RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSITA HAMILTON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

LUZ D. SANDOVAL

Luz D. Sandoval: This starts the interview of Rosita Hamilton on June 13, 2018. I am here with …

Rosita Hamilton: Rosita …

LDS: Being interviewed by Luz Sandoval and ...

Laura E. Sandoval: Laura Sandoval.

LDS: We can start at the beginning.

LES: Can you tell us about your early life and family, where were you born and when were you born?

RH: I was born on June 27th, 1955, in Brooklyn, New York. The area was Bushwick. I spent a great deal of my life in Brooklyn, until I got married, which was at twenty-seven. Most of my life I spent there, and then I've been in New Jersey since I got married. It's about thirty-five years now because we're going to thirty-six in August.

I grew up in a very ethnic neighborhood. There was a lot of Italians, Germans, Irish, very few Puerto Ricans, hardly any Blacks. That was difficult because we were new. We were the new immigrants, the new group. My parents had to fit in, so they kind of assimilated right away. When they came, they didn't speak English, but they learned really quickly because assimilation was important at that point. There were five Puerto Rican families in the neighborhood then. In first grade, there was only two, me and my other girlfriend, Joanne. We were the only two Latino families in the school. It was a Catholic school, a Roman Catholic school, and I went there. I graduated from there in eighth grade. The neighborhood changed quickly, during the time I was born to the time I was maybe twelve, thirteen. I grew up in very ethnic kind of area, but it was not Latino ethnic, it was very white ethnic. Judging from the picture of my parents, you could tell. You know, they're dressed very much like the rest of the people in the neighborhood. I had a really great childhood. I mean, growing up in Brooklyn, it's in the city, in New York, you have a neighborhood. I played outside every day. I had friends, and there was no concern about crime. Even though there was crime at that point, not as much because we were broken into like three times in Brooklyn.

When my parents got out, the neighborhood had really changed. It was increasing crime coming into the area. A lot of the white families were moving out. It was like a white flight, and in were coming more Latino families, like Dominican families. African Americans were coming in. That happened overnight. It happened, let's say, from when I was born '55, by '65, boom, the area had changed in the matter of ten years. The area had changed, and that's when my parents said, "We have to get out because of the crime," you know, New York City had crime. It was the '60s. They had a lot of issues with the police, and there was civil rights going on. It was a big, a big stuff going on in the inner cities. There was crime. There was poverty. There was corruption in the city government. The mayor, Mayor [John] Lindsay, he just didn't know how to govern. He was mayor for a long time, but there was so much corruption. The sanitation workers would go on strike. There were strikes, labor unions and stuff, so it was like a really

crazy time. People think today, now, is crazy with our president and stuff that is going on. In the 1960s when I was growing up, between '65 to '70, it was like overnight it was lots of stuff going on. Dr. [Martin Luther] King was around, civil rights, women's rights, so I grew up like in a really important time. I think that influenced how I, when I became an adult. My childhood influenced when I became an adult.

I saw the struggles my parents went through and the poverty. We lived in a four-room rental house with six floors, so there was poverty. The fact that they sent me to private school, I don't know how they did that, but they were laborers, my parents. My father worked in the docks in Brooklyn, as a longshoreman and a packer for the Santini Brothers, that was the name of the company, very much mob oriented. They were related to the mob, the New York mob. They were related to the Colombos and Gotti, [laughter] those people. They controlled the New York shoreline, the Brooklyn shoreline, and the workers. My father worked for them. It's funny because they liked my dad. He would come home, and he would bring things, like stuff that he used to say, "Oh, it fell off the truck," like suits, Italian suits. My father, it was his bosses would give it to him because his bosses, that company, was mob controlled. That was controlled by the Mafia. My parents, my father especially, they liked him, so they would give him things. Then, he would bring it home. He worked hard. I mean, they both did.

I had no brothers and sisters. I had no brothers and sisters, so I was kind of privileged in a way because everything my father brought home, he would give me. I had a private education. I mean, it cost them money to send me to Catholic school. [Editor's Note: A cell phone rings briefly.] Oh, I'm sorry. My mom, she worked in the factory. They were both factory workers. My mother, she worked all her life, so I had babysitters all the time. First, my grandma would take care of me until she got sick. Then, the upstairs lady or the downstairs lady took care of me. When I got old enough, I was on my own. My childhood definitely influenced who I am today. It made me very independent, and both my parents, that's really from my parents, the independence, the willingness to work very hard, that work ethic. You get a job, and you do your best. No such thing as slacking, and that you can complain, but you're on time. You do your job as you're told. You don't take advantage of your workers, and that I got from both my mom and dad. That's from them. That's very much an ethnic thing. I think it's an ethnic thing, very much a Latino thing, where your parents, they teach you how to behave. My parents did. This was the order of things; it was your family always. Then, it was church. Then, it was everything else, school for me, in that order. That came from my parents, too, and in my life today, it's still that way. It's family, church, and then whatever, and then my job.

LDS: How did your parents meet?

RH: They met, I think, it was here, in the Bronx. My father--now, let's see if I remember this--my father came with his older brothers. He was the baby. He was the baby of the family. They brought him over from Puerto Rico. He would work with my uncle. That's how he got the job because my uncle, his older brother, had the job. They met. My dad used to love to go to dances and stuff in social clubs. The Puerto Ricans had social clubs in New York because they weren't accepted. Puerto Ricans were not accepted, just like we don't accept the Mexican immigrants now. Well, guess what? That was going on back in the 1950s and '60s when the Puerto Rican diaspora came because they couldn't find any jobs in the island. The island was living like the

depression. Now, it's back to that. It's back to that. Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans came. The point of entry is New York City because you get off at Kennedy Airport, and, boom, you're there. It's a short flight. It's only like a two-and-a-half-hour flight from Puerto Rico, from San Juan, to Kennedy. So, they met in New York City. My dad was young. He was in his twenties, I think in his twenties, so he liked to go out and dance and go to the social clubs. My mother was the same way, so they met each other in the social club. They had a mutual family that knew both of them. They knew my mother's family, and they also knew my father's family, introduced them. They met up in the Bronx. We're not sure when they got married because back then, they didn't keep any records. Even the records they did keep, my mom, later on, she developed the Alzheimer's. That's how she died, from Alzheimer's. The one thing that you do when you develop that is you throw things out. She threw out all this stuff before I even had a chance to go through it, so there is very little stuff that I have, even the pictures and everything. I mean, I saved some of the things, but all her jewelry, all the paperwork, even my father's death certificate, which fortunately I had a copy of it, she threw out. Her marriage certificate, she threw that out. I had my birth certificate, but because it was in such bad shape, I had to get a new one.

They met in a social club, in one of those, and they still have them in the Bronx. They still do, and that's how they met. They got married. I was born in '55. They got married, I think, in '52. The marriage was in the City Hall, so the church didn't recognize it. The Catholic Church was really, I think they were exclusive at that time, so they didn't recognize it. I was born, and when they wanted to baptize me, the church wouldn't do it until they got remarried. They have two marriage days, which I don't even know what the anniversary was. She says the anniversary was in, I think it was in September, but I don't know which anniversary. We never knew what to celebrate because they got married twice. That was a secret because my mom was a really devout Catholic. She did not want to tell me that I was born way before [they were married in] the Catholic Church, that they were married in City Hall. She didn't want to tell that. I didn't learn that until I was like thirty, and my aunt told me. After my mother had already the Alzheimer's disease, my aunt says, "You know that your mom wasn't married when you were born. She was married only civilly?" I said, "Yes, well, she would never admit that." In my baptism, I remember, I was like three. I was older. I was walking. I had a dress, and I remember that that was my baptism. I wasn't a little infant when I was baptized. I was baptized in 1960, which means I was five years old. They were married all that time, and they hadn't been married in the church. That was a scandal for my mother, scandal, so she never told me. She never told me. I learned it from my aunt.

LDS: Was your mother also born in Puerto Rico?

RH: She was born in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, and she came with her mom. During that period of the diaspora from the 1950s, that's when she came. They came first though, before my dad. My mother came first. She was older, my mother, too. My mother was four years older than my dad. She came here first, and she went to work right away as a seamstress in a factory in Brooklyn, in the garment district in Brooklyn. Then, my grandma, they supported her. She came with her brothers, her two brothers, I think her two brothers and sister. The four of them came together, and then the two others because my grandmother married a second time. She was divorced. That was another scandal, you know, the scandals and families.

My mom came ahead of time with her mom. Then, all the brothers and her, they supported the grandma. She took care of me and my cousin because that's how it was. You didn't go to babysitter. You were taken care of by the grandmother, so she kind of raised me and my cousin, Henry, who was four years younger than me. My mom was a very strong, strong woman.

My grandparents in Puerto Rico got divorced. My grandfather, José was his name, José Rodriguez. He was like a ladies' man, handsome, you know, dark, ladies' man, but he was also college educated, which, for that time, that was unheard of. He was an engineer for the government. He constructed, a construction engineer, so he had money. Then, the depression hit. My grandpa always had a home, but somehow, he was always traveling because he went to work in labor during the depression. Of course, when you travel, men, they, you know, he had all these women, and my grandma, I guess, wouldn't tolerate it. She left him.

My mom was the oldest, so she was about fourteen, twelve, thirteen. She's at that teen age, so she had a very hard time with my grandfather. I think he was not very good with the women in the family. He was more, what's the word? He favored the boys, my two uncles. The women, on the other hand, you know, because my mother was very headstrong like the mother, my grandmother, she didn't get along with my grandfather. My grandfather, she used to tell me the story that he threw her out when she was fourteen, and she went to live with my grandmother's brother and wife. They got divorced, and then my grandmother and her, because she was the oldest, the others were babies, went to live with my great uncle. That house became more like her brothers and sisters. The mother and her uncle, the uncle became more her father, and the mother, the wife, became like the mother. My grandmother, I guess she was going through the divorce. It was very bad. It was very bitter, you know. I think my mom never got over that. She never got over it. Even until the day she died, she never got over that. She hated my grandpa, to the point where we used to visit him, but she wouldn't go. She would send me with my aunt and my uncle. She would not go. She did not go to his funeral; I did. I went to his funeral. She did not go to her father's funeral, so she never got over that. That influenced how she was. That influenced her a lot, and I guess later on, it kind of influenced me, too, because I never really knew my grandfather really well. He remarried, too, and to a lovely woman. They never had any children. My mother refused to recognize her as her stepmother, and because of that bitterness, she wanted me away. She would keep me away from my grandfather, and that did affect me. She kept me away, and the only way I knew my grandpa was through my aunt and uncles. That was it, so that's how they met. That's how they met.

LES: Did you know your other grandparents?

RH: No. On my father's side, my grandmother, I am named after, okay, I am named after, and I resembled her in a way when I was younger. Now, I am more like my mother, but I have her body features, like my grandma, and the color. My color--because my mother was darker--but the Martinezes are all the Spaniards, so we're all white. Where my mother's family, they're all Black because of my grandpa. I did not meet her because she died before I was born. She was a juvenile diabetic, and at that point, they did not treat juvenile diabetes. My dad grew up in Guánica, which is in the southern tip, the southern part of the island, which was *campo*. It was country, no cities. Today, it's like a resort. I went to see it. It's a resort because it's in the

Caribbean side, and the water's nice and the temperature's great. It's not that crazy side of San Juan, with the Atlantic. You can't swim in the Atlantic. It's bad. It's dirty. He grew up, that's where, and she died when he was sixteen. She died from a diabetic shock coma because she didn't take insulin. My grandfather, we don't know who he is because my grandma, she was something. I know, I am named after her. She was a maid for this very rich [family]. Now, we think that the sugar industry was down south because the weather's warmer. It's more tropical than up north where my mom came from. She's San Juan area. She's in Guaynabo, which is the town. It's about ten miles, ten, fifteen miles outside of San Juan.

My grandmother, her name was Rosita, actually Rosa, Rosita meaning the "little rose." She was a maid, and she was a housekeeper in this very rich family, sugar plantation owner, which at the time in Puerto Rico were owned by Jews, Jews and Spaniards, those two. We don't know my grandfather. We don't know who my father's father is because she had children from different men. At that time, you didn't marry. Even if you did marry, there was no recordkeeping because you're in a little, local, country town. You know, who kept the records? The Bible, that's where you kept the records, "This is when you were born. This is when they died. This is when they got married." The Bible, we can't find the family Bible, the Martinezes'. These are the Martinezes. My father's brothers have different fathers. They all look alike because they look like my grandma. There were four brothers and a sister. There were five kids. The oldest was Nelson. Then came Carmen Rosa, which was the girl, then came Aquelio. Oh, no, then came Orlando, and then came Aquelio. Then, my father, he's the baby. We don't know who the dad [was], I don't know.

I did my AncestryDNA to find out if I was related to, let's say, a Jewish family, but I found out I wasn't related. I was more Spaniard than anything else, so it must have been a Spaniard that owned the house that my [grand]mother [worked in], you know. My grandmother never married, so Martinez is her name. All the kids had Martinez. Like my mother, being the Catholic, the devout Catholic, it was like a shame. She never, she would never allow me to find out. That was a secret, "Your father's illegitimate." He was illegitimate. I didn't know that until I was a teenager. I thought his father had died in the war or something, I don't know, World War II or something. I don't know, but he was illegitimate.

We don't know who my [grand]father is. Right now, that's what I'm trying to find out, who my grandfather is. I went last year to Puerto Rico, and I visited the town, but I didn't get a chance to [research]. I would need like a month down there to research through the archives. I did find out that my father's name is not Elliod; that's name they gave him over here. I found out my father's name is Elias, Elias. Then, I am saying, "How the hell did that happen?" Well, it must have been when he got here. Puerto Ricans are natural citizens, so you don't go through customs or anything. You don't go through Ellis Island. You don't go through immigration. He must have applied for a driver's license, and when he applied, all of the sudden, they put a "D" at the end. I don't know even know how he got that name, but it stuck with him. We know him as Elliod. So, I did find out through AncestoryDNA that my father is named Elias. That's his real name. We don't even know when he was born. I just guessed. I only know from what was on his driver's license because it was March of 1932.

Then, my uncle Aquelio, which is the next, that was the closest to him. Apparently, Aquelio, who was older, his birth certificate says he was younger, even though my dad was the youngest. It was like we would joke about that for years. It's crazy. This is the way things were in Puerto Rico because the church had all the records, but because my grandma never married in the church, there were no records. We're not even sure if she was a church woman. We don't think so because not with having all those men. That's not a church thing, where you have [different] men. It's funny because I was telling my aunt; my dad named me after her and maybe I was a little rebellious like she was. I think I got a little bit of that rebellion stuff from her. I do have pictures of her. I saved one picture. She's beautiful. She had long jet black hair, long. She use to put in what we call *moño* [bun], and she had a big chest, just like all the Martinez women have big chests, all of them. Tall, she was tall. She was like five-foot-eight, which is tall for women at that point. But she commanded. She was a strong woman, very strong, [Editor's Note: Ms. Hamilton claps her hands.] like a matriarch. I don't think she was religious. I don't think she was religious at all, so that's probably why we don't know anything about my grandfather.

LDS: What were your favorite things to do as a child? What did you like to eat? What was the home life?

RH: Well, here's the thing, with my grandmother, we ate all the Puerto Rican dishes. My mom, who wants to assimilate, boom, comes the American diet. My diet was terrible, so I was always overweight, always. I mean, even going back, if you see pictures of me when I was seven, you see a chubby little girl running around. [I was] always overweight. Why? Because my mother adopted the American diet, whereas my grandma, she cooked the Puerto Rican diet. My dad used to complain to my mother because she did all the cooking. Oh, she was terrible, terrible, terrible cook, terrible! In fact, I learned how to cook immediately, as soon as I could stand up next to the stove. I did a lot of the cooking when I was a teenager because my mother was terrible at it. She adapted to the American diet: steak, hamburgers, soda, you know. Grandma didn't do that. Grandma did the pork, the rice, the beans, the *pasteles*, so I had both. I had the experiences from both, which is crazy, but it actually was beneficial to me later on because I cook both diets.

My husband doesn't speak a word of Spanish. He is not Latino. He's a gringo as much as you can be. I mean, his relatives date back to Peter Minuit, when the Dutch came to New York. They're the original English that came to the United States. I cook Spanish dishes; he loves it. He loves it! He can't get enough of it.

It helped me having grandmother there. My grandmother taught me everything that I know, because my mom was working. She worked until five o'clock, from eight in the morning to five o'clock, so somebody had to take care of me, Grandma. Grandma was there, so I learned everything from her. I also learned, I spoke Spanish. I started when I was born. Spanish was my first language because Grandma didn't speak English. She refused. She didn't assimilate, so Grandma didn't speak English. Of course, I had to speak Spanish, so I read Spanish fluently, spoke it fluently, and write it fluently. That's an advantage to me later on in my career in teaching. That became an advantage, and I thank my grandmother for that because I think if she had assimilated, I probably wouldn't have known Spanish at all. All of my cousins, my cousin Henry, all of my cousins because of the grandma, know Spanish, all of them, and they are way

younger than me, ten years younger than me, because of my grandmother. I thank God that she was a big influence. Daniela was her name, Daniela Rodriguez. Powerful woman, too, she's another strong woman. I come from a line of strong women. Grandma, strong, matriarch, Grandma Daniela. My mother, she's a strong woman. Even my great grandmother, Mama Juana, she's another one, very powerful woman. What was their main thing? The family. I think that's beneficial to me because even today, I am a very powerful woman in my career, in my life, at home. I thank them for that.

LES: What did your mom do for a living?

RH: She was a seamstress. She used to sew bridal gowns and prom dresses and evening wear, beautiful. She made my bridal gown. Oh, my God, she was good. I mean, she was good. She taught me how to sew. The business I have now is due to her because I sew. I make alterations. She took me as little, little girl to the factory when I started first grade. Three o'clock, my mom would come home, pick me up from school, take me to the factory until five. She was so good that the boss never questioned. She was treated differently from all the other seamstress ladies. She'd be able to go to lunch. These women, they couldn't do that. They were mostly immigrant women. There were a lot of Italian women. My mom was so good and so fast that she would do all the bundles, and then she would leave to pick me up. She would pick me up from school every day at three o'clock. Then, we would go to the factory to five-thirty. Then, I would be in the factory playing with dolls, playing with the material, looking at the machines, playing. The manager used to let me go on the top. These were power machines--this is a factory--power machines that I used to get my fingers caught in the needles. My mother used to say, "You're going to get your finger in there," and then I learned. I learned how to use the machines. Then, I used to sew doll clothes. That's what I used to do. I used to go there and sew, and I loved it. I loved being in the factory, the smell of the cotton, and looking at the bridal dresses.

These are the ones that they sent to Seventh Avenue, to the fashion [district, the Garment District]. My mother was one of the women that makes them. They made them in Brooklyn, and then they sent them over to New York City. New York, it was a big garment industry. All the garments, if you needed a bridal gown, it was made in Brooklyn and sent. You're talking about designer gowns, like Christian Dior. I mean, my mother was making Coco Chanel things, high-class gowns that today would cost two, three, four thousand dollars apiece, she was making over there. At the time, they were four, five hundred dollars, and that was in the 1960s. That's how expensive they were.

There were scraps and stuff all over. I used to take the little beads, and I used to make bridal dresses for my Barbie dolls. I used to make dresses. That's where she worked. The factory was very close to the house. It was down on Fulton Street, in Brooklyn, where a lot of the factories were for garments, because they also had suppliers, like the guys that supplied the buttons, the zippers, the threads, the materials. Most of them were owned by Jews. All the suppliers and the factories were by Jews at the time, so they would close. They would leave early because of Sabbath. They were Orthodox Jews. Most of them were Orthodox Jews. Yes, that's where she worked. She was a seamstress.

LES: Did you grow up a political household?

RH: Yes and no. It was union, very big union, because Mom was part of the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and Dad was part of the Teamsters. We were very union, supporting workers' rights, because, yes, factory workers, you've got to stick together. [My parents] politically [were] Democrats, probably because of the unions. If the union told you to vote, you voted the way the union told you to vote. My father would vote the way the Teamsters union told them to vote, and my mother would vote the same way. They voted. I remember them having a voting card. They voted in every election, every presidential election, every mayoral election, every councilmen election. It's amazing that here are immigrants that barely speak English, and they are registered to vote. They registered to vote. They didn't have a driver's license for a long time. They didn't really need it because at that point, you're taking buses. It was only when I got older that they actually had a driver's license, but they voted. They did jury duty. I remember my father doing jury duty and my mother being called, too. A lot of the democratic principles, I learned from them because I saw them vote. As soon as I turned eighteen, boom, I registered myself and I voted. I vote in every election. I have not skipped an election year, not yet. I vote. I vote in the primaries because they voted in the primaries. I vote all the elections, all the local [elections], even the school election, that was from school. That's from the union. See, we're really big union people, so, yes, we were political. We were.

LES: Did they take you any union meetings?

RH: I remember they didn't take me to meetings, but my mother took me to the rallies that the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union went on. They would go on strike. My mother would take me to the rallies that they had when they were promoting the salaries and what they were doing for the garment workers because the garment workers were making like fifty cents a garment. They worked piecework, not per hour. There was no hourly wages for the garment workers. My mother was big with the garment workers because she's [talented], so she donated. They would give money to the union in the form of dues. Whatever union rally, she would take me.

Dad, on the other hand, he really, because the Teamsters--he was in the Teamsters union--was the top union to be in at the time, but they were also the most corrupt. They were associated with the mob. I told you they were mob related. Jimmy Hoffa is Teamsters, Jimmy Hoffa. My dad, that union, didn't really have issues, except when they threatened strike, my dad would go on strike. He did everything the union asked him to do, everything including voting for whoever they approved. They didn't really have that because the Teamsters operated a different level from the rest of the unions. They had the politicians in their hands because they had bribes and kickbacks and all kinds of stuff. I'm going to tell you that my dad never had to pay a penny for anything. Eyeglasses, we had the best healthcare. At the time, we never had to pay anything. I had the best because of that union, but they were very corrupt, I mean, very corrupt. [Editor's Note: Jimmy Hoffa was a labor leader who served as the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) from 1957 until 1971. His role in the union became intertwined with his involvement with the Mafia. He disappeared on July 30, 1975 and was declared dead seven years later.]

LES: Can you talk your elementary school experience and your education growing up?

RH: Elementary school was Saint Barbara's Roman Catholic School. It was a one-through-eight school. It was a religious, so we prayed. We went to Mass first every day before we started class. Nuns, I had nuns as teachers. I didn't have lay teachers until I got to--when did I have a lay teacher? I don't think I had any lay teachers. We had nuns until I got to high school; that's when we got a lay teacher. It was all nuns, and they were the Dominican nuns. They wore black, and they had the square head. They wore all black with the big white collar and big giant rosary beads. Really scary, those nuns, but they were all young, like young girls. They were like maybe just twenty. Some were like eighteen. They go right into the monastery and become a teacher, so the education was very good. I had a very really good, basic education. I mean, a lot of the things that made me successful was that education.

In seventh and eighth grade, they didn't have like honors classes or anything like that because we were in a Catholic school. You were taught by one nun; different nuns would teach you different subjects. In eighth grade, I went in--I always loved to read and write. I love to read and write, so they recognized it. The one nun, the English nun who also taught history, recognized that I had a talent for reading and writing, so she put me in an advanced English language arts [supplemental class]. We used to meet before school. It was not a class. We would meet before school and after school to do advanced writing, very good education. My math teacher, too, I was thinking about her the other day. She was a little crazy, the nun. She was tough in math, but she was good. My teachers were very good. They were very good, and I was a good student. I was an "A" student. Third grade got a little hard for me, but I was punished by my mom.

That's the other thing, my mom and dad, when it came to education, that was first. [They would say], "Your job is to be in school. Your job is not to be talking to your girlfriends and going outside. Your job is to be in school. You can't go out of the house until you do all your homework." Education was really important to them. Dad graduated high school; mom did not. Mom left high school to take care of her mom when they got thrown out of the house, so that was very important to them. That came first. Boy, I mean, the report cards, I had to have "A's". I had to have good report cards; otherwise, I'd be punished.

My elementary education was good, and it got me into a really good, private high school. Saint Michael's High School, that was a really good school. That was on the border of Brooklyn and Queens, Bedford Stuy, really bad area. At that time, yes, it was a bad area, but I used to walk around and never was afraid. I had to take the subway to go to high school. My parents let me at fourteen. I would hop on the train. Most people would say, "Fourteen, hopping on the train, are you kidding me, the subway?" I hopped on the train and went to high school. Then, they moved to Queens to make it easier. Then, I would take the bus to go to school, the city bus, the Atlantic Avenue bus. My mother would drive me to the bus, and I would take the bus. She would go off to work, and I'd go to school. There was no school buses. There was no, "Somebody has a car to drive you." Nothing like that. Nobody had that. We were all ethnic people. We didn't have cars. [laughter] We took the bus and the train.

Even when I went to college--I went to Queens College--I took the bus. I didn't drive to Queens College. These people over here, they have no idea what's it like living there. You hop on the bus; you take it right to college. I didn't even live in the dorms because there was no such thing

as living in the dorm. First of all, Queens College had very few dorms because it was in the city. There was no such thing as not living with your parents. Are you kidding me? My dad would not let me out, even though I was eighteen, no such thing as that. "You don't leave this house until you're married," that was the rule then, although I left way before I was married because I said, "Dad, it's the 1970s now, you know, the women's movement." Then, I became active with the women's movement. I said, "Dad, it's the women's movement," and he'd go, "I don't want to hear about that, blah blah blah." So, elementary was good.

LDS: Did your parents have any opinions about the statehood of Puerto Rico, about it being a commonwealth or being a territory?

RH: Yes, they wanted it commonwealth. They were not *independentistas*, the independents that wanted to be out on their own. They were not the others, the communists. They were anti-communist. My parents were influenced once they got to the United States, they became American citizens. It was America do or die. The flag, we had a flag, a US flag. My mother didn't want the Puerto Rican flag. She goes, "We're not Puerto Rican." I said, "Mom, we're Puerto Rican." "We're not. We're American citizens now. We're American!" That was their whole, "We speak English in this house. We don't speak Spanish."

In fact, she didn't even want to be called--her name was Concepción--you could not call her that. Connie, you had call her Connie, Connie. Her nickname was Conchita. You couldn't even call her Conchita, Connie, "My name is Connie." "No," I said, "Your name is Concepción." She used to hate that. When I used to make her mad, I used to say, "Concepción!" Oh, she'd be so mad. They were American. They were American until the Vietnam War. They were very pro-American. They did not agree with the draft dodgers. I was the opposite because I was a teenager, and I went to really progressive high school who were very active in the war movement. That's where I learned my activism, in that high school. Boy, did we used to have fights, my father and I, because he was, "America first." Until the Vietnam War, that's when I rebelled, and all through the '70s. Then, I left home at twenty-three. I was the first one of the family to leave home. Of all my cousins, I was the first to leave home and be single. Leave home without being married and single, you never heard of that. My father had a hard time with that. He had a very difficult time, but he had no choice. I was twenty-three. In the eyes of the United States, I was an adult.

LDS: Did you hear about the Young Lords growing up? [Editor's Note: The Young Lords were a Chicago-based Puerto Rican organization founded by José Jiménez in 1960. They relied on community organization to oppose the United States military occupation of Puerto Rico and support Latinx self-determination.]

RH: Yes, my aunt, who I was very close to because she was close in age to me--she was, let's see, ten years older than me--she dated a Young Lord. In fact, we think--although, she won't admit it now--we think my cousin is the daughter of one of the Young Lords. Joe, his name was Joe. I loved him. He would take me everywhere. See, for a very long time, because my mother was the oldest sister, I was the first of the grandchildren. I was the oldest, and I was alone until my cousin Henry. But I was a girl. You know how they treat girls differently in the Latino community than boys. I was like the pampered one. My Aunt Felicia, very rebellious, she got

pregnant before she graduated high school. She had to go for her GED, so that was a scandal. I took care of my cousin like she was a little doll because my aunt, she was living with my grandma. Grandma was still alive, and Grandma was still taking care of me and Henry. I was older than Henry, so when the third cousin came, which was Sonia, she was like my doll. I took care of her, threw her in my doll carriage, running around in East Manhattan around 106th Street, running around the neighborhood with her in the carriage. I just used to take her because my aunt was an unwed mother who had not finished high school. She did finish high school and she wound up getting her college degree, too, but my cousin was alive. Sonia is the third oldest. It's me, Henry, Sonia. For a long time, it was just the three of uses until the others came along.

As a matter of fact, that's who I am going to California with. I am going with Here, which is my mother's sister, not Felicia, Here, and her son, a daughter-in-law, her grandsons. Then, we are going to see Evonne. We're going to the other cousins over there. They're all coming. We're all going over there for a reunion with the cousins. We're very, very close first cousins, and there's a bunch of us. In fact, I should have brought the picture. At my uncle's funeral, we took a picture of all of us, and it's really a cool picture at the end of the funeral. I have it on my wall. The other day, my cousin Evonne sent it out again because it was the anniversary of my uncle's death. She goes, "Do you remember when we took this? We were all together." The first cousins, all of us were together, so we figured we don't see each other. We live in different areas, some of them in Florida, some in California, some Upstate New York, some out in Far Rockaway. We don't see them.

LDS: Was going to college to be a teacher your main goal when you went?

RH: No, it was going to college and getting a good education, a liberal education. At first, the high school I went to didn't really have a good guidance department. First of all, the guidance was a nun, the head of guidance. You had two choices at that time. One, you become a secretary. You go through business and become an administrative assistant, a secretary, or you go work in a bank as a teller, or you go to college and figure it out after that. Then, in college, you got married. Those were the two choices we had. There was no women having careers. Remember this is 1969 to 1973, so that is right in the heart of the women's movement.

The women's movement began with Betty Friedan's book, which was published in--when did I read it?--I read it in 1974, when I got to college. [Editor's Note: In 1963, Betty Freidan released her book *The Feminine Mystique* and became a leading figure in the women's movement in the United States.] I figured, "Okay, I'm going to college. I'll figure out what I'm going to do after that because I am going to live with my parents until I figure out what the hell I'm doing." When I got to college, being an only child and being sheltered and not knowing what real life is, of course I fooled around. I didn't go to class. I flunked out the first year, and I rebelled. It was all during trying to figure out what I was doing. I was supposed to graduate in 1977. I didn't. I left school in 1975, so '73 to '74, I went one year. I had maybe twelve credits, but the second year that I was starting college, I don't know, I just fooled. That's rebellion. You know, it's a rebellion time. You become active with many things that are not necessary [for] your parents know, like you become sexually active and you experiment with drugs. I was right along with them, so I dropped out of college because I figured, "Why am I was wasting my time?" I dropped out, and I went to work full time.

Figure, I was supposed to graduate [in] '77. I left in '74. I think it was '74, '75,'76, '77, four years. [In] '78, I went back at night to get my bachelor's. At that point, I wanted to be in education. When I first got to college, when I was first doing my bachelor's, I was going to be a lawyer. Then, I didn't want that. Then, I wanted to take psychology, wanted to be a psychiatrist, and that didn't work out either. When I decided to fully [work], then paid it for myself. Once I left college, that was the deal my parents made, "Well, now, you're out of college. You're going to go to work, and you're going to pay for everything yourself." That's what they did, so I went to work. I went part time to college at night. I went back to get the bachelor's, and that took me six years going at night and every summer and every spring.

LDS: What did you work as during at that time?

RH: I worked in retail. I was a cashier at Woolworth for a while. Then, I went from there. I had a really good friend who I had an affair with, which--well, you can say it was--he was married, which was not a good thing. You know, I was young and immature. It was the '70s, sexual revolution and women's movement. Birth control was easy. I went to work in the city in Seventh Avenue and 50th Street, Woolworth, which doesn't exist anymore, but they were now what Walmarts are. Woolworth was like the first Walmart. Very big, it was an old company. I worked there for like two, three years, about two years. Then, after that, I went to work at a factory as a secretary in Brooklyn for a year.

Then, I got a job in 1978. I got a job with the railroads in Manhattan above Penn Station in Seventh Avenue. That's where I met my husband, in that job. It was a bunch of us in our twenties. We were young. We were making ridiculous money because it was a non-profit, but the railroad union was paying. We made ridiculous money. It was ridiculous, and then I am in my twenties. I'm not saving any money. I'm paying for my college. At the time, I was still going to college, still part time at night, but I was living out of my parents' house. I moved out at twenty-three. When was that? Twenty was 1970, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. [In] '75, I think I moved out of my parents' house. It was the year before the centennial, so 1976. Then, '78, I went to work at Eastern Railroads Penn Station with a bunch of crazy people, all my age, all of us drinking, partying, spending money, you know. I would go out. We'd get paid on Thursday, so we would leave the office at three, even though we were supposed to work until five. We'd leave the office at three. We wouldn't come back to the office until the next morning, nine. I come to the subway at two or three o'clock in the morning and get back at six to the subway to go back to work the next day at eight. That was how I was living. It was the wild time. We had all this money. I was making twenty thousand dollars at the time in 1978. That's a lot of money for a young person not even having a bachelor's, not even out of college yet. Then, I met my husband, and then I settled down. Once I met him, that settled me down. It was crazy. I had a crazy life. [laughter] I still do.

LDS: Yes, you decided to be a teacher.

RH: Yes, I decided. I decided when I left. Actually, I used to teach the Sunday, you know, the little kids ...

LDS: Do you mean CCD?

RH: CCD, I taught CCD when I was still in high school, and I liked it. I had a history teacher who I adored, loved her, Miss Beach, loved her, loved her, loved her. She inspired me to be a teacher. History was what I wanted to teach. I said, "I want to be just like Miss Beach," and she never married. She lived with her mom. I don't think she's alive now. I think I heard a couple of years ago that she had passed. I still think of her every day, and every day I thank God that she influenced me to go and teach. She was so fascinating. I thought she was the most fascinating woman that I had ever met, who knew so much. I used to tell her, "Miss Beach, I want to be just like you when I finish college."

Once I started, I knew I was going to teach. My job just became an occupation to help me pay for college. That's all it was used for, to pay rent and college. That's all I used those jobs. I knew I wasn't going to be working in like those kinds of jobs. I said, "Eh," so I didn't really care. It doesn't mean I wasn't a good worker because that's part of what my father taught me, but it was always to go to be a teacher, always. For as long as I can remember, when my cousins were born, we used to play school, and I was the teacher because I was the oldest. In fact, in my family, two of them became teachers. Two of them became social workers because social workers is very close to teaching. Teaching was very important, so that's why I decided to be a teacher right away. Even back in 1973 when I graduated high school, I had wanted to go into education.

LDS: Where did you first teach when you finally finished college? Did you go to Rutgers?

RH: No, I finished my education in 1986, and I was already married. I was already living in New Jersey. [In] 1982, I got married, and '86, I finished my bachelor's in Queens College because I told my husband that it was very important to finish Queens College. I loved that university. I was at home, but my husband, the reason why we are married thirty-six years is because he understood that was important to me.

Our first year of marriage, I was living in different areas. I would spend time in New Jersey with him on the weekends. During the week, I would stay with my parents a couple of nights to go to school. The other days of the week, I would--this was the first year I got married--I would stay with a girlfriend in the city. I was working full time and going to school part time. For the first year of marriage, that's the way it was. John, my husband, he jokes. He never said, "No, I want you to be home," never. He allowed me to do that.

I met him in '78, but we didn't date each other until '79, so '79-'80. I think maybe it was '80, yes, something like that. He knew the way I was. I wasn't a stay-at-home kind of person, and I used to tell him, "I'm not really a stay-at-home." He knew that, so that first year of our marriage was crazy. I was living in three different [places]. I used to bring clothes in the bottom of my drawer of my desk. People thought I was crazy. I used to pull out, and my underwear would slip out. We still joke about it when I see these people. I keep in touch with a lot of those people, and we joked about that. I lived like a wanderer. I lived with a backpack like a traveling salesman for the first year of the marriage, so that was '82. We got married in '82. Then, my son wasn't born until '85.

By '83, we bought the house in Piscataway, New Jersey. We lived here. We bought it in '83, I think it was. I knew eventually I was going to graduate college, and I was going to become a teacher. I knew eventually we were going to have children. I didn't want to live in an apartment with a child like my parents did. I wanted to have a home, so I said to him, "Can we put the money together?" He had a really good job. He stayed working longer. My father passed away in 1982, too, so he left me money. I used that money to get the down payment for the house, so we bought the house in '83.

Then, Scott was born in '85, but that's why he came to my graduation because I didn't finish until '86. Scott was not even a year. I think he was a year and two months because it was June. He had a cute little. I had him in a cute little outfit, but it was the hottest day in June in New York. Graduation for college is outside in a big giant tent, like thousands of students, and John is in the audience. He's taking care of the kid, and I'm sitting with the graduates. I remember the ceremony was so long because it's graduation. It's long. I remember when I went to see him, Scott, his shirt was out. His tie was all undone. He was all disheveled. John took a picture of him, holding him. I took a picture of them. I still have it. It's so funny because he's all like disheveled. It's like the hottest [day]. It's like ninety-five degrees, with eighty percent humidity in New York. You know what's that like? That's like, "Ugh." I graduated, but I was already living in New Jersey. The minute we married in 1982, John hated the city, he didn't like it, so I knew that I would have to give up the city. I said, "Okay, well, I'm going to move to New Jersey." So, 1982, that's when I moved to New Jersey permanently, so I have been ever since.

LDS: Where did you move to?

RH: Piscataway, this town, I moved to. I lived on Stelton Road on the other side. Stelton Road is the one that goes down Livingston, Busch Campus. Then, I lived on that side, near the border of Plainfield, South Plainfield, in that area. We lived there from '82 to when Scott was five, so '82 to '90, 1990.

LES: What was the town like?

RH: Piscataway, well, was a college town. You had Rutgers University. It was all college. It was blue-collar workers, working families, middle class, mixed, because Piscataway had a very large Black community and very, very mixed, very diverse. There were a lot of Asians, but the Asians were just moving in. Then, when we left, all of it is Asian in the area where I used to live in. It was nice because I liked it. It was very much where I grew up, everybody different ethnicities. We had the Black family living across the street. It was an interracial marriage, very nice family. We had the Irish guy lived next to us. Next door was somebody else. It was a lot of fun. Piscataway schools were very diverse, much more than when I first started working in North Brunswick. Piscataway was very diverse because of the college, and I liked it. I liked that diversity. I don't want to live in an all-white area. I want to be with other people, so I liked it. We stayed in Piscataway until Scott was five, and then we moved because of the schools. The Piscataway schools, Scott was having a hard time, and I knew it was either putting him in private school, which I didn't want to go that way. At that point, I'm a teacher in public school, and I believe in public school education. John, he's public school all the way. There is no such thing

as putting your kid in private school in his family. We made a decision to move to a better school district, and then I moved from there to South Brunswick. At that point that I moved, I was already at Linwood Middle School. I was already working in North Brunswick.

LDS: Did you only work in North Brunswick?

RH: Yes, well, I spent five years in the Catholic school system. When I graduated in 1986 in June, I went to work immediately to work as a teacher in September of '86. I could only get a Catholic school job because at that time, it was difficult to get into public schools in New Jersey. I had made the decision even though I went to school and got my certificate from New York. I could have gotten a job like this in New York City. I could have worked in any public school because they needed public school teachers desperately. They needed Spanish-speaking public school teachers, so I could have gotten a job easily. In fact, my two girlfriends who I graduated with winded up getting jobs. Then, the one became an assistant principal right away in the middle school she worked at, and the other one become an assistant principal. Then, she worked for the assistant superintendent. I could have been a principal of a school. I'd have been a superintendent if I stayed in New York City, but I was married. The idea of commuting to New York and having a child, there's no way. I knew that I wanted being a public school teacher, despite the fact that people think you only work until three o'clock. You're working until five, six o'clock, and you're working all year, even though people say, "Oh, you got off the whole summer." No, there's no such thing as that for a schoolteacher. I had to make a decision, so I decided, "Okay, I am going to make my career in New Jersey, become a New Jersey teacher." I applied for the certificate for New Jersey. New Jersey gave me a permanent certificate, but I had in mind that maybe I would like to go back to New York. I kept my New York provisional certificate because New York didn't give you permanent. You had to have your master's degree.

As soon as I got the job in New Jersey, I went and applied to Rutgers for the master's. In the back of my mind, I always thought, "I am going back to New York, and I need the master's to teach in New York public high school," because that's what I wanted to teach, in a New York public high school. I said, "Oh, I have to get my master's in Rutgers." Rutgers, I lived in Piscataway, why, that's the way you go. You go to Piscataway. I could stay all night in Rutgers and then just go home, so that's why I went. By that point, I had already decided, "No, I'm not going back." The master's, towards the end, didn't become as important, so I never took the exam. I got all the credits, but I never took the master's exam. I don't know why. You know, you have a child. You're busy being a mother, and I am busy working as a schoolteacher. It is hard, and I figured, "Eh, why do I need my master's?" New Jersey doesn't require it, and I'm not going to New York. Only New York required a masters, so I said, "It's no big deal." I went through the whole master's program here at night, working full time during the day. Just like the bachelor's, I got used to it. I used to be able to run from school, run and go to class, be here until nine o'clock, run back home, get up the next day, and go to school.

For one year, I worked in Kearny at Sacred Heart School, that was the first year that was 1986. It was '86 to '87. Then, I got the job closer to Piscataway, where I got to work in St. Helena in Edison because it was still tough to get public school jobs. It was really tough, especially history in the high school. It was very tough even in middle school. I didn't have an elementary license. I only had a secondary. It was so hard, so I figured, "Okay, let me get my experience, and then

I'll go." I spent in four years in Edison in St. Helena. In 1992, I just had had it with the principal, so 1991, I told her I'm not coming back. Even though I had tenure and everything with the Dioceses of Trenton, I said, "I'm not coming back." Actually, it was the Dioceses of Metuchen. The principal just irritated me, and she could never fire me because I had really good reviews. I had good records. She could never fire me, but we just did not get along. I knew. I knew. I said, "I got to get out of here," so, 1991, I got an opportunity.

There was a job opening in North Brunswick. It was a middle school job. I said, "Eh, what the hell? Let me go. Let me go for the interview, what the hell?" It was August. I got called in August. Remember, I told them in April that I wasn't coming back in September. I was getting a little worried because I didn't have a job. We needed that second income because we were still paying this mortgage. We were paying a big giant mortgage because at that point, we had already decided to move. Well, no, we were still in Piscataway, but we were looking to move. Then, I got the interview. The secretary from Linwood called me, and I met Mr. Defamean. He was the principal at that time. I said, "Oh, I'm not getting this job," and he hired me. Within two days, he called me, and he hired me. I started in 1992. It was seventh grade. I was in seventh grade history and North Brunswick ever since 1992. Then, I retired in 2016, twenty-five years.

LDS: When did you join the New Jersey Education Association?

RH: I joined when I was in the Catholics school because I knew I needed it. I was eventually going to become a public school teacher, so I started going to the conventions before I was a public school teacher. I went to the convention in Atlantic City. Remember, I was a big union person, and I hated the fact that the Catholic school had no union. Because the Catholic school is private school, you don't have a union, and the principal treated them terribly. Not me, she would never. I was respectful of her, but I never gave into her. She hated that. Oh, my God, we used to fight, and she would say to me, at the end of June she would always say, "Perhaps you should think about getting another job." I said, "No, when I leave, it's going to be on my own terms." She hated that. She hated that because I would challenge her, but she could never fire me because I had the best of lessons, the best. I started the school newspaper when I went there, the newspaper club, which they never had. They never had that. I started the kids becoming active politically, registering people to vote. They never that, and the parents loved me because the kids loved me. I had really good lessons, so she hated that crap, hated it. I never took it. I didn't take her stuff either. She used to be a very big women, very big nun, you know, and sometimes nuns, they think, "I'm the principal. It's my way or the highway." I used to say, "Not for nothing, but we're democratic." I used to always to use Christ as the example, so she used to get mad. She used to get mad. She used to get mad. She can't say anything when you use Christ as the example. You're a religious person. She hated that, but I hated working there. The last year I really had a miserable time. I said, "It's time for me to leave," because one day, I'm going to say something to this woman, and I know I'm going to be fired outright. I was going to say something nasty. I didn't want to do that because I respected the position that she was principal and a nun, but that doesn't make you superior to me. Just because you're a nun, that doesn't mean intellectually or as far as knowing what education is that makes you superior than me. That nun, we had to go because of her.

LDS: What kind of classes did you like to teach? What were the histories?

RH: The classes? Well, I started fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth. It was history, but a lot of it was civics and government and I love that. In fact, they don't even teach that anymore, and this is why we have the crazy nut in the White House. Anyway, I used to love teaching. I would teach history. All the histories I taught, and then I would also teach art and religion and then penmanship, spelling. In Catholic school, you taught everything, except I didn't teach math. As a history teacher, you're also an English teacher, although I didn't teach English because they had an English teacher. Still, the kids have to be able to write. They have to be able to read the textbooks, so I kind of taught everything. History was the main subject. I taught seventh grade. Seventh grade was civics. Eighth grade was US history, and there was no world. It was US history from the beginning to the end because it was a year course. It was like everything.

Then, when I went to Linwood, and Mr. Defamean said, "You're going to be teaching civics," so I taught all the seventh grade civic classes. Then, we changed the curriculum, and they started teaching world ancient history. I went to eighth grade and taught ancient history, or what we called world history. Then, I got to the high school. Who was the principal? Dr. Rimor was the principal, but the supervisor came with me from Linwood. That was Dave. Dave wanted me to teach US I. Then, I taught US II, and then I taught world. I taught everything, anything to do with history. I liked that because it was not boring. At Linwood, I got bored because it was the same lesson five times a day, and I said, "I can't do this anymore." I went up to the high school, so I could teach different things.

LDS: At the schools that you taught at, what did you see of the Latino population of students?

RH: Sacred Heart had a big one because it was Kearny. There were a lot of Latino kids. They were from parents who came from the Southern border, so there were a lot of Central Americans, Mexicans. There weren't really that many Puerto Ricans because they hadn't all assimilated by then when I started in '86. Sacred Heart though had a lot of Italians because there's different neighborhoods. Then, when I got to St. Helena, there were mostly white kids almost because it is North Edison. It's near--what's that high school? Miss DePasquale graduated from there. JP Stevens, so the school wasn't big. They would send kids to the Catholic high school, which was--oh, my God, I forgot the name of it. Not Immaculata, well, I don't remember. It's some saint name. It's in Edison. In fact, it's still there. [Editor's Note: The school being referred to is St. Thomas Aquinas High School, formerly known as Bishop George Ahr High School.] Sister Donna is there. She's retired now. I taught her two nieces. They were twins, really nice. I taught both of them. In fact, they still contact me. Sister Donna, she retired a couple of years ago. Pious, was it? No, St. Pious was in Piscataway.

We were center school, and then we sent to the other one. I forget the name of it. It was a mixed group. At that point, we started getting a lot of Asian students, like Asian from Korea and China and Filipino children. In St. Helena, it changed because North Edison started changing, but the enrollment declined because the public schools in Edison are so good. The Asians, the Indian Asians don't send their kids to Catholic school. They sent them to public school, so it started changing. By then, I had left.

I got to Linwood. In Linwood, they were mostly Italians. There were a few African Americans. There were a lot of Russians that came in during the Soviet era, the Bosnians and all that, the Czechs. There were a bunch of Hungarians that came in from New Brunswick to Linwood. There were a lot of Irish, a lot of Jews. We had a lot of Jews. We had a few Asians, but not as many as there are now. Not as many Latinos, because the Latinos, there weren't even that many in New Brunswick yet. It wasn't until--when did we get the Latinos in? It wasn't until maybe 1995, maybe from 1995 to 2000; that's when the Latino population became huge in New Brunswick. The university, the hospital [were] eating up all the stuff in New Brunswick. They built then UMDNJ [University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey], and Rutgers University took over all of New Brunswick. They tore down all the poor housing, and they moved to North Brunswick. It's the apartments that were built. All of a sudden, we got all these Latinos where they had to use me to translate. I was translating left and right for the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, for the principal, the assistant principals because they didn't have any Hispanics. They had no Latinos. They didn't even have that many Latino teachers, so that's when it changed. 1999, something like that, to 2000 it changed. Those were most of the kids that I taught. It's funny because I did my student teaching in New York City, in Jacksonville near LaGuardia Airport. It was a middle school, very diverse, very diverse. Why? It was controlled by Queens College, and they used to put all the student-teachers there. Boy was that a good experience because it helped me when I got to Linwood and in the high school. It helped me. It was a lot of Latinos, a lot of Asians, a lot of Blacks. It was good. It was a good experience.

LDS: In North Brunswick, or wherever you taught Latinos, did you see Latino populations face certain issues like discrimination in the New Jersey school system?

RH: Yes. Well, first, there was no bilingual education. See, New York City at that point has already changed, and bilingual education was really big in New York State, very big. They had bilingual education--not ESL, not English as a second language--bilingual, which means teaching the subject in the language, and that's what they did. When I went to New Jersey, they didn't have any of that. It was ESL, throw the kids in, immerse, because they didn't want to pay bilingual teachers. They didn't want to pay, didn't want to have the books bilingual. That didn't exist, so it was every man for himself. A kid comes from Honduras and doesn't speak a word of English and comes to you in eighth grade. You've got to bring them to high school. What do you do with them in the classroom? I used to have to translate. I was lucky that I was able to translate, and then I started getting the supervisor, the principal, I said, "Vick …" Vick was really good. I said, "Vick, we've got all these kids. You've really got to look at what we're doing as far as textbooks." So, he allowed me to change things in the curriculum. He was really good, but he grew up in the Bronx. He grew up like me in an ethnic area, where you've got everybody, so he was very good and I loved him. I mean, he was very inspirational as a principal, but he pissed off the wrong person at the board, you know, so they transferred him up to the board.

At point, I was disillusioned, and I wanted to go up to the high school. After he left, because I was going to stay in the middle school my whole career with Vick, only with him, but the minute they got rid of him and put him in the board, I said, "That's it. I've got to go to the high school because I'm unhappy." Things were changing in North Brunswick. They didn't have the ESL program. It was nowhere it is today. I mean, they didn't have any books. They didn't have any

programs. It was sink or swim. You throw them in, and you get it or you don't get it. That was wrong.

At that point, I'm in Linwood when I started getting involved with the multicultural club. In fact, I brought it into Linwood. It became a club. It's still there today. It became a club. I got the board to give money to pay me as an advisor. I had to struggle because they, "Ugh, you've got Latino students? Oh, yes, they'll learn." No, you need something. You need something for these children. Oh, my God, the fights I would have with the board, but that's when I became really big in Linwood with the diversity club. It came in 2000, the year 2000. They won a grant. I became active with the diversity council on the board because they had a lot of racial issues in North Brunswick. They paid this guy, I don't know, 24,000, some professor from Harvard or somewhere, came in to tell everyone that everyone was prejudice. I was on the council, the steering committee, and I said, "I could have told you five, ten years ago that everybody was prejudiced in North Brunswick. Are you kidding me?" I knew that from the minute I started in the school. Who was moving in large numbers? Latinos, because they were being gentrified in New Brunswick and they were all moving over. UMDNJ took over all of it. They levelled all the houses and built these big giant buildings. They are still building them. I saw them driving when I was coming up here. I'm looking, driving down Route 18, and I'm saying "Oh, my God, look at these huge skyscrapers." Latinos are not going to be living in those. That's gentrification, so where are they going? North Brunswick, that's where they all went, or Franklin. Here's North Brunswick, here's Piscataway--that's where Rutgers took over--and then right next to that is New Brunswick. Then, right next to New Brunswick, you've got Franklin, North Brunswick on the other [side]. Where do you think they're going to go? They're pushed out of Piscataway. They're going to go in New Brunswick. They're pushed out of New Brunswick. They're going into North Brunswick.

There was nothing for them. The parents would come to register the kids. They didn't have translators with the secretaries. When I started Linwood, the special services director was a Black woman, very nice, goes to me "Rosita." I knew her really well. I wanted to work in the special services. I loved the special ed kids. A lot of the kids that were Latino, they would identify them and throw them into special education, even though it wasn't that they needed special education. It was that they needed bilingual because they had a language barrier. They didn't have a learning barrier; they had a language barrier. They would throw them into the special ed classes, and that used to piss me off. I went to the woman, the Black lady that was in charge of the special services, and I said, "You know, you really need the forms of registration to be in dual language." One summer, I said, "I will volunteer. Some of your documents, and I'll put them in Spanish and English." One summer, I spent the whole summer translating the documents for this lady because I wanted to work with her. I wanted to advance with her, and I knew she would be good. They didn't have any of that. None of it, and there was so many Latino students. I mean, they were coming in left and right. Terrible, it was terrible, but it was going on in every district, unless you were in a city. If you were in Elizabeth, boom, everybody is Latino there. They had it, but North Brunswick, are you kidding me? They resisted. They were prejudiced. Even the teachers were prejudiced, "Oh, I'm not going to teach. Those kids can't go into the honors classes." I said, "Are you kidding me?" I used to go with Dave, my supervisor, and said, "Dave, maybe we should open the honors history and put in some Latino and some Black people in it, so they're not all white." Dave, he was very good. He agreed with

me, but, oh, my God, we had to like fight the Board of Education that was all controlled a small group of people who, they're all white people. Oh, my God, it was terrible.

Then, I remember Vick telling me this story, this was his advice to me, he goes, "Water on the rock." He goes, "You know how water wears away the rock? That's what you have to be. You have to be the water." I said, "Vick, I'm sorry, but that takes too long. That takes thousands of years for erosion." He goes "No, you've got to be patient." "Patience is not my middle name." Patience is not. I'm not a patient person, but I fought a lot. A lot of it, because I fought so much for it, when it came to jobs and advancement, they wouldn't advance me. They would give me the work, but they wouldn't give me the title. At that point, I was already knowledgeable about how the system worked, so I would just say, "Okay, I will take the work," because this is going to benefit the kids. That's really what I really care about. I don't really care about the title. I would do all the work, but I would fight every which way.

Even until to the point where I left, when I retired, I was still fighting because there were a lot of things they were doing, especially with Mr. Brotschul. The last year, I took the Latin American Club, and he had the nerve to tell me--first of all, I got them involved with the Rutgers group here and we went to Rutgers Day. We performed and everything. Then, he had the nerve to tell me that all we were interested in was in dancing, and I said, "Excuse me, Mr. Brotschul." I didn't care if he was my principal or not. Remember, I told you, you're not more superior than me because you have a title. You're on the same level intellectually, so I don't give a rat's ass, excuse me, I don't give a rat's ass whether you have a title or not. You have to earn my respect, okay? I said, "Excuse me, Mr. Brotschul, I didn't see you come on that Saturday when we were up at six o'clock in the morning, and we were over here with the fourteen kids that drove themselves because you wouldn't give us a bus to go to Rutgers to represent our culture." He didn't say a word after that, but he wouldn't give me a promotion to administrator. He wouldn't do it. I told him after he left, well, he knew exactly how I felt about him, because I said, "I'm sorry, but you don't have my respect, and you never will." He didn't say a word, not a word. You have to earn my respect, especially in education. You've got to earn it.

I respected Mr. Clark, and I would never say that to him because I respected him. The one thing about Mr. Clark was he cared about the kids, but anybody else who didn't give a damn about the kids and was only in it for the title and the money, meh, I have no business with them. Teachers that would come to me, like my colleagues, and say, "You're really hardheaded," and I said, "Yes, because I have a point." These children should be treated with respect. Just because they can't speak the language does not mean that they are not intelligent. It's a lot of prejudice even to this day. Now, there's even more with our crazy president, that crazy. He's not even my president, but that's another story. We can't go into that. You can ask me more questions.

LDS: When did you start teaching the Latin American history class?

RH: Latin American history, I started when I got to the high school. As soon as I got to the high school, I believe it was the year after 9/11, it was 2001, 2002. I asked Dave who was our assistant principal. He had the insight that he wanted to increase the social studies department because it was a little tiny department. He wanted more electives, so I said to Dave, "Okay, Dave, you want more electives, I'll come up with two electives." Women's studies, which, you

know, [in] 2002, come on, they should have women's studies from 1970. Someone should have. I said, "We will do a Latin American, we'll do a cultural study," because the world history that they had in ninth grade was ridiculous. I mean, it was more European history. I knew that because the one thing I knew about when I went to Queens College, taking the history courses that I took and activism, that college was wonderful and my high school, too. You want to bring diversity. I believe in diversity. I still do. I said to Dave, "Dave, we need a culture class because, you know what? This world's history that you think its world history is really European history, and it's really white people's history. It's not really the Black people's history, you know, the dark people's history. You really need to get that in." Miss Beach, at my high school, they had Latin America, Africa, Asia. She had a mini-course. I took her all her classes. By the time I had graduated, I had like a hundred and fifty credits. I had so many credits. I took eight classes. It wasn't, "Oh, I'm going home to work." You were school, so I said, " I have this." He goes, "Yes, that's a great idea. Let's get it." I said, "We can get the special ed kids that are thrown in the classes. We can get the kids, and maybe we could put them in honors and AP." "Well, you come up with the curriculum, I'll approve of it, and we'll send it to the board." They approved.

I went and recruited all the kids because that's what I used to do. I went the special ed department. I told you I was big with them, with the director, and went to them. I met with her, and I said, "The kids need than something other than English, math, science, and social studies. They really need, we really need cultural classes." She was good because she's a Black woman, very nice woman. She goes, "Yes, that's a good idea." I said, "I'll take special ed kids in my class, and you will see that they will succeed. I'm not going to baby them. I'm going to treat just as if the other students," so that's how it started. It started as soon as I got to the high school, so that first year. After that, kids lined up at the door to take my class. The first two days of class, I used to tell the kids, "I can't go by the roster because tomorrow the roster's going to be more." Every year that I taught those classes, they were full packed, every year until I retired. That is a legacy. That's my legacy, that I got them to be aware, and we discussed about having kids in the honors and AP who we wouldn't consider. I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" "They have a 'C' average, and they want to try AP. No they have to have 'A's'." I said, "How they going to have 'A's', if in the middle school, you're throwing them into special ed classes or low classes, and when they get up here, they're in general class. How the hell are they going to take AP if you start them down lower?" They're not going to succeed.

Now, Mayor De Blasio is trying that now with the magnet high schools in New York, and he's getting flack because the Asian parents. He wants to get rid of the tests because it's unfair. How are you going to get a kid from the Bronx to go to Bronx Science who goes to school in a crappy neighborhood school, how are you going to get them to pass the test? So, I agree with that. I don't believe in the advanced class. I believe all classes should be taught [in an advanced way], and you should be the best teacher and give the kids the most opportunity. Don't deny them the opportunity. If they want to try it, put them right in you know. That's my philosophy, that used to be my philosophy.

Even my colleagues, I had to fight them. One year, I made the mistake and threw them all in honors. I said, "What the hell? Let them all go to honors." Oh, my God, the honors teachers were making me crazy. I said, "Well, if you worked with them, they would be able to do the honors," and they never would admit that. They would never admit that. I loved these people

that I worked with, but they had a bias. I recognized it. I would go into it. Dave and I, we would spend hours arguing, yelling, said, "Dave, they have a bias, there is a privilege. It's called white privilege. There is such a thing." I know; I grew up with this struggling and fighting every which way.

LDS: Could you speak about the *Hermandad* youth Puerto Rican club you were a part of?

RH: Yes, my parents were actually a part of it. Again, remember, they met in social clubs; that was a big thing. Social clubs would bring Puerto Ricans together who were in Bushwick in Brooklyn, where there weren't too many Puerto Ricans. At that point, there were a lot moving in, especially a lot from Central America. All of the sudden, there was, because of the war in El Salvador, then Nicaragua, then the Sandinistas over there, all of the sudden, they got in this whole group. Then, they had the earthquake, so a bunch of people [were] moving in. My parents, they all joined this. It was called *Hermandad Hispánica*, and I forget what else. It was a political club for Latinos, all. It wasn't just Puerto Ricans; it was Central Americans, Mexicans.

What it was was a group that would promote Latino candidates in the assembly in New York, in the local assemblies, and in the Congress. In 1974, I worked for one of the guys who was running. He was a Puerto Rican guy running for the State Assembly in Brooklyn in our district, and I went to work on his campaign. I did political work, so I did phone calls to Democrats. It was through the Democratic Party, but it was phone calls, rallies, signs, letters, typing, all kinds of office things, and rallies. I met Mayor [Abraham] Beame, [who] I think at that point was the mayor. I met Robert Kennedy. God, I loved him. Who else? Robert Kennedy, the mayor of New York, the Democratic mayor, I met the Democratic council people from Brooklyn and the congressional person from Brooklyn. It was really a lot of fun, and it was eye-opening, too. I learned a lot about the political process, and I also learned about some unpleasant things, too, because there was a lot of corruption in New York politics at that time.

LDS: Was this when you were a child then?

RH: No. '74, I had already graduated. '73, I had already graduated from high school. It was my first year in college.

LDS: What role did you kind of play besides going to rallies? Did you play any significant roles? Did you help organize anything?

RH: No, I didn't help organize. I just helped in the office, made phone calls, went to the rallies. At that point, also I'm in college because it was also before I dropped out. At that point, it's Watergate, so I became really interested in watching what government was doing. Also, '74 was also the first year that I was able to vote. I couldn't vote in the presidential election because I was turning eighteen in '73, and the election was '72. '74 was the only one I could vote for was the council people, so I got involved in. I became really aware in politics. Like I said, I voted. It was something. It was a good experience.

LDS: How long did you stay there?

RH: It was over the summer, so it was four or three months of political work until November. The election was in November, but he lost. We tried to get him in. He was a good friend of my parents and belonged in our church.

LDS: What's his name?

RH: Oh, my God, his first name was Ray, but I don't remember his last name. This was a while ago, but Sierra I think it was his name. Sierra was the last name. He was from Puerto Rico. He was born there, came here. I was seventeen, eighteen, and he was in his thirties, married. We remained good friends, like my parents remained friends, but he lost the election because there was a lot of crazy corruption.

LES: When did you become a National Organization for Women (NOW) member?

RH: That was in '72. I was in high school. We were big women's activists. See, it was Vietnam War and then from there women's rights. Twelfth grade, so that was '72, '73. Nixon was president. The war wound down in '74. Then, the women's movement became big after the war wound down. Then, I became a member. I became a member, and we went out to march. That's really what I did, march in New York.

LES: Did you see a difference in how race played a factor in leadership?

RH: Yes, because at the beginning of the women's movement they were all white college-educated women. Even the lesbians weren't allowed. Then, when the lesbians came in, that was in '72, '73. Then, the Black women came because there was still prejudice with the Black women activists and the gay women activists. It was prejudiced all along, so it changed about '75, '76. It started changing. It got better, I think. Once Betty Friedan acknowledged the lesbians, then it got better because there were Black lesbians too and white lesbians. So, it got better. I was fighting for women's rights since the beginning. That's really important, and I still am. Right now, we're in bad shape.

LES: What are some of the roles that you played in that?

RH: Well, I went to marches. I went to Washington. I marched in Washington. I belong to the local chapters of the NOW. I sent money. I donated money. I promoted. Everywhere I go, I promote women's rights. That's always number one for me. Oh, the ERA, I marched for the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment. I wrote letters to Congress. I wrote letters to the president. It was a lot of struggles. I mean, it still is. It's only recently in the last two years, I had to go back, since Trump got elected that I have to go back now. Now, I'm back. I'm back writing the letters, marching in the things, going back to doing the activism, and I'm sixty. I'm going to be sixty three in three weeks. I figured, "Oh, it's over!" It's not. I mean, I don't need birth control anymore. It doesn't mean I stopped.

LDS: Were there any challenges with you being a member because you were Puerto Rican?

RH: No. There were a lot of fellow Puerto Rican women, but I was more with the college women. There were a lot of Jewish women, who had their own prejudices, the Jewish women, because Jewish men, they're very patriarchal, and Jewish women, God forbid you would be a Jewish woman who wasn't going to be a mother and take care of the kids. A lot of that had to do with Queens College and very big women's activists, Jewish women's activists, that I joined with, very big, I mean, big chapters. Bella Abzug, I met Bella Abzug. She was like the number three lady. It was Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Bella Abzug, in that order. [laughter] I met her. I used to go to hear her speak. She was a feisty woman. She didn't take anybody's BS. She was feisty. I loved her. I loved Bella Abzug. The first time I went to see her, I said, "Oh, my God. Oh, my lord!" Every time she came to Queens College, I would go listen. I went to her office in Manhattan. She's a very big activist. She used to wear big giant hats all the time. She was really funny. Yes, that was good.

By that point, the women, as far as racially, they were all kind of accepted, but the one thing that didn't were--that's when the issues with lesbianism came in and who was real the women's activists. Were they radical lesbians? At this point, at the end of the '70s, you start having gay rights, Stonewall, 1984, AIDS stuff. When one group gets liberation, then they all come after that. First it was the African American civil rights, and then came the antiwar, then came the women, and then came the gay rights. You know, it's one after the other. Now, we're going backwards. We're going backwards with the Trump administration, unfortunately.

LES: When did you become a member of the American Civil Liberties Union?

RH: That was right about the time I was teaching, right when I started in Rutgers, when I was getting the master's here. It was around the 1990s because I just used to donate. I used to want the card, the card because I declared myself a liberal, but I've been radical. Actually, I'm more of a radical than a liberal. I would always go around pissing off my other colleagues, who thought that I was a communist, but I'm not. That's when I became a member. Mostly, what I do with that is I read their letters. I send donations. Right now, they need the money for the immigrants. I got my husband to join and send money and the rest of my family, too, because the immigrants. We're like Nazi Germany. I mean, literally what's going down on that border, you saw the pictures of the kids in the cages. That's true. They're keeping them in cages, and they're tearing them away from their parents, as young as, what was it, eighteen months old. Come on, an eighteen-month-old baby, you're taking away from the mother; are you kidding me? That's Nazi Germany. Right now, it's very serious. I'm a little worried, a little concerned.

LDS: Do you see yourself being involved in more union work and organizations going forward?

RH: Well, I'm very active with the Indivisible group, which is the group that marched on Washington. I went to march in the women's march, and I marched in New York this year. I'll march next year and the year after that. I don't care how old. As long as I can walk, I'll march. Then, I'm involved again with the ACLU, and I belong to a local chapter in Monroe, where I live now with a bunch of other seniors who are all around my age. Some are older who grew up in the sixties as activists, and they're all active again. They're all in canes and wheelchairs. I mean, literally, we have to go back out. What they are doing in this country is terrible, so I'm involved again.

I thought I'd be able to retire from education. I didn't join the retired education union. I left my unionism because now I'm more involved with the resistance against this president and the administration. What am I doing? We went to march in New York City, and I'm encouraging the people to register the kids to vote. I went and put on my Facebook page, which is my business page, that if anyone wants to register to vote, how to register to vote because we need young people. You guys, the millennials, now all have to vote because our freaking generation messed it up. The Baby Boomers are the ones that elected this doofus in the White House. The Baby Boomers, I don't know how he conned them into it, but we did it. Now, I feel responsible, so now I have to go back out again and get the younger people to [vote]. Every one of my students that I meet, I'm like, "Did you register to vote? Did you register to vote? Are you going to vote?" Every time I see one of my former students or they contact me, [I tell them to] make sure that you vote in November and vote the Republicans out because there is never going to be any other way. We're not going to have a country. He's jailing innocent children in cages because they are coming into the country escaping death in Honduras and Guatemala. The very same thing that I taught for thirty years is being thrown out the window, the thing I thought I taught. I believe in the American system of democracy. I taught it for thirty years, the thing that Miss Beach taught me. If she was alive, oh, my God, I know she would be out there with me. Yes, that's the reason why I'm not so much involved with the union. Now, I'm involved with this other thing.

LDS: Going back a little bit to the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) union, what role did you play in that?

RH: Well, I was membership mostly, and I attended a lot of their diversity workshops. One of them was here. I know that it was in Livingston [College] in one of these buildings. I attended a lot. Anything to do with diversity and anything to do with bilingual education and ESL, I would attend. Then, in 2000, Mr. Clark asked me to be a member of the diversity council. In fact, because of Miss Pasner, they won a grant this year. It was the first time. Since 2000, we were all members; this is the first time that we won a grant. Miss Pasner is on it. The NJEA, I went to the minority workshops they had for minority teachers. The NJEA funded it, so I never paid for any of these workshops. I just used to go to it. I am no longer a member of the NJEA, but I still keep tabs on what they are doing. I do support the teachers' unions, so I vote for the school budget every school year. I make my husband vote, too, and my mother-in-law and anybody else. My neighbors, too, I make them vote for the school budget. I have to go to the ladies' room. Is that okay?

LDS: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LDS: Now, we are going to go over now some reflective questions over your life.

RH: Sure, sure, it's crazy, my life. It still is.

LDS: How do you think being Puerto Rican influenced the way you raised your son?

RH: Well, I taught my son to be independent like me and to respect people's culture. I regret not teaching him how to speak Spanish, although my mother spoke Spanish to him. He understands it, and he did take it up in high school. He understands it, and he knows some words and stuff. But I did teach him about the culture. He respects. He knows all the foods. He knows how to cook. He's very much a Puerto Rican; he wears the flag. He understands how important it is to have a culture, so I'm hoping he will teach his children once they start having children. The fact that his wife is bilingual, too, and that she has a culture. She has a dual culture. She's from Colombia and then Dominican culture. I think they are going to raise their children to appreciate the cultural differences between us and them. Scott is very intuitive about the plight of being different. He's a Hamilton, but he's still Martinez. I gave him that, and I think he retains it. I took him to Puerto Rico when he was young. My mother took him. My mom took him to Puerto Rico when he was a little boy. Then, I took him, and we get together with the family. He understands what that is. That is a Latino thing, the family. You know how important it is to have a family, to have a grandma. I think Kathy, my daughter-in-law, was brought up that way, too. She was brought up by a single parent. Her father died. Her father committed suicide when she was young. She understands what is to be single mom. Her mother raised her single parent. Her grandmother raised them. She understands. She grew up in poverty just like I did, so I think Scott understands that. Even though Scott grew up in the middle class suburbs--he didn't grow up the way I did--it doesn't mean he doesn't understand. I hope that's what he's got from me.

LES: What connections have you maintained with the island?

RH: I go still. My uncles are still there, my cousins. I call. I write. I go over to visit. I went four months before the hurricane. I was there. My uncles and my cousins are elderly now. They're in their eighties and seventies. I made it a point to visit them before something happens to them. I don't want to visit them in their funeral. Then, I took a trip the last time I went there. We kind of went where my grandfather was and my father grew up. I took my husband with me because he likes it. He likes the island. He knows how important it is to me to have. I call it my homeland. I don't consider the United States my homeland. I consider Puerto Rico my homeland. That's why I went to the parade this year after many years of not going because I knew this year was different. This year they were going to honor people who died, to honor the first responders who went over there and the nurses, everybody that went to volunteer themselves over there, so I had to go. It was important. I didn't even care that it was going to rain. I didn't care. I had to be there. I'm going to go back. Probably next year, I'll go back during the spring. I can't right now because we have our vacation planned and being on a fixed income when you're retired doesn't mean you can fly. You're still on a fixed income. I don't get a salary. Then, my son got married last year, and we spent a lot of money on his wedding. I'm kind of paying that off, and my business keeps me really busy.

LDS: You talked a little bit about how you experienced Hurricane Maria through your family, but can you speak more about the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico? What are your opinions on the fiscal crisis?

RH: Well, I blame the United States government and the policies. I blame the corruption that's over there. I saw for the first time. Sometimes I'm the type of person that I've got to see to really

get it in my head. I have to see it. I don't just believe it from reading. Although I'm supposed to be an intellectual, I have to see it for myself to believe it. I saw it for myself, the decline of things. From when I was a little girl visiting, I remember I visited every year. Every summer, I went to visit for years. Even when my mother retired, she went over there. I visited, so I saw the decline. I mean, they're living on a string. Literally, it's like being in the depression all over again. The fact that the United States, they crushed their agriculture, so they weren't even growing mangoes. I'm saying, "I can't even get a mango. Where the hell? You can't even get a mango." You know where they were getting mangos from? The Dominican Republic. "That's crazy," I said. Where my grandfather was, across the street was the mango trees. You just took them from the road. You just went over there and took them off the tree. They didn't have that. I couldn't find a mango. I said where, "Where the hell are all the mangos?" This is Puerto Rico; there should be mangoes left and right, grapefruits. Everything is from the Dominican Republic or the United States. Nothing is grown agriculturally in the island. I'm saying, "Where the hell are all these people? What happened to all of the farmers?" That's the United States' policies. It's the US, and you think they are going to help. They don't even help the Latinos in this country, you think they going to help them there? They think that they are foreigners. They don't think they are American citizens. It's terrible, and I blame the US. I blame both parties, Democrats and Republicans. I blame the American people for not being aware and being *Dancing with the Stars*. You remember they used to say that. That's all they care about is *Dancing with the Stars*. The American people have lost their way. I don't know what's happened. It's really horrible.

LES: Do you have any opinions about Puerto Rico becoming a state?

RH: I think that it should be a state. I have approved statehood for many, many, years, but the Congress will never approve it unless we get a whole new Congress. You know what I mean? Again, the millennials, we've got to vote. Everybody's got to vote, vote them all the hell out and vote in a new Congress. That's the only way. It was doable before the disaster. Now, I don't know because it's going to be a state that's in poverty. It's going to be like Alabama and Mississippi. It's going to be just like living in Alabama and Mississippi. Those states are in the bottom for everything, education, healthcare. That's what Puerto Rico is going to be. It will be in this order, Mississippi, Alabama, Puerto Rico, in that order. Puerto Rico will be last. Alabama will be second to last. Mississippi would be third to last. There's destruction. Eight hundred schools, "Pff," closed. Eight hundred schools, I've never heard of that! Eight hundred schools, what the hell happened to all the children? There's no children. They're all here in the United States. They all came. They're mostly in Florida. Eight hundred schools. [Editor's Note: This refers to the closure of schools in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria and declining enrollments due to students leaving Puerto Rico to go to school on the mainland United States.]

The University of Puerto Rico, I wanted to go to, I almost went there. I wanted to go get my bachelor's. The state that that's in--I went to the campus, and I said, "Oh, my God." The buildings are run down. It's so sad. They had beautiful palm trees. When you went to the university down there, UPI--they call it UPI--they had beautiful palm trees and these gorgeous, flamboyant trees. Now, it's like, "Ugh." This was four months before Maria, oh, my God. They had strikes, oh, my lord. They won't pay the professors. It's terrible. It's so sad. It really is sad.

Being older and appreciating what that country was doing prior, it is very, very sad for me. The fact that I still have family over there. If they we were all over here, but, no, they're all over there. They're seventy and eighty. What do you do? You're not going to go to work at seventy and eighty. What are you going to do? You're living off your pension and Social Security. I don't know.

I did like statehood but not now. Now, they're not going to offer it. It will never happen. It would have to be a miracle. What I think might happen is--and other Puerto Ricans were talking about this when we were in the parade--there is going to be investors from the United States that are going to go in there and level everything and get rid of all the old people. They're all going to die anyway. They're going to die. They're going to build up these huge [hotels] because of tourism. It's an island in the Caribbean. That's what going to happen, so you're going to have Hilton and Madison and whatever. That's what they're going to do. That's what the Puerto Ricans were saying, "They're killing off the people that are there. They're dying. They won't give them electricity, so they all die." I think that's what going to happen. They're going to realize that this is a cash cow, so Trump is going to build all his hotels over there. That's what's going to happen.

LDS: Was religion a big part in raising your family?

RH: Yes, but we didn't raise Scott as a Roman Catholic because the Roman Catholics kind of turned me off because they weren't inclusive of gay people. Once you get involved with the women's movement, the anti-abortion and the anti-birth control, the Pope won't allow women as priests. I mean, that turned me off right away, and that was early. That was in the 1970s. I decided was going to raise, John actually, we both made the decision that we would raise Scott as a Protestant in the Episcopal Church because they are more inclusive. We have the gay bishop and the women priests. We have the Black bishop now, who is the bishop of all the United States. He went and spoke in the wedding, Bishop [Michael] Curry. Yes, he was in Meghan Markle's wedding in England. He made that big speech. He's great. He's like a rock star, a really nice man. We raised him as an Episcopal, but we are involved with our church. I serve on the vestry board, which is, in the Episcopal Church, the Protestants are ruling, unlike the Catholics. The people that rule the parish are laypeople; they're not priests. The priest works for the laypeople. The laypeople employ him or her, and I like that. I like that the laypeople [rule], so it's not priests. It's not controlled by men. They could be women. There is a whole bunch of people. I became a vestry member last December, so I am serving a three-year term. Next December is the end of my term, then I can serve another three-year term. You know, we have terms. It's really good. I'm involved with two committees at church. One is the children's choir, because I still like to teach children's choir, and the other one is stewardship, which is the way we pay for the church, you know, getting people to pledge and stuff. Scott, they don't belong to an organized church, but eventually that's going to change. Once they start having kids, that's when it'll change. They're always working, those two. They do nothing but work. [Editor's Note: Bishop Michael Bruce Curry was elected to Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in 2015, becoming the first African American to serve in this position.]

LDS: Time for our last question.

RH: Yes?

LDS: Is there anything you would like to share about your life that we have not covered that you would like on record?

RH: Well, you've covered my education, career, and my family. What I wanted to stress is that that's really important to me, family, and the fact that I didn't appreciate for a long time what my parents did for me. That's because you're immature. I was immature for a long time. Even when I was in school, you know how I was. I was immature. I was. I didn't appreciate a lot of things, the sacrifices that my parents made until it was too late, until my parents were deceased, or my mother, her mind was gone. I regret that to this day. I believe my parents are with me, even though they are deceased, that your family is always with you in the afterlife with Christ. Every day, I thank them. I tell Scott, my son, and my daughter-in-law now, Kathy, I say, "Learn to appreciate your parents, because when we're gone, it's too late. You got to be here and now." That's the main thing, and I think if people were to only understand that, I think the world would be a lot better. You know what I mean? I think people would be nicer to each other if they treated each other like family, regardless of where we come from, what we believe, what our political [views are], whatever. Yes, it is a struggle now with the craziness that goes on here, but I still have hope. I won't give up. Until there is a last breath, I won't give up. So, the struggle continues. [laughter] I think that my legacy in school and with all my students--remember, you two were my students--that I'm hoping that they will change the world even more than what I could have done. I believe that with all my heart. The last thing that I said to them when I left the last day of school was, "Change the world." If you remember me, that's fine. If not, I'll be around. It's an honor. It's something that I think is something no teacher wants anymore. That's it, that's all folks. [laughter]

LDS: We want to thank you for the time you have given us for the interview. This concludes the interview.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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