1-1-1990

Games, Frances G Oral History Interview: Members of the Hispanic Community

Joseph O'Grady

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/hisp_comm

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/hisp_comm/2

Published in: 1990 - Members of the Hispanic Community (H88-0234) - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, January 1, 1990. Copyright © 1990 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Members of the Hispanic Community by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
Interview with Frances Gamez
Interviewed by Joseph O'Grady, 1990

JO: When did you first arrive in Holland?


JO: Where was your first place of residence within the city?

FG: It was on west 13th Street, right in the middle of the block. I don't remember the address, but it was right down the street from St. Francis de Sales Church.

JO: Was there a neighborhood already established there when you arrived?

FG: Yes, there was, and the people that rented to us were a couple that were...what is considered a mixed marriage. She is white; she is from the south, and he is Hispanic. So we didn't have any problems renting from them.

JO: Was it a Hispanic neighborhood or a white neighborhood?

FG: It was pretty much a white neighborhood.

JO: Where do you originally come from?

FG: I come from Monterrey, Mexico, which is in the northern part of Mexico. Near the Texas border about 150 miles south of Mc Allen, Texas.

JO: Did you settle in Texas before originally hopping to Michigan?

FG: No, my husband and I moved here directly from Mexico, however, I had lived in Texas when I was a little girl. I lived there from the time I was seven years old until I was about fifteen years of age, at which time my family returned to Mexico.

JO: Where you were from in Mexico was it a rural area or a urban area?

FG: Monterrey, Mexico, is the third largest metropolitan area in Mexico. It's also a very industrial city.
JO: How many people came with you from Mexico?

FG: Husband and three sons. When I was living in Mexico, my neighbor’s daughter and son, who were then residents of Holland, came to visit her. We talked. We were living in extremely poor conditions. We were living in a home that didn’t have any windows, we didn’t have running water, we had an outhouse. Living conditions were very bad. Because I spoke English, my friend’s daughter suggested that maybe if we came up here where there was plenty of employment, things could change for us, especially because I spoke English. Without thinking too much about it, I sold whatever I had, which amounted to one hundred dollars in American money and packed my three children at the time, my youngest being five months old, and came to Michigan. At that time, my husband was working at an Air Force base in San Antonio, Texas, and we had already planned to move to Texas. But when my friend told me about how industrialized this area was and the opportunities that were available, I opted to come up here. Once I arrived here, I called my husband in San Antonio and let him know that I was here. He came about two weeks later.

JO: Why did you come to Holland? Just because of the conditions in Monterrey?

FG: Yes, in Mexico it is very difficult for a woman to acquire an education, especially if you have not finished high school, and I had not finished high school. I did not even complete the 9th grade. I had to drop out because I had to go to work. I married at a very young age and being Catholic and not wanting to go against the teachings of the church, I did not use birth control. We had three children by the time I was twenty-two years old. It was difficult. I could not find employment, precisely because of the
fact that I had not finished high school. At that time down there you had to have a high school degree to be employed anywhere. That's one of the reasons that I decided to move to Michigan. It was very risky, but it meant a change.

JO: What was your first job within the city?

FG: When I arrived in Holland I met some people that I had known in Texas, a big coincidence, Al Serrano's wife's family. I saw them at Meijers and they made all kinds of suggestions and one of the suggestions was to try to get my kids into a day care center. I went to the day care center and the woman that was speaking there at the time was someone that I had also known in Texas. She suggested that I go to the employment office and apply for a job. One of my first interviews was at Meijers Thrifty Acres. I had had cashiering experience in Mexico, yet when I arrived at Meijers to interview for a cashier's job, I was told that the only job they had was cleaning pet cages in the back. I felt let down. So I went back to the Employment Office, which was at the time across the street from Meijers and I was very fortunate that I was then referred to Parke-Davis. My first place of employment was Parke-Davis.

JO: Doing?

FG: I was doing inspection on the line. Parke-Davis had employed a lot of women on the line doing packaging and inspecting. So sometimes I would do packaging, sometimes I would do inspecting. It was very pleasant.

JO: Where are you employed now and what position do you hold?

FG: I coordinate services here at El Centro, which is under the umbrella of Catholic Social
Services out of Muskegon. I am a clinical therapist, after having acquired my masters degree in Social Work at the University of Michigan. I came back to Holland because this is where I wanted to work. I interviewed for this job, it was offered to me and I accepted it.

JO: Does this organization, El Centro, work directly out of Muskegon or does it work with St. Francis?

FG: No, we do not work with St. Francis other than having referrals from St. Francis to our agency. We're here primarily to serve the Hispanic population. As a bilingual therapist, this is the very first service of its nature for the Hispanic population of Allegan and Ottawa counties. Our monolingual population continues to increase and there is no other agency in town that provides the services that we provide here for senior citizens and for people who need mental health services. We also provide case management and advocacy services.

JO: Did you attend any schooling within Holland, public schools particularly?

FG: When I came to Holland in 1968, I started going to night school in West Ottawa which is where community education was centered at that time. My intent was to finish high school and graduate. Then later on, Dr. Jack Stewart, who was I believe Dean of Students and also professor in the History department at Hope College, went out in the Hispanic community and recruited Hispanics from the community to come to Hope College. Hope College, at the time, wanted to offer educational opportunities to Hispanics so that we could then go back into our community and work here. It's one of the best things that Hope College has ever done for the Hispanic community.
JO: Can you remember some of the other individuals that were recruited at the same time you were recruited?

FG: Yes, there was a woman by the name of Yolanda Alvarado, and there was Gilbert Morroquin, who incidently is still active in the community working with the Census Bureau. I believe now he's employed by the state; I don't see Gilbert very often. Another woman was Maria Leal. Maria has since left and gone back to Texas. I believe out of the seven or eight people that were recruited, two of us graduated from Hope.

JO: What were your impressions of the Holland Public School system?

FG: When I first arrived, my oldest son was four years old and so the following year he would start school. When my three children were all at Longfellow School, we ran into a lot of problems. For example, when my oldest son was in the second grade, he had a teacher who was the wife of a local minister. She had convinced my son that he had the devil in him and that if he didn't change his ways he was going to go straight to hell. That created a lot of nightmares for my son and he was scared of the dark. Another situation was when my mother had given my oldest son a zarape and a Mexican hat for his room. It was his turn for show and tell and my son very proudly brought these two items after we had discussed their significance at home. He came home that afternoon crying and saying that he didn't get a chance to show it because his teacher didn't allow him to. I went to the school to ask why this happened, and her explanation was, "I didn't allow him to talk about it because it's irrelevant." And then at that point I asked her, "Irrelevant to what?" And she said, "To what we're
learning." And I said, "That's part of my son's culture." The other thing was when my youngest son started kindergarten, his teacher called me very alarmed sometime in April to tell me that she felt my son was retarded because he was very slow. I had worked with the public schools as a volunteer. I quickly went to see a school psychologist because I was very upset that she had said that to me. He tested my son in the next three days and what was found was that my son was shy, not retarded as she had stated. There were several incidents. One of the teachers there made a comment to me, and I quote, "You're not going to have to worry about having to drive your kids anywhere when they get to junior high because they'll probably all be old enough to drive themselves." Meaning that, they would be sixteen and probably still be in junior high. At that point I believed that the preconceived notions did not allow people to look at children individually. Instead of instilling in the child self-esteem they would make them feel like they really weren't worth very much because they were Hispanic. I really believe that that continues presently, not as much, but I think that people still feel this way. My opinion of the Holland Public School system at that time was that there was not a lot of sensitivity towards Hispanic children. There has been a lot of failure due to their insensitive attitude.

**JO:** Did these attitudes change as your children grew up or did it continue, as you stated a lot of, when they're in elementary school changes and then went to high school?

**FG:** When I went through all those problems, this all happened within two years, I pulled my children out of public schools and sent them to St. Francis school. My oldest son was going in third grade and he was not reading yet. He went to St. Francis in
September, by December he was reading, quite normal for his age. We didn't experience public schools again until the kids went to junior high school. They did okay in junior high, by the time they started high school my oldest child had a lot of problems. My children had integrated themselves in the community quite well, they're bilingual, fluent in both languages. My son Jerry had befriended a young man that had moved here from New York City and felt like an outsider, but he was not Hispanic he was white. Both their names were Jerry. At one point, my son's friend became entangled in a fight with another young man who was of Hispanic descent and my son was trying to separate them. A teacher came and his comment was, "This is just like you Mexicans, always getting in fights." The other Jerry, my son's friend, tried to explain to the teacher that my son was trying to help him. He was told to shut up and go to the office. My son had several encounters like that, and he dropped out in tenth grade. He had very, very, negative experiences with the Holland Public Schools. My two other children didn't only because they were more tolerant. When my son Tony, who's my second son, was in twelfth grade, he was going steady with a woman by the last name ________, obviously Dutch. She and I had become very good friends. She came to me one day very angry and wanted to know what she could do about it. She says, "My counselor just talked to me about my career plans. And one of his comments was, 'What are you doing going steady with one of those Gamez boys? They're burnouts, they're no good. And you're a bright young woman. My advice to you is to try to get out of that relationship as soon as you can.'" I was very upset by that of course and I confronted the counselor. I think that
I should have probably confronted him in front of his superiors because he denied that he meant it that way. He felt my son was not college bound, and she was, that's what he meant, that the relationship wasn't going to work if he wasn't college bound and she was.

JO: What about your experiences as a non-traditional student going back to high school, did you have any problems?

FG: No, because I was going to high school at night with people pretty much my age. At that time a lot of people were coming back from Vietnam. In fact, one of Andy Fierro's brothers had just come back from Vietnam, and his friend who was also returning from Vietnam, were in a class with me. Pretty much within my age or older. It was a pleasant experience. Again, I was at West Ottawa and the people that were teaching those classes seemed to be very sensitive to the needs of the older students.

JO: Were most of the individuals in your classes Hispanic or were they...?

FG: No, it varied. In fact they're weren't a lot of Hispanics in my classes. I think that maybe in my psychology class there were about three or four and in my literature class their were only two. I felt very, very, lonely.

JO: You were bilingual when you arrived, was the rest of your family bilingual as well, your husband?

FG: No, my husband was not bilingual. My husband only spoke Spanish, I think he could say good morning, thank you and hi. My children were not bilingual; of course, my youngest son was five months old when he first came, but the two older
children were speaking very well by the time they came. They did not speak English.

JO: Did you teach them most of their English or did they learn in through daily interaction?

FG: Both. I think TV helps children learn English very well and when they are playing with other little children they are forced to learn. Actually, in our home I spoke English to the children because I wanted them to learn correct English and my husband was the one who always pushed the bilingualism so he always spoke to them in Spanish.

JO: What were your first impressions of Holland when you first arrived?

FG: I thought I was in the garden of Eden. Comparatively speaking to where I come from Holland is a beautiful community. And to this day, I go out and I look at it and I thank the Lord for having me here because it's just truly, very beautiful. I really like it.

JO: Was there any point where you didn't like Holland, did your impressions change over time?

FG: There was a point there when I didn't like Holland. When I started working at Parke-Davis, it was very difficult for us to find housing. When we first arrived we were living at that apartment on 13th Street that I talked to you about with my friend and her brother. Soon we had to find our own apartment. One example was a house on west 18th Street and we tried to rent it. The other people that were trying to rent was a Cuban couple with a child that was thirteen years of age. We had three children. Both of us were told that they could not rent it out to us because we had too many
children, the Cuban couple only had one child, we had three. A few weeks later I found out that they had rented to a white family with six children. So we ended up renting a dilapidated, roach infested, little house that was on First Street. I was very unhappy because I had never been treated as though I wasn't a person, a valuable person. I was very upset over that. I think that at that point I almost had a nervous breakdown. We tried buying a home and after we had gone to see the house, the real estate agent came over to our house and told us that he couldn't sell that house to us because the neighbors didn't want Mexicans on the block. I was very upset; I was crying and a couple of people that I worked with noticed that I was very upset and asked me what was wrong. I told them and one of them, whose wife was on the newly created Human Relations Commission, said to me, "I'm going to talk to my wife and I'm going to see what we can do about this because this is discrimination." Of course, I had never heard of discrimination or human rights. You hear of discrimination towards blacks, but because I lived in Mexico and in Texas, things weren't that bad for us. My co-worker talked to his wife and before you knew it somebody who was a professor at Hope College at that time called on us, and to make a long story short, we ended up getting the house. The real estate agent had to buy the house from the owners and then he sold it to us. The owners were afraid about what the neighbors would want them to do. Six months later we found out that our neighbors had taken up a petition and took it to City Hall to try to have us kicked out of the neighborhood. Of course, that didn't go, but they tried. Ten years later, while talking to my neighbor when a Vietnamese family wanted to move in next door to us,
they tried to do the same thing. When they came to me I tried to explain to them how we had felt when they had done that to us and that we were all God's children, what is the difference? And they said, "Yes, but we accepted you because you are different, you're better. You're college educated now, you made it," so to speak, even though most of my white neighbors were not college educated. So when my Vietnamese neighbors moved in, I did everything I could to help them adjust because it's hard, it's difficult. At that point, no, I didn't like Holland. My neighbors would come into my house without knocking, I used to hang my wash out and they would come and look at my clothes and look it over to see if it was clean. My neighbor to the east side of the street was always sitting by her window making sure my children did not step the boundaries of her yard. If they did she was immediately on the phone telling me that she didn't want my kids in her yard. I think that most of my neighbors never even said hello to me until after I'd been there for ten, twelve years. We had a very good neighbor across the street, who was a good neighbor because he's Christian Reformed and we were Catholic and of course he was going to save us because he felt we were going to hell. Our neighbors to the west were two spinsters who had moved here from the Netherlands when they were young children. One of them was a retired teacher, the other one was a chiropractor. We found out that we had a lot of things in common, the Hispanic community and the Dutch community had a lot of things in common; love for family, very strong religious values even though maybe our religious beliefs were different, we tried to live by those values. We became very close friends. But I think that was the only family that really ever became friends
with us and we lived there twenty-two years.

JO: Do you still live there now?

FG: No, my second son does, he and his wife have taken over that house and we moved.

JO: Where was this neighborhood at again?

FG: East 18th between Central and College.

JO: Obviously you feel that you were discriminated against throughout your time in Holland. Were you ever physically intimidated? Did any Holland resident ever try to physically intimidate you?

FG: Yes. A neighbor around the corner on Central Avenue, they must have had like five or six children. I would not allow my children to go around the block. They could play in the yard but they couldn't go farther than that. These children would come to my house and pick the flowers. I've always been an avid gardener and I always planted flowers and these kids would just come, fight with my kids and they'd pick my flowers. They broke a picket fence that we'd put up and at that point I said, "Enough is enough." I wanted to talk to the father, so I went to his house. He came out, he had a bat in his hand. His words to me were, "Get the hell off my property, spic. You have no business being here, go back to being a Commie." I said, "A Commie?" He said, "Yes, go back to Cuba where you belong." And I said look, "I am not from Cuba and I am not a Commie, but I will tell you what I am. I am very angry that your children are just coming to my house and destroying my plants and I will not put up with it anymore. I will take you to court if it is necessary." And I did, I ended up taking him to court and he ended up paying damages. Then about
three or four years later he sold his house and left the neighborhood. But yes, he came at me with a bat.

JO: Were there any other incidents?

FG: No, I can't say.

JO: Did you ever feel any racial tension in Holland? Was there ever a civil rights movement, per se, changing conditions in Holland?

FG: Civil rights as we know civil rights, a movement, no. There was a time in the early '70s when a group of us threatened to boycott Tulip Time, I don't remember the year. The Chamber of Commerce prints a booklet every year to promote Holland and it was as if Holland was 100% white; they had completely ignored the Hispanic community. About nine to ten percent of the community was Hispanic at that time and the booklet sounded like we didn't exist, just one hundred percent Dutch descendants. We found out about it and we planned to picket the Chamber of Commerce during Tulip Time unless the Chamber of Commerce did something about it. They then decided to do an insert sheet to speak about the Hispanic community. They put beautiful pictures of our fiesta and the Latin Queen on the insert. There have been times when we had to confront City Council. Last year for instance one of the councilman suggested that maybe one of the streets in the new developing areas be named after a Hispanic. And another councilman said something to the effect of, "Well, we could call it Wetback Drive." I was one of the members of the protesting group. We confronted that issue in City Hall Chambers. When it has been necessary, we, as a community, are able to come together, even though there are differences in opinions and ways of thinking.
When an issue hits our community here, we come together and try to make changes. But a civil rights movement as such, no.

JO: What in your opinion prevents a civil rights movement from happening in Holland such as Grand Rapids or Detroit or Chicago?

FG: Holland is a small community. Things can be taken care of very expeditiously and very rapidly if the community at large sees the Hispanic community coming together we can pretty much work things out. Of course, that also is because we have the support of many of the people in the larger community, meaning the majority community. I need to say that people that make comments like that gentleman made—and such as the comment made by an Allegan Sheriff's Deputy, just a month ago, that stated that Hispanics are responsible for the drug trade in this area. These comments are made by people who don't think before they speak, perhaps they really believe what they say, it's obvious that this man does, he doesn't want to retract it, he doesn't want to apologize. The Sheriff in Allegan County has decided that he will stand by his deputy's statement. And I believe that there are many more people that think that way, but I do not believe that the majority of Holland residents who are non-Hispanics feel that way.

JO: Do you think Holland will always have the advantage of not having a civil rights movement? Holland is growing by leaps and bounds do you think eventually a civil rights movement will form or do you think Holland will avoid that?

FG: I think that if we continue with the trend we are following where we can sit down with people and discuss issues, we can sit down with, let's say for example, the Chief
of Police and discuss an issue if one of the police officers oversteps their bounds with a Hispanic. We can request that changes be made. I think that if we can continue dialoging and communicating feelings as well as solutions, we can avoid confrontations. I don't think that there will be a need, but we have the Human Relations Commission. I agree that Holland is growing and one of the things that we're seeing now that we didn't see in 1968 when I first arrived, is the black community in Holland is growing also, which was not true at that time. It seems that black issues are different from Hispanic issues because most of us who are bilingual prefer to speak Spanish wherever we go. Saturday, my friend, who is also a social worker in Grand Rapids, came to visit. She's Puerto Rican from the island and speaks mostly Spanish. We were at a bookstore at the mall, we were sitting down looking at tapes and books and we were speaking in Spanish. People came by and they would stare at us. I've heard people say, "Why can't these people learn English?" People are trying to learn English, especially the new immigrants, it's required by the amnesty program that they learn English. But English is a very difficult language to learn, and you don't learn to speak English in a year. In answer to your question, I think a civil rights movement can be avoided, however it's hard to say because Holland is growing so rapidly and things are changing.

JO: What does the Hispanic community offer to Holland and what has it offered in the past?

FG: I think that one of the major things that the Hispanic community has offered to Holland is productive, loyal and disciplined manpower for its business and industry.
Many migrant families settled out; those are the people who have contributed greatly, not just to Holland but to the nation as a whole. I can tell you many of those old families that I mentioned to you earlier, the Serranos, Reyes, etc., were people who worked very hard in the fields, and when they left the migrant stream, they went into industry, but never thinking that it was going to be easier for them. They weren't doing stoop labor anymore but they were working just as hard. Before we come here we don't think, "We're going to go to Michigan and we're going to be on welfare." We came here with three children, we have yet to say we ever filled an application to the Welfare Department because I wasn't brought up that way. I was brought up to eat what I could work for and if I didn't have the money for something I didn't buy it and that's hasn't changed these days. The majority of Hispanics do not go on welfare. The majority of Hispanics are very hardworking individuals. The big Christmas tree industry, the nursery industry in the area has done as well as it has mostly because of the Hispanic manpower. We also bring with us a culture that is a rich and beautiful culture. We bring with us a culture that we love, unlike European cultures that have arrived in the United States and lost their language and their customs, we have maintained them. We maintain that connection with the old country or with Texas or with California or Florida, wherever it is we come from. We love our culture so much that we maintain the traditional food...we also bring with us love of family, contrary to what many people might think, we love our children very much and we want our children to succeed. I'm not going to say that the school system is to blame for everything that has happened, my son perhaps failed at school because of family
problems and my husband’s alcoholism; he is in recovery now. As a mother, I was too involved with trying to raise them all by myself because he had problems adapting to the community. So there were mistakes made by me, by my husband, by my child, so it’s not all the school system’s fault. But certainly the school system does not foster warmth, they have not fostered an understanding for the culture of our children. I think that we need to look at the way our families are and we need to learn from one another. Another important aspect is our Catholic religious beliefs. The majority of the Hispanic community in Holland remains Catholic. In fact, funny story is when the prison used to be a Seminary, many of the Cuban refugees would come here. I worked with a Cuban refugee program in the early ’70s, and my husband used to cook at the Seminary on weekends. There was a group of cloistered nuns there, and they used to have mass at the convent every Sunday in the evening. I used to take four or five Cuban women with me to go to Mass there. I would ask them, "Why don’t you go to St. Francis?" And they would say, "Well, because we go to such and such Christian Reformed or Reformed Church and if they knew that we were going to the Catholic church then it would be bad for us because they help us so much." So out of loyalty, they didn’t go to their church. However, many Cuban people remain Catholic. Our faith is something very beautiful. We foster this faith in our children, I think that is one of the very beautiful aspects of our culture, the love of family and the love of church.

JO: What organizations do you belong to within the Hispanic community and the Holland community?
FG: Within the Hispanic community, I am not a member of any of the Hispanic organizations per se. I do volunteer work for all of them and I provide support to all of them when called, for example during Fiesta or other events. Part of that is because I am, aside from being a clinical therapist and sometimes putting ten or more hours of work a day, I'm also a Board member of Department of Social Services in Holland, I'm on the Health Care Task Force at the Hospital, I'm on the Review Committee at the Hospital, I'm a Board member with Catholic Human Development at the Grand Rapids Diocese. Some of us represent the Hispanic community in other larger organizations which affect the Hispanic community. I guess sometimes you have to set limits on your time. I'm also a grandmother and I like to spend time with my grandchildren.

JO: What organizations do you belong to in the Holland community?

FG: Within the Holland community I don't think I'm involved in any organizations, like I said I serve on the Review Board at Holland Hospital and I was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Ottawa county Department of Social Services Board. I'm also on the Health Care Task Force at Holland Hospital, but as far as organizations go, I don't have the time.

JO: What would you really liked to see changed within the city?

FG: I think that I would like to see more employment opportunities for the Hispanic people. Our people right now do not want to be going to agencies and seeking help with food, rent, clothing. They would like to be able to support their own families. That has become increasingly difficult because of the temporary employment agencies
that have come to our community. It used to be that a person could go directly to the company and the company would either hire them or not and they could go to another company. At the point of being hired, people had medical benefits, insurance, retirement, other benefits, but with the temporary agencies, that's just not possible anymore. People go to work for a few months and if the contract ends, that's it, they get laid off. People are being told, "No, we cannot send you there because you do not speak English." That was never a problem before. Another problem that I see with employment is many of the local bigger churches, like the Reformed Church or the Christian Reformed Church bring in refugees from other parts of the world, say for instance the Indochinese. When Indochinese families are brought in, people meet them at the airport, they already have a home set for them with furniture and food in the pantry and employment. Now no one can tell me that these people learn English on their way here, on the boat, that's just not possible. So you see where the discrimination comes in? We're being told, "No you cannot be referred there because you don't speak English," and yet when a Indochinese family comes everything is all set up for them. There are families that provide support for the family and they get them going. That kind of support is not available to our families. I'm not demeaning the Indochinese in anyway because I've worked with the resettlement of the Vietnamese community and I've worked with many Indochinese students as a counselor with the Upward Bound program, so I'm not saying that that shouldn't be. They need all the help they can get. But let's be fair, see what I'm saying?

JO: What would most Hispanics within the Holland community want to see changed? Do
they agree with you or do they have a different viewpoint?

FG: Next week we have requested the Governor's Commission on Spanish speaking affairs to come and meet with us, when I say us I'm talking about people like Tino Reyes, Al Serrano. We are concerned about the issues of housing, employment, specifically employment, training programs, education, better opportunities all around for the Hispanic community. That's not just what I think. Those of us that work with the community feel the need to bring about some changes. I work with the Maternal Support program at the Migrant Health Clinic. Dorothy Bol, who's the director of the clinic, agrees with me. Reverend John Hutt, who's with the Hispanic Christian Reformed Church is very concerned about these issues as well. He and I started together on the Health Task Force at the Hospital because we are concerned because most doctors don't want to take Medicaid patients. Not only that but then we have the poor of our community too who are not covered by any medical insurance at all.

[end of side A]

[begin side B]

JO: I'll just restate the question real quickly. What would most Hispanics want to see changed within the city?

FG: Most of the Hispanic community would like to see more available housing, employment. Not better and fairer conditions, just employment period. And better educational programs that would provide more support for at-risk kids and instill more self-esteem in the children so that they would want to continue in school, so that they don't feel like they are not good enough.
JO: What do you see for the future of Holland and its Hispanic community?

FG: I'm very optimistic now because I see more Hispanic youth graduating from high school. The numbers seem to increase every year. With more of our kids graduating from high school, it means more of them will be going on to college, it means more of them will be seeking better employment opportunities, better training for themselves, just a better quality of life. I see the Hispanic community not just growing in numbers but growing in terms of our quality of life.

JO: Do you think Holland will have enough to offer or will be willing to offer your children and their children's children, which will be college educated, do you think Holland will be willing to allow them to step up within the economic scale and take jobs that were originally white jobs?

FG: We haven't seen that happening a whole lot. Some of us, people like Al Gonzales, myself, Lupita Reyes, we have had the opportunities that we have because we were assertive. We've worked very hard for what we have now. You have to become very assertive it seems to get to those jobs that have been mostly held by the white community. Again, as our children have better educational opportunities as they go to college they will too. Yes, I think that some of those jobs will be available to them, just because they are better educated.

JO: Do you think they would be willing to stay within Holland or do you think will they move on to a different area? Will they be willing to struggle with Holland as it tries to change, or has to change its structure and identity?

FG: I think that the majority of our children, if they go to college, move to larger urban
areas. I have an example of a family where two of the girls went to study at U of M, one of them met her future husband there and because he was from out east she went on to law school out east and ended up marrying him and staying out east. The other daughter decided to live in the Detroit area just because the banking opportunities are better for her there. It seems that in Holland it is difficult to get into those positions. People feel that if they go to the large metropolitan areas, the competition's not as bad as it is in Holland. We, I'm sorry to say, in Holland still have people who are very narrow minded. I identify myself as a clinical therapist and every time I go to the hospital somebody will invariably say, "Oh, are you the interpreter?" And I will say, "No, I am the clinical therapist." "Oh I thought you were the interpreter." I know that's one thing my friend has struggled with because she is the head of her department and the nurses know that, yet they still call her the interpreter. We're still not allowed the respect that goes with the position. It's necessary to say that those of us that have acquired those positions are very proud of them because we've worked very hard for them. I think that things will change, it's difficult and they won't change very easily, but they're changing.

JO: I just have one final question. You mentioned before and I found out in my own studies, many of the Hispanics here originally had some sort of migrant background. Do you have any migrant background whatsoever?

FG: No, I don't. I moved here directly from Mexico and when I lived in Texas I lived there all the time, my guardian was an older brother who was working and living there. My brother had a stable permanent job, so no, we were never migrants. I
have picked cotton and I have worked in a tomato packing factory. I was only fifteen, I worked there three months until I was discovered. But that's part of the agricultural industry. I never migrated back and forth.

JO: Thank you very much, Mrs. Gamez.