situation, our condition, they would help. I was under that illusion: "The day that they realize what we need, what we want, our aspirations, they will come and help us." I really, really believed that; that was a great illusion of mine. So I tried to bring it to their attention, at first nicely. I can show you one of the first letters that we ever wrote, an open letter to the high council of the Stake of El Paso. We tried to point out some of our needs, but they really didn't want to hear; they didn't want to know our needs because I don't think they really wanted to help us. So this attitude, a nice way of trying to show them our needs, kept changing our posture. We were more aggressive and more

obstinate, I guess, and took up the challenge, in sports, in the say in the road shows, in certain activities that we could compete with the Anglo wards. We tried to show them up. I think it's a natural problem; I really don't think that it's anything special. I think that every religion has it. We still have these problems. They're there. A lot of people in the church *think* that we've got it, we're there, we don't need to really strive. We dilude ourselves that we are the chosen people, that we are saved, that we have everything that we need, we really made it. I think we dilude ourselves.

M: When was it that you began changing your mind about the attitudes and lack of concern on the part of the Anglo leadership? What brought it about?

H: Well, my dad always told me about this, but I didn't want to believe him. I felt that that's the way people are; we really want to find out by ourselves. He had told me of these problems. When I was eighteen, out of high school, they asked me to go on a mission for the church. I didn't know whether I wanted to, and it wasn't because I didn't believe in the doctrines or because I questioned the leadership. There was a question in my mind, because my dad put this question in my mind.

M: What is that? What question?

H: You know, I really believed in Mormonism per se, especially in the Book of Mormon and the doctrine and covenant. But somehow he had put a question in my mind about the leadership. I wasn't quite sure about the leadership, that they made errors, mistakes. That was a conflict in my mind that I couldn't see, because we are taught, the

attitude is, that the leaders don't make mistakes, that they always tell us the truth. Since then, naturally I found out that we make mistakes because I was a leader myself, and we've made grave mistakes. The problem is that we don't want to admit the mistakes that we make. But that was my problem, that the leadership would not accept the fact that we are human and even in the church we make mistakes. I guess I wasn't paying close attention to the teachings. If I had read the title page of the Book of Mormon, that one line, that one phrase that hit me lately: "If there are faults, they are the mistakes of men." This divine work, the Book of Mormon, according to Mormons it's the perfect book; yet the Book of Mormon says: "If there are faults . . ." There is the possibility that in the Book of Mormon there are faults, even though it is inspired; and if there are faults, it is the mistakes of men, so you can't prevent the weaknesses of men to creep in even into a divine work as the Book of Mormon. But now I can accept that, and I can accept these problems--that we've made mistakes and that I've made mistakes, and that they made horrible mistakes. These things that have been done to me personally are great injustices. I accepted it and I think that it's a mistake; and I wish they would realize that it's a mistake and do something to correct it, because they are going to hurt themselves and hurt others. Me? I accept it, and I accept a leader like that. I can not accept a leader that says he is infallible, and I think that there is this attitude of infallibility. I don't know whether men really believe this about infallibility, but at least the attitude is

there; that's the posture. I guess this is the thing that bothers me, you see, this infallible attitude. But anyway I thought to myself when I went out on a mission, "Well, I won't let this bother me. I'll try to accept the leaders and try to understand it as I go along." I put it out of my mind and I accepted the church and the responsibilities and everything, and I was just eighteen when I went out on a mission, and I completed the mission and came back.

M: Where did you go?

H: To California for three months and back here to Houston, Corpus Christi area. I really enjoyed it, because all of my life I really enjoyed learning about the gospel, the Mormon doctrine. I really have, because I guess that was my dad's influence, especially in the Book of Mormon; finding an identity there as a Lamanite. This is the thing that really impressed me and I guess I get my dad's influence in that. If anything attracted me to Mormonism it was the teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning the Lamanite. That was the thing that really impressed me, and from there naturally all the other doctrines (doctrines of priesthood, of salvation) impressed me. I learned about them, I accepted them; but the thing that really attracted me was the teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning the laymanite, his identity and his mission, whatever that might be.

M: How did you feel about the references in the Book of Mormon regarding the curse of the dark-skin upon the Lamanite? When did you first deal with that?

H: Well, I accepted that and the influences in the branch. We had a man,

Jose Apolinar Balderas, who dealt with the same subject at length and constantly all his life. Guillermo Balderas was his father, and he dealt with this subject all the time. I guess this man influenced me in the fact that it was always a blessing. The curse was never a curse, you see; it was a conflict that was turned into a blessing. I didn't really know the doctrine as such; now I can find it for you in the Book of Mormon. In several parts of the Book of Mormon it says that this curse was really not a curse, but a blessing.

M: Having dark skin was a blessing?

H: It was a blessing. It was a situation created for the Lord to bring about conflict, conflict in a good sense, you see, for development. I believe it like that. It creates a situation of conflict that you can't avoid, you see. I can't go over to the Anglo side because of my color, because of my features. I could if I try to forget Spanish and try to forget the Mexican influence; this would be easy. But I can't because of my features, because of my color, and that makes me keep the conflict. You see, as I was telling you, I think that we have quit confronting these problems here in the Third Ward. We have quit for reasons but we really can't quit so long as this is one thing that keeps us--the color, the features.

M: I don't quite understand about the conflict.

H: Well you see, in the first place, the Anglos, generally speaking, reject us because of the way we look, I think. It was intended like that in the Book of Mormon; that was the intent. I think that if there was a policy, and if there is still a policy in the church,

against interracial marriage, I think that's the reason that this policy is not verbalized much nowadays. It may be because of the movements, and they naturally wouldn't say, "They used to tell missionaries, 'don't marry Mexican girls,'" I can still feel that they are present, but they are not expounded; they are not brought out into the open. They're in the old priesthood manuals. I can show you where they are.

M: That would be interesting to read.

H: So, I'm not telling you something that is not documented, is not there. This was part of the problem that came up with the Seventh Ward and the Third Ward, because there was the feeling of no interracial marriage, with the older Mormon generation. Maybe now the younger Mormon generations have a different attitude; some of them not all of them. Some of them may even consider interracial marriage. But as I said, not that I'm so much for races. Maybe some people could get rid of the problem by erasing this color line. But in a sense I think it's good that the Lord gave us what's called a curse in the Book of Mormon, but I really don't take it as a curse. I think that if taken positively it can be a tremendous motivating force.

M: Of course, the way things have turned out, the history not only in this country but in other places shows us very well that people of a dark skin have been oppressed by people of a white skin, so in that sense a doctrine of this kind legitimizes this kind of oppression. This is one criticism that has been leveled in church with regard to the doctrine about the blacks, and then to a lesser extent but really along the same lines with regard to the dark-skinned of the Lamanites.

- H: Yeah, I've heard that the Book of Mormon preaches racism because of this doctrine of the Lamanite being cursed with a dark skin. I really don't see it like that and never have. I really think that it's a blessing in disguise, that it is keeping the conflict; I really do. The Lord helped the Jews keep their conflict in a different way and they've kept their conflict for centuries; they've kept their identity and they've kept the conflict. It was in some manner that they did it, in some way. I think that this is another way and this is the way he did it with us, because we refused to assume conflict, we want to forget. We don't want to face reality and this is one way of assuring that we will face reality, at least some of the realities of life. I think it's really too bad that in the Third Ward we've tried to white wash this whole thing, these whole problems. But I think the time will come when it will come to a head again.
- M: Could we go back to the beginning of the disbanding of the Seventh Ward? Where did it all start? What were the events that lead up to that point?
- H: Well, I think that the church will say that at that period of time the policy was that there would only be one Spanish speaking unit in each community. Why? I don't know. And they are not obligated to explain church policy, why should they? This is the policy, this is the authority. I'm not saying that I don't believe in authority; sure. But I'm saying that it has its weaknesses and this is one of the weaknesses that it has. It refuses to be analyzed and so it does itself harm. But they are not going to give you an explanation. If you ask, "Why this policy? Why did so many people in

the southwest suffer, leave the church?" They don't seem to care if they left the church. You know, I've often asked myself why they force this policy upon us, and it happened at the time of Seventh Ward. They are going to deny, anybody will deny that we have problems, and it was because of all these problems that the Seventh Ward was dissolved. They are going to say, "It was dissolved because at that time the church developed a policy that there would only be one Spanish speaking unit in each community."

M: And there were two at the time?

H: There were three.

M: For the benefit of identification, which ones were they?

H: There was the Seventh Ward, there was the Third Ward; at the Fifth Ward there was a small group meeting there.

M: Aside from the regular ward at the Fifth Ward there was a Spanish speaking group?

H: Yes.

M: What year are we talking about?

H: I think it was in 1973 when the Seventh Ward was dissolved.

M: When the policy was formulated?

H: That's when the policy was formulated.

M: After the things had built up?

H: Yeah. I think that these problems had been built up throughout the church; but since we can't communicate with the other parts of the church, there is no way of the Third Ward or the Seventh Ward communicating with other parts. But I know, having lived in Austin,

that they had these problems; that years before that, these questions were being asked. This didn't happen over night. I have letters there that I can show you that go back to 1966. Way back these problems started building up.

M: Could we talk about those problems and the way they built up?

H: Okay. It came to a point that we wanted to bring these things out into the open. We wanted to verbalize these things, we wanted to document our needs, our problems. So this letter is dated the 8th of February 1966 as an open letter to the El Paso Stake Presidency and the High Council. Now looking back it's ridiculous trying to inform the High Council in an open letter. Why can't we talk to them personally? Weren't they here? Did they know about all these things? Do they know Spanish? Many of these people are Mexican citizens, they came from México; they've been living with the Mexicans all their lives and here we were trying to tell them about the good opportunities living in a multicultural environment. Well, it was an effort. In a sense it was a very mild letter.

M: What is the thrust of the letter?

H: The idea was to try to learn the gospel, to put Mormon culture (whatever that is) first before Mexican culture or Anglo culture (whatever they may be), but to permit ourselves to be influenced by Mexican or Anglo attitudes that we felt were conducive to establishing the kingdom: Mormonism. That was the idea: Let us establish Mormonism among the Mexicans the best way we can. We think the best way we can is by permitting the Mexican influences that are good and the Anglo influences

that are good, both Spanish or English. Let us speak English wherever we think English is more effective in the teaching of the gospel and let us teach the people in Spanish wherever we think it's more effective for the learning of the gospel. But learning of the gospel being the first value, the highest value, was the idea.

M: Did you feel any restrictions about that, that you needed to put that in a letter?

H: Well, no, at the time I don't think we felt any restrictions because we grew up and we developed in a branch of the church that was completely ignored, left alone. We did not have the control of the direction of the Stake. For years and years and years we only had missionaries come in there, and missionaries come in for a little while and mostly we developed and we learned Mormonism on our own. Brother Apolinar Balderas was a great influence in that branch, and we didn't feel the influence of church policy. This thing to me has become, I don't know, in a sense, terrible. We didn't feel control and therefore we were pretty free to develop and learn Mormonism on our own and I think we did a pretty good job of learning Mormonism from the standard works--from the Book of Mormon doctrine and covenants, the Bible. The idea was to substantiate the doctrines through the standard works. Now I think we have gotten away from that. I haven't heard a talk in church that says, "This scripture in verse..." We hear a lot of opinion, but that was the attitude then. I greatly admire Balderas for this attitude. He learned the Mormonism from the standard works and he greatly influenced, so I said we didn't have this control. So I didn't feel these obstacles for a long time until we came into the

Stake of El Paso, and not right away then, either. It took some time before the Stake started gaining control and direction of the ward, but it wasn't this time. I felt that we were neglected. And it's crazy how I wanted attention; and when I got attention I didn't want attention any more because I didn't want the kind of attention that was given, because it was control. It was, "Do this this way," or "Don't do it." You know, purely authoritarianism and to the sacrifice of individuality. It's natural, but it's too bad that we can't see that you have a natural conflict between the individual and authority; you know, these are two goods. You can't wipe out the individual, you can't wipe out the authority. It's the conflict between the individual and the group, whatever the group may be: the social group, the community, the church in this case. So in a sense I kind of felt, as time went on, the desire to wipe out the individual. That's why, as time went on, one of the things that was attacked by the Stake leaders was free agency. Free agency naturally goes with the individual and we resisted the attack upon free agency. The attitude was that you lost your free agency upon being baptized, that you lost your free agency upon accepting a calling in the church. The Mexican influences belong to the individual, didn't belong to the major group, to the Mormon church. The Mormon church didn't want to bring in the Mexican influences; it was us as individuals that wanted to bring in the Mexican influence in an individual sort of way. Naturally we went over to the side of the individual, and this was the conflict; it was the individual against the controlling group and this was what happened. If they had only seen that it was

natural that this would happen and that it will happen again, they wouldn't have persecuted it and said all these things about us.

It was natural, and it's still natural; it's going to happen again, because you can't wipe out the individual. Mormonism teaches the value of the individual; we are a child of God, in the form of God, and I could tell you what doctrines emphasize the value of the individual. So this was the conflict: the group versus the individual. So naturally, as I said, at the time we didn't feel the obstacle, we didn't feel the opposition; but we felt that we needed help to reinforce the Mexican influence, the losing of the Spanish.

M: In 1966?

H: Yeah. I think by this time we felt pretty much that we were going to lose the culture.

M: And this is in the context of a branch, what we are talking about now?

H: No, it was already a ward.

M: This is a ward now.

H: You see, you felt these two influences. There was the attitude, a faction among the Mexicans that didn't want the Anglo, that didn't want English. Then there was faction, which we represented, that wanted some of the Anglo, some of the English because naturally if you want to educate your people, you got to go English. If you want to get a good job, you got to go English. So there was this conflict there. We were fighting amongst ourselves because of the values, permitting the Anglo values and also permitting the Mexican values and we were at odds there; we were fighting amongst ourselves. We were lost, we didn't know what to do.

M: This was the Third Ward that we are talking about?

H: The Third Ward.

M: What brought on the need for this letter, on an immediate basis?

H: Well, I think, at the time we felt a need to strengthen the Anglo influences. It's ironic, it's really crazy when I think about. Some of us felt that we needed to strengthen the Anglo, the English, that our young people, our children might have a better start, a head start. I don't think this concept had come about then, it came about later on. But we wanted a head start and we felt we could give our young people a head start by teaching them English and the gospel in English. We could "kill two birds with one stone," as the saying goes. But we had some people, some older people, that came from México that opposed this idea of presenting the gospel in English. It's crazy how we have changed our minds to these things, because at the time we saw the need to introduce more English, more of the Anglo culture, now we feel that we need to reinforce the Mexican influence. It's crazy, you know, it's really crazy, but I think that maybe the situation warrants the need to emphasize one or the other if you want to keep both. So maybe the situation dictates what you are going to emphasize, and you can't say, "We are going to emphasize this one from now on." Because I think that a lot of the young people now in the Ward, if asked to give a sermon in good Spanish, I don't think they can. To me, it's too bad. Looking back I am glad that I had to do it, that if I learned to speak Spanish and if I learned to read it, it was because I had to, because of the church. If I can give a sermon in Spanish or a class or anything, it's because I had to and I don't think that

these needs are as great now in the Ward. It's a bigger Ward and we have better facilities, we have more young people. Apparently things should be better now, but I don't think the opportunities are there to learn Spanish and to keep the Mexican influences; no, they are not there.

M: What response did you get to this letter?

H: No response at all.

M: Who was it addressed to?

H: The High Council.

M: Was there a follow up?

H: No, not really. As I said, I don't think they really cared.

M: Did the members of the Third Ward or the leadership pursue the issue?

H: As I say, we were fighting among ourselves, because of these two influences. We were trying to find the right attitude, I guess, as to how much English, how much Spanish. The Stake pretty much kept out of it until later on. Later on it came in and the whole church dictated what the policy would be.

M: When was that?

H: Well, I think that this bringing of the units into one is an effect as I see it, it's an effort to force some of the young people into the Anglo wards, to acculturate them into the Anglo, to do away with the problem. That's the way I see it. And many of them have not gone. Well, something else; with the problems that the Third Ward has, as big as it is, it's ridiculous to have a big Ward like that. You can't

divide it and make two Spanish speaking communities where more leadership can develop like that, like had been the policy.

M: But that policy came in 1973.

H: Yes.

M: That was after the problem had blown up.

H: Yeah, well....., I didn't go to that Stake conference, but at that Stake conference they announced that Seventh Ward had been dissolved.

Naturally we felt that it was because of the problems that we had had there, and the problems had been the accusation that was made to us at the court, at the trials that we had. That was that we had been insubordinate because we had gone to a different ward that was not in our boundary area, and after that all the boundaries were done away with, no boundaries, everybody goes to the same ward. To me, it's very... I just can't think of the word. Something that changes, something that isn't constant. You can change policy at whim, at will, whatever you want. And to hold us for that, to disfellowship me and Moroni and Roberto and this other man, I think it's terrible, that it should never happen again.

M: I am sorry I interrupted you as you were going to go through the letters that you have there.

H: Well, I was trying to remember the past the troubles that we were having amongst ourselves. We were trying to find what would be the right attitude; how much Spanish, how much Mexican influence, how much Anglo influence. I guess this was an attempt to try to find an orientation. The church was not involved in this as a whole, so we had to do it because the problem was upon us and we were at odds with some of the leaders. Some of the people still there in Third Ward

were at odds because of this non-agreement; we didn't know what to do. But as time went by I think we've been changing all the time, even now. For a while there, we were sure that we needed more Spanish, more Mexican influence, that this was the way to make the church go amongst the Mexican people. In some of the letters here we asked for a Stake conference in Spanish, everything in Spanish.

M: For the whole Stake?

H: For the whole Stake. For our people. While they were having their Stake conference and their speakers in English, we wanted to have in some ward, somewhere, a meeting, a sort of Stake conference, where we would have the talks in Spanish, everything in Spanish. The letter was sent to Kimbal and he considered it; but instead of going in that direction and emphasizing more Spanish, more Mexican influence, it went the other way, less Spanish, less Mexican influence.

M: When was this letter sent?

H: The 3rd of April, 1967.

The Third Ward and Seventh Ward bishoprics of the Spanish speaking wards of the El Paso Stake would like to request the El Paso Stake to provide a quarterly Stake conference in this area for members of the church who are Spanish speaking and do not understand English. We feel that a better climate, one that is designed to fulfill the laymanites' needs and sensitivity, is needed.

We are always asking for the laymanites' needs and sensitivities; and instead of going in that direction, it has gone in the opposite direction--no needs and no sensitivities.

M: Did you receive response to this letter?

H: Yes, we received a response. The Stake formed a committee to study the question and the committee members were Guillermo Balderas, Moroni Flores, Elias Flores and Manuel Gonzalez. They are all bishops in this committee.

It is of the opinion of this committee that the Stake conference for the Spanish speaking members of the church in this area is a must at this time.

December the 12th, 1967. So you see, the committee was of the opinion that it was a must that the Stake form. So the request was ordered on to Salt Lake. I think I have the response here. That it was being considered was really the response; it was taken into consideration. I have the letter here somewhere. Kimbal answered, but, I guess they did consider and the consideration developed into the policy that we have now.

M: What response did you get at the conclusion of that consideration? Did you get a letter back?

H: Yeah; that it was being considered, that whatever they felt would be in the best interest, long range goals for our benefit, these things would be done.

M: They didn't give you any immediate response? I mean, was there a length of time they considered this question and then sent you a response about their decision?

H: No, it wasn't a length of time. They answered and told us that they were considering this idea.

M: But, did you hear a decision?

H: No, not really.

M: They just left you hanging.

H: Later on the policy developed.

M: But that was 1973.

H: Yeah.

M: And here you are in 1967 asking for this.

H: That's right.

M: So, you get a letter saying, "We are considering it," and you hear nothing more about it?

H: That's right.

M: That's a long time to be left hanging.

H: Well...

M: That's the usual bureaucratic way of stalling.

H: Yeah, that's right.

M: Letting things die.

H: So it was considered, I guess, and the policy developed that there should be just one Spanish speaking Ward or congregation for each community, and that was the policy that was considered best. Why? I don't know.

M: During all this time that they're considering this question, what was happening in the Mexican Ward or Wards?

H: Well, it's just one; the Third Ward.

M: During all time between 1967 and the latter part of 1972, what is happening with all the issues that the Mexican American Mormons are

concerned with, in this interim period when they are waiting for a policy decision?

H: Well, I think we're developing a more aggressive attitude about our needs and we're defining our needs, and we're demanding them. This will come about with the dissolution of the Seventh Ward, because it's not an asking, it's a telling. This is what we're doing and naturally that was against the church attitude. You know, the first tool that we used, because I really think it was a tool, was to complain about the conditions of the chapel at the St. Vrain in the Second Ward, because that wasn't really the problem. It was the problem that the chapel was very small, it was inadequate; we had the danger of the roof coming down on us because it was Spanish style and it was very heavy. The boards were old and it leaked all over the place. We had tremendous problems with the building, so we used the building and said, "Our needs are not being met." We started complaining about the building, with the idea that maybe we could motivate the church, bring some attention upon us so the church would help us construct a better building. We never figured on being forced into the Douglas Street Chapel, we never figured on that. As time went on, we got wind of these intentions but repeatedly we opposed the move to the Douglas Street Chapel. My brother-in-law, Manuel Gonzalez, Jr., was bishop after me. He opposed it and while we had somebody that was in sympathy with our needs, we felt we wouldn't be forced into the Douglas Street Chapel. We knew, or at least I felt, that we'd have problems in the Douglas Street Chapel, being wards; I mean, wards

in the common usage of the word, wards of another congregation. I don't know, but I'm sure they're having tremendous problems right now. Dice el dicho en español: "El muerto y el arrimado a los tres días apestan," y estoy seguro que apestamos allí. Especially when we had trouble financing a building that was falling down. We had trouble keeping it up and repairing it and maintaining it; I'm sure they had tremendous problems helping with the maintenance of this chapel, that's many times bigger and many times more expensive. So I know they have problems and I don't have to hear about them. So it was an attempt, as we got wind of these intentions, to try to not be forced into this building.

M: This was in 1972, that they did this?

H: Well, after the dissolution of the Third Ward.

M: Oh, it came after.

H: I take it back; the Third Ward was moved before. That was one of the reasons we went to the Seventh Ward, because we did not agree with the bishop that was put into the Third Ward. We felt that he was elected as a bishop with the intent of forcing us to do things, not just that thing but many things. That was one of the major things, forcing us into that building, because he was of the opinion that we should move. And I always felt that they took bishops off and on that would go along with the policy they wanted. If they'd hear me, I guess these would be grounds for excommunication, to say this. They put in bishops and took them out according to the way that they felt they'd go, but maybe this is inspiration. Anyway, this was one of

the objections to that bishop, even though we'd never voted against him as many people did in one of the conferences. The Ward conferences voted against that bishop, and this was the reason; because we didn't want to be forced into a situation we didn't want. That symbolizes the fact that we are there and the members don't say anything about it anymore.

M: That was the Stake's response to the request to have a better building?

H: Yes, yes, that was the answer to a better building. That would shut us up once and for all.

M: Just to get the chronology straight here, when did that happen?

H: Well, it happened, I'll say six months to a year before the dissolution of the Seventh Ward, something like that.

M: When was the dissolution of the Seventh Ward?

H: I wrote a letter right after that, and so it should have the date on it, May, 1973.

M: So about six months before that? You're talking about December?

H: I can't remember, but I'm sure that they were moved.

M: Was that the immediate cause then of the beginning of that conflict?

H: Well, some of us went over to the Seventh Ward and we were ordered not to participate in the activities of the ward.

M: By whom?

H: By the presidency of the Stake. We were told we should not participate actively in the activities, take any calling; the bishop was not to call us. We tried to point out many times that this thing about the boundaries was ridiculous, because there were people that should

have been going to the Seventh Ward that were going to the Third Ward, and there were people that were living in the boundaries of the Third Ward that were going to the Seventh Ward. They really weren't keeping the boundaries. It was happening with the Anglo wards, to people going to different wards, and they weren't really bothered about it, but we were. So naturally it was something more than the boundaries, even though that was the reason given for the disfellowship. So we did take part, though not in the official manner, in the Seventh Ward. My wife, for instance, played the harmonica because they didn't have a piano. They met in a little room. We met at the Woman's Club in Ysleta, they just had one piano, and the children had their junior Sunday school. She has a melodica and she played the melodica so that they'd have a little bit of music. Ridiculous, you know, the kind of participation we gave them, and for this participation, that was the insubordination. But I guess one of the main things that troubled the Stake Presidency and the Stake leaders was that I was teaching a priesthood class, the high priests, and they ordered the leader to take me off. This had been the story of my life when the problems started showing up in the Third Ward. That was one reason that I left for the Seventh Ward, because I had been the teacher of the high priests and one day without reason, without explanation, they took me off. Apparently the leader had been ordered that I should not teach anymore and I knew; so this was one of the things that started pushing me, motivating me to change over to the Seventh Ward. As a matter of fact, I did ask the Stake Presidency

if I could go to the other ward, to give me permission to go to the other ward. They never granted the permission. So when we did go, we went without permission. Teaching the high priests at the Seventh Ward, which met at the Woman's Club in Ysleta, right in front of the Ysleta High School, the leader was told that I should not participate that I should not teach; and he would not take me off as a teacher. As a matter of fact I was encouraged to continue giving the priesthood lessons and he was threatened with losing future opportunities in the church of service. But the leader at the time refused to take me off as teacher.

M: Was that Moroni Flores?

H: No, Rogelio Flores. Rogelio Flores is Moroni Flores's brother. At the time they changed the leaders as an effort to have one of the leaders take me off; but none of the leaders that they could get would take me off. So, they felt that we had tremendous power and I guess it must have been a threat in that these people should have this much power and should stand up to the authority of the church. I guess those were the reasons for the dissolution of the Seventh Ward and the disfellowship of the bishop, even though he had asked to be released. It's terrible that he wasn't released when he asked to be released before, instead of being disfellowshipped. He could have been released because he told them he didn't want to continue, the situation was getting bad for him. He is really a sweet man and the fact that they accepted us there was why he was having trouble, because we were there. He would not reject us, he would not tell us

to leave, even though the orders were to tell us to leave, not to make us feel welcome. But they never did, they never made us feel not welcome. So I guess that was his big mistake and that's why he was disfellowshipped, because he never did make us feel not welcome. This was the other brother to Moroni, Roberto Flores who was the bishop then. So I think this was really the main reason why the Seventh Ward was dissolved, because this threat of these people gaining self determinations to this extreme, that they would not follow the authority of the church. It was just too much, I guess it is too much.

M: Who were the members of the Stake Presidency at that time?

H: The Stake Presidency was Brother Turley, Brother Mollen and Brother Romney.

M: Turley was the Stake President?

H: Yes.

M: Could you outline the events that lead to your being disfellowshipped?

H: Well, even though it has never been said, if I were making an analysis, that would be the greatest threat. It was not so much the participation, playing the harmonica; because my wife was brought to court too, the only woman. And it was not so much because I presented the priesthood class or because I helped them with the road show, or because of the content of the road show.

M: What was the content of the road show? Was that a problem? The content?

H: Yes. It was always a problem. As a matter of fact, I had the feeling that many times we weren't permitted to participate in the

production of the road show, because when the Stake started having road shows, we started learning about writing them, producing them, actually putting them on. Being that Norma has musical ability, we'd get together and write the play and find the music, and teach the music to the young people. It was always with a message, an attitude of finding pride in ourselves and this sort of thing. And I guess this spirit of self confidence was very disagreeable to some people. But we thought that it was needed, that it was making us go, that it gave us life.

M: What form did it take to make it disagreeable to them? What in the content that they find objectionable?

H: Well, they found all the different road shows objectionable, but the one we presented for the Seventh Ward, we took the theme of The Wizard of Oz. We changed The Wizard of Oz, gave it Chicano matrices, you know, coloring. It wasn't Dorothy, it was Dorotea. Her shoes weren't slippers, they were huaraches. . And she wasn't going to go see the Wizard of Oz, she was going to see "El Gran Huaruri". The Tin Man wasn't the Tin Man, it was a Chicano, it was an Indian, it was a charro. Immediately this is very distasteful, to give it a Chicano flavor. It's very distasteful. To a Mormon attitude, this is distasteful.

M: Was that expressed by any Anglo leadership?

H: Well, it was expressed at other times. In other road shows it was expressed more clearly, because in other road show we had "Las Canciones de la Niñez Mexicana", "La Naranja Dulce, Limon Partido" and all these little songs; and the ideas were expressed, "Why so much Spanish?" Even though the rest was in English, just the songs were in

Spanish; but it gave you a different note, a foreign note to these people and anything that's foreign to many people is evil, it's not to be accepted. But we were trying to bring it in, and it's as if we were flaunting it, and this is not to be done. "You don't flaunt these things that we don't like." And we were, we were flaunting it in the best manner that we could, as nice as we could, as beautifully as we could, because our young people just loved it. Then naturally we wanted the prize, first place, to show them that we had not only done it, but that we had done it well. But one of the objections was Spanish; they don't want Spanish. Also in this one I was telling you about, The Wizard of Oz, when you have this Mexican going up to the "Gran Huaruri" and instead of giving him courage like the Wizard gave courage and brains and whatever, they were supposed to already have them, he just made them recognize that they already had them. We did that to the Chicano, to the Indian, by giving him the blessings the Book of Mormon gives. That was just too much, you know, "You people taking all the blessings!" But these things are never expressed, you feel them. We knew what we were doing. We were flaunting the things that we wanted, our dreams. "How dare you flaunt your dreams, that are not our dreams? That may be threatening to our desires. How dare you?" So we did. So, that was one of the accusations: "Did you, or did you not, on the night of so and so forth, present the road show?" Sure we did; they helped us, the Seventh Ward, or else they wouldn't have a road show. But we had a theme, we had a message in this. There was a message and they were not supposed to have a message. Then, why weren't they supposed to have a message? Because it

had this ring to it. It wasn't only that it had a Chicano, a Mexican note in it; but it also had some of the dream of the laymanite, which you are not supposed to verbalize, you are not supposed to express. So I feel that these were some of the underlying things that had never been spoken out, reasons why they didn't want us to participate. "You people bring out an attitude that we don't want. This is not church policy, this is not in the church program. This is not a road show that has been written in Salt Lake." Sure, we wanted to create something, though it's just "pininos", como dicen en espanol , at creating; because we really don't have the artistic ability to create a road show, a drama, music or any thing like this. It's just "pininos" and even these "pininos" were threatenting. And it's terrible that because we did present these "pininos" that all these things have culminated in the dissolution of the Seventh Ward and in the courts. It's just terrible. So what are you going to do? When these people want to assume responsibility (and some times they must want to assume responsibility to do something on their own), will they have realized that these things we are trying to do are for our own good? They flaunt what they have, or what they think they have, so why can't we? Pero no les gustó esta actitud; no les gusta esta actitud. In general, no les gustó nuestra manera de proceder, no les gusta esta manera de proceder.

- M: Could you talk a little bit about how they brought these people to the court that they held and what happened there?
- H: You know, it's just terrible the way the preparation for this court was done; just horrible. I even hate to think about it and I hate to

talk about it, but I'll give you one example. My brother-in-law, Manuel Gonzalez, Jr., who still lives here, he attends the Third Ward and was on the high council. Before the courts were convened, before the charge and before we were brought to court, he was released from the high council. I think that if he had remained on the high council... Naturally, it's very hard for a father to turn against his son or a son to turn against his father, or a brother to turn against his sister. I'm sure my brother-in-law wouldn't have turned against Norma, wouldn't turn against me. It would not have been a unanimous decision to disfellowship us on whatever grounds they had. So I felt that this was fixed, that he was released, so that these trials could come about, and he never knew that the trial was going to come about. There had been many threats, first on the Ward level, to bring us to court, to bring me to court. I think all this ground was prepared and that's what I mean it's just terrible that it was done this way, because I think he feels that it was done like that; because he has never come [back] into full participation and activity in the church that he had been previously. He never has. I think he feels that he was brushed aside in order that these courts could become about. Even with all the problem, I was very, surprised that they would do things like these. I forgot why we were at the Stake house building, I forget what the reason was that we were there, but we were all there and we were presented with the letter there, with the summons. As a matter of fact, Moroni was very hurt; well we were all hurt. But I mentioned him because he reacted, he expressed it. "Why do you give it to me here?"

Take it to my home. You know where I live. Why do you do it here?" And we were given these summons, my wife and I, and we were supposed to appear on May the 10th. But she thought, "May the 10th is Mother's Day in México, and I sure hate to come to court on May the 10th." So we told the high priest that gave us the summons that we would not appear on May the 10th, they had to change the date. So they did, they changed the date to another day and Moroni came on trial first. But it was really hurting, you know, just the summons, the general attitude; like we were some sort of criminals, as if we hadn't been active and faithful members of the church all our lives, as if we hadn't been to the temple and made covenants with the Lord that I hold sacred. It was just terrible. But these are some of the little details that preceded the courts.

M: What was the composition of those courts? The Bishops' court?

H: No, it was the Stake Court.

M: Who were the people on it?

H: The Stake High Council, the Stake Presidency. I think many accusations were made that were false and ridiculous and they should have never been made. My wife can give you beautiful details about it; she talked with them, I don't know for many hours. I didn't feel like going into detail because I always felt that we weren't going to really deal with the problems; we never dealt with the problems, never.

M: What was it that they concentrated on as they questioned you?

H: Oh, the thing was insubordination; that was the accusation. We had moved from one ward to another. Why? They didn't want to know why,

they didn't want to know anything. Just insubordination. I thought it would be excommunication at the time, but it was disfellowship. And you know, I never felt like some of the people that have gone back to the church, that have taken back some of these things that we were struggling for. They actually took everything back word by word. I never felt that I could take anything back, especially out of context; because we never had talked about the problems, as I am telling you, at least some of the ones that come to my mind right now. It would be too much suffering. Too many things have happened just to forget it. I can't forget it. If everybody else wants to forget it, well, I don't think they can, but I can't forget it. There is nothing I can do about it. Now, as times goes on, time just keeps covering this thing up, more and more and more. But I feel we'll still have these problems; we still have them and somebody is going to come and confront them.

M: When were you disfellowshipped?

H: May the 23rd, 1973 you were called to a high council court where you were disfellowshipped. The letter that I got January the 25th, 1974, at this time when the decision was made by the court, you were asked to come back in to receive the decision of the court. I'll quote from the minutes. In general they told me that the court had found me guilty of insubordination and not following chosen church leaders and inciting others to insubordination; that was the charge.

M: And the date was January '74? That's when it took effect?

H: No, it took effect immediately on May the 23rd, 1973.

M: Right in the court?

H: Right afterwards. "This therefore means that you are denied the privilege of participating in the full program of the church. You are encouraged to attend sacrament and auxiliary meetings and public conference sessions, but you are not entitled to speak, offer public prayer, partake of the sacrament or otherwise participate in these meetings. You should pay your tithes and offerings, live in harmony with the gospel standard and seek for return for fellowship in the church. You will not be admitted to priesthood meetings or any assembly of church officers and will not be permitted to hold any office in the church or exercise your priesthood in any way."

M: That took effect immediately after the hearing?

H: Yeah.

M: Did they have you go out and wait while they deliberated, and then called you in and informed you?

H: Yeah. And my wife was found not guilty. She was also tried for the same thing. But all the males were found guilty and disfellowshipped and they have all come in back into fellowship except Felix Valenzuela and myself. But Felix is not active in the church at all; he does not attend at all.

M: Do you attend?

H: Yes, I attend Sunday School, just Sunday School. Sometimes sacrament.

M: Do you have intention of going back?

H: I don't see how, you know. I just don't see how.

M: What is it that you have to do in order to get back in?

- H: Well, the Stake President was here recently and told me that if I paid my fast offering and my tithing, I could come back into fellowship; that they would call the court together, and he thought (at least that's the impression that I received) that that would be enough. But I wouldn't have to take anything back, that's the impression that I got; that I could come back into fellowship. But now, you know, I don't see how I can. I don't see how. I would like to function in a real manner and try to deal with these problems, but if they don't want to deal with the problems and people want to forget them, what's the idea? I have a conflict; I don't know.
- M: Was one of the problems a matter of personality to some extent between members of the Stake presidency and perhaps some of the Mexican American Mormons?
- H: I don't think it's so much personality. I think it's cultural values, I think it's political orientation. Because I think that they have a terrific establishment, when they are united economically. If they're in business together, a very successful business, they're united economically, they work for each other and things like that. And they're connected family-wise; they're intermarried and they've related to families, and religiously there are relationships. Politically, I imagine they would be for Republicanism. So it's okay. If you have these things that unite and the more ties that you can get to have a structure and a unity, more power to you. But please don't use it against me! Don't crush me, don't commit genocide with your power. Why? I'd like to have this sort of power, too. But I think

these are the influences; they're still there. As I said, it's perfectly good, perfectly good; but don't use them against somebody that can't fight you back. Let me fight back! Let me be able to stand up to your structure if I feel I should stand up to it. "I can't." What individual or few individuals can't stand up to that structure? You tell me. "Can't." They're tight. They're the leaders in the church, and they're the leaders probably because they economically they have the time to do it. They're economically well off, and as I say, family ties. Fine. I think we could have had the same thing in time among the Mexican community; but no, these possibilities were put off, now they've been put off for a while. Sure, we have relationships, family relationships and all that; but we could have had stronger relationships in the making now, and I think that some of those possibilities have been put off in the Mexican community. That's why I say, "Okay have those ties. Have them. If you can get them, have them." Because it's very hard to form a structure, tremendously hard. We couldn't do it. We couldn't do it on just ideals with _____ to the building of the kingdom of God. The Chicano group, we couldn't do it. It's sad to say, but we need some more of these ties: more family ties, economic ties. Because when you start having some, get ahead of the others economically, jealousies, envy, and all these things creep in; the basic natures creep in. Entonces we start fighting amongst ourselves and everything is gone. I think that's precisely what happened. You have to be similar in all these things. You start getting ahead economically, or perceive

somebody having more education, being different like that. Ya nos separamos. I think these were some of the reasons why we can't get together. But as I say, they've gotten together on some of these other grounds which is perfectly good; but it's too bad that they've used it against it and I think they are going to continue to use it against it. They have a structure that just won't quit. We don't; we have no structure; we are powerless. I guess some of the things that we feel sometimes is a desperation. It's, oh, terrible when you feel that powerlessness, that here you want to do something that's good, you want to build up a dream, a Mormon dream from your point of view. You can't do it, you don't have any of the power, in any sense.

M: Well, related to what you are saying about the powerlessness of the Chicano within the church, what has been the feeling of local Chicanos with regard to the lack of leadership in high positions? I'm speaking here of leadership in Salt Lake City or at the regional level, or even here at the state level.

H: Well, I think it's the same feeling that I expressed. I don't think they'll express it, but I feel that the ability is there. It's not because we don't have the ability, the know how; we have the know how and the ability and the faithfulness and everything you have; but the opportunity is not there. It was never given to us. When there was tokenism given, there was really never the opportunity for those leaders to participate in a free way, open; so I think there is this frustration by some of the potential leaders, there is this feeling of

frustration and powerlessness and they just feel bad about it. But I don't think they're going to do anything about it now, for a while.

M: Did you ever entertain any hopes of having a Chicano apostle?

H: No, not really. I guess my feelings....I don't know I may be thinking crazy, but my feeling was to bring the group along as far as we could, and if any leaders developed there that had the ability to be an apostle, well, let it be so. But bring everybody together, let's come along. I never had the aspirations of even being in the Stake High Council. Those were not aspirations here for me.

M: But isn't it critical if you're going to make any progress within the church to have somebody there where it really counts? Otherwise you'll just be on the outs forever. This is one thing that bothers people that I have talked to in the past.

H: Yeah; well, I guess I am sort of different in that respect. That doesn't really bother me about having an apostle or two. That really doesn't bother me, what bothers me is that the people do not express their being. That's what I want to see. I want to see responsibility, I want to see the people say, "Here we are, this is what we want and this is what we are going to do." Because you can have an apostle, or two or three, and they can tell them, "You need to do this...." But I want to see them expressing this feeling of being what they are, what they want to be.

Mrs. H: Can I say something? All I want to do is just to give him the idea, then he can say it, because I think I can tell what he is trying to say. His emphasis is on individual development. You see, we can gloss over it. It's like taking the mean of something or an average.

You can have a person way up here but really the bunch is down here. And I think what he is saying is that every individual should develop, and having one or two apostles way up here won't make a darn bit of difference if the individuals themselves are not exerting their own personalities, their own individualism.

H: Yes, this is what really concerns me. Who gets up there? Well, it's good, it's fine and good; but I'm concerned with the opportunities that the group should have, and I think many times that these opportunities we make for ourselves. I really don't think that the Anglo leaders, whoever they are or may be, can't.... Maybe I am wrong, but I feel that we should assume, make these opportunities, and it bothers me when they don't want to make them.

M: Isn't there a problem there? If you don't have a person sitting in where the decisions are made then the environment for those kinds of things to happen will not be created, because the people who make decisions will not create that kind of environment.

H: Well, yeah, maybe so; maybe there is a problem and maybe you do need a leader up there.

M: It's hard to bring it about from the bottom up.

H: Yeah. But you see, now I'm hung up with the value of, the importance of, developing a religious attitude from an individual point of view. I think that this needs to be brought back. I think that the emphasis now is on religion from the top down. I think that we were taught, when I was a missionary, that the Mormon church was unique, because its baptism was the only baptism that was true, because it was by

immersion, and because you received the Holy Ghost after you were baptized. And this Holy Ghost would take you to all truth, would whisper to you in a soft voice, a still, small voice. Then this to me is the emphasizing of the individual receiving revelation and direction, following your own and making your own religious attitude, which I think people do, anyway. But it's not emphasized. We get lip service. It's too much from the top down, the policy thing. You are not supposed to give a lesson, say anything that's not in the lesson, that is not already there in the manuals. This thing of the individual, they want to ignore it. You can't really ignore it. We can't wipe out the individual. But I'm hung up on the importance of that and I don't know how you're going to get it.

M: There is very little room within the structure.

H: Well, this is a problem of religion. It's a natural problem, and it should look at itself and see that it has this problem and it should give the individual its due. Not everything, no; I'm not saying everything, but its due place. When you give the individual his due place, then you can allow for these individual differences, you can allow for the influence of Chicano, or Mexican, whatever. The church, now I've heard that it claims to be a world-wide church, with a world-wide attitude. It's being more liberal in the permitting other cultural influences from other people. The times have changed from what was happening then.

M: We haven't talked about the black issue, the doctrine toward blacks. How do you feel about that?

H: What do you mean how do I feel?

M: Are you in agreement with church policy with regard to the blacks not holding the priesthood?

H: This is a problem and it's based on the way I see the concept of Israel. It's a tremendous problem because I had to take care of that problem first for the laymanite and I haven't really taken care of that problem, and I don't think the church wants to even deal with the problem of the laymanite, even if it's right here in the Book of Mormon, the foundation. It doesn't want to deal with that problem. How can I start dealing with the problem of the black if it doesn't even want to deal with the problem of the laymanite? What is the place of the laymanite in this idea of Israel? As I wrote in that paper, when you have at least two points of view that are strong and are completely opposite, you have a tremendous problem. They're not even talking about it; they don't even want to talk about this problem. Even though I've read a lot from Dialogue about the problem of the black, I can't even start thinking about the problem, because they haven't dealt with the laymanite problem, and it's basic to Mormonism. If we are denied a place in Mormonism, the laymanite, pues, pobres los negros. If we are not permitted to come in to mainstream Mormonism, being of the house of Israel, being the chosen, being the remnant of Jacob and all this sort of thing, I don't know about the blacks. I feel that the day we can come in, maybe there will be more of a chance that the blacks can come in. But when we haven't even come in....

Mrs. H: But you didn't answer the question.

H: The answer is that I really haven't considered it. I haven't considered the problem with the black and his not holding the priesthood. Because in a sense, what is it to hold the priesthood? Priesthood, is, the way I see it, a right to act in God's name; but priesthood also has power in it. It's just not the right, but it has power. But when we don't have right or power, and we say that the laymanite got the priesthood but not power, it's a denial of the priest. We can't magnify the priesthood.

M: Have you sensed the feeling among Chicano Mormons, in sensing the attitude of the Anglo Mormons about the promises toward the laymanites (that the laymanites are going to blossom as a rose and come forth and fulfill all these promises), that what the Anglos perceive in the building of the new kingdom is that they are going to provide the labor for that and not so much the leadership?

H: Not any of the missionaries that we've met lately even know about these things. But I felt that in the past some of the Anglo Mormons that came amongst us really felt, really really believed, that we had a place, and it was not just a place of providing labor. It was a high place. As a matter of fact, it was a first place. I felt that some Anglos really believed this, I really do. And then I feel that other Anglos don't believe it. Some Anglos don't believe it at all, that we have any place. But I really do believe that in the past, this feeling we got from Anglos. They gave it to us, some Anglos gave it to us; that we really had a first place, that we didn't think up these ideas.

M: And you think they are retreating from that now?

H: No, I think that some Mormons still feel the same way, but they are in the minority.

M: I want to go back to something that we were talking about before when I asked you about the problem of personality conflicts between people on the Stake presidency and some of the individuals involved. One of the things that Moroni Flores mentioned to me was the carry over of an attitude of Anglo Mormons from the colonies. They have these relationships with Mexicans over there and thought of those Mexicans as peons, and that carried over into the setting in El Paso. And there is a reluctance among some Anglo Mormons, especially the ones from down there, to treat Mexicans on an equal level because of that relationship back there. Did you sense that element?

H: Well, I have always felt that they were looking down upon us. I don't know if it's just from the colonies. I always felt that there was a looking down on us. Once when I was a bishop, somebody from the Stake called the house and I answered. I answered in English and he asked for Bishop Hernandez. I said, "This is bishop Hernandez speaking." He said, "Oh, you speak English!" Like, "I didn't expect you to speak English. I didn't expect you to know anything." Then somebody in the Stake also asked my wife one time, "Oh, you are a teacher?" "Yes." "What do you teach, Spanish?" I think these examples of looking down. Like, "Oh, yes! If you teach, you must teach Spanish. You can't teach anything else."

Mrs. H: And then when I told her that I taught mathematics, she said,

"Do you teach it in English or in Spanish?" Today terca.

H: So I think that they looked down on us in our possibilities, in our potentials. We never were called to the Stake leadership because of the feeling that we weren't capable of the calling. I really think that.

M: Have there been Chicano members of the Stake High Council on a regular basis here in El Paso, representatives?

H: Moroni was on the High Council, and my brother-in-law, Manuel Gonzalez; Guillermo Balderas. Guillermo Balderas was there for years; he's not there any more.

M: So there has been representation on a regular basis.

H: Well, the bodies have been there. Whether these bodies have represented, I doubt it.

M: But at least they have been there.

H: Yeah.

Mrs. H: I think that all of them have made attempts, sincere attempts.

H: Probably so, I'm being too critical. Probably they did what they could under the circumstances.

M: Is there one now?

Mrs. H: Willie.

H: Guillermo Balderas, Jr.

M: Wasn't he just put in recently? There wasn't one for a time, right?

H: As I said, I may be completely wrong. My ideas may be completely wrong, my perceptions may be completely wrong and my feelings off, but I feel that it is very important that a person express these feelings and these ideas, even if they are wrong, that he be not afraid of rejection or

whatever, because he expressed himself. This is what I was telling you at the beginning, that this is facing reality, this is facing life. This is what I feel, this is my life. If I go over there and tell people how good I am and how faithful I am, how much I believe and how much I follow, I'm not saying the same things. This is what I really feel in my heart, as well as I can express it in words. It's just off the tip of my hat. But I don't feel that people are saying what they feel, what they think. And before you can feel their life and vitality in the congregation, this must happen. After this happens, then you can maybe pursue the dream and pursue other things; but this must happen first. People must be able to say what they feel, what they think, even if it's wrong. What I may have told you may be completely off, it's just one man's point of view; but it's my point of view and it's my life and it's a life. I must above all things, como dijo Shakespeare, "Be true to thine own self." I must be true to myself. If I am not going to be true and express these feelings--and I don't go around expressing them all the time--but whenever the opportunity presents itself or somebody asks me, I should tell them how I feel, and I shouldn't cover up. Because before we can have anything really happening there in church, before we can really have a religious experience, a feeling of spirituality, you must do this. It's not by keeping the doors closed and keeping the noise down that you are going to get spirituality, no; you can shut everybody up and close all the doors and close all the windows and everything else and you are not going to get it, you are not going to get spirituality. Because I think

spirituality comes from, first, being honest to yourself, and that's what I am trying to do, be honest to myself by telling you these things. And as I said, I may be completely wrong, and as I said, I wish somebody would confront me and tell me, "No, well, look; it's not wrong what you are saying, because of this, this and this." But they won't do that, because I can't express these things.

M: You mentioned the publication Dialogue a while ago. How do you feel about that kind of publication and its relation to the Chicano community in terms of issues that it deals with, that are not normally dealt with, in normal church publications, in relation to things that Chicano Mormons are concerned with? Didn't you send that article that you wrote to Dialogue?

H: Yes. Well, you know it's at a very high level. It's very hard to read. But I feel that as you read it, you can find these things that I am telling you; I think you can find them in different articles. You can find all these different points. I think that people have expressed these same feelings, that their feelings that I'm expressing to you are not unique, and that many people have them. And they don't have to be Chicanos, they can be Anglos. When they are speaking and being true to themselves and writing to Dialogue, they come out; maybe not at great length, but you can see they're there, these feelings are there. I think it's very important and I think it's very good, and I think that the article that I wrote is not the type of article that they want because of the way that it's done. It's really taking to task leaders of the church that are still living and it's taking them

to task on a doctrinal basis. And you just don't do that and Dialogue doesn't do that.

Mrs. H: To that extent, they've copped out.

H: They're not going to discuss the doctrine; no, they're not going to do that, not yet. And this paper goes to the doctrine. What I am saying is, I see a contradiction here; two different points of view on a doctrine that's basic. That's too much.

M: For the benefit of having that on tape, could you summarize the conflict that you are talking about?

H: Well, I think the conflict is really in the interpretation of the Book of Mormon, and I don't say it so much in the article. Bruce R. McConkie, in his book, Mormon Doctrine, speaks of the gentiles, and in effect this is what he is saying, this is what I understand. He is saying, to my understanding, that Lehi did not understand the concept of what or who the gentiles are. He did not understand the concept and that Lehi had a different concept, and that Lehi's concept of who the gentiles are is not the correct concept; but the correct concept of who the gentiles are is Bruce R. McConkie's concept of who the Gentiles are. Then, you know, you can originate the problem there. I'm just trying to seek a place where you can start to pin point, where you can talk about the problem. And it's a tremendous problem. Who am I to believe? Bruce R. McConkie, who is a leader and I am supposed to believe? Or am I to believe Lehi and the logic, the theology of the Book of Mormon? If I follow Bruce R. McConkie and the concept that he gives me of who the gentiles are, I don't understand the Book of

Mormon; but if I follow the concept that Lehi gives me, I can more or less understand the Book of Mormon, at least the way I want to understand it. Maybe we believe what we want to believe and I guess that's what I want to believe. I want to believe the concept that Lehi is giving.

M: And what is that?

H: Well, in a sense, Lehi is saying that the Anglos in general are the gentiles. The Anglo members don't want to be the gentiles at all; they don't want to be gentiles. They don't want to say that, okay, they are of the house of Israel to adoption; that's not good enough. They want to be of the house of Israel like the Book of Mormon claims that the laymanite is of the house of Israel like the Book of Mormon claims that the laymanite is of the house of Israel, through direct lineage, through blood, that these blessings come, in a sense, through his blood, through his inheritance. That's the way they want to be of the house of Israel. It's the same problem again that we were talking about a cultural problem; it comes from the doctrine. So they don't want that interpretation, they don't want to be the gentiles, as the Book of Mormon speaks of the gentiles: "This is a gentile nation." The title page is written to the laymanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel, and also to the Jew and the gentile, and it says, "It is to come forth in due time by the way of the gentile." But they don't want to be the gentile in any sense of the word, and that's what the Book of Mormon says. So they must read, define, reinterpret the Book of Mormon, and I want to take it literally. And that's where the problem begins.

Mrs. H: That in effect is what he is saying in the article that Dialogue

refused to print, because you can't tell an authority, "Man you're re-defining the Book of Mormon to your convenience so you are not going to be the gentile; you want to be of the house of Israel. We claim we are of the house of Israel. Look at our color, that's our proof. We don't know who you are, but we know who we are." Man, they don't like that.

M: Have you confronted any Anglo Mormon here with that position?

H: Yes, but they're young and they're inexperienced, and many times they are humildes, and they accept it.

M: Have you talked with older members?

Mrs. H: Well, the old members were the ones that understood it that way.

El presidente de la misión viejo, Brother Jones, that's the way he taught it to us, that we were of the house of Israel.

H: This is an old problem. They had problems in México about it, so it happened forty years ago. Recently, Romney says, "This has a smell of the problems in México." Because when you assume the attitude of you are of the house of Israel and you are chosen, as I said, you are going to flaunt this feeling of thankfulness in a sense. It's a feeling of thankfulness, of pride. It smells of la tercera convención en México. It's got to smell of it; it's the same thing.

M: What are you referring to, la tercera convención?

H: Well, they have problems in México. They had excommunications en masse because of this problem. They were teaching the members over there another concept of the gentiles and reinterpreting the Book of Mormon, from this other point of view. The members in México, some of the

older members that have an understanding of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon resist it.

Mrs. H: They would meet and discuss these things, the leaders of México; sharp, sharp people. Apparently there was a Third Convention, they meet in conventions and conferences. One of the big things that the whole thing started around kind of focussed on when the missionaries went down there and were teaching square dancing. They had a fit. Why should they be learning square dancing when they should be learning their own 'bailes regionales and their own cultural type of things?

H: Then the feelings of la Revolución de 1910, the cultural revolution in México, was very strong then. Naturally they were going to detect them when these other influences came that were foreign to what they wanted, and they were going to identify them and they were going to relate them to the teachings. It happened once in México, and we never wanted to be influenced by these things that happened in México; so we waited until we were touched with our own experience. So that's why. It's really our own experience and I shouldn't even bring up the thing about México. But I want to tell you is that it happened before, it's happening now and it's going to happen again.

M: When did it happen in Mexico?

Mrs. H: Late 30's, early 40's.