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Rodriguez, Fred Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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

Interview #15
Mr. Fred Rodriguez
Holland's Past 50 Years

Conducted by:
Tracy L. Bednarick
August 1, 1996

Abstract (subjects appear in general order of appearance in transcript): move from Ludington to be in an Hispanic community, migrant workers, auto-body repair, family, Denver, CO, Holland as a helpful and open community, work for Hispanic people, zoning, diversity as a quality in Holland, immigration and insurance problems, difficulty hiring workers for auto repair business, education for minorities, gangs, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, need for a leader in the Hispanic community, Hope College, HOI Inc., Alcohol Highway District, no more growth for Holland, displacement of the Dutch, We-Met Program, Officer Larry Rodriguez, migrant farming experience, Industry, Edgar Prince, corruption on local churches, miracles, difference in treatment of migrants in Holland compared to Texas.

Interviewee: Fred Rodriguez (FR), Owner of West Ottawa Collision

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

TLB: The first thing I want you to do, is to say your name, your date of birth, and where you were born.

FR: My name is Fred Rodriguez. I was born in Ludington, Michigan on [date removed], 1941.

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

FR: The first time was in 1991.

TLB: Have you lived in Holland since 1991?

FR: Yes.

TLB: What brought you to Holland?

FR: Actually it was my sister that told me to move here. I've always liked to be around my people, Hispanic people. And I figured that this was a good area to get to know them a little better, because where we lived in Ludington we were the only family in 1941. My father came here from Mexico in 1920. They stated that he was one of the first families that ever came to the state of Michigan in 1920.

TLB: Really?

FR: Yes, in Ludington, Michigan.

TLB: What brought him up to Ludington?

FR: He wanted to get out of Mexico, because Mexico is a very oppressed state. Mexico is a very poor state. He wanted to do something for his family. Actually, he walked all the way from Mexico to Ludington, Michigan. That is where he ended up.

TLB: Wow.

FR: From there he started picking as a migrant worker. He decided to make something of

himself, so he decided to buy a small little farm. Then it became a big farm. Then he went into the trucking business. He had for three or four years, from what my brothers tell me, where he had sixteen trucks that he had already bought. He carried lime, and helped the farmers with certain things they needed to irrigate their fields and things like that. He is very successful. He was a very very good man.

TLB: [someone walks into room] Is that your daughter?

FR: Yes, my daughter Lisa.

TLB: Do you need to stop for a minute?

FR: No.

TLB: What did you do in Ludington, before you came to Holland?

FR: I went to high school. I graduated from Ludington Senior High School. Then I moved to Muskegon Community College. I went there on the Criminal Justice program. Then from there I went to Grand Valley State University. I graduated from there, and I just kept on going.

All this time I was doing auto body repair. That was my life. When I lived in Ludington, we were migrant workers. We started off that way. A very poor family. Eighteen in the family. I just kept on going in auto body repair. I opened up a shop. Wasn't very successful back in 1981 when I opened up an autobody shop. So we moved to Denver, Colorado. In Denver, we opened up a shop, and we were very successful there, but my wife decided to come back. She had cancer, and they only gave her three years to live, so that is how we actually ended up here in Holland, Michigan. We enjoy it here. We think that it is a beautiful town. People

are fantastic here in this town.

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

FR: We figured from what they told us, being Hispanic, I am talking in the Hispanic way now, very prejudicial, very discriminatory. That is wrong. That is way out of proportion. The people are great. They're good people. Very very helpful. In fact, to be honest with you this is what happened. . . When we moved in there were all kinds of people there trying to help us, trying to help us move in. They were helping us unload our stuff, and bring it in to the house. These people lived across the street, and over to the other side. They were people, ordinary people, not Hispanic people, but white American people. I just couldn't believe it. They were very nice to us. They showed us the town, and showed us this. They went out of their way with thing like that. It was great. We couldn't believe it. They stayed friends. The whole neighborhood on that block, on Dutton Street, the whole block was coming over to help us. They would even bring food, while we were unloading the truck. You just don't see that very much now days. You just don't. It has been a good deal.

But I've always wanted to live in the country, always. So we moved. We moved from there, and moved out in to the country. We have a farm out there. We enjoyed it. We enjoy it in Fennville just as much as we did living in Holland. Holland is a good town. Like I stated in another interview, a lot of Hispanic people feel that discrimination is a lot here. To me there is still a little bit of discrimination, but not where you can't make something of yourself. You've got to push it. Holland is wide open to be somebody, if you want to be somebody. Don't use that idea that

discrimination is not going to move you ahead. You can do what you want, here in Holland, within reason, to be somebody, to make something of yourself, and to start a business. It is wide open for the Hispanic community.

The Hispanic community has always been, when they come into some legal problem, or when they come into some licenses, they give up. They just don't know how to do it. They just quit right there. That is the worst thing that I have ever seen about my people here. They have a great opportunity to start businesses, but they just give up. Restaurants, yes, they are good at restaurant work. It is good food, fantastic food, things like that. They tend to give up on the pressures there. That is what has always happened to our people, all the time.

As far as Holland, Holland has been good to me. No doubt about it. Holland has been great. I wish sometimes, that I could return a favor, or something like that. Probably I will, in the near future. It has been good to me. I think that it is one of the greatest cities, at least that I have ever lived in and I have lived in a lot of cities. You've got great opportunities to be here, and good people. Very good people. I can not say anything about Holland.

They work with you, especially the zoning department. Zoning is one of the crucial things here in Holland. They bend backwards to help you. They just do. One of the biggest downfalls in business is where you locate you business, and zoning. But here they are willing to work with you. If a place is zoned for certain things, and they know that they can get you in, they will. They set certain laws that you can not do, but they are willing to bend backwards to help you make something

of yourself. And that is what I like about this town.

TLB: My second question is, what are some qualities that seem to stand out concerning Holland? Do you have any in addition to what you just said?

FR: What are you looking for?

TLB: Just things that stand out about Holland. You mentioned the people.

FR: The quality of Holland to me; the people, yes they are great, the quality of people is fantastic. I already stated that. To me, the quality of Holland is the idea that this city gives everybody a chance. That is the thing. The quality of this town. I can't imagine the amount of minority people that are here, all kinds: Asians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Hollanders, and they all seem to get along. It is just amazing. I like that. I really enjoy that. The quality of this town, the way it is taken care of, it is a beautiful town. Quality? To me quality is serving the community. And Holland does serve its community. No doubt. The quality of people that are here. There are leaders in this community. In the Hispanic community, they just feel that Holland has given them quality of living that they need here in town.

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

FR: Now we come into a certain issue that I would like to address. To me, the only thing that I foresee. . . I deal with a lot of insurance companies. I am a paralegal. I deal with immigration law. . . but the issue that I see here that will have to be addressed is the insurance companies dealing with the Hispanic community. I am talking about the idea that a lot of these people are very illiterate. They do not understand the ramifications of insurance companies in simplicity. The insurance companies have to

address the need to get more minority people into some of these so that they can understand where these people stand. A lot of places that I have seen do not hire enough Hispanic people to serve this community that is a Hispanic community. That is one of the things that I see.

Also, we need more people in Holland that can help the Hispanic community: educated people, people like myself, paralegal, licensed autobody repairmen, mechanics. We don't have that. And these people are so scared to take it all over. In fact to be honest with you, my business is 90% Hispanic, and Asian people.

TLB: To bring the service to you?

FR: Yes, to bring the service to me, because they do not know where to go. Attorneys here do not hire Hispanic people. They use services, but the services are not educated to handle that kind of law, and to tell these people what they are talking about.

I think that one of the biggest, best things that ever happened here was Hope College. Hopefully, they will bring in more Hispanic people, or minority people to help this community, to educate more of the Hispanic Community. I would like to see Hope College to do that, some kind of seminar or meeting to let the Hispanic and Asian communities know that, "Hey, we are here to help you." They are here. Don't get me wrong, Holland is trying very very hard, but the growth rate is unbelievable.

The unemployment rate. I have been four years, and I have hired only two people, and only two people have applied for bodyman's job. You can not get people

anymore. This is a goldmine as far as employers are concerned for employees. You just can't hire people. People that are professionals, or people that have a little bit of trade, everybody that walks into this store--we have to teach them. We have to grab them and teach them. I am willing to do that to keep employees in here. We are having one heck of a time trying to get help, because the growth rate of Holland is unbelievable. That is what I like about this town. The idea that if anybody asked me, this is a goldmine for employees. You could just about ask for any job, and you've got it.

But I would like to see the Hispanic community, especially, to get out there and do something to get some of these jobs. If there was a program that I could help assist with would be to educate and to make these Hispanic people stay in school, go to college, and be something. That is one thing that I have always seen throughout. As a senior about fifty-five years of age, I think that I was about the only Mexican person, out of my nieces and nephews that went to school in Ludington, Michigan. The rest, it has always been our tradition to go out to the fields and work, the more people you put out there the more you make money. Our forefathers forgot education; it caught up with us. It is finally catching up with us. It has caught up with us, because we don't have enough educated people out there. That hurts my business, and it comes back to me because I can't get Hispanic, or anybody to work for me. I just can't get anybody.

TLB: What are some things that you think can be done in Holland to help the minority cultures that are here?

FR: Like a stated a little while ago, there is a lot of things that can be done. Schooling, the biggest thing no matter who tells you, politically or whatever. I am not talking about being a leader of this community, because I am one of the leaders of the community, but not in the hierarchy. But in other words, I am saying out of my heart, the idea that we should strive to make the Hispanic community, especially the Hispanic family, to get these children to go to school.

The gangs, I despise the gangs; that is wrong. We can stop it. We can stop the gangs. That is the thing that I addressed in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We've got to do something to stop the Hispanic gangs. It has got to stop, How do we stop it? It is the idea that we have got to have some kind of leadership. That is what has always happened to our people.

The Hispanic community doesn't really have a great leader, per sae. It really doesn't, and that is what has hurt us. We need to get Hope College involved to recognize that there is a leader, or help us get a leader so that these people will know. Like Caesar Chavez. Caesar Chavez was a great leader. When I went to Grand Valley State University he did a seminar over there. People that were "uppity-up" all went there, but the poor migrant worker couldn't go to Grand Valley State University. That is what got me. I love my people. I figure this, if we could have got the migrant workers to come and see this man teach the Hispanic society that education is one of the best things in the world we could have done something for the Hispanic people in the United States. Caesar Chavez passed away, a good friend of my father's. My father knew him, he picked cotton with him.

TLB: Really?

FR: Oh yes, they were good friends. Now we have no-one. Nobody knows who the leader is. Nobody knows anything. Just like the black people. They have a good leader. They have NAACP, and all this. We don't have anything. It is because the Hispanic society, and the Hispanic people do not have the education to do something about it. It comes back to education. They all scream, "Holland is not great and the police are bad." But that is not true. You have got to do something. Hope College could help us. And I bring Hope College into it, because it is one of the leading colleges around here. If some of these kids who might be listening to my tape, if they want a project--the project is to help. Go to these families. Tell them that is important that their children go to school, because that is where is going to start. That is where you get leadership, and that is the way you will see the Hispanic community grow in the right way here in Holland. Not the gangs, because that is where the gangs start. All of a sudden, the children reach the age of fifteen and say, "Sorry, I'm not going to go to school."

"Where are you going to go? If you are not going to go, go and pick. Go to the blueberry farms."

That is where the gangs start. They come into these little dances on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Pretty soon they get in and say, "Hey man, come and ride with me. We are going to go over here." That is how the gangs are created. We lack people that are leaders.

We should have leaders in the colleges who can go into these family homes,

and say, "Hey, this is what we have got for your child if your child stays in high school. These are the programs that we have got." So that they can look at it. We all lack that. I try to do my project here; I have tried. And I am still trying to do that. This is why I joined the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and addressing some of these leaders that this is what we are going to need.

TLB: I know that you have only been here since 1991, but have you noticed any changes in the city of Holland since that time?

FR: Yes, the growth is fantastic. Some people say that it is bad. It all depends. If I was to live here all my life in the city of Holland, and looked at I would probably get a little bit disturbed, because of the idea that it is not the way it was. Back in 1975, I worked as senior counselor for HOI Incorporated here in Holland. I was their legal advisor for their corporation on substance abuse counseling. I ran the Alcohol Highway District here in Holland. I remember back then that it was a small town. The only thing that I remember back in 1978 was Denooyer, and Barber Ford, because they were on Thirty-one, and you could see them. Now I can't believe it. Even in 1991, when I walked in here, and now to 1996, this town almost doubled. It is unbelievable the amount of commercialized stores that are around here. I think truly that we have got enough. We have enough. I don't mind Holland growing, if that is what the city fathers want to do, but I have been around. I have seen cities that are destroyed by the growth. I think that Holland should stop growing. I really do. I think that Holland is a beautiful town. I think that Holland should stay like Grand Haven. Don't grow anymore. That is enough. We have got enough, what we

see. We have got enough revenue in Holland. We can support it. The roads are bad. The roads can't even accommodate the amount of traffic here. I think that we should do something for Holland, put our money back in Holland. Fix the roads, because the traffic is unbelievable. US-31 is backed up at 4:30 (pm). My goodness. This highway on 136th, they should have never done this on Highway 136. They should have done this on James Street, because James Street needs it. I truly believe that it is good revenue. We have all got work, but we don't need the growth.

A lot of people that were here before us, the Dutch, I feel sorry for some of those people in a way. I do. This was their town. It grew, and all of a sudden it is now way out of proportion. It is growing. People are moving out of the city. I can't believe it. I used to live over here on 18th Street, and look at it now. I feel sorry for them. I would be that way. I am not talking about discrimination the Mexicans because they live on 18th Street. That is not what I am saying; I am stating that I would be mad. "Goodness gracious, I built this house, and there it is. And now I have to move out of town, because the city had grown at an unbelievable rate." I'd say, let's stop. Let's stop and educate the community. Let's have some seminars as far as this is growing.

I'm going back to Hope College again, because one of things that I have always seen, being a migrant worker, and coming from a poor family is since I have been educated I see the problems. We have got have educated people like yourself, leaders who are in Hope College that can say, "We've got to do something about it." Step in. Do not be afraid and say, "Hey look, let's stop this." Let me tell you

something, Hope College does have the power. The students, and the faculty does have the power to stop this, because they are very intelligent, and they know exactly what to do. We have one of the best professors there in that school. They're the ones that teach the whole community. They are the ones that teach the educated people that come into Holland. This is where we can stop it, because it can not continue. When a city grows, like Detroit, like Grand Rapids, then you are going have gangs. You are going have problems, because now they are coming from Chicago. Everyday over there in the Hispanic *barrio*, *barrio* means the little community. There are always police over there trying to chase those Chinese, or Mexicans all the way back to Chicago, because they come to fight. That is how you start trouble. The drugs, the this, and that.

My brother, he is the commander of the We Met Program. Commander Larry Rodriguez. They had to move their department, their drug enforcement program, here in Holland. For the simple reason, that Holland is just going out of hand. It is going out of hand with drugs. They are here now. They were based in Grand Haven, but now they are here in Holland. You see the difference that the amount of growth makes.

How can we stop it to be a good community? I'm not saying that it isn't, but it is going to get out of hand. The only way we can bring up the quality of this town is to stop the growth. Especially the commercial growth. Stop it. I am talking Wendy's; I am talking big companies that are coming in here. Everybody says, "Let them come in. We need the revenue. We can build Holland. We can make Holland

look better. Have better streets. We can do that." Wrong. You've got to look at the other side. What is coming in after that. That is what I see.

TLB: Do you want to talk about any organizations that you are involved in?

FR: I am involved with a lot of immigration. I am a paralegal. I assist people with filling in their papers, things like that. I love that kind of work. I just love it. Right now, I am fifty-five years old, I don't want to get my license to pass as an attorney. You can represent anybody before the United States Department of Justice being a graduate, and being a representative. You don't have to be a licensed attorney. I love that kind of work, because it helps my people. They are illiterate in the way of speaking, and education. They don't know where to go. I enjoy that work. I enjoy doing things here for people that need their help.

As far as auto body repair, it has been my life. It has always been my life. A lot of people say, "You should be an attorney. You should do this." But I love this. This is what I grew up to do. Sure I was a migrant worker: picked cotton, picked cherries, picked everything.

People look at me and say, "No, you didn't do that."

I say, "Yes, I did. I know where you're coming from."

TLB: How old were you when you stopped working in the farms?

FR: At that time there were eighteen of us kids in the field. He said, "We've got to have somebody who has education in this family, because we are going to need it." It was just like a big turn on. We couldn't believe our father was saying that. He sent me to school in Ludington, Michigan. I went to a little school called Riverton Number Two

Fractional, out in the country. Then I went to Lubbock, Texas, and picked cotton. I don't ever want to give anybody that kind of job. That was terrible. Good thing that there are machines now. That is the pits. It is like slavery. Oh, it that ever hard.

TLB: I bet it is pretty hot in Texas, too.

FR: Oh yes. I'll never forget that as long as I live. I wouldn't dread that on my worst enemy. It is terrible. Then in the mornings he would send me to school. In the afternoons he would come and get me. We would go out back to the cotton fields until six - seven o'clock at night. I didn't stop picking cotton, but then when we finally made the money to buy this farm in Ludington, Michigan, he finally said, "You are going to school all day." I started going to school. In fifth grade, I was advanced to the seventh grade. I don't know if I was smart or what, but they advanced me. Probably trouble, I don't know. But then I went on to do the education. I am very happy that I did go.

I have five children. My first son, Randy Rodriguez, is Major in the United States Army. He graduated from second in his class at West Point, in 1983. Graduated with a Bachelor's in Science in Engineering. Went to Saudi Arabia. He got honors and everything from President Clinton. He was the one that met the Republican guard head on in Saudi Arabia. I have a daughter who is Tamala. She graduated, and ended up at a tool and die company in Detroit, Michigan. They have a very good company over there. Then I have Lisa, who is going into her second year at Hope College in medicine. She wants to be a surgeon. I have two other children that are in Fennville. One is thirteen, and one is eleven, Alicia, and

Tamera. And Alicia, I am happy to say is a valedictorian at Fennville Middle School. I am very proud of my children.

TLB: What do you make of all the industry in Holland? What does that do for the city?

FR: Like I stated a little while ago, the industry is great. We have got enough revenue coming in. Industry is only going to bring in trouble to me. I think that a lot of Dutch people would probably agree with me 100%, we are growing too fast. The city forefathers better realize that we are going to be in trouble. I am talking about Holland. Holland is not going to be Holland as everybody saw it. Sure there is changes. There are times, there is growth. There are people coming out of college looking for jobs. There are all kinds of issues that we have to look at. The way my father used to tell me this, "Fred, when we die we don't take anything with us." That makes sense. Leave Holland as it is now. Leave it alone. No more industry. We don't need it.

Edgar Prince did a great job here. I think that a lot of people despise it, but he recognized Holland. He made it what it is. He did. I've got to envy the man; he did a good job Crown. Now they call it Crown industry, or whatever it is. He made something of himself. Nobody believed in him. Nobody wanted to buy his new technology, which he sold to General Motors, but he did it. That is enough. He brought enough in here to help hold the community. That is the way we look at it in the Hispanic community. The man did something for this town. I am not trying to put a plug in for Edgar Prince. He passed away. I am sorry about that, but we all have to go. But that is what I am trying to state, we don't take anything with us.

Why make this town grow? Why make it miserable for you kids? Why? It is enough.

You guys are going into education a lot more broadened than when we were back in 1958. A lot different. You have the wisdom to change this town to town it is, and will be for the rest of our lives. Don't let it grow. We need jobs, all of us need jobs, but not Holland. Holland has grown enough. We don't need industry; we need small businesses. Small business is what makes this whole United States grow and see that it is growing real nice. These big companies that are coming in are destroying the small businesses. It is just going way out of hand. Like me, I've got two people here, and myself, and my daughter. Great small business, but if a great big auto body shop comes along, some franchise. They'll give this away, and give that away. I would have to close my doors. The business or the college educated people, students, faculty need to come in and say, "This is enough--leave it alone." Let's get the small businesses going. That is what you need to do. Big industry, we don't need it. And it is going to happen here, it is going to grow.

But I think, and this is what they taught us at Grand Valley State University, we have a voice. This is where it comes in. The Hispanic community has a voice. The Hispanic community has never had a voice, because we have uneducated people. We have people that do not want to open their mouths, because they are afraid that they are going to get in trouble. Or they lack the education to oppose the issue of having more industry here. This is where we need education to let the Hispanic people know that Hope College is there to help you know how to address this issue.

We have students like yourself that are willing to tape dictations from us, and make realize that there are great opportunities out there. Not only that, you can look at Holland and say, "This is enough. We are going out of hand. I've seen towns that have grown like this, and have gotten way out of hand. Police, and more police, and more of this, and more of that. And industry, I oppose it. I oppose big industry, it is enough. We are getting way out of hand. Sam's Club, and all this, and all that but gosh pretty soon we are going to be hooked to Grand Haven, and Grand Rapids. What happened to this little town? That is the way I look at it?

TLB: How do you think the Dutch heritage of Holland still influences the city?

FR: I think that the Dutch community should influence the city. It is their town. We are here in their town, and I am talking about the Hispanic community. These people were grateful enough to bring our people in here, and make something of them. This is what I get mad about, how can the Hispanic community turn around, and stab the Holland people in the back. We should strive to have a better *barrio*, to have a better neighborhood, to stop this gang problem that they are having now. I'm tired of it. I think that it degrades us. Because the Dutch people, I don't care what, this is their town. This is their city. I think that they have a voice to voice out. I wish that the Dutch people would voice this to the Hispanic community, and say, "Hey, we are willing to help you, but you are going out of hand." I, being Mexican, can say it is getting out of hand.

TLB: Are you involved with the church at all in the area, and what do you think the influence of the church is on Holland?

FR: I have always been forward. My father says, "Fred, you are always forward. You don't go round in circles." To tell you the truth I believe in God, I believe strongly in God. Miracles have happened to me that there is no way things could have happened without God's presence. I don't go to church. I used to go to church. I see too many things on television. I see too many things happening here in the Holland Hispanic Community. I've seen people take money. Become Mexican preachers, and they take the money and then head out. The Dutch people don't know this. A lot of people probably don't announce it, but it is there. I have seen it. In fact, there is more fighting, separations of churches, or separation of people. Congregations go their separate ways, because they didn't like this preacher, and they didn't like that preacher. There they go. That is what is happening to our community. Especially, I am talking about the Hispanic community, because I can only address the Hispanic Community right now. It doesn't help at all. It makes us look bad. It does, in a way. There are churches that some of the Hispanic higher up people go the uppity-up, and the poor Mexican person, the factory worker, does not want to get involved. So they go to this little church, and then this guy goes off with the money. And it has happened here. It has happened here. I can't remember, or else I would tell you. I can't remember what happened, but he took the money and headed to Mexico. He left the whole congregation here. They had to close the church. I don't think the ministers help the Hispanic community. As far as our churches--no. They try to take away from the poor person, instead of trying to help. It is so different. I wish sometimes, that you would walk and go and sit in that

church. You would not believe it.

The Mexican people are happy people. They are good people. They will bend backwards for you. They are not suit happy people. They will do anything to keep out of the courts. They will. They are scared of the police. Why? The minute you mention Border Patrol they are scared. Probably because a lot of them are undocumented people. A lot of them call them "illegals." They are "aliens." No, the way I look at it the law should revise it, and say that they are undocumented people. I hate the word *illegal*, and I hate the word *alien*. They should change it to undocumented people, because they are people.

Coming back to the churches, I have never seen a church yet that in my eyes, that has really stood out to help the Hispanic community. I really haven't. And if I have I will apologize, because I just have not seen it. It comes right back to the leadership. They say that we are going to be the biggest voting majority in the world--the Hispanic people. I have yet to see a leader. If we are that big, then where is the leader? What happened to the leaders? Caesar Chavez was the leader only for migrant working people in California. But all these people out here all over the United States were hungry for a leader. Caesar did the best that he could. This is the thing, to get the Hispanic community together you are going have trouble. For some reason. I cannot figure it through.

I have never seen the churches do anything for this community. And I think that the Dutch community will agree with me. You tell me one thing in the town that the churches have done. Where is the thing where they can say, "We did this." I

haven't seen anything. I haven't even seen the Hispanic community do something for the city of Holland. Show it to me, it is embarrassing to me. If I had the resources, and the money, because I just started, I am just making it, but if I had the money and they asked me to do some services for the city of Holland I would do it. I would do it, because we owe the city of Holland. The Hispanic community should be grateful, and should do something to pay back the city of Holland, and the Dutch community.

TLB: Can you explain a major turning point that you have had in your life?

FR: The major turning point my life . . . You won't believe this; this is a great one. I am glad you asked this. All through my years, like I told you, I lived in Ludington, Michigan. Everybody hates their hometown; you don't want to stay there. We are all that way. "Yeah man, I am getting out of here." But my father taught me the right way. We weren't radicals. We weren't anything. My dad had us by the string, very strict. You couldn't date until you were eighteen years old. The sisters couldn't date until the age of twenty-one. Oh yes. My father was very strict. And that is another thing that we lack here in the Hispanic community--strictness from the family. That is another reason why we get a lot of gangs. But coming back to what you said, grew us up very very tough. Not tough in the way of fighting, but tough in the way of trying to make a living and not going through the welfare system, and all that. My father hated the welfare system.

"If you guys ever go through the welfare system, you're not my sons." That is one thing about the Mexican people, a lot of them will not go through the welfare system. Lately, sure I have seen a lot of it. Back then, you just didn't do that. It

was a "no-no."

I went to different towns, I got married young. I would lose a home. It was irresponsible. I lacked the education. I was married at sixteen years of age. I had my son, Randy. I didn't know what a credit card was, never heard of a credit card. My father didn't believe in credit cards. My father was strictly cash. That is what you believed in, nothing else. Lived on the farm. He gave me five acres, and I sat there in a trailer. I moved out. I wanted to become something. We all want to get out of there. You hear that your friend went to Detroit and made big money, so here we go. Went out there, just like any normal young kid. Lost my home, lost my trailer, so then I started renting, and renting, and renting all my life. Land contracts: people would sell the house and I would lose my home. That was my life, ups and downs. Going to college. I tried to go to Grand Valley University at night. All this just kept that in my mind, "I've got to have education." I am a firm believer of it. I stayed with it, because my father planted it on me. Finally in 1991, after running all over the country trying to do something for myself. We were doing great in Denver, Colorado. We loved the town; it was a beautiful town. If anybody was to hear me right now where they should go--Denver, Colorado. It is beautiful at the outskirts: Vistis Park, Breckinridge. For you young kids, that is the place to go. No doubt, I still miss it. We would have stayed there if my wife wouldn't have gotten cancer. We moved up here, and never owned a home, honestly. Except for that trailer, that I told you about. Always renting. Land contracts are not your home. The owner can sell a land contract right off your nose; it is in unbelievable.

Finally I came to Holland. I noticed the Dutch people and how the community treated me, the Dutch community. I sat there and said, "No discrimination, and if there is I can't see it. Look at these people help me unload my truck, and everything. Look as the Hispanic community, they all get along. Not one has brought anything about discrimination against the white people here. Nothing." I sat at home on Dutton Street, they had sold that house from under me again, and I sat there and I cried. I cried that day. I was sitting up on the front the porch; I said to myself, "I am fifty-two years old, I've done something with my life, I have done enough form my children, I have a business, and yet still I don't have a home for my family." The next day I got out, I don't know if it was God or not, but I said, "We are going to build a house."

My wife said, "Naw, we are not going to build a house."

I said, "We are going to build a house."

She said, "Where are you going to get the property?"

I said, "I don't know, but I am going to build a house. I am moving to Fennville, there are a lot of Mexican people up there and I'd love to be with my people."

She said, "Well, let's go look for property."

I said, "I don't know where we are going to end up, but I am going to look for property. When I see that sign I am going to go buy it." Sure enough the first day that we went--no property. I said, "I like that piece of property right there." I came back and asked God, "I want you to see if you can help me with that piece of

property." No sign, remember. The next day the sign was there. We bought that property. Between me and my daughter, my wife, and my two children we built that house. We did it all in Southwestern, and would you believe, it is paid for. We did it out of this business, we took it out of this business. We did something for ourselves. Now five years later, we are building another house on the other side of the property. It is three quarters done.

So you see if you really look at everything--we owe the Dutch people, we owe the city of Holland something. This is what I am trying to stress to the Hispanic community. Coming right back down to it, you can do something with yourself. The city of Holland is letting you, a minority, do and be something of yourself. Anybody that comes in this door and says, "I've been discriminated against," no, to me, no. Here I am, a poor person who walked in here with fifteen dollars in my pocket. We were living over by the Ponderosa out of U-haul. Then I said to myself, "I am going to make something of myself."

Nobody said, "You can't walk into this hotel, because you are Mexican." Nobody discriminated against me. It is the idea that you've got to do something with yourself, you life. And if you are going to do it, then it is the city of Holland where it is going to have to happen, because they are good people. I can not say, "No."

A lot of these Hispanic people are giving us a bad name as far as the gangs are concerned. This is where the Dutch community probably sometimes shies away from some of these businesses thinking that the gangs are right there eating, or they are coming over here to the body shop, or things like that. It is not true. We need,

my business, and all Hispanic businesses need the Dutch, the white people, to come to our businesses, because we need their revenue, we need their support. Without them a lot of restaurants couldn't exist here in this town. The Mexican people, why go to the restaurant, we are cooking down here at the house the same things that they are cooking.

It is the Dutch people, my family owes them a lot. We have done more in the past five years, than I have done than in the past thirty years. I've lost all thirty years of my life. If I would have come here when I was in High School like I wanted to, I really would have become a good leader of this community. I would have straightened out the gangs, and the community itself, and get these people to get these children for education. That is the biggest thing. Look at the county of Ottawa: Migrant Worker Headstart, programs for different needs in the Hispanic community. I have not seen that in some of these towns out West. You don't see things like that. Texas, sure, Texas is full of Mexican people, 80-90%. They say that Texas belongs to the Mexican people now. Coming up here it is great to see Headstart. Holland has done a lot for the Hispanic community, and I think that the Hispanic community should come back and do something for the city of Holland.

TLB: I think that is it.

[end of interview]