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Rebolledo, Luis Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Tracy L. Bednarick

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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1996
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #16
Mr. Luis Rebolledo
Holland's Past Fifty Years

Conducted by:
Tracy L. Bednarick
August 12, 1996

Abstract (subjects correspond to general order of appearance in transcript): Alfredo Gonzalez, Calvary Baptist, Inner-city mission church, Queretaro, Mexico, childhood in Mexico, Chicago, similarities between the Dutch and Hispanics, Caterpillar America, first impressions of Holland, Tech Center in Holland, organization involvement, founder of Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Luciano Hernandez, City Council, LAUP, business development, Posada Christmas Celebration, Literacy Program, sister city with Mexico, increase diversification, deterioration of neighborhoods, growth and traffic, Holland as a well organized city, drawbacks of Holland, youth, controversies, local institutions, church, Hope college excluding local citizens, changing of Hope College, industry, Dutch influence, Asians in Holland, abuse against women in Holland, family.

Interviewee: Luis Rebolledo (LR), Founder of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Holland.

Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB), Student Oral History Coordinator.

(The following is a section of conversation that took place before the actual interview, that I, as the interviewer, feel is pertinent to the rest of the transcript.)

FR: I have a good friend of mine that works at the college, Alfredo Gonzalez. I keep saying to him and others, that a lot of the students don't go to church because they are not connected with anybody. Usually it is not that you don't want to go to church, sometimes you have a need for spiritual life, and even new friends. Sometimes the only way you'd do it, is if there was a connection with the college with a local church, so that there would be referrals and it would make things easier for the students. We talk once and awhile, but we never get into actually detailing how to connect the students to our church.

We have wanted to do that, because we need to work together with the other Baptist churches. We are working with one. Our mother church is Calvary, and there is just another one a few blocks from where we are called Immanuel Baptist Church. We are working with them on a partnership. We are going to try to get them evolved with the mission. Imagine an inner-city mission, instead of a foreign mission. It is a place where he (the pastor) wants to almost train people for future missions, so that they have access to something here in their backyard. Some people don't feel called to go to Africa, or Asia, or South America, or some other places, but they have a heart for bringing the Gospel to others, befriending people. Sometimes it is difficult for them to go outside of the country, but here in town we

actually have a mission. That is where he is. We asked our pastor, "Could you send us to the mission? We want to go there and worship, and tithe there, to help establish the church." I don't know if you have read, a few weeks ago, that we got a team of some kids that came over from the city of Queretaro. We brought them over here. We were the ones that were involved with that. There are kids just like your age. [discussion about college life] I always wonder how I could connect with some of the student who feel lonely or feel like they really need to go to a church and make a friendship, at least while they are here. It is difficult. I know that you have a chapel. I know that sometimes people have problems with a denomination like that, or with some of the things that happen at the chapel. It wouldn't be bad to have another option to go some other place.

I have two kids here. They are eleven and twelve year olds. I have an older daughter too. I have six kids. There are four that live in Chicago, and the other two live here.

I wish that you could have met some of these guys from Queretaro. They were 18 to about 25. They were from the University of Queretaro, the one that you are going to have exchanges with in the future.

I teach Spanish; there was an article about me in the newspaper a couple of weeks ago. That was in the Grand Rapids Press. (Article included in folder.)

[Actual interview begins here.]

TLB: First thing, state your name, and your date of birth, and where you were born.

LR: My full name is José Luis Rebolledo. I was born in Mexico in the state of Jalisco,

the city is called Techolichtlan (Sp?).

TLB: Is that where there are a lot of Aztec ruins?

LR: No, that is Mexico City. That is where our forefathers founded Mexico City, which happens to be the biggest city in the world with 25 million people. I have a lot of my relatives living there. We are from the second biggest city that we have; it is called Guadalajara. Nearby, is this town where we were born. Half of my life was spent in Guadalajara. My mother lives there, my father lives there, my brothers and sisters and most of my relatives live there. I have a brother and sister who live here in Chicago.

TLB: Do you go back to visit?

LR: Yes, I go. When ever we can do it; when ever we can afford it. Yes. My niece was here. She is leaving tomorrow back to Mexico. She came to talk about maybe trying to do a business of importing crafts, handy crafts from Mexico. She came to talk with me to see if it would work. Now she is back, and we have been talking some more. We have connections here and there.

TLB: When did you come to Holland for the first time?

LR: For the first time, it was about fifteen or sixteen years ago. It was Tulip Time. We used to live in Chicago for a big number of years. We came to visit here during the celebration of Tulip Time. We camped north of here, and we stayed for two weeks here. We liked Holland. When we went back to Mexico, I took my wife there. We lived there for about five years, then we came back. We wanted to decide where to come back. We remembered this little town. We choose it, because we remembered

how nice it was here: the environment, the institutions. A lot of what happens here reminded us of my own country.

TLB: In what ways did it remind you?

LR: The culture, the way that the Dutch celebrate their culture, that is the same way that we celebrate. They are religious people and we are too. They were traditional, and we are too. They care about the institutions, and the family. Also they have a community life. We researched that. We here sixteen years ago, and we said that if we ever moved from Chicago this would be a neat town to live in. When we were ready to come back from Mexico back into the states, I went to work there for Caterpillar Americas. When we were ready to come back we decided that we didn't want to go back to Chicago, so we choose here. We said, "This is a more protected town; it is small. It is a different environment for our kids." Two of our kids were born in Mexico. They have dual citizenship. That is why we wanted to sort of protect them from the environment of the big city.

TLB: You have six children? How many were born in Mexico, just the two?

LR: Just the two, four were born in Chicago. I have a twenty-seven year old. Then the youngest is twenty-four.

TLB: When did you come to the United States for the first time?

LR: That was back in 1964, when I came to visit some friends in high school, in California. I lived there for a couple of months. Then I went over to North Hollywood, and then to the city of (word?) Heights. I went back to my country, and then I immigrated here legally back in 1967. I have been in Chicago since 1967, all

the way through 1981. Then I went back to my country a couple years to work for Caterpillar Americas. Then when we came back, but instead of going to Chicago we went to Holland.

TLB: What were some of your first impressions of Holland when you came here to live?

LR: When I came here to live ten years ago, the city had already changed from the time that we had seen it. Six years had already gone by. It looked bigger. It looked a little bit changed. We saw more Hispanics living here. Of course we liked that. We saw that there were more people around. The city looked a lot bigger. The industry was very sound. We thought that this would be a good time to work. It was difficult to find work. We couldn't find work right away. I remember that I had to go to the Tech Center and have some classes. They didn't help me to get a job, but they at least helped me to maintain my sanity in doing something, and doing research from there, and sending resumes. Then I did some volunteer work for one agency here in town, and they hired me. That was Community Action House; I was their case worker for two years. That was something that I got through by doing volunteer work, and also being at the Tech Center with other students. I thought that it was so neat to be an adult in student class like the one that I found there. But it was a real challenge. We were always successful wherever we were. I thought that I needed to get myself surrounded with young people, because they are motivated. If I get surrounded with people that are my age they are already have home situations. I thought that I needed a challenge, and it came.

Another thing that we liked was that there were churches here. We were

Catholic then, and we knew that there was a Catholic church here. We thought that it was nice to go to that. Which we did, and we experience that, but it was not the same kind Catholicism that we has experienced in Mexico. We went to other Christian churches. We went to a Reformed church, and stayed there a few months. It was not what we were looking for, until we went to Calvary Baptist Church, and we knew that was a good church. We were looking for a place where people would accept us, would be nice to us, would care for our family, the things that we were doing, and the things that we were involved in. That was the church. It was a great place to be.

TLB: What are some organizations that you have been involved in, and how did you get involved?

LR: One of the things that I always believe is that if you want to bring change you need to get involved. I did. I have been in so many organizations. I have been on the Board of the Good Samaritan Center, the Board of the Bilarola, the two shelters that we have here in town, the CBBG which is a city board which administers the money that cities get in order to give to agencies and that. I have been involved with the Hispanic organizations that we founded here. In fact, I am the founder of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Not only those, but I have been involved with the schools. I have been a board member of the school, the president of the P.T.O., those kinds of things. At the church I have gotten involved. They have always elected me to an office. I was an elder when I was at the Reformed Church. Now I am a Deacon at the church that I go to.

We have gotten involved because we feel that we have things to contribute to our community. This is our community, although it is mixed. We feel that we have input, that we've got good ideas. I've gotten involved with the museum; I was a trustee of the museum. I started with them on the Posadas, which is our traditional Christmas party. I was the one that gave them the idea, and actually did the first one. Now it is part of this community.

I also got involved in electing Luciano Hernandez to City Council for the first time, because we didn't have any City Council people here before. I was behind that helping. I kind of said to him, "Please run, because we need some representatives." I had a little experience back in Mexico. I was president of a Congressional District of the Republican Party, so I had some idea what to do. Also I had been involved with the sister city project. I was the one that went to city council, and the national committee, and even to Hope College with Alfredo Gonzales and some others, to talk about some of the things that we could do. This was several years ago, and it has given fruit just now a few years later.

There have been other institutions that I have been part of. They are of Hispanic nature. I was one time member of LAUP, member of the Hispanic Lakeshore Forum, our own Hispanic task force, I was the president. There have been others that I have been a board member on. I thought that was the way to change that attitude that people here in Holland had about Hispanics. It wasn't a good attitude. They thought that we weren't sophisticated, or even educated. They thought that we were dreamers. People were getting involved in the community to

make it better. Now we have changed that attitude. Now days, you see that Hispanics are the biggest minority here that is growing. People listen to us now days. People are partner-shipping with us. They are happy that we are getting involved in the institutions, and doing the same things that they are doing, knowing the system and utilizing it, and also giving back to the community.

TLB: What are some thing that you do with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

LR: Basically try to promote business development. One of the things that we know that we (the Hispanic people) don't have here is a lot of businesses. So one idea of making the sister city project was that--to generate an enthusiasm both here in Holland and abroad in Mexico so that we have trade. So that we have the opportunity to encourage Hispanics to dream up a business opportunity. We have "mom and pop operations." I do translations as a part time job, because it doesn't come often. There are three or five months that I don't have translations. This is why I need to work some other place. Nonetheless, it is a business. We think we need to promote business development, so that our Hispanics also feel successful. Then they in turn contribute to the community in terms of the involvement, and doing something for the community and their own children. So we are thinking in terms of business, and terms of our youth. We want to be a role model to people. Hispanics are not just gang members. We are successful individuals: teachers, lawyers, doctors, business people. We want to promote that. We are also involved in the cultural aspect. Chamber of Commerce is always involved with business, but it is not our only focus. Our focus is to help our Hispanics regain the identity that they have

lost. That identity has to do with institutions; it has to do with celebrations that they don't celebrate here. That is why we promoted the Posada. That is why we want to promote our Sixteenth of September, which is the equivalent to the Fourth of July. We are going to promote projects like the Literacy Program, for the older Hispanics, who talk in Spanish perfectly, but they don't read and write. That is the description of an illiterate person. We are going to work with the Mexican Consulate to see if we can import the program from Mexico into Holland with their help. It is going along. We are going to have a social project in the future, as soon as we collect some information that they need, so that they can help us train a group of individuals to take care of the administration of that program here. We are involved with wanting to have intercultural exchanges. That is why the idea of a sister city occurred. We would be so interested in trying to do an institute here where you can go and learn Spanish, Spanish history, Mexican culture, or cuisine. We would like to man it with professors from Mexico, or from here where you can have an exchange. We would like to have some people come here to do their internships. And by the same token, send some people from there from here to do the same thing in Mexico. That is why it works so beautifully with Hope College. It was a good move. It was something that we needed. It was something that we needed to do together, because our future lies in that--the global environment that we are going to become in the future. We are no longer number one, although we say that we are. We need people. We need other countries to work with us toward being great. And I think that greatness is making relationships with other people, and that is exactly what we

are trying to do. We are trying to establish ourselves to become role models, and to say to others, "Please partnership with us. Work together with us, because we are looking for the same things here in town." We want our children to be happy. We want them to be educated in the institutions you have here. We are going to work at your commissions, and your boards, so that we indeed have an opportunity to give our input, and also feel part of this community. We are not just a group that is here, and no-one pays attention to it. So those are some of the kinds of things we do.

Awareness is another one. We also like to think that we are a group of small business people that will attract the future resources for information, for people who are targeting the Spanish market. Those are the kinds of ideas that we are promoting.

TLB: What are some of the changes that you have seen in Holland, since you moved here?

LR: Changes? They have been great. They are very powerful. The one that comes to my mind the most is the diversity that we have here now. I remember a few years ago we didn't have any African-Americans. Now we have a lot of them in that live here in town. We had some small communities of Haitians. Now we have a lot of them. We have people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. It is great that those have been tremendous changes. I have seen also, by the same token, the fleeing of the Dutch people from the town to the Northside suburbs, to the Southside suburbs. This left a gap here in the middle. A lot of the houses where the owners were Dutch before, now they are owned by Hispanics, Afro-Americans, and Asians, because they moved out. It is like an exodus of people that left from around Hope College, all the way to 24th, from Lincoln to Van Raalte. When I was here, I was about the second

Hispanic on that block where I used to live. Now it is all Hispanic. There are a few Afro-Americans living there. That was a big change. It was a change that transformed our city. Now we have a neighborhood that is in trouble, because these are people that are coming and buying houses. They are not necessarily the best people. They are not trained on how to maintain a house, or how to maintain the payments. They were not like the old Dutch. These are poor families. These are working families that are trying to buy a house for the first time. Naturally the neighborhood looks a little bit deteriorated. It was a beautiful neighborhood, before when the Dutch who were successful, established, and kept their houses and everything really nice and fine; it looked different.

Another big change is the growth that we have had here in Holland. From being a small city all of a sudden it looks as if we have doubled and tripled in size. To see more traffic, more cars, delays. We used to take a couple of minutes to go from one place to the other. Now there is for the first time in the last few years traffic back-ups. Traffic accidents is another big change. People are not paying attention when they drive here in Holland. This is like a tradition, if you are in Holland people don't follow the rules. [laughs]

Another big change was to see how the churches and some institutions that were very united have given opportunities to others to join. That is a significant change here in Holland. There was sort of a monopoly here before, where the local institutions almost called everything. They had the power, socially and politically speaking. Now they are willing to share. They are willing to bring new people, new

ideas. Some are even taking risks in the sense that they feel that doing partnerships for others is good for everybody. That is a big change. I didn't see that a lot before, but I see that now. I think that our church that I was talking about a few minutes ago has really changed, and has allowed us to become partners in the true sense of the word--physically, spiritually, politically, and socially. I think that there is more of that coming.

TLB: What do you think some of the causes of the changes have been?

LR: Basically numbers and the ability of some newcomers like myself and other families that bring ideas that are not the same that people had here before. The compositions of Holland in the terms of Hispanics was that a lot of them are sons and daughters of migrants. We are not. We are people who came here. We have education. There are other families that come from South America that are here. And all of us are motioned for change. Change needs involvement, and it is painful. We have gotten our share of both, but we have made change be part of Holland. That is the most amazing thing.

TLB: What are some qualities that seem to stand out in the city of Holland?

LR: In terms of business, this is a business community that is well organized. It is one of the most successful around this area and south West Michigan. They have a beautiful Chamber of Commerce that is sensitive to their own members. The city fathers have a well oiled machine, things run on time. If there is snow, they clean. We don't have blackouts a lot. Most of the public services work. There is a true organization when you see things in terms of social activities. They have directors, and they have

programs well organized. The efficiency of the city is impressive. Their people have also been opening up lately to receive others. The ethics of this community, which have always been based on work and success. That is very important to them. We recognize that and we love it; we want to be part of that too. The religious environment that permeates the city is good for us. It is good that you have a moment sometime during the week to have a personal relationship with your Lord, you Creator, and that you have a communion with others that think alike. Our nature is because we need to be nurturing each other. There is a lot of support in Holland. There are a lot of agencies that cater to migrants, to the poor, to people in general. It is a well rounded community.

TLB: Are there any negative aspects to Holland, or any drawbacks to living in Holland?

LR: Yes. The violence. The violence is something that none of us want. The statistics that we hear, the Hispanics and others from the schools, that is not good. Another drawback that I see too, is that now days you need a two jobs in order to survive. You have parents working day shift and night shift. Kids have a lot of time involved in things that are not necessarily constructive. We have gaps in services and organizations, and delivering what is needed to touch some of these kids and families. And gaps with coordinating and synchronizing that, so that everybody has a similar level. I know that is impossible sometimes, unless you live in a Communist country. But at least some level of comfort by living here. Another drawback is, of course, the traffic, the congestions at the stores, the meanness of people. We have seen some confrontations that have gone back and forth. That is new to Holland. We didn't

have those thing before. That comes with change.

Another thing that I think is a drawback is for example is the inability of all us to work together to determine our future. We are doing it fractionally, and sometimes we don't agree on what is best for us. The resources that we have allocated sometimes compete. That is a drawback--not being able to work together. It is a difficult thing to work together on. Not being able to target areas that could be designated, and really need the assistance. Some have a lot, some others don't have any. We have to channel some of that, and spread it around. I see that as a drawback if you do not have the ability to compromise. That is the something that we've seen lately as a drawback. You need to give something up in order to delegate, in order to share, in order to bring change. Change is always painful; it hurts people, and scares people. I guess those are some things.

The new groups that are coming here, the drugs. These are things that are always there, but you don't necessarily always see that they are rampant, but they are there. That is a drawback, because your children are going to be in that environment. No matter how much you protect them, they will be part of it. You know that. A lot of us believe in community. Even when you parents are around, you still get touched by peer pressure. That was the word that I was looking for. A drawback is the peer pressure of people that involve our sons and daughters in doing vandalism, and drugs. As an adult, if you tried some of those things, and had that experience you know those kinds of things you know better. You don't want to get your kids involved in any of that. I remember growing up my adult life in Chicago. Drugs were never our

cup of tea, but we had so many friends who are not married anymore because of the drugs, the alcohol, substance abuses, and the abuse at home. That is not good. It is something that corrodes a community, and it is here.

TLB: Have you ever noticed any controversy in Holland?

LR: Yes, there are several. When I was talking about resources, and how to spread the resources evenly, that is a social controversy. There have been things that have a raised nature. People call names, and there are others who don't want to give others access to those resources that are part of the city area. We would like to have a park certainly named after a Hispanic. There is a big community that is here, and it is growing. Certainly we would like to have something allocated for us just like they allocate for everybody else. There are controversies in the sense of decisions that are made that affect our future, the future of the environment that we have here in Holland, the future of our roads, the future of our housing stock, the future of our economic situation, the future of some of our neighborhoods, the future of business in town. Those are areas of controversy, because no-one seems to agree on the right formula. If there was one, we would be a very specific community. We're not. We have ideas of our own, and sometimes those clash. You see sometimes there is some calm, and then all of a sudden you have a storm. You have people doing something that transforms the community from what we usually experience to something else. Sometimes that is not good for everybody.

There are controversies in the sense of what is best for our schools, and education, for our children. I get the sense that sometimes we don't take our children

seriously, that they are not children, they are not adults; they are in the middle. We don't pay attention to that. Sometimes, I feel that that is a controversy. That is why they are misbehaving. That is why people tend to do anti-social things, because people don't even know that you exist. You are a person, you are a young girl, or a young guy. People just don't care for you, that is not good. That hurts. It is a social problem, because then kids get back to you in a powerful way. We ought to pay attention to our youth, we need too. After all they are the ones that are going to inherit this community, the businesses, the institutions; the well-being of the community is going to be in their hands. If we create a generation of mean people, we know what we are going to get in the future--nothing but problems.

TLB: Do you have ideas on what the city can do for the youth?

LR: Yes, almost anything that we have can have a person who is a youth person involved. We thought about that at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We have in our constitution, the ability to have a junior Chamber of Commerce, if we ever get people involved. We know that if you do not get involved the children in what is good for them, then we won't know. We as adults think, "Well, this is good for them." You have all these programs that you have around the city that are church sponsored, or city sponsored. But are they the right things for them? Are they really the right things for them. We won't know until we ask the horse's mouth. And the horse's mouth is you. Are you a user of those services? Do we have the right things for you? Does that make you happy? And does that make you a better individual in this community? We don't know enough. If we don't go and involve our kids in the

decision making, we can make big mistakes. The church needs to get involved, and get youth groups involved, the colleges need to get involved. Just name any agency. The teens are the future of these agencies. They can be incorporated if people would take their time and pay attention to the young ladies, and young guys. [tape flips here]

I definitely think that we have failed our youth here. That is why we have so many problems. Our social problems are not actually between adults. They are not between people at the college, people in the neighborhoods, people of the churches, people at the school. These happen to be young people. Just read the newspapers, there aren't that many adults that are there, unless something unusual happens. It seems to involve the youth. It seems to involve a group of people that are confused, that are looking for a niche in this community. Sometimes, I feel that we have failed them. We have not made them a part of our decision making. We don't ask them for their input. We don't go and say, "At this institution we are planning on doing this, what do you think?" They are the last ones to experience that. Sometimes they resent that, and they fight back. That is not something that I think is right. I think that there are some teenagers that are here in town that are very vulnerable, and confused. We have failed them as adults, because we don't make them part of our sphere. In fact, sometimes we fear time. "Oh, no I'm not going to get involved." That is not good. To treat our future leaders like that can backfire. In fact, it has already, you can see some of the effects of that here in Holland. If you don't pay attention to our kids, they are going to misbehave. They are going to do something

that we don't like to see them doing: drinking, raping, vandalizing, shoplifting, breaking the law, getting in car accidents, fighting groups against group, and all that. That is not good. It is preventable if we get these kids involved in everything we need in this community. And we have so many needs, and so many projects. Just imagine the young ideas it would bring if we would let them do it. I guess we are kind of cowards; we don't leave room for improvement. I think that that if most significant here; we have to get them involved. We have to.

TLB: Do you want to talk about what you do with the church in Holland and how the church influences the city?

LR: I feel that the church is actually the source of a lot of the questions and answers that we need to be asking ourselves about our situation. I feel that unless you change somebody's heart, unless you teach somebody how to have a personal relationship to a creator, that it doesn't matter how much money you have, or how many programs you come up with. That won't significantly change a person, but the Gospel does. The Gospel has the ability to significantly change a life. The programs are then implemented. Then the programs work. I feel that the churches have one of the greatest influences here, because they contribute, they have programs that are well intentioned, and sometimes well applied too. I think that they have resources that we have not used. I think that as they close the Welfare system, and other things that are going to happen we are going to need the churches more. They have family support systems in place already, and we have not been able to use those to the capacity that we could. I also feel that the church is the place where our youth need to come to. I

think that we have a number of kids here in town that probably feel the need for a spiritual life, yet there is no place for them to go. It is not easy to have a spiritual life when you are competing with all of the thing you see here: your friends, your associates, your work, your co-workers. People around you who are constantly bombarding you with things. Sometimes you don't have the ability to take a time-out, to have a respite sometime during the week to recharge your batteries, to come and be with others who are in the same boat as you are.

I feel that the church has a true influence on what happens here in town, because there are so many of them, and there are so many of our citizens that are there. These are people that are well-to-do, and people who are powerful because they belong to these organizations, and all these boards, business people, educators, and our professionals are there. It is a source of constant renovation. That is what we need here in Holland. We need to give the church the opportunity to work with individuals, and programs, not to substitute those programs, but to work with them to compliment them. There are some good programs that we have in this community. We need to work together with the church to follow through on whatever happens after those programs are gone. You go to a program and then you are done. You don't have anybody doing a follow-up. You don't feel that you made a friend just because you went to Women in Transition or some other place. They may take care of your immediate need, but that is about it. Then afterwards, what happens? There are no support systems. The church offers that--support--support groups that are so needed, and in different areas, not just the spiritual one. The churches are not

institutions where almost anything nowadays works, because it is important that it works, and it is important that we let individuals take ownership, so that they can approach others and get them involved in some good habits. It is a good source for making people come and get good habits. At least be available to find out how other do (worship), and would lead you to do better in your life. You have the ability to choose. You have more options, not just the options that your peers have, now you have options that are scripturally based, and also the fellowship with people that have more experience than you do. That is important.

TLB: On to the second page of questions. Do you want to talk about Hope College and the community?

LB: I felt very good when I saw that we had a college. That was just the first impression when I came here to visit, and then when I came here to live. But I felt a little bit disappointed when I found out that it was a private institution that locals almost never aspire to go to Hope College, because it is so expensive. Sometimes, it is a little aloof in the sense that it hasn't got involved with the community with things the way that some people have wanted it to. I feel that it is one of our national institutions, it is known all over the nation, yet we are losing opportunities to give the local community an opportunity to learn there. I wish they would have more things in place, so diverse groups that live here would have the chance to send their kids there. Maybe even make a way of subsidizing. We do it for other reasons, why don't find a way to go get an education and become a productive citizen, instead of throwing it into Welfare, or some other thing. I would be more comfortable paying taxes to see

my money help a kid to go into a institution like Hope College which would give them prestige, credibility, and a job in the future, than blowing it on Welfare, or some other social program. I was impressed though, because of steps that they have taken, the construction that they have done. Their willingness to participate in the community lately has changed somewhat. I guess with every administration there are new people coming in. They have made more Hispanics, and others part of the administration. I guess there is a new attitude now. I still feel that they have not targeted the local community to go there. That is something that is uncomfortable. Sometimes I wish I could go back to college, and take some courses. Because I can not afford it I am losing the opportunity to do it when I have a college that is an institution of all our nation, and I can't go. Sometimes, I say, "What is the use of having this college here?" Sometimes we have some elite people there, and there is nothing wrong with it either. I just feel that they should share some of that with the community that is hosting them. It is a good community that needs education. I feel that they need to work a little bit on that.

TLB: What do you make of the industry in Holland?

LR: It is great. It is not something that you can talk about in terms of negativity, except the growth. It has expanded so much that it is taking over everything that we had available. That produces some effects: smoke, the influx of people trying to come from other places to work, the housing, it jacks up the rents. It also produces a competition for resources. It changes our environment. Overall, it is one of the best around. It is a growing business community here. The industry is just absolutely

working fine. All we need to do is administer it well. If it is well administered we are going to have some good benefits in the future, if we don't we are regret it.

TLB: We talked a lot about diversification in Holland already, what are some things that can continue to make relations between different cultures work in Holland? And how does the Dutch heritage still influence the community?

LR: That last one is very easy to answer. It still influences a lot.

The first question is not so difficult to answer either. I think that we need to build relationships. I think that we need to lose that fear that we have of each other. Just because I am Hispanic, and you are white, or you are from another race or whatever that we don't get along. Actually, when we meet together, and we sit down and enjoy each other we then see how alike we are, and how it is easy for us to talk, work together, worship together, dream together, and dream our future for this part of our nation in partnership. We need to build more relationships. We need to be more open to people. Sometimes we are so closed, that we don't let anybody in. We lost that ability, that our older generations had of inviting people and being nice to each other, or being social, of celebrating together the good things that both of us have. That is something that needs to be done more. We need to invite people to our homes, and they need to invite us to their homes. We need socialize in the parks, in recreation, in work, in church, and all over the place together. We live here. We are part of this community. If we do not have the ability to do that, instead of integrating, we are going to be separating ourselves, and we are going to cause the problems that are associated with that. Not being integrated and not being a part of

the group always produces big problems.

TLB: Are there are any problems that the citizens of Holland have had to deal with that are different from when you first came here?

LR: Yes. I think that before it was a closed knit community. The problems were underneath, now they are more on the surface. That makes it more important that we deal with them. Repeat that again, and see if I can tell you some more.

TLB: Are the problems facing the citizen of Holland different?

LR: I think that the problems that we have now, have to do with growth that we didn't have before. They have to do with numbers, that we did have before. They have to with competition that wasn't there before, and even influence that we didn't have before. All these thing, even influences that we didn't have before come into place now. These are making our community challenging.

TLB: What do you think brought the other cultures to Holland?

LR: Some of the Asian cultures were brought here by the churches. They traditionally get involved with helping the Asian community. That part is easy to answer. The other part about Hispanics is logical. This is an agricultural area, a lot of the crops that are here need to be picked up. You have people that come here year after year after year that come to do just that. We have people that live here in town for nine months, and then they go back to Florida, Texas, or California, wherever they are coming from. They only stay here for those number of months. A few of those families, 200-300 families, stay every year. These are the ones that are increasing our stock of Hispanic families that are residents of Holland.

TLB: Can you tell me about one job or task or activity that you've had since you have been in Holland that you really enjoyed?

LR: I enjoy helping a lot at the church. I enjoy tremendously getting involved in our institutions, boards, and commissions. I enjoy tremendously teaching Spanish, and providing a translation service for this community. I enjoy the fact that we are putting works to our words, that we are trying to do a ministry to what is needed in a neighborhood that needs assistance. I'd like to be part of help in our Hispanics' move from the level that they are in to a higher level of wellness. I enjoy doing things that are community based. I feel the more that we do, the more that we are going to benefit. Those are things that are very possible here. I have done them in the past, and continue to do so.

TLB: Have you had any difficulties since you moved here?

LR: For someone like me, that all, not having a job is a big thing. We have an economy here that is vibrant, but sometimes older people retire earlier than before, and opportunities are not there as much as they need to be. If I was laid off right now, and I need to go get a job it would be easier for you to get it rather than me. I know that there are all kinds of jobs out there, but they won't hire anybody like me. Age is a concern, experience sometime too, because most of the choice jobs need certain experience that is specific to the descriptions that you see in the newspaper, and at the recruiters. Sometimes that throws a "monkey wrench" in you ability to have a good job. There are some jobs that I just wish that I could have that I have never been able to get them, because of the letters that I get after I have done an interview. It

hurts sometimes when you are not able to use your skills that you know that you have, because of experience, age. You have to sustain a family. I have to make house payments and car payments. I have children that go to a private school, it charges me; it is not free. We are a two working family. My wife works in the morning, and I work in the afternoon. I have two part-time jobs. That is what people want to keep you on nowadays. They don't want to pay the benefits. That is one of the drawbacks. Nowadays, you almost need to get any job, not the one that you are looking for necessarily, but on a part-time basis. They will keep you there a long time, in order to not have to give you the benefits, the insurance, and all the things you need. It is so tough for a family man like me. We can't afford to get ill sometimes; even if we are we don't go to the doctor as often as we need to. Sometimes it takes months or even years before we can visit a doctor. We can't afford it. It is a big drawback.

TLB: Has the role of women changed in Holland?

LR: Yes, women are more involved. They are very aggressive. I like it. I think that we need to have our women participating. They were very submissive before, or we had them subdued, or something. There is a lot of abuse in this community against women. That is something that we don't say, but there is. I think that women are getting more independence. They are being more competitive. They are being more outwardly out there. I like it. I just think that a women brings a perspective that we need in our services, our businesses, and our social atmosphere. I just think that we need them.

TLB: Have you had any turning points in you life that stand out?

LR: Yes, when I found the church that we go to that was a turning point. When I was hired to teach at a private institution that was another turning point in my life. When I got some of the ideas that I had in my mind that I had personally said to others for a long time, and I saw them taking off, like the sister city and the Chamber of Commerce, by all means, that has been a blessing to us. It has brought tremendous personal satisfaction and even credibility. I am in the newspaper quite often, and I don't ask for it. I don't call a reporter, and say, "Come and interview me." Notoriety has come because people give it to you. I have even been asked now to do speaking engagements. I hadn't had any of those before. I think that it is good, because anything that is to contribute to the wellness of our community, and to the changing of the attitude that people have about us, I'll take it. I will take any opportunity to be able to say to others that we are as good workers, good dreamers, good parents, involved individuals, and good citizens as you are. Sometimes we even work harder to prove it. I think that is a good thing that we are able to be ourselves. That is a big thing.

TLB: Can you tell me what you have heard others say of Holland, such as family and friends from out of town?

LR: I think that people feel that we have a good thing here. People have a great sense of what Holland is, because we are thriving community economically, and otherwise. I think that people have a negative comments when we feel that we have too much of a good thing around here, but they don't understand how our community works.

Overall, people have a good thoughts about Holland. They want to come here, and live here. They hear that there are good services, social and otherwise, good industry. There is a little bit difficulty with housing, and it is a little bit expensive housing, but otherwise it is great. It is a thriving community that is growing. It is a community that seems to be aware more of others that are coming that are willing to take a risk in order to work together. We have seen in just the last few years more and more involvement. I think that people are paying more attention to the social problems, and the political problems. As long as people cooperate, and as long as people trust and know each other, it will work well. That working well is what attracts people to Holland.

TLB: Is there anything that you want to add about your personal life, such as your schooling, when you met your wife, or your childhood?

LR: I had a real nice childhood. I had a really tough father and mother. I just loved them for that. That was through discipline. I think that we have lost the opportunity to use that with the new generations. I had a very happy childhood, although we were very poor. We don't have an social services in Mexico. You had to work. I didn't have as much education as I wanted, because I was the oldest in the family and I had to work in order to support the others so that they would go to school and college. I always helped my dad to be that other provider in the house. It was just basically a beautiful childhood. Then I went into the seminary at the University in Guadalajara. I was going to become a priest, but I quit because I couldn't get married. I was a Catholic then, but Catholic priest don't get married. I couldn't be a

celibate, so I had to quit. It was the most enjoyable time that I have ever lived.

When I was like you are now in college, I can't ever forget that. I remember a lot of my friends. Now that we are adults, we get together sometimes when I go to Mexico. I have nothing, but good talks about that. That experience of being around hundreds of peers your own age from different backgrounds just makes you well rounded, it just gives you an opportunity to test your ideas. It gives you the opportunity to be somebody, to charge your batteries, and say what you are going to be, then do it.

About my wife and children, I think that it has been an enjoyable life. I married before, I had four children from my first wife. We divorced. It was a difficult time. She had cancer; she died young. She was twenty-six years old when she died. Then I married Lila, and it has been twenty-three years. It has been a very enjoyable time. I personally love her very much. She is not just my wife, she is my friend, she is a confidant. She is somebody that I can approach with all the things that I have. She is somebody who I trust, someone who I can talk about my intimate and personal things. She is my advisor. She is a beautiful individual. You know, you can't do it by yourself. You have to find someone who is different than you. We come from opposite sided in many things, yet we compliment each other. We have our ups and downs, but have never thought about separating, divorcing, or doing anything of those silly things. We work things out and try to understand each other, and to enjoy each other's company. We are growing in our marriage and keeping our love alive for each other. We try to share that with others, with friends, and

individuals. I think that makes it really important for us to be part of this older group of marriages that are here in Holland. We try to be good people and good citizens. We avoid places where you can get into trouble. We don't go to dances, or bars. They are full of temptation, and at the same time there is danger there. As you become older you don't want to take as many chances as you would when you were young. We are getting mellow. We are just enjoying ourselves, our house, our place in the community, being a mom and dad, and being a wife and husband. We try to make friends, and we try to be involved with whatever we feel is good for us and our community.

TLB: Do you have anything to add about how Holland has changed, or just about Holland in general?

LR: I think that I would like to see more change happen here in Holland. I think that change has to come from forming true partnerships. I think that we can help each other, and that we can understand each other if we really try. Just by being here today you have experienced that Hispanics are human people; we have some things that are (word?) and some things that are nice. If we don't work together, then we can really make thing worse. By excepting you the way you are and not asking you to change yourself, I think that it provides a sense of security and well-being. That is what we need to try to do need to do more partner-shipping. We need to open up a little bit. I know that it is not going to be easy; it is difficult to do. How many people here open up there houses, and invite others in? It is not easy. I think that we should work on that a little bit more. Then perhaps, maybe move outside our

community. We need to leave and go other places to enlighten ourselves. That is why I think it is good to have a partnership with the Mexican city. By seeing how other cultures live and by experiencing other people, then we can bring those good experiences to our own community and try them here. I think that is going to allow us to increase our awareness, and our celebrations. That is also something else we need to do--celebrate more. Have a good time with each other, instead of fighting, instead of calling names, instead of making things tough. We should be the opposite, celebrating, enjoying each other's company, appreciating each other, just working together and being together enjoying the things that we have in this area. If we do more of that we will be all-right.

TLB: That is it. Do you have anymore final comments?

LR: No, that is probably it.

[discussion of transcription process] [end]