# Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

# ROSARIO MORALES

Interviewed by

KELLY ANDERSON

January 29 and 30, 2005
Cambridge, MA

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with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

Narrator

The daughter of Puerto Rican immigrants, Rosario Morales (b. 1930) was raised in *el barrio* of New York City. In 1949, Morales joined the Communist Party and married Richard Levins, the son of Ukranian Jewish immigrants and a scientist. Together they moved to Puerto Rico in 1951 where they became active in the Puerto Rican Communist Party and the Fellowship of Reconciliation while working a small farm in the mountains. They eventually returned to the U.S., first to Chicago then to Cambridge, but the people and culture of Puerto Rico remained at the center of Morales' work. Morales and her daughter Aurora Levins Morales became active in the women's movement in the late 60s, were a part of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, and co-authored a book of poetry and prose called *Getting Home Alive* in 1986. Morales is recognized as a major contemporary Puerto Rican writer.

Interviewer

Kelly Anderson (b.1969) is an educator, historian, and community activist. She has an M.A. in women's history from Sarah Lawrence College and is a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. history at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Abstract

In this oral history Morales discusses her family background and childhood in New York City, discovering radical politics, and her work as a writer and poet. Morales details her experience within the Communist Party, both in New York and in Puerto Rico, and her developing feminist consciousness. She speaks to the roles of women in the Party, the Left in general, and in the academy. Morales is forthcoming about her relationships with her husband and children, particularly her daughter (and co-author) Aurora. Her work as a writer and poet is the predominant theme of the latter half of the interview.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Six 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Peggy McKinnon. Audited for accuracy by Kelly Anderson and edited for clarity by Revan Schendler. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Rosario Morales.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

**Bibliography:** Morales, Rosario. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Video recording, January 29-30, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Rosario Morales, interview by Kelly Anderson, video recording, January 29, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

**Bibliography:** Morales, Rosario. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Transcript of video recording, January 29-30, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Rosario Morales, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, January 29, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23–24.

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Transcript of interview conducted January 29 and 30, 2005, with:

ROSARIO MORALES
Cambridge, MA

by: KELLY ANDERSON

ANDERSON: This is Kelly Anderson and Rosario Morales at her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on January 29th, 2005, and we are doing an oral history for the Voices of Feminism Oral History Project at the Sophia Smith Collection.

We will start by talking about your family background, because, as I explained to you, this is a combination between a life history and a focus on your activism, so we don't want to just talk about you as an activist without any context of where you came from or what came before and after. So let's start by talking about your family background, and talk about your grandparents. Tell me what you know about your parent's parents and their life — and I'm assuming it was Puerto Rico.

MORALES: It was Puerto Rico, in fact, he was in one small town called Naranjito; and Naranjito was made fun of because it was so small it had only one street. I know from my daughter, that the Moraleses, my father's family, helped found the town. There are Moraleses all over the place. I'm sure that if I wander around the town, practically everybody is my cousin or some sort of relative. The Moures, that's my mother's family, and my father's family, were prominent families there. All of which I didn't know growing up.

I grew up in New York City, the daughter of working-class people. I had some sense that my — you know, that there was some land involved with that. My grandmother's father had a store, a grocery store there, and I did visit when I was ten. But we're talking about the colonies. So the store and houses were wooden, what would seem to me like cabins here. I lived in a brick apartment building in New York City, so there is no sense in which I got an idea that my — what my daughter found out [was] that my family were large landowners, in the past, downwardly mobile, these were remnants of the big estates, that they were slave owners at some point in the past. All of that I was completely ignorant of.

I grew up in Manhattan, in the Bronx, in el barrio in Manhattan, at a time when the Puerto Rican population was really quite small, where my mother and I could on subways use Spanish as a secret language — which

is totally impossible at this present moment. It was before World War II with the big migrations. So, um, I grew up not really understanding that, but really growing up in that community of New York Puerto Ricans that had come in — most of the people I knew had come in around the ’20s and ’30s. My mother came in ’29, which is really a terrible year to try and get a job in New York City.

The stories that I grew up on are the stories of the Depression, of their having no job, of hunger. Of course, they are my mother’s stories principally and my mother dramatized, but I also know it was real and they had real economic problems when they came, and that by the time I’m really conscious, things had gotten better. My father had a steady job, this kind of steady job, [things] changed and improved during the war. He was able become an electrician. We never were in want, that I could see, there was little money, scarcities, that kind of thing, but all our preoccupations were about that and all my friends and relations, with some exceptions — one of my best friends, her father owned a factory making, I think, ribbons and labels — but most of the people were working-class people, so that’s how I grew up. In complete ignorance of the fact that my family were from this background.

ANDERSON: Did you have a relationship with your grandparents?

MORALES: Not really. Not really. I know that I was taken to Puerto Rico when I was, I don’t know, a year, year and half old, something like that. My mother went and eventually had to come back because I got sick. Um, we went when I was ten. So I have a memory of going when I was ten. And I didn’t go back until I was married and 21 years old. So I remember seeing three of my grandparents — my father’s father had died long before. I remember seeing them, meeting them. I particularly got to know a little bit more of my maternal grandfather. He was still alive when I went back when I was 21. No, I never had any real relationship with them.

ANDERSON: And they never visited in New York.

MORALES: Not the grandparents.

ANDERSON: Do you remember what it felt like to go back to Puerto Rico at ten? I mean, you don’t remember the –

MORALES: Not go back, because I was born here.

ANDERSON: Well, when you went as a baby, wouldn’t have remembered the trip at a year or two.

MORALES: Oh not at all. And remember, I’m telling you, this is a person whose — I have no memory of that trip whatsoever, just what I’ve been told.

ANDERSON: Even the ten-year-old trip, you have no memory?

MORALES: Not the little-girl stuff.

ANDERSON: So what do you remember when you were ten about being there? What did it feel like?

MORALES: It was interesting. I mean it starts with a trip by boat during a storm and enormous sea sickness and my parents out flat, just sort of sitting there letting the stewards take care of us, because nobody could cope. It was just very traumatic, kind of — what was traumatic was having my hair combed afterwards, because it hadn't been combed in five days. Um, I had a vision of sailing in, which I've never seen anywhere else — ever since, I have gone in by plane — seeing these big white colonial buildings which were on the docks, so I have a picture of that. I have mental pictures of the wooden houses, of a brown wooden house, my grandmother's house, my father's mother's house, with steep steps. A lot of us have pictures of that one. I had my tenth birthday party in that house and me and my cousins are all posed in front of these big cement steps going up to a brown house.

I have sort of snapshotty views of remembering my grandmother, my maternal grandmother. I have no pictures of my paternal grandmother, my father's mother, except sort of a set picture of the whole family very early on, but I do remember her being sort of knobby — rheumatism and stuff. I was told later — my daughter unearthed our family history — that she did a lot of hand work, which I'm sure she couldn't possibly do with her hands in that state. But these are just glimpses. The countryside really — you know, we went to the farm — all the images I have are of the countryside. I think it really appealed to me, no doubt fueled by my father's nostalgia for the country, also. Yeah, but, that's what I remember. Individual people I remember from the photos more than from the actual experience.

ANDERSON: How did your parents meet? Did they meet on the island of Puerto Rico or in New York?

MORALES: They were part of the same town. My mother's best friend was his sister. My father's best friend was one of my uncles, if I'm not mistaken. They knew each other. It was a small town. They grew up together. My father had gone to New York already, he had trained as a teacher and for some reason or other — I think he only worked briefly for a year or something, I'm not sure — then went to the States to find a job. He was there, I think, a couple years, came back — I don't know if he came back just to visit or to find a wife, whether he came to visit and fell in love with my mother — that I have no idea. But it's not a question of meeting. They had known each other all of their lives.

My mother had fallen in love earlier with someone else who was of a more snobbish and perhaps more *buena familia*, which is the phrase that is used in my family. They were more *buena familia* than my family, which is funny, because my family is *buena familia* enough, thank you! But I gather he was whisked out of the way — she was not an acceptable — so I have no idea whether my mother fell in love with my father, but I know my father fell in love with my mother. And she agreed to marry him and he want back and that summer they married in August and she came to the States. That's the year before I was born, August 1929. Terrible time.

ANDERSON: You father had already established a life in New York.

MORALES: Some sort of a life.

ANDERSON: He had some employment when he came back to –

MORALES: I guess. He couldn't have. That I don't know, but he couldn't have. I know that by the time, supposedly by the time I was born, he was out of a job. But that could easily be the job he had before.

ANDERSON: What do you know about their feelings, or at least your mom's feelings, about coming to the United States, about leaving Puerto Rico? Do you know much about their decision to come to New York? I mean, like you said, it was before the big waves of migration. It's a small community here.

MORALES: It was a small community, but it was also a very bad time for everybody. The Depression that hit the metropolis hit Puerto Rico long before. It was hard to get employment. I think my grandfather's store was not doing too well, I'm not sure. It's interesting, I don't get a lot of that information, and again, my daughter would probably know more because she researched it and because I had less interest in all of that, in my family's background and all the things my mother was interested in — which was just family and who's married to whom and who married whom and, you know, all that kind of stuff, this kind of network of relations, throughout the island, that just didn't interest me that much. So I don't really know.

ANDERSON: Why was that, that it didn't interest you?

MORALES: For one thing, most of those people that she was talking about weren't in front of me. She's talking about people that weren't around. This is a whole island full of relations by marriage or by blood that were mythical. A few of them showed up in Puerto Rico, but it's not enough.

And, you know, I grew up — I don't remember as a little girl, but certainly as an adolescent, my consciousness of myself was as a child of immigrants. The people I related to were — you know, the passport, as I

put in a piece of writing, our passports: Where are you from? Where are your parents from? That's what we exchanged as information. It wasn't, Who is your family? Oh, they are related and they are married, oh, I know, they married so-and-so, is a cousin of so-and-so, he married your — oh, yeah. So that you end up really, in a way, as part of a conversation or beginning of a conversation finding out how you are connected. The way we are connected is, Where are you from? Where are your folks from?

I just grew up in an entirely different culture, and all that preoccupation was about something that I couldn't see, couldn't smell, hear or touch, really, so –

ANDERSON: So tell me more about your family, then. Talk to me about your parents and your home and what your home looked like, what it felt like. Were there siblings?

MORALES: My earliest memories are in Manhattan, in a house. Most of the time I was in Manhattan the house I remember was on 102nd Street and Madison, and it's a house that is no longer there. It was one of those wonderful old, brick, New York brick, houses, with tiles in the landings — when you stop and think of it, beautifully built old houses. My earliest memories [are] the house before that. I remember my sister being brought home and put out on the bed, when I was five or six, I guess, being put on the bed. And she was red in the face. You know, they tell you babies are attractive — well, they are not. Not to a six-year-old.

So I have a little bit of memories of that house, but mainly it's the house on 102nd Street which was either five or six flights up. My mother and I had some words about it toward the end of her life, because I always thought of it as the sixth-floor apartment, but you don't know what floors are counted in different part of the country. The ground floor is the ground floor and the first floor is that — anyway, five or six flights up, in the rear, which in some ways curtailed my living. My mother could not look out and see me from the window, so she didn't like [me to be outside alone] — I have really have very little memory as a kid. A lot of my best memories are school.

I remember the church we went to. I was confirmed and had my communion and confirmation in a Catholic church there, but not really part of it, I mean, going to the lessons and doing that and end up having to choose a middle name, confirmation name, pick, you know. There was St. Francis and I just picked — obviously it was a little foreign to me in some way. It was no doubt not a Puerto Rican church. I don't think I ever, as a Catholic, was in a Puerto Rican church, because when we moved to the Bronx it was mostly Polish and Irish. So there is this gap, kind of stuff. My mother particularly was Catholic in a very Puerto Rican way, not that it's universal — one of my aunts is very, very religious, but it was, she went to church, that kind of thing, but she wasn't involved in the church.

ANDERSON: What does that mean, Catholic in a Puerto Rican way?

MORALES: Just not — there wasn't the intensity, there wasn't belonging to organizations, there wasn't a whole lot of things. And mostly you went to communion, made sure your kids were confirmed — you know, baptism, confirmed, you did that kind of thing and you went to church most Sundays and if not at least on the big holidays. That kind of thing. But I ended up being more religious than my mother when I was in my adolescence. She would set me down to pray when she lost something, because I had clout.

ANDERSON: Why is that?

MORALES: Because I really became very religious in my early adolescence. I took it very seriously — which, as I say, I don't think she did very much, at least not most of her life.

ANDERSON: So you don't feel like sort of Catholic dogma, or faith, was something that was a strong presence in your household as a child?

MORALES: Not in my home. Not at all. My father went to church usually on big holidays, not on a regular basis. It was very important when we went to Church we had a nice hat on and gloves, but I mean, you know — it was an occasion of that sort. But nobody in my family but me got really serious about it so that I briefly even considered being a nun. I think again a very adolescent thing.

ANDERSON: So you had one sibling, a younger sister.

MORALES: My sister, my younger sister. She was born — as I said, it was very hard to accept a younger sister and all my earliest memories are jealous memories. She broke my doll. She, poor thing, got diphtheria and my little chick died and my early memories are that she had killed my chick. So they are all envious types of images, but we spent a lot of time together. We played together. When we fought, we were often sent to kneel down until we got over it. And of course that made us immediate allies, because *they* had oppressed us. So we had this sort of on-and-off relationship. I was that much older and brought home my interests from school and stuff because I was much more interested in school and that kind of thing, so. But there was enough of a gap so that when I was adolescent, she was too young to tag along, kind of stuff. But, yeah. And I know we had some cousins around, but my memories are mostly of my aunts and uncles, rather than anybody of my own age, growing up.

And as I've written, my parents fought a lot. My father was autocratic and jealous, a controlling male in the standard way, so that as girls we were very curtailed in what we could do, where we could go. When I

wanted to go stay at someone's house when I was 18, what he said, was, "You have a bed of your own, why do you want to go there?" So there's this real restraining of us. My mother was very beautiful: if anybody looked at her, it was her fault — standard kind of stuff. Abusive, periodically, but enough so that it frightened us. It was scary.

And my mother had us as her allies, so she basically scared us some more. You know, he could kill me. She was very dramatic, so that was the dynamic in the family, this kind of thing. And in some ways my father, in spite of being controlling, autocratic, he was in some ways more genuinely loving. It's interesting to see. And really, talk about the contradictions, um, he did a lot around the house. I mean he swept, he cooked. He taught me to cook — which is not your usual sense of a standard sexist, Latino male, you know. Some of them don't know how to boil water. So he really did a lot around the house. Both the sort of masculine kinds things, like fixing electricity, carpentry — which is where I got my interest in those things, in carpentry, you know, I built a lot of this stuff and designed it, because I got those interests from my father — but he also did a lot of the so-called feminine tasks: sweeping, finding our bobby pins when they got lost all over the — you know, three long-haired women were losing bobby pins all over the house. Teaching me to cook, clean, whatever.

ANDERSON: So which parent would you say you had a closer relationship to?

MORALES: In another way my mother. We were her allies. And my father was hard to talk to. But as I said, I think, I sense — I don't know if it's almost a sense of more security with my father, because my mother was very changeable. One minute you were a cute adorable person and the next minute she was really rejecting, whereas my father was pretty steady. He might whack you, he was violent, but he was also steady affection — including for my mother. Because we said, as kids, Divorce, divorce!

ANDERSON: Oh, you did?

MORALES: Oh yeah, we showed it all the time, we wanted them to divorce, and my father would just — well, part of it is, that's part of what a controlling male does, but I think he was genuinely really in love with my mother and didn't blow hot and cold. You know, he got fiercely angry and thought it was his right to whack her, and whack us, but he didn't blow hot and cold. And my mother yelled, too. My mother's was a sort of shallower kind of love for us. They both took wonderful care of us, it isn't in that direction. Emotionally, my sister and I had a really hard time, because we were wonderfully well fed — they were both excellent cooks — and taken care of, clothed and seen to, and guarded like holy hell, but taken care of and to some extent loved. It was just a very hard love to take.

ANDERSON: What were your coping strategies as a child or adolescent?

MORALES: Being good. Yes. Being the good one. Doing well in school. Not doing anything to irritate. It's hard for you sometimes — because one of the crucial things I have from that trip to Puerto Rico when I was ten is being hit with my father's belt, which horrified my aunt, my maternal aunt. I don't know, because that's all that I remember is that little snapshot, I can't conceive what I could have done. I can't! You know, maybe I underestimate myself, but I really — that was my strategy, would be good in school, being good at home. Whereas my sister, you know, took a different tack. She was angry, she was feisty about it, which frightened me because I didn't want anybody to stir things up any further. We just took different tacks in how to deal with the family situation, the fights and stuff, while we both were united in saying, Please divorce, please divorce.

ANDERSON: It sounds like you and your sister were always a team.

MORALES: We were. We were.

ANDERSON: It didn't really come between you.

MORALES: No, it didn't. It did later, in the sense that we've had an on-and-off relationship, in some ways. I think, um, I don't know, it's really hard to figure out what the dynamics were, but we definitely — it did come between us later, I think, as we grew into adults, so that it's an on relationship, which is interesting, because when you haven't had a relationship you start having conversations about growing up. You begin to sort some things out. It's very nice that we are talking now.

ANDERSON: Do you remember things differently, you and your sister?

MORALES: Yeah, we have different — some of the things I've written she said, "Hey, it happened this way." She's right. From her perspective, it was different. It wasn't just that we remembered it different, it was different.

ANDERSON: Did your parents stayed married for their whole lives?

MORALES: They divorced sometime — I was in Chicago, I don't know, really, when I was in my late 30s or early 40s. They divorced briefly for a couple years, beause my father had beaten my mother up. She had pictures she could take to court, she was in Puerto Rico, she had family, so it was very different from being in New York. They had a home that was given to her. And he had to accept that, but he moved, got a room across the street — which, I gather, say his television wasn't working, he'd come and watch television with her, and before you know it they were married again. They remarried.

ANDERSON: Do you think his treatment of her changed though after she divorced him and called him to task on his behavior in that way?

MORALES: I'm pretty sure it did for a while, but I know that one of the — the first time my mother fell and broke some bones I think it was because he treated her roughly, and I don't know that he was beating her but he may have pushed her. Um, and I don't know, I really don't know, she wasn't telling me that much. And I wasn't asking that much, also. So I really don't know. But I don't think he changed completely. And I don't know exactly when he started getting dementia. But that was part of his — with dementia you also get some kind of violence. And I know that toward the end, you know, I didn't realize it until I went down there, I think she broke some bones when I went down, I think she said she was desperate, she had to put him in a nursing home, so I said OK. And what I saw was my mother wasn't well. She herself was almost crazy and I think, from what I know now is, taking care of a person with dementia — both from my brief experience and also from reading about it — it takes an enormous toll on a caretaker. And she was — [even] after the doctor treated her — undernourished, but she herself was often provocative with this man who could hurt her. She often was provocative, but now was really dangerous. So it was really a scene that had to be broken up in some way.

ANDERSON: Right. Right. We'll talk about that perhaps a little bit more tomorrow, when we'll talk about your adult relationship, but let's talk about your childhood just a little bit more. Um, you said that you were very guarded, and I assume some of that is because you were two females living in that family, that you might have received a little bit different treatment, given a little more liberties, if you had been male children. So, what kind of messages did you get from your parents about what it meant to be female? What were the expectations for you as a girl? Or how did they treat you as a girl child?

MORALES: Definitely for me to get married. Lots of femininity. My mother was an extremely feminine woman. My father appreciated — wanted her all dressed up, wanted her gussied up. Ah, lots of that. Obviously two models about what it meant to be a woman, because my mother to some extent was very dependent on my father. But she was so feisty with him. Like my sister, she fought back. I mean that's what — she felt to me like provoking — this one is dangerous, don't provoke this guy. But she was not docile — which is interesting — she was not a docile woman. So it was this woman who fought but she didn't get out. And, you know, to some extent we didn't understand her. What could she have done? She was not prepared to do anything [ I used 'not prepared' here the way it's used in Spanish, meaning 'not trained'] and she was — I think both of them were not quite at home, I don't know, not quite at home, so this whole

immigrant stance of not being sure of their place here. So I think it would have been really hard for her.

But, you know, as kids we didn't see that, we just wanted them to stop. Especially in our adolescence was when things got really hard between them. So my sense is this double message of dependency, but also, you know, women could be feisty. But I was not expected to do very much on my own. But in spite of being expected to marry I was expected to go to school and do well in school, unlike some girls that I knew. Their families were against all that. My family was very pleased — I think that's part of how I earned my good-girl status, is that I did so well in school. And, you know, they approved when you did well, but they didn't — it's so interesting they did that, but they didn't have, like, a career in mind for me at all. I mean it was just, I was going to get married, but — I mean, it's very contradictory.

ANDERSON: They didn't expect college for you.

MORALES: Oh, they did!

ANDERSON: They did expect college.

MORALES: But not in any sense [of], you know, what are you going to do for a living, kind of, in that sense. But yes, of course. They had no hesitation. It was easy in New York in the sense that they didn't have to have any major outlay because I went to Hunter College. So financially it wasn't a humungous burden at all. But they, you know, they didn't urge me to go to work, like some other families would have done because they needed the income or they were expected to or something. No, they were very pleased for me to go to college. I think one of my — they were for education all along, both in Puerto Rico and two of my aunts went to college and one trained for a lawyer**.** There was a real sense of education being good.

ANDERSON: I know your mother worked too. Do you think your parents thought of themselves as working class or as middle class? How would they identify?

MORALES: I got a complete mixed message in a sense. I realized that afterwards, but they had a kind of sense of superiority, that came across in various ways. Um, in small ways. But they were both members of unions. The way they thought about what they were going to do with themselves in the future was, you know, it was about jobs, and it was about saving money, it was not about anything middle class. In fact it was my husband's mother who told them their savings should be in stocks. You know, they — you know what I mean? They had a mutual fund simply because of, you know, somebody else told them about it. But, no, I think they really acted in the States as working-class people. They were both, particularly my father, was very pro-union, you know, that kind of stuff.

So I got both messages in a sense that we were slightly superior people. My father didn't ever invite any of his workmates to the house. Partly maybe because they were male competition for him, but also, I don't know. My sister says different things about it than I do, but they just were not invitable. I don't know. I have no idea. But that's important because my mother did make some friends from her job and bring them home. Of course they were women. But also I think my mother didn't have this sense of protecting us from an alien world. And I don't know to what extent the alien world was about class, or to what extent it was about culture, to what extent it was my father's general paranoias — I have no idea.

ANDERSON: Describe the racial mix of your neighborhood. You were in upper Manhattan, not the Lower East Side.

MORALES: No. Yes, el barrio was in the east there, from 100th Street to 110th or something like that, in there. And most of the people I knew were white to tan, kind of stuff, there is such a mixture. My Uncle Flores was darkish, so there's a real — I didn't tend to think of people that were Puerto Rican in terms of color. Only African Americans, you know, the Negroes, et cetera, et cetera. But my parents were racists, so I did get a sense of superiority, and interestingly, pity — which is a way of *pobrecita*, you know, poor baby, she's black — that kind of thing comes from my mother.

ANDERSON: Would that be for black Puerto Ricans or for African Americans?

MORALES: That was for black Puerto Ricans. That was for black Puerto Ricans.

ANDERSON: Was your neighborhood mostly Puerto Rican then?

MORALES: Oh, el barrio was Puerto Rican, definitely.

ANDERSON: Right, and the edges were –

MORALES: And the edges were an African American community — somehow I think of it as downtown from me, but then I don't know, my memory isn't that sharp. I knew there was an Italian –

ANDERSON: Closer to Columbia — well, no, you were on the East Side. Yeah.

MORALES: Yeah, and I have no idea.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORALES: But that was my sense, that over there, there was a black community and there was an Italian community where one of our cousins lived, because

he had to deal — he was guy and he had to deal with some gangs in the tenements and stuff, so I heard some rumors about that end of the world over there. But I was in a Puerto Rican community, but not all the kids in my school were Puerto Rican.

ANDERSON: OK. What was your school makeup like?

MORALES: I can't tell you right now, except I knew there was one Jewish girl, because I accused her of killing Christ — obviously I got enough of a Catholic education for that one.

ANDERSON: You made up for it.

MORALES: (Laughs) I think I did. Um, yes, it was my karma to move to a Jewish neighborhood. Oh, I remember Puerto Rican kids in my junior high school. There were some Anglo kids, I don't know what their background was, I think there was a girl named Alice Peters, who was the girl who walked home with me, because the junior high school was way off by the river on 99th, I think, and it was a long walk home. She would walk home to my neighborhood. I don't really have clear memories. Most of the people I remember were white. I don't remember hanging out with black people, with many black people at all, not if they were not Puerto Rican.

ANDERSON: Right. So would describe most of your friends then as white? Or were your friends, the kids in your neighborhood, mostly Puerto Rican, versus the kids at school?

MORALES: Well, you know, I don't remember my friends very much, and I don't know to what extent the way I was kept home meant that I didn't have friends or that my memory is so bad. I feel really terrible that I don't remember. I remember this one girl, when I was 11 — when I was 16, I went back, I was operated on several times, I spent some time in the hospital — when I was sixteen she was a nurse's aide and I remember her in her little pink dress. But I don't really, I think that I got a scholarship when I graduated from the sixth grade and I think the other one, the boy who won, was also Puerto Rican. I know there were Puerto Ricans in the school. But I just don't have any specific memories beyond these little things but a lot of it is that is that I don't have that good a memory.

ANDERSON: Yeah. You spoke Spanish or English or both at home?

MORALES: That's so interesting. I spoke only Spanish until I went to school, as far as I know, and I have very faint memories of what it sounded like. And I learned very quickly. By first grade I already was getting A's. And then after that, I remember I was sitting with my sister and I trying to figure out what we did talk, and I think we ended up talking mostly English to their

mostly Spanish, because we were in school and that's what we mostly talked. I understood all Spanish, there was no problem with comprehension. And also I think it wasn't just mostly Spanish, it was Spanglish, which is what they talked. And I suspect I talked with something I call Inglañol, because Spanglish is Spanish which incorporates English words and I speak English incorporating Spanish words. That's what my husband and I talk all the time now, you know, because English became my principal language. And in Spanish I never went to school, and I only got tutored by my father in how to do — that I can remember — the accentuation in Spanish. He sat me down and autocratically insisted, If you don't do it right you get whacked, kind of teaching? But I did learn then, and he thought the Spanish language was wonderful, and he really thought that it was the most beautiful language in the world. So I was always getting that kind of propaganda about Spanish. But I hung out, I mean, the places I loved was school, the library when I moved to the Bronx, you know, wherever I was — that's English. But I could translate, because when I was — I don't remember which of my two operations — maybe it was when I was eleven, I translated for the doctors at that time. So I could go back and forth very easily in both of them. But my vocabulary was in English.

ANDERSON: And your parents, did they end up being fluent?

MORALES: They spoke both languages, but my father and I used to do the *Reader's Digest* Improve Your Word Power**.** He always got higher scores than me all the time. I got kind of sad when I surpassed him because I was very proud of him. He had an immense English vocabulary.

ANDERSON: How did they learn English?

MORALES: They went to school in English. It's a colonial government, they weren't taught in their own language. So they had basic English when they came here. Then of course the rest depended on them. And my father read a lot, mostly newspapers. But he was very interested in the English language and my mother read magazines and newspapers. So they both were pretty fluent — with accents, but pretty fluent.

ANDERSON: I'm going to change the tape.

END DVD 1

DVD 2

ANDERSON: Let's talk about school a little bit. You've said how much you enjoyed school. School was sort of refuge, it sounds like. You did well at school.

MORALES: Yeah, but before we do that, I realize, thinking back, that one of the things that's missing from talking about living in el barrio was that my parents hung out a lot with a whole coterie of Puerto Ricans. A lot of them were, I guess we could just call landsmen**,** people from their home town. So there was this whole bunch of people — when they came in they were not loners, there were already people here from that town and more people came in — or family. So there is this whole community of which I was part, that is sort of missing from my story. And I just wanted to mention that, especially in the barrio but at all times these are the people that we visited, that were part of my community in some way. The Puerto Rican side of my life was these people, mostly from that area of Puerto Rico, relatives or just people from that town.

ANDERSON: So let's just talk about school. I want to know what kind of school you went to. Did you go to public school or Catholic school?

MORALES: I went to public school all the way. I can remember all of them. PS 72, which was where I went up to sixth grade — I loved the things I did there. That's where I learned, aside from basics, I learned to draw, to write poetry, to sew — all of which are still interests in my life. I was a teacher's pet — sometimes the kids stood outside and, you know (laughs). Yeah, my memories of — I think this is a period when they changed. They were trying to interest kids in a different way in school, so that they would have railroads as a project, I think that was part of the new progressive education. [We did art, math, geography, English—all our regular subjects—within the project.] And I remember that we, you know, built this railroady thing, we wrote about it, we did whatever — all of that kind of thing, I loved all of it. I even loved grammar when I was in school. There's very little that I didn't. I learned to love science.

So I did well and I enjoyed it and continued — I mean, it's one of the things I pursued throughout my life. See, my memories of home always had some painful parts, but even though I'm sure painful things happened in school, that's what my memories of school are. Those are erased — my memories of school are always, yeah, one kid tried to beat me up, yeah, all this happened, but mostly what I remember is loving being there. And September still is the beginning of the year for me.

Unlike others where, Oh, summer, summer I was home! Summer was not, and home wasn't this place I loved to be. We didn't go anywhere. I can remember one or two years that we went somewhere and that's it. One summer, I think in my teens, we went somewhere. But, you know, my father in fact worked extra in summer, he'd go off and work at camps, he'd take a Saturday job. So summer was not what I looked forward to.

ANDERSON: Were you expected to work as a teen in the summer?

MORALES: No. That would get me more money, put me out of my father's control. Actually the first time I worked in the summer was the summer I was 19. And that's when I had a job for just a couple of weeks. I saved every cent and used it to give myself a better allowance. My father was incredibly stingy with his allowances. And when the subway fare doubled he didn't increase my allowance. I didn't have money to sit and have a Coke with my friends — let alone ice cream soda, forget it. Because he gave both me and my mother very, very small allowances and some of that [was] maybe we didn't have great resources. A lot of that was because he was very frugal, but also very controlling.

ANDERSON: Right. At school, how did you feel? Did you feel singled out [because] of your ethnic background or your combination of speaking English and Spanish? Was there anything that marked you as Puerto Rican?

MORALES: I don't have memories of that. I only remember that — again, I have to remind you that my memories are faint, a little like snapshots rather than any kind of concrete memory. One of the snapshots I have, which was, because I was a monitor, because I was good, I'd get to go to other classes and send messages and I walked into someone's classroom and someone was humiliating a Puerto Rican boy. Obviously that meant something to me, because I've forgotten everything else, but I remember that. So I don't have any — I didn't in fact have these memories that I retrieved later, like my adolescent memory of going to my sister's school and having people being totally surprised, as if I'd grown three extra limbs or something, because I was in college. So there are these little things.

So obviously there was more going on than I was cognizant of, but these little bits of what I remembered later. I knew, for example, that my mother, when she went to get the apartment in the Bronx, she moved us [to] the Bronx — later I found out that my father was involved with his male friends, you know, they played cards and gambled a little, and money was hemorrhaging out. And she wanted him away from this, so she moved to the Bronx where we weren't surrounded by this community.

ANDERSON: So that's why you moved to the Bronx!

MORALES: I didn't know that until later. But that's why we moved to the Bronx. And she went to look for the apartment, not just because she was the one looking but because she was whiter than my father, she had a better accent and she passed for Italian.

ANDERSON: It was an Italian neighborhood that you moved into then?

MORALES: No, but Italian was acceptable and Puerto Rican wasn't, so. And for years we left down in the mailbox the name of the people who had the apartment before us, Foster. I mean, there's all these little things you know that are in there. But I don't have any direct memories of being discriminated or devalued or anything like that. I just have this sort of miasma out of which, you know, I go like, Oh, so that's why. But I don't have memories of anything.

ANDERSON: It sounds like a combination of privilege and self-protection, a little bit of both. You filtered out the stuff that might have been painful at the time and also that you were –

MORALES: I was light skinned –

ANDERSON: Yeah, you were light skinned.

MORALES: – and spoke good English, without an accent, so people were surprised.

ANDERSON: You had employment as a family and so –

MORALES: I think you're right.

ANDERSON: What do you remember about your parent's politics or the conversations in your home about politics?

MORALES: Well, they were definitely for *Popular* [i.e. for the *Partido Popular Democratico*, the political party in the 1930's that mobilized the rural poor with the slogan "Bread, Land and Liberty" and was linked with Roosevelt's New Deal], particularly my father, pro-union here in the States, pro Muñoz Marin, that meant he was not quite indipendentista but, you know, for feeding the poor and that kind of progressive-edged politics, growing up — which changed, particularly my father. My father became quite the conservative racist and stuff like that. But yeah, especially — it was kind of hard to become a Communist. There was a whole period [when I thought] I better not raise any political questions and if he raised some I would deflect them, because there would be a fight. So that was interesting, but I grew up — remember, see, I grew to consciousness during the war. And during the war, what floated around was not the stuff we have now, but much more democratic kinds of ideas. Women in movies were more feisty, there was a just a general sort of democratic feel to things, so I grew up with that kind of stuff. And as I say, a lot of pro-union, pro-justice kinds of stuff.

ANDERSON: So some of those values you got at home.

MORALES: Yeah, and in the world. It was that kind of a time.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So you started Hunter College right out of high school?

MORALES: Yeah, I went to Hunter College High School.

ANDERSON: Oh, Hunter College High School as well.

MORALES: Yeah, so it was almost automatic if you didn't know any better, and I didn't know any better, because I didn't know about colleges, I didn't know about applying and my parents here didn't either. And no one advised me. It was just a good automatic thing to do if you wanted to go to college. It was an unfortunate thing because I wanted to do physics, and at that time physics was — we didn't even have slide rules! We did pages and pages and pages of calculations because we didn't have slide rules. It was pitiful. And so, at some point I gave it up. Also, me and this young woman and I were the two best students, and she was so much better than I it was incredible. And on top of that she had brothers at MIT and knew where you had to go to get a good physics education, and I went, This is hopeless. So I gave up physics. But that was what I was interested in when I was in school — while at the same time, doing a lot of cultural work. We did radio programs, we recited poetry, that kind of stuff. And in college I also did — so when I switched, I switched over to Speech and Dramatics, which is — but I was always interested in science and I became interested in science in seventh grade with a teacher — this is still in Manhattan.

And I pursued some kind of science or another, because after Speech and Dramatics [an academic department at Hunter College] didn't seem to be like a good career move for me, it was really clear, I was not going to get away and do, you know, summer stock kind of stuff. I'm not going to get away from home. I mean, it was just not my kind of world. It is very competitive. I wasn't. I, like so many people [who] get up on stage, I was timid. So that seemed like another world. So Hunter College was one of the few places that had a course in neurology at the undergraduate level and I took it and loved it, and then had a hard time trying to pursue it, because I couldn't find it in other colleges. I wasn't in Hunter College for very long.

ANDERSON: Where did you end up graduating?

MORALES: City [College], but after an enormous detour I went to [the University of] Puerto Rico, went to Cornell first when I married, then I went to Puerto Rico, then I came back to Hunter. So I got this whole peregrination, just taking courses wherever I could. That's the essence of it. I kept pursuing mostly science stuff.

ANDERSON: So which comes first, meeting your husband or joining the Communist Party?

MORALES: I was being actively wooed by a group of women at Hunter College. And in fact — because a lot of what was happening to me intellectually was that I was losing my religion. I was busy sorting it out. I had two close friends in the neighborhood, Norma and Laura. Norma was atheist. And Laura, with me, sort of questioned — besides her talking boys all the time, the other thing we talked about was religion. So I was in the process of losing my religion and they gave me, as a present, a course at the Jefferson School, which was the Communist Party school, on — I can't remember what it was called, but it's basically the philosophy of historical materialism, which it really in the course of it talked about the history of religion and how religious ideas came about and why, et cetera — which was wonderful for me. First, I fell in love with that way of thinking, with dialectics, which I still do, the sense of understanding through the processes of history and the science — all of it was just wonderful. So I was wooed through philosophy and through essentially everything else, that they talked about, which was in line with my own ideas about what was fair, what was just in the world.

So I was in that process, and then I got myself a job that summer. I was bound to get myself a job. As a college girl, I went and got a job, all through District 65, I think, was the union hall. They had a big board with your names on it. I couldn't find mine — turned out that they interpreted it as everyone does, my name is a man's name so I was listed under the guys. I got a job tagging dresses, I guess now they do that mechanically, at a warehouse where the woman I was working with was one of Dick's best friends.

She taught me the International as well as teaching me some things, and this woman was Aileen Kraditor. And this woman has written some important feminist texts. She taught me some basic feminist stuff. I mean, that's one of the things that we talked about there. I can't remember anything but that and the International, but we talked all the time in the stacks while we tagged dresses. And she took me home with her and he and she collaborated on putting leftist words to Gilbert and Sullivan, so I definitely had to meet him. And we fell in love instantaneously. Unlike other such romances, we're still at it — so that one worked out. But yeah, I was already on the way, but I didn't actually become a member until the 29th of that year, July 29th, just after I met him. And that's a very crucial day. I lost my job. I joined the Communist Party and Dick and I decided that we were going to do the equivalent of being engaged. We didn't call it that.

ANDERSON: How did you lose your job?

MORALES: Just laid off.

ANDERSON: It didn't have anything to do with your ideas or politics?

MORALES: No, no. A lot of people were laid off. I was laid off. But I fortunately got six weeks and accumulated enough money to give myself a decent allowance for the rest of my stay at home. It wasn't too long, because I married the next year.

ANDERSON: OK. So you met your husband, you do not marry at that time, you stayed at home –

MORALES: No, I was 18 at the time. We didn't even tell our parents until months and months and months later, because we were both going to be deemed too young, we knew that. And besides, we'd only just met. We knew each other two weeks when we decided this. So we had the sense not to tell. We exchanged rubber bands. Made jokes, like, Ho, ho, ho, an engagement ring. And then at Christmas we told them and it was — my parents liked it. I guess I hung out with Jewish kids so much that it was no big deal that I married a Jew.

Dick's mother — his father was dead — was not so happy. It had to do primarily with my being Puerto Rican, um, a Catholic, and they had hopes for him. He was the bright boy. He was supposed to go into important things, according to what they considered. He would become a doctor. She said later, she had wanted him to write musicals and plays and she would get front-row seats, but they wanted him to do something exceptional or something, a cancer researcher or, you know — but become famous in some way. Getting married at that age, when we were still in college, was not in their plans — and particularly not to me. I was not a nice Jewish girl.

And who knows, I think that they asked Dick, his mother asked Dick, whether there was any black mixture. And Dick said very truthfully, Yeah, there's such-and-such a percentage of white, and such a percentage of black, and such a percentage of Indian — you know, sort of like, You sort it out. Particularly her, who was not wanting the marriage. But ineffectual. She didn't really — you know, it wasn't a question of pursuing this or making it really harder. Maybe psychically, but –

ANDERSON: So she attended your wedding?

MORALES: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. There was no breech or anything, she just sort of whined. She disliked it. But, you know, what could she do? He was an immovable force. I think she always had trouble with him in that sense. And he didn't do what she wanted him to do. I think if his father had been alive, it might have been a different story, because his father was an effectual sort of person and he definitely had real plans for Dick, this bright young man. And we don't know, we don't know. I don't know if he would have been equally opposed. We have no idea. He died when Dick was 16. But his mother, you know, voiced some objections, but she greeted me nicely. I mean, it wasn't like she was rude to me, nothing like that. Just simply — again, so much of my stories are in the background,

it's this kind of stuff that is never something that became — in fact the only time I was insulted directly in that way when I was growing up was when someone threw stones at me because I hung out with a Jew. I was stoned as Jew, not as Puerto Rican.

ANDERSON: Yes, you've written about that.

MORALES: But the stuff about being in Puerto Rico always has that kind of flavor to it. It's happening slightly off stage, too. There's always some awareness but not having been directly stopped by being directly confronted.

ANDERSON: Can you remember, are we talking about 1949?

MORALES: Yes.

ANDERSON: Can you remember your ideas at the time about politics: what sealed the deal for you in terms of joining the Communist Party? What was the most attractive and what kind of things were you all talking about?

MORALES: God, there we go with the memory stuff. God!

ANDERSON: It's only 55 years ago (laughs).

MORALES: Well, yes, there's that, too. I don't know.

ANDERSON: What was so exciting to you?

MORALES: I don't know. And remember, this is a really bad time to be joining the Communist Party.

ANDERSON: That's right.

MORALES: Um, it must have been all the people and their ideas and, I think, I mean, I tried to think back — it was interesting because I joined the Communist Party and aligned with a group of people who were very critical within the Communist Party. It was interesting, it was very alive, very full of ideas and discussion and argument about what needed to be done in the country at that time, you know. Definitely with Dick a real excitement, not just acceptance about my being Puerto Rican, an understanding of Puerto Rico as a colony. I don't know. It was just this kind of a ferment of ideas, almost like — but within a small group. Whereas with the feminist movement, the antiwar movement and everything, and here within this small group, at a time when things had shifted — so I mean, one of my memories of the end of war — [I have no idea what I was trying to say.]

Mind you, I was not, even though I had all these ideas, I wasn't very politically minded, but I had a real sense of, like, movies changing, you know, and becoming grim. There was a real change in the atmosphere in

the country, and this was a group that was ebullient and full of ideas about — the kinds of thing that, marriage and fairness, you know. With the family I grew up with, fair and just were really high on my agenda, personally as well as politically.

So I can't tell you chapter and verse, except I think back into that time and those people and it was both personally, in the sense of the kinds of networks of friendship, [and] politically, in the kinds of ideas they were talking, culturally, because they lay around, that group of people, and, you know, listened to classical music lying all over the rug at Aileen's house, and their ideas of feminism were being discussed, introduced, and they were wildly exciting to me. Just before I met Dick I had been about to dump — I [had] just been dating this guy, [he had taken] me out, and for our second date, I don't know, I was proposing that I take him out, which he found truly humorous. But I was determined. So I was already all this feminist stuff, I found it very important and exciting. Of course he never got his date, because I met Dick and that was that. But that's all I can sort of figure out about it, because I don't have concrete memories of exactly what kinds of stuff we talked about or what the exact politic [was].

I know that I was there at Peekskill. This is one of the things I was able to see and feel myself. I have memories of — this is the second piece of the — I think it was denied at first and then we — Dick was in the guard they [were] all around the edges guarding and I was in there listening. I remember the buses being stoned. And I remember coming home in a taxi from where the bus left us off, talking to the driver and seeing the newspapers, having them call it The Peekskill Riot. All of a sudden we said, We rioted — not that they attacked us. And just hearing how the newspapers, you know — so in fact a lot my politicization happened after I joined the Party because I was able to experience and see stuff that I couldn't make sense of home and school in quite the same way.

ANDERSON: Right. What was the demographic makeup of this loose network that you're referring to? Were you the only Puerto Rican in the group?

MORALES: I do think so.

ANDERSON: Were there a lot of women?

MORALES: There were women. I don't remember how many. I think there was a preponderance of guys. Dick's friend Bernie — Dick remembers, since it was his group of friends, he remembered more than I did. Um, in Hunter College it was all girls, all women. Again, I think they were all white. Preponderance of Jews because it was a Jewish neighborhood, and Dick's group — Aileen and Bernie and Paul, those are the names I do remember. I don't remember all their names, who were Jewish. Yeah, so this preponderance of white — and I don't think I remember a Puerto Rican in those immediate groups that I was part of.

ANDERSON: Right. Right.

MORALES: But a real understanding of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, and complete sort of acceptance. It was no big deal except that Dick was particularly interested in politics in the colonies, knowing what was happening in Puerto Rico. One of the main things, I remember my father going out — people didn't even know where Puerto Rico was, let alone what was happening in Puerto Rico. He [Dick] knew more than me.

ANDERSON: What kind of literature were you reading at the time, in terms of getting your ideas? Do you remember anybody who moved you or radicalized you?

MORALES: That's one of the things I most forget. I have been known to pick up a book and say, How interesting, how exciting, I've never read it — and it's underlined by me, with notes on the margins. So you're asking a really difficult question. I have absorbed something but I don't remember that I read it. So I really don't know. I really don't know. I'm sure there were magazines and the Party paper and um, talks within the groups, remember that, the part of the — what you did in the branches [was] you read stuff and discussed it. So I'm sure I read stuff, certainly I was in tons of discussions. These people were verbal if they were anything. So they were always discussing something. So yeah. When we were married is when the Korean War starts — it was a little later — but yeah, everything was discussed. I'm sure I was in the swim of it but [to] tell you what it was, what we wrote? No. That's beyond me.

ANDERSON: Can you talk about the fear about being found out or — I mean, it was a climate, as you refer to [it], a very intense repression against any leftist, but especially Communists. So how did you all deal with that? Did you feel like you were living a life of secrecy? Or were you careful, or cautious –

MORALES: Not in New York, not while we were in school. I don't remember that. When we were in Cornell, yes. One of the first things we did, because we arrived at Cornell and we weren't too sure what was going on, and so part of my contribution to a leaflet we were going to put in mailboxes was to go and read the *New York Times*, what they'd been reporting what happened, as against what they were now saying [about how the Korean war started.] But we didn't sign it with our names and put it in secretly. And Cornell was a really strange place, I mean it was full of FBI agents, because there was nuclear physics going on, various sorts of and, you know — in fact there was a parking problem because the FBI weren't paying their parking fines — it was really completely overrun and that's when I remember a sense of secrecy, of not saying who you were. I don't remember what was expected at the time, but, yes, I remember that.

One of the things that was a relief about moving to Puerto Rico was that we didn't [engage] in secrecy. Puerto Rico was just a different atmosphere, although especially a lot of the anticommunism had been imported from the United States — some was domestic but the sort of mania was American. That wasn't part of how we lived. There was repression of various sorts but there wasn't secrecy. Um, but yeah, in Cornell particularly that year, we were at Cornell, I remember.

ANDERSON: But not in New York, you felt free to move about, and –

MORALES: I don't remember any of it, no.

ANDERSON: Attend meetings without fear?

MORALES: No, we went to the movies, we went to the mass meetings, we went to the Jefferson School. Jefferson School was sitting out there open to — I took a class, I don't remember what else I did, but, you know, there were various events and parties and that kind of stuff.

ANDERSON: And why did you guys go to Ithaca?

MORALES: Dick had already decided to transfer to Ithaca, when I met him. He was in the process of transferring. He was going to NYU for some reason, I guess mostly, I don't remember, I think it was a question of what scholarships he got. I don't quite remember the particulars of it, but it was a horrible school, it was real pre-med, trying to know what grades they were going to get on an exam and all of sudden you have the exam. Fascist teacher, literally, imported. He hated it. And he ended up talking to someone who said, "Come on up to Ithaca," and he was interested, particularly in P\population biology and in the agriculture school. He found someone who was willing to mentor him, and so he had already — so we met that summer and he disappeared in the fall.

ANDERSON: OK. And you stayed in New York for another year.

MORALES: Yeah, and we had stilted conversations on the phone. I didn't have a phone at home, I grew up with a phone on the third floor apartment landing, upstairs with, you know, people passing by, so it wasn't a place I [felt] comfortable, the way I am now, jabbering the way I do now. And he came home for Christmas. His mother and I went up, I think spring sometime and visited. So I did see him in between but, yeah, he disappeared in the fall, a couple months after we met.

ANDERSON: So then when did you marry and start living together?

MORALES: In the next June.

ANDERSON: The next summer.

MORALES: Yeah, the end of our school year.

ANDERSON: And then you moved up to Ithaca, too.

MORALES: And moved up to Ithaca. And what I did was also enroll in the school of agriculture because it was free. And I was able to take some courses in [The College of Arts and Sciences.] I took psychology courses, because I couldn't get neurology, so I did the next best. But I also took farm shop, it's very sad that I dropped it, because I thought the lab thing I was doing was so much more important, because I was going to be a scientist, right? So lab was important so I dropped the farm shop and the next year I was in a farm. Damn. But I did learn some basic tools and I love carpentry. That was interesting, because this was full of farm boys and here I was a girl and they watched me like an eagle. They were sure I was going to fuck up and — you know, I knew how to saw straight, I guess my father must have taught me. When I soldered or [used the] feed scoop, I was surrounded by guys testing — but I didn't get to do welding because I quit. That would have been a gas. But it was very, very interesting.

So, yeah, I've been to the ag school, to a bunch of both interesting and also interesting classes. And that was the year there.

ANDERSON: And continued your political work, it sounds like?

MORALES: Yes.

ANDERSON: Was it hard to find a network though in Cornell?

MORALES: There was a Communist Party student group.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORALES: Dick's best friend was there, and his brother. And he had spent a year there, so there was a coterie of people. In fact, you asked me to look for photographs, for memories, and I was looking through them and seeing how many of those people have died in the meantime. It was really sad. But yeah, I have one close friendship with his best friend Bernie and his wife and another couple. So we had both a political and a personal relationship. That was really nifty.

ANDERSON: Do you think you were ever watched by the FBI during that time?

MORALES: I don't know. I'm sure we were now, but I don't know if I remember being watched. I do know that in Puerto Rico, absolutely we were told the minute we landed, but I don't have any particular memories. Once I just remember people being cautious, often in stupid ways, some in

dramatizing ways, I mean, you know, shutting us out so they could call on the phone, the phones are tapped, you know. Some of the guys often did a bit of play acting. But we were conscious of something real. We were being watched with our nice thick dossiers to prove it.

ANDERSON: Have you received copies of your files?

MORALES: Dick asked for his dossier. I didn't want to know, but he did, yes. Most [of it] inaccurate and hardly readable — I mean they are blacked out so much it's really hard to decipher them.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So tell me about your decision to go to Puerto Rico? I've read that it was a combination of fear of repression at home and also — Dick wrote, I think, in a piece — a desire for both of you to learn more about your homeland. Is that accurate, that it was for both or either of those reasons?

MORALES: Not quite. For one thing, he'd finished school. He didn't know — they told him not to stay there for graduate school, he'd suck them dry — he didn't know where he was going to go, alright? He thought he was going to get drafted. He didn't know if he was going to fight. So he might have been jailed, whatever — court martial, whatever they do. Our future was really uncertain at that point. So this was partly, yes, he was immensely curious about the country, and he wasn't happy. So I said sure. I was curious, too. I didn't know it all that well. But that was really primary, the fact that he needed to go somewhere, he didn't know where, and we had this complete sense of uncertainty. We didn't know what was going to happen. People were being drafted, you know, a lot of good people got drafted. We didn't know what was going to happen, whether he would have to refuse to serve — I mean, that was like really high on our list, like that sense of complete uncertainty and of what was going to happen to us.

ANDERSON: And how was being in Puerto Rico protection against the draft?

MORALES: It wasn't a protection. It was just about what we were going to do for now, for that summer. That was it. We didn't go there to be [there] permanently, we just went to go right now, to solve the immediate problem of what we were going to do. So why don't we go down there, be there for awhile, and think about what he was going to do in graduate school, see whether he was drafted, see what would happen. But we didn't, you know, we had no idea. But it wasn't in any sense a permanent move and it wasn't a way — in fact, we did feel we were moving away from, we thought we were moving toward a country with an enormous movement. So in that sense we felt we were absconding the life of a movement that was shrinking and that was under fire, um, but we did want to do this at least for a little while. But there was going to be a big student movement, it was all in a place with a lot of activity. It turned out not to be true, which was disappointing. You know, little groups, tiny little Communist Party.

So it wasn't any of that, but it turned out that — well, two things. One is that Dick was followed around by the FBI from job to job. He couldn't get a job. I mean, we needed something to live on while we were there. And while that turned out, of course we immediately contacted whatever progressives there were. I think Dick went to, we went to, someone who was going to talk and, you know, he asked where he could get the Communist Party paper and somebody said, "Shhh," and introduced us to Jane [Speed] and César [Andreu] — you know, high up in the Communist Party, and they became lifelong friends. She particularly became my best friend.

They are the ones who suggested that we try to get a piece of land or something, because what Dick was working on at the time was the genetics of tomatoes. He could probably, on a piece of land, continue some of his scientific work while we kept ourselves alive. Because we had no means. And she suggested somebody out there who was saying he wanted somebody to inherit his land, and maybe he could work with him. We ended up, however, going through the department of agriculture, some department, and somebody knew about a farm for sale. I don't know what the funds, but we were able to buy the land on time, essentially, is what we did. We bought a small — what is actually a large piece of land, but a small piece of a farm, really. And we started farming, which neither of us had done before.

ANDERSON: And you're going to make a living at farming, too, or were you just going to try to feed yourselves: what was your goal with that?

MORALES: I don't know how we thought about it, because we ended up farming, you know, to sell. So, I don't know immediately how it started. To me it's always astounding how quickly everything happened. We landed in June, in September we were already on the farm, you know, so probably very quickly our ideas changed and evolved. From, you know, we'll sustain, we're not going to do experiments to, we had to farm.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORALES: So the only experiments we did, in what we grew, immediately, because of the guy who — because it turned out that we were in the neighborhood of the people that Jane and César had said, you know, the guy who wanted to get someone to inherit his land. He was a disbarred American lawyer who had spent his life farming vegetables and flowers. So we knew you could grow vegetables. We knew you could do that kind of thing. So we learned a little from him, from the department of agriculture booklets, from all kinds of meetings, and we learned on the job.

ANDERSON: That's a long way from upper Manhattan.

MORALES: Yeah (laughs) — and Brooklyn.

ANDERSON: I'm going to have to turn this off. What's a city kid like you know about farming?

END DVD 2

DVD 3

ANDERSON: So why don't we start by talking about communism and feminism.

MORALES: Oh, yeah, what I remembered that didn't come up was, I'm going to end up having not been in the Communist Party for very long. But what it did at this crucial point in my life was give me really a way to look at the world and understand it. It gave me a sense of history, of how societies are organized around class, about the racial injustice — which has served as the foundation for everything I've done in my life. So, you know, I left the Communist Party, criticized the Party, but I'm really incredibly grateful for having been given an education, which was, I mean, education was really important in the Communist Party of the United States. And given that education, history [if] you want to call it history, political science — they call it political economy — it was really important to me as a basis for everything.

And the other thing is, that I didn't realize until I read *Red Feminism*, which I did moderately recently, that I had skirted by the edge of an important feminist period in the history of the United States and the history of the Communist Party. Dick and I, the lecture we went to, the night we decided to become a couple, was with Claudia Jones, who was a marvelous, wonderful feminist black Communist. You know, all of that stuff that was I getting through Aileen and everything, and I didn't stay long enough, I didn't participate — when I read it I almost could have cried, Why did I leave? Why? Because I seem to have brushed the edge of something madly exciting, which didn't really come to fruition for me until, you know, the late '60s and early '70s, when the feminists were around. I never was again in that kind of atmosphere. But what little I got was also a basis for how I lived the rest of my life. Those are really crucial and basic ideas and ways of behavior and expectations that I got from the communists, for which I'm incredibly grateful.

ANDERSON: And you also wrote that — I think you wrote this — that despite all of your awareness of male chauvinism, that somehow you still ended up in some traditional arrangements, in terms of your marriage, and ended up with 95 percent of the housework

MORALES: That was slightly fictionalized, but, yes.

ANDERSON: Tell me about the dynamics between the two of you and how you incorporated feminism into your marriage.

MORALES: Dick is a feminist guy. He's — part of the feminist things I learned was from him. He grew up with that ideology, but with no expectation to do housework 50-50. Basically, his mother took care of everything in his house. Although when I met him and he was at Cornell, he was cooking with the other guys and that kind of stuff. So basically what we did was

spend a lifetime in disputed territory, but with both of us agreeing in principle, basically. I mean, this is a fight in a very different way from fights that I've heard or seen of, that were basically disputing the questions of feminism — how women are, how guys are. That wasn't the problem. The problem was, when it came down to it, you know, he wanted to be out in the fields, not cleaning up after tea, that kind of thing. So we spent a lifetime in disputed territory.

And also, yes, I was trained at home to do the usual caretaking. He was trained in masculine ways, I was trained with the feminine ways. He wasn't trained in masculine ways the way other guys were, though. He's definitely not a guy-guy and that kind of thing, and he not only didn't have the ideology, he didn't have the temperament for any of that. And god knows that may have been part of why I unconsciously chose him, because he didn't do that. He doesn't know the insides of cars, he's not interested in the sorts of masculine kinds of bonding with guys. Yeah, if there was anything anybody could mistake him for, it would have been — once someone did, when we were living in New York — was for a scholar, Hebrew scholar or something, you know, one of those. But he was not, definitely —

So yes, it's true. We continue, I mean, it changes with time. I don't see how it could be otherwise, we live in a sexist society and those are the pressures on us, and that's what we brought with us. But with a basic agreement about feminism, which deepened with what it meant with the feminist movement, as more women spoke up, more clearly about what it meant. So that the fight renewed with extra vigor with a lot of politics around, so he was — see, it's very different when you have the political groundwork for it, which is no doubt why women split up in this period where I was going, Ah, Ah — because, in fact, he agreed with the politics of it and he absorbed the politics of this new wave of feminism and incorporated it into his own political outlook. So it has been and continues to be always some maneuvering around that. And when it came time for, I wanted a child, *I* wanted a child, but, Oh, how am I going to take care of it? Who has to learn how to do all this? I did it. So I also brought with me my feminine training.

ANDERSON: Uh huh. You just said on the other tape that you were both a little bit disappointed, in terms of the lack of movement that you found on the island. I guess it had been talked up a bit more, either in your networks or in the press here than –

MORALES: Yeah, I think they sent out, you know, slightly inflated –

ANDERSON: Right. So tell me about the movement that you did find.

MORALES: It was a very small, I don't know how many people totally, I guess — my husband probably knows more because he remembers that kind of detail — maybe like a hundred or a hundred and something people, with a

population of several million. And the core of the Party was a very small piece of that, very, very small group of people. Yeah, it was very small. And, also, you know, the way we talk about it, the stories we have is basically it shouldn't have been a Communist Party there. There weren't communists around, communist ideology, um, but there were people considering having some sort of, I guess, a study group or whatever in order to consider. But somebody was coming from the States with politics they didn't agree with, [so] they said they better form a Communist Party before he did. Thus is the history of a country made.

So there was a Communist Party that really had enormous — all of the members being, [in] my recollection, more nationalist than communist. And nationalism in Puerto Rico is really so often allied with real class snobbery and class attitudes and real disdain for the issues of hunger and poverty and for the people. So, you know, it was very much nationalism, and with the drama and fighting and all that kind of stuff — very masculinized, also, kinds of ideas, which we disagreed with. So it was a constant struggle against those ideas. And also I decided they weren't ready to be communists. There was a real sort of taking on of the ideology from other countries. For instance, the ideas we should put forth politically about the countryside is that land should be distributed. Peasants need land — peasants in Puerto Rico. What we found was an agricultural working class, therefore we had to talk differently. So Dick set about working with the men to build some kind of movement of coffee workers. So it was not, like you say, a very, um, ideologically educated group.

The people we hung out with are the people who are really — we had a small group or faction, and you're not supposed to have factions in the Communist Party. And Jane and César — not César, Jane — César was part of the Central Committee and he didn't want to be part of a faction — but Jane and actually a lot of the people who either spent some time in the United States when we were there or who were Americans who had lived in Puerto Rico a long time, besides ourselves, and who had very different ideas from the people who were in a relationship with the Party — we did basically agree with him [César], but he wasn't going consider joining us in our discussions. But we left the Communist Party two years after we joined it.

ANDERSON: Because?

MORALES: (sighs) I don't remember the specific causes exactly, except that there was, right at that time, there was this sort of cabal against Jane specifically. She did get a lot of being pushed out and I don't know — principally for being a woman, for being outspoken and disagreeing, um, and I think they were going to try to push her out altogether. By accident we found the papers that they were going to have at the next Congress. This was a period we met, we were bound to meet when there were arrests happening. This is 1954. And in the course of it, you know, we found out that they were about to shove her out or something. But this is sort of the mechanics of it.

I think the politics really involved a lot of those issues that we're talking about, including the fact that during a set of arrests, the Party had gone into hiding, the leadership. And they wanted to stay there [underground.] And the only reason to do that was to be able to publicize [our protest] and send articles to the press, which César did.

And then, you know, it's over, and I think they had some sense of being revolutionaries in the trenches, stuff like that. The actual disagreements are pettyish and small but they are really about — there are kind of people who seek leadership even in the Communist Party, and basically I keep saying about democratic centralism, which had a lot more centralism in it, which is part of — I mean there was some democracy but centralism at the core of it. Um, yeah, these were people — these were individuals, you know, a lot of it is, it's a small party so individuals matter a lot more. We definitely — I really didn't understand the political situation in a way they were operating on. I think [they] began playing games like boys do about, you know, this was repression? Yes, people were arrested but yeah, there was real repression going on in [other] places. I think it's the same as in the United States, however much repression there was in the United States, they didn't know from repression. And a lot of these guys got really into it, misunderstood, I think, the situation, dramatized it. So that was part of what was going on.

But also, like, these basic disagreements about a lot of crucial things, like nationalist politics, that kind of stuff. It was all underlying our basic disagreements. The trigger was a cabal on their part, and we dropped out.

ANDERSON: What was the role of women in the Party in Puerto Rico versus in New York? Or even a discussion about women's issues.

MORALES: God, it was really bad. I mean, obviously, you know, there were strong women. There was one woman on Central Committee. Jane had been on the Central Committee and was pushed off. Yeah, there were women, but we were given a hard time. I was given a hard time. There was a lot of sexism. A lot of sort of disdain, I mean just really sad. I found that the hardest of all, personally — not only the Communist Party, but a lot of the Puerto Rican left I have other problems with. There were women there but I think there was a lot of sexism. As there was, I'm sure, in a lot of the Communist Party in the States –

ANDERSON: All the left in general.

MORALES: Yeah, this group of women in the Communist Party had a lot to talk about. If you've read *Red Feminism* you remember that the newspapers really balked at the sexism and the things that women complained about. But yeah, for me personally, big dose of it.

ANDERSON: So what was your involvement in leftist politics in Puerto Rico, outside the Communist Party? Did you feel connected to any women's or feminist anything? Any labor issues?

MORALES: No. Remember, we were off in the countryside. And these were, you know, the — and also very, very, um, sexually divided, gender-divided kind of labor, or visiting. Especially in the countryside, women visited separately. It wasn't quite the same scene, especially in the working classes. So I got to know a lot of women but we weren't invited as a couple to their house, that kind of thing, except for big holidays, you know, we went to somebody's house. But basically not.

I ended up, first of all, there were several groups we connected with. One of them was the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which was largely Americans, OK? There was also a community of — there was a hospital, a mission hospital, where we also connected with people who had progressive ideas. Some of them were conscientious objectors — that's why they landed there in the first place, and did this as part of their job. In the community itself, I ended up working with all things with the agricultural extension club. And, you know, it's not like madly feminist work, but it felt to me important to get women out of the home. And, I mean, they did go to church and — they did go to each other's homes and stuff, but they didn't do something like go to meetings and learn skills or doing that kind of stuff, so getting women to come. The only other organization there was the church club. Those were the only two organizations. So I was really active with the women. That's how I met the women. It was the place where we could be — remember, I was already of a social class, I owned land. So getting to know working women really occurred through that organization.

ANDERSON: Through the extension?

MORALES: Through the extension club, where we sewed and did cooking and I organized — I won a prize for — I happen to adore interiors and work spaces and organizing architecture and that kind of thing, so I obviously started by organizing myself a kitchen out of dynamite boxes that we got, and this and that. But that was one of the things we did and, you know, it was very domestic oriented. It was really great. It was where I formed most of my relationships that lasted, because then we left and came back. A lot of the key relationships with people — but that was where I formed a lot of my personal — you know, because we were land owners, we were known, we were the neighborhood ambulance, you know, if anybody needed a ride. Nowadays, a lot of people have more Jeeps and stuff, but at that time there were very few with vehicles. We had a truck. We were constantly taking people to the hospital.

So we were known, but me personally, my relationships were formed through the agricultural extension center. New people I talked to, you know, we exchanged, we had a lot of that kind of stuff in common.

ANDERSON: Right. And how were you two received on the island as an interracial or interfaith couple as that ever taken notice of?

MORALES: No, actually, since we were not interfaith, we were both atheists. What was really shocking was the fact that, as one woman said, I guess at one of these agricultural things, "She doesn't believe in anything." I do too. I don't believe in god, but I believe in a lot of things. But that's the way, that's the phrase *no cree en nada*, believe in anything. So that was a shocking thing. It wasn't hard but it was shocking to them.

The other thing that was of interest that people sort of went and looked at slightly askance — but wow, what a miracle — was, Dick washed dishes and worked in the home. Guys didn't. The communism was sort of more of a distance — I remember that Dick spoke up at some meeting and someone wrote to the Popular Party in San Juan to find out and they were told that the Communists were dangerous and blah, blah, blah, you know, this kind of stuff. But personally I don't think people — no, in any way — were scared of us. I mean, I'm sure there were stories around, especially because we were spied on and stuff. There were some [Puerto Rican internal security] guys supposedly going around saying they were Dick's cousins. I mean, please, you know, Dick's cousins? But people know things, some people told us these stories, and who was in the neighborhood asking about us and that kind of thing. And I think we found out from Dick's papers people who also helped spy on us, too. But generally speaking, we didn't meet hostility.

The people who sold us the land, he was an agricultural extension teacher, and she was a nurse [and taught me first aid] — I don't know, [had] some nursing skills — so we were part of the community in useful sorts of ways, with employment to people and, you know, we were *serviciable* [meaning accommodating in Spanish.] We helped through that kind of thing. It was interesting that we didn't — we were spied on by the security forces and Dick was briefly arrested and all that kind of stuff was going on, but I don't think in the neighborhood we were shunned or anything like that.

ANDERSON: Do you remember any direct encounters with the people who were spying on you?

MORALES: No. That's not how one spies. No. In New York City we had the FBI show up at the door, but no, I think –

ANDERSON: That didn't happen there?

MORALES: No, we were there when Jane and César were dragged away by the FBI. The whole neighborhood was watching these guys sleeping in their cars so they could come at dawn — actually it's a good time to come and arrest

people — and we watched them being taken away. Then Dick was briefly arrested.

ANDERSON: While you were in Puerto Rico?

MORALES: Yes. I think this was the time. I don't know if it was when [Lolita Lebron] was involved. It was '54 and they had a roundup of the usual suspects kinds of things, and naturally there were Communists rounded up. I had just — I had a two-week-old baby, who fed at all hours, so I was really not awake. And he was arrested and taken away and I remember that the whole neighborhood knew it immediately. So I'm trying to remember, because I think there was one period when they came into the home and took away our stuff. I think that's when they took Dick away. My memory gets all muddled. Um, but the neighbors from a distance saw somebody hanging up our diapers, because Dick got up when it rained to get the diapers in, and the agent sat him down and got the diapers down for us. They checked our shortwave radio and stuff.

And here I was left. They took him away and I had this little baby. And these women, I could cry right now, these women showed up, you know, these are the women who believed I didn't believe in anything, you know, who are so different [from me.] They turn on police radio because they were savvy about things I wasn't savvy about — to try to check where he was and what was happening. Yeah, I'm still moved by the fact that they just came and supported me and stayed with me. Dick was released in a couple hours. He obviously wasn't on some important list or another. It was like — but we didn't get our books until we sued for them, years later. But what I was left with was this incredible sense of their solidarity, these women.

I knew I'd cry. I didn't know what I was going to cry about, but I knew I'd cry.

ANDERSON: What was it like having — tell me about being pregnant and childbirth in Puerto Rico. You also gave birth to one of your children I think in the States, later.

MORALES: No, all three were born in Puerto Rico.

ANDERSON: All three were born in Puerto Rico.

MORALES: It was interesting, because we were traveling back and forth but I always managed to be in Puerto Rico. Yes, especially my first one. I mean, I was pregnant, Dick got hepatitis, the farm had zilch income coming in — it was a wildly exciting period. Um, yeah, that was a hard time, but that first pregnancy was one of those idyllic pregnancies. Everyone assumed I was having a boy because my belly went out this way, and that's the lore. There's a lot of touching. You know, people would come touch my belly. So I have like physical memories of people. A pregnant woman, anything

she wants, you know, so I could crave things and people would get them for me. So I had a real sense of being cosseted, in fact, my being pregnant and getting a child also made me much more part of the community than I had been before. You know, women without children, going out there and helping, you know, working on the farm — and in a very different way, women worked on farms, everywhere. But I did in a somewhat different form.

All of the stuff — I think having a child, being pregnant, having a child, made me more acceptable. I remember that once Dick got a job — he didn't work immediately — he found himself a job in the hospital in the lab at that point, because our farm wasn't bringing in any income. Things picked up so it ceased being the sort of thing where we didn't know where money was coming from. Um, and then soon after, months afterwards, Dick's grandparents came in to visit, went home appalled because they didn't expect that — we were living in what seemed like crude cabins to them. Eventually his mother gave us some money too, which we put into the farm immediately.

But that really was the worst period, was when I was pregnant with Aurora. It was the worst period financially. But it was also — I just felt wonderful. It was a really great time. You know, Dick was just lying there — he couldn't work for ages and he had a really good time and great discussions and he kept himself busy doing also some mathematical work, which eventually became part of his thesis and stuff like that. That's what started him thinking about going back to school eventually.

Remember we didn't come there originally to stay, we just ended up staying, became really involved in the Party, in the community, in the country, and we were just — you know, for me it was a transformation almost as a Puerto Rican, because I became acquainted with a different kind of Puerto Rican culture, very different sorts of stuff. We learned different kinds of music, and actually the whole landscape where we were was beautiful. It was just gorgeous. So I love the flora and fauna of it, I mean, that's why this place looks the way it does. I brought some of it home with me. Whatever from there that can grow here, it's here. So yeah, so that was really a wonderful period for me there, and I really liked being pregnant, liked everything.

Of course then when she was born it was hard physically. I've never been a high-energy person, and she was a very small, hungry baby. So it was very tiring in the immediate period.

ANDERSON: Were women typically breastfeeding there?

MORALES: That was what was interesting. I think women were having to be urged to breastfeed. They had already been lured off. But nevertheless it was perfectly OK to breastfeed anywhere. With my second one — I moved when he was a month old — the amount of "yuck" that I got from Dick's mother, from, I mean, just generally, it was really hard. It was just not the atmosphere for breastfeeding, and I dried up pretty soon. I was also at that

time anemic, that was part of it. It was incredible, the difference between breastfeeding in Puerto Rico and breastfeeding in New York City, roughly two years apart, was really dramatic.

ANDERSON: Right. That's interesting.

MORALES: But I remember the people in the hospital, the nurses and doctors trying to urge a particular woman to breastfeed, and she didn't want to. So I think already a lot of the propaganda for bottle feeding had made its mark, even deep in the countryside — because we were in the countryside.

ANDERSON: This was also the same time that the Pill is being experimented on Puerto Rican women. Were you aware of that?

MORALES: Not the Pill, what I was aware of regarding testing, I think — was it the lipis loop was the first thing?

ANDERSON: Could have been. But the Pill was also used.

MORALES: I don't remember the Pill at all. But I remember that the hospital I was in was running a whole experiment on that and I became one of the people who got one, because blah, blah, blah. But I'm trying to remember now — it's hard for me to remember what I learned afterwards and what I learned at the time — I know that birth control was important, you know, in a positive sense. Controlling the population, I don't know that I was aware of — I'm surmising now — until later, but I sensed the importance of it for women because they were getting pregnant whether they wanted to or not. And women really wanted to control the number of kids. I think that I felt at that time, from that breathing space comes the liberating kinds of stuff, and it's always double edged.

ANDERSON: Of course. When you were part of that particular experiment, did you feel like it was successful and/or you were given the appropriate amount of information about it, and what was your experience like, being part of that?

MORALES: It was great.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORALES: I mean I don't remember details right now except it went well with me.

ANDERSON: You didn't have an adverse reaction.

MORALES: Yeah, I got it [the loop] after I'd given birth, which is very important. Not before. I never had any problems with it. I was sad to lose it because I wanted to have another child. No, I had no problems with it. I didn't know

at the time the dangers. I found out afterwards. But the dangers of it — nor the intense pressure to either sterilize or stop Puerto Rican women from having children.

ANDERSON: We have about ten minutes left. So I want you to go back and speak to something that you mentioned briefly, which was the impact that living in Puerto Rico for that period had on your sense of identity and your connection to Puerto Rico and how you saw yourself differently. Could you start anywhere you want and start thinking about that?

MORALES: Yeah, it's true in so many things, because one of the things I was really clearly aware of while I was in Puerto Rico is, I was a New Yorker. I didn't speak Spanish well, and in fact I had missing from my vocabulary crucial words. I remember going into a drug store and not being able to say *comb* and having to gesture because I didn't know the word in Spanish. So, you know, that kind of awkwardness in Spanish really marked me — lot more from the intellectuals, but from everybody as someone who was slightly foreign, even though I was Puerto Rican. My accent was perfect but my vocabulary wasn't.

But while I was there I was also acquiring vocabulary. Having to talk — I was in the countryside. These people in general didn't talk English. I mean, they were younger people who weren't raised like my parents learning English, they learned some English in school but they weren't being taught in English. A lot of the vets knew some English. Dick said when he went to have a drink if they had drunk a little bit they'd talk English at him. But I had to speak Spanish and so, just learning to speak and deal with Spanish and bits of culture that I didn't know. Sometimes in music that didn't hit [the States,] Plena and other kinds of music, you know, all kinds of music that were part of the Puerto Rican culture that I just didn't get — I got Afro-Cuban music and stuff like that in New York, but not this type of culture.

I got to see and live here in a cultural community. To see women with machetes, working in the fields — not in the fields, in their own little gardens, you know — when I was little I was expected to kiss every person who came in and greeted me. It was so strange. I left Puerto Rico, going and doing what now is natural, particularly because of the women's movement, kissing everybody, and some people were like — you know, there [were] obvious and subtle ways Puerto Rico Puerto Ricanized me, while at the same time being so conscious that I wasn't a Puerto Rico Puerto Rican, I was also being re-Puerto Ricanized completely by people who weren't my family, so I didn't have this kind of war with them or whatever.

And yeah, there are so many ways in which I've fell in love with the way they looked. I mean, their being so surrounded by all the different — Puerto Ricans are such a mixed people. And I was doing art, I was always drawing, and my ambition at the time was to draw every kind of Puerto Rican face, they are so different. And in the countryside where we were,

there was this marvelous Indian face. The region was called Indiera. It was one of the few vestiges left of the indigenous Puerto Rico, you know, from their mass extermination. So they have very particular kinds of faces.

There was, yeah, an appreciation of the way people talked, and the feel of the language, the language itself, which I needed to reacquire, the politics. I mean, I just got a whole immersion in a culture which I'd only seen from a distance in some way and just a small piece of it with my family and their friends. It was very different.

You asked two questions: one was the Puerto Ricanization. Was there another one?

ANDERSON: About the impact that being there for that period had on your sense of yourself and your cultural identity.

MORALES: Yeah, definitely, because remember, I grew up like so many adolescents, I rebelled but I grew up thinking of myself as American in many ways. Not really facing to how I looked, thinking I wanted to look like Hedy Lamar and sort of adolescent fitting in to the main culture, kind of thing.

ANDERSON: Well, you have written, too, that you had wanted to erase your Puerto Ricanness at time, change your name.

MORALES: Yeah. Yeah. To this I owe Dick's curiosity to be there and his appreciation of the culture. And I acquired some sense of why I was [the way] I was. You know, I did certain things because I was a Puerto Rican. I wouldn't have known about that otherwise, unless I was with a mass of Puerto Ricans and there was something you could talk about. But, yeah, of course. And also because an understanding that a whole lot of how I behaved was because we moved there. And so in some ways, cut off a whole lot of what happened to young women or what happened, you know, how they grew up there. I definitely didn't grow up there. I have met other — I remember I went to quilting, an organization where I met another woman [who] was told, a friend of ours said, "Oh, there's another Puerto Rican there." And she was reluctant to meet me, until she found out I was a New York Puerto Rican, because she'd moved back and had much more negative experience than I had with women. And so it was just this sense that we were a slightly different culture. And we were. There's no getting around it. We were. So, both getting my sense of really understanding myself as a Puerto Rican and really getting the feel of it and getting reprogrammed, you know, getting more of the culture, but also really clear of how different I was because we were from New York.

ANDERSON: And you were probably also held at a distance because you were a New York Puerto Rican as well, right?

MORALES: And because we didn't quite understand each other.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORALES: We didn't quite say, we didn't quite — I'd had no deep personal friendships, you know, good best friends. I had friendships, but not that kind of friendship. I had a friendship with Jane, who was an American from the South. I had a friendship with my cousin who had grown up in New York. Not as close. But I think it's very telling that I didn't have a close personal friend. In fact, I don't think any of my really best friends are Puerto Ricans. I have a good friend who is Puerto Rican, in fact grew up slightly younger than me, in my neighborhood, but I didn't [know her then]— and I think that's part of how Americanized I am.

ANDERSON: What language did you all speak in your home in Puerto Rico, once you started raising your children?

MORALES: Probably both, Spanglish. English/Spanish, Inglañol, as I call it. I mean, we were in a neighborhood where we were speaking Spanish and they were going to school in Spanish. In fact, I had to teach them the basics — this is in the second trip. I'm really moving ahead, because we moved out in '56.

ANDERSON: Sixty-six.

MORALES: No. Then we went to the New York for five years. It's so confusing, I had 11 years there, but they were split.

ANDERSON: Right. Right. OK.

MORALES: So especially when we had children to talk to was when we came back.

ANDERSON: Right. OK.

MORALES: Aurora spoke both English and Spanish. They say it's confusing, whatever — she learned sentences, she learned in both, so I became convinced that it isn't an impediment, you know, some people wanted to teach the pure one language and then they'll learn the second or whatever. She learned them both as she went along, both languages, both vocabularies. She moved a step, she moved in both languages. I mean she hit New York and everybody was talking English. She talked Spanish. She said, "That's not what happens here." She was, you know, two and a half, three. She dropped it — it was really interesting to watch. But I think we talked both. I can [switch] into Spanish and back again.

And Dick too. I think the beautiful thing that happened was that he acquired my culture as I had acquired his before I met him, and so he learned country Spanish first, before he learned anything else. And we can banter back and forth and he has a real feel for the Spanish, the Puerto Rican Spanish, that keeps me from feeling lonely. I mean, there's just this

— I think I would be culturally lonely if I married someone who didn't have that intense feel for the language, the jokes, and stuff as I do for his. We are good that way, in a sense that we both love each other's culture. And can spit it out.

ANDERSON: And you left for his graduate education? Is that why you came to New York?

MORALES: Yeah. I think it was time to move on. The farm wasn't doing that well. I can't tell you how grateful I am that we made that decision. We did agriculture with all the most modern techniques, which involved horrible pesticides that we now know. So if we hadn't moved [then], we would be in far worse shape than we are. So yeah, it was for him to pursue his graduate education, and of course immediately education was what I wanted to do, too, so I ended up going to school too. Yeah, it was to continue schooling, because the farm was not going to support a family in the same way. It was a marginal operation.

ANDERSON: And was that a sad decision for you to leave at that time?

MORALES: Yeah. I mean, we were ready, but it was sad. I certainly didn't want to go back to New York. It was the only place that gave him — very little, but some money. He was disappointed, he was sad. I didn't want to leave the house we fixed up. We didn't want to leave the neighborhood. No. It was sad.

ANDERSON: OK, I'm going to stop the tape.

END DVD 3

DVD 4

ANDERSON: So, day two with Rosario Morales in Cambridge, Mass. Let's pick up where we left off yesterday, talking about going back to New York in the late '50s, and then your return to Puerto Rico in 1960-something.

MORALES: Yeah, 1961, I guess.

ANDERSON: OK. So why did you go back and –

MORALES: To New York?

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORALES: Oh, we really went back to the States, we were trying to get a graduate education for Dick, which wasn't available in Puerto Rico. And he applied to a whole lot of places, and New York was the only place that gave him even minimal amount of money. We were by then a family of four. We sold off pieces of our farm in order to have some cash, because we had no money and we had to subsist. Dick's mother also helped with tuition, but we cobbled together enough money for him to go to graduate school, but that was the only place. I didn't want to go back to New York, I really didn't. I have a sentimental feeling for New York but I don't want to live there, especially after living for five years in the countryside, the idea of living in this great big city, and also having to deal with family — you know, it was easier to manage at some distance than it would [to] be closer to home, so I wasn't too pleased to go back to New York.

But we did move to New York and we lived on the West Side. I had a baby. First we moved in with Dick's mother, and then we found an apartment, on the West Side. And I didn't realize it but I was seriously anemic, I had a parasitic infection and I had a young baby, a couple months old, and a toddler, and my husband's off to school. I got seriously depressed, seriously depressed.

And Dick took me to his doctor, a wonderful person who had, since the '30s, I guess, had been a doctor to the left. One of the people who helped women particularly learn to use thermometers and things the doctors used to wield, and he's the one who sort of cross-examined me, and I realized I needed to do something and I ended up starting taking art classes with a painter and ended up going back to school. In the meantime, [some time] in there, I took myself to a doctor and said, "I may have a parasitic infection," simply because I knew about all the things I could have caught in Puerto Rico. And I did. And once I was cured of that, my depression lifted and I was able to cope.

It was also really depressing in itself to be living, you know, again, on another fifth- and sixth-floor rear apartment with two kids, when I just left

this beautiful countryside, where, you know, it was just a wonderful place to live. I didn't want to be in the city again.

ANDERSON: Did that cause conflict between you and Dick?

MORALES: No. No. You know, I think he understood it, too, we both loved our place and we left for good and sufficient reasons, not because we wanted — we left friends, because Jane and César had subsequently built a house on our land. So we left it in their care but, you know, we had friends there, we had a life that we were leaving behind. We were conscious of doing it temporarily, but it was still hard to be in New York in winter! Gray New York winter! It's a whole nother story, it was really hard. And two little kids to raise and in an apartment rather than with open spaces where I could just — you know, I have pictures of Aurora in her playpen outdoors. I couldn't do any of that kind of stuff.

What I got in return was that we were in a large apartment house that had um, the person who tends the telephones, I guess telephone operator [at the apartment switchboard,] and we had phones that we could communicate with each other and then outside phones. This person called out [i.e. he transferred our calls to the outside world,] so he was this guy, he was by the elevators and this was not a very safe neighborhood so it meant we needed somebody in the elevators [if they eliminated the switchboard.] Somebody bought the building, started to eliminate all our services and we immediately organized. And I got to know all my neighbors, so I had something I didn't quite have in Puerto Rico, this really condensed, intense community of people, all of us intent, and we won some victories from — we didn't get our telephone operator back, but we did get various other things we wanted, so almost immediately we were launched into some kind of fight.

The other thing is, I mean, these are very crucial years for Communists. We had left the Communist Party in '56, the Khrushchev report happened, a lot of people in the American Party had left, they were forming little grouplets and talking to each other. And we met a lot of people, we went to some of these groups who were having discussions about what to do with their lives. These were particular people — a lot of people whose lives were completely within the Party and stuff, so their lives, having left the Party meant more than simply leaving one political group. It was really a very, both troubled time and interesting time, because people were opening up discussion about all kinds of topics. So we were part of that, also.

Let's see what else. I was in — when I start thinking about these small periods of time they seem so full, I don't know how we managed to fit everything in, you know, because we had to take care of these kids, I started to go to school, Dick was in school, we had to get our schedules straight –

ANDERSON: And it was too early to be doing any women's liberation or feminist activity.

MORALES: Not as such, not as such.

ANDERSON: What was it like going back and forth — and I know that there's five or six years here but — sort of moving in and out of Puerto Rico, in terms of being female, for example? What did it mean to be a woman in Puerto Rico versus New York, and how did you manage that? You've expressed in some of your writings some tension about gender expectations, and so how did you manage that or feel about that?

MORALES: It was real obvious that for all my feelings about New York, being in New York for me was an intensely comfortable place, because — if nothing else, physically. There's one thing in the countryside — I didn't drive and I was dependent. But on top of that I also was dependent in the sense that being alone was a dangerous thing in many, many places in Puerto Rico. I had to have an adjunct. You know, I had to have either a lot of other females or a guy. It always felt slightly dangerous to go alone. But you know, in the United States, it's a big country in which I got to choose somewhat the communities I was in and they were communities obviously that didn't have as deeply sexist views. I didn't in Puerto Rico. We lived in a community and in that community there were a lot of those who held sexist views and it was just harder being in Puerto Rico.

And I think that's why after the women's movement I could never have gone back, even though I still loved the place and still had, you know, [the idea] that could have been a possibility for us to return there, but it never was. I think there was just something — I went over some kind of threshold where I could no longer maneuver my way around that without being constantly, constantly angry. And it's my experience, I know, because I've known other Puerto Rican women who do manage to contest and to deal with and be OK in Puerto Rico. But for me it's not true. It's not true. For me personally, I always feel freer and more able to deal with the sexism, to fight it with some sort of confidence. Yeah, it felt better. So, yeah, New York felt a better place to be in as a woman. And also, you know, immediately whatever activities I joined in, I also felt — one of the things that happened when we went back to Puerto Rico is I didn't join any political activity.

ANDERSON: Why was that?

MORALES: Principally for sexist reasons. I was very leery of joining any kind of independentist or socialist group. On top of which, they started looking to Marxism to — because actually after Castro's victory they realized they were missing a little piece in their knowledge and ideology, they wanted to know about the Marxist past, they wanted to have people instruct them,

they looked for César and they looked for Dick. I didn't exist. I was off the map. And, you know, as I said, it's another place where I felt like not fighting, so I gave it up, I did. I did not take part in any political activities in Puerto Rico at all. Dick became a member of the Movimiento Pro Independencia and then the Puerto Rican Socialist Party.

ANDERSON: When you returned?

MORALES: When we were in Puerto Rico, when we returned to Puerto Rico. Whereas I, eventually, you know, joined up with some women of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in the States here in Boston for a period, for a short period. But I'm not now. No.

ANDERSON: Had it changed any culturally by the time you went back in that short period? In the United States you can feel a little bit the movement from the McCarthy period of the '50s to the '60s, by '63, '64, '65. What was it like in Puerto Rico?

MORALES: We had a brush with the House un-American Activities Committee. We were able to appraise people's reactions in the States by 1959. Sentiment was shifting politically. In Puerto Rico in terms of that kind of politics, that was, remember, not that great an issue, but we definitely weren't followed and pursued in quite that way. I mean, with our neighbors, but we were not. Yeah, Dick had a job with the university, we just, you know, all of a sudden we were part of the scene. We weren't actually at the moment members of the Communist Party but, you know, Dick was [part] of these organizations, Dick, at the university, got involved in the antiwar movement early on. I'm sure there was some — you know, he appeared in the papers, there was that kind of stuff, but it was not what was happening before.

ANDERSON: So the heat was off, in a certain way.

MORALES: Off?

ANDERSON: Well, that you didn't experience so much surveillance and –

MORALES: Even though he did get some attention for being an active in the whole — they had sit-ins, all kinds of stuff, but that was happening at the university and we were still living in the countryside. So I lived in the countryside, by the time I got from New York, my studies eventually led me to anthropology. I was studying. Summers we traveled to Michigan, to the University of Michigan. It was the only place I could take a class in the summer. So when Dick was off we would toodle up and I would put the kids in the various camps and stuff so they got a little bit of an American child's life. And I went to school. He did various employs. But the main

purpose was for me to go to school. So that was a lot of my preoccupation in the early ’60s.

ANDERSON: And why anthropology?

MORALES: I lucked on to a really great professor, Anthony Leeds, who one, both encouraged me and had similar ideas to mine. And I took off. I really wanted — it seemed to fit in when my whole idea was to be able to understand people’s cultures and yet, with my perspective from Marxism, my analysis of people and classes and all that stuff built in to finding out about tribal peoples and all that kind of stuff — and the impact of European capitalism on these peoples. So that was really to me very exciting and interesting, and he was very encouraging. He became a good friend. He was really crucial in that. And I ended up taking a class before I left New York, at Columbia, before we headed back to Puerto Rico. And I kept studying.

It was also a very interesting period because we were up in the mountains. We now had university connections as well as various leftist connections and people started finding out about us and ending up — it took four hours to get to our place. And so people who were touring around ended up on our place, stayed the weekend and they were all strangers, friends of friends of friends, so it was also very exciting time. We were having all kinds of people, people from universities or people from *The Guardian*, or you know, just people who were friends of friends. We had always exciting weekends [in the] country, [which was otherwise a] generally quiet life. You know, people who were seeking Dick’s help as Marxist students from his own class would appear and we would feed them Chinese food and give them chop sticks or talk politics, whatever was going. So the kids grew up in this atmosphere of a lot happening, a lot of politics, a lot of discussion in which we all took part.

ANDERSON: So why did you leave?

MORALES: Dick and I went to Cuba in 1965. [A colleague gave Dick a contact in Cuba and they invited Dick to help them develop Biology in Cuba.] So we decided to go. We asked, to come and take care of our children, and we had to, because there was not — we ended up gong to Czechoslovakia, from Puerto Rico to Czechoslovakia, where they would not stamp our passports. And then went to the Cuba and all the way around back again.

The university took exception to this. In the course of all those travels we managed to stop at, I think Dick had a gig in Washington in summers also, so that we had actually, in their terms, legitimate, academic things that we were doing in that period. But without their saying why they objected to him going, they wanted to not rehire Dick, so he fought it and made an issue of it at the university, so we started looking for a place to go and for a place where I could study. So it had to be where I was accepted

in graduate school. And I was accepted at the University of Chicago, so that's where we went.

ANDERSON: And leaving that second time, did you feel the same kind of sadness and loss as you did the first time? Were you ready to go in a different way?

MORALES: It was interesting, we go into a whole dispute with — I'm trying to remember which happened when, but we got into a dispute with our [Pentecostal] neighbors. We got some Pentecostals, who would put loudspeakers on top of their house and broadcast their services to the whole neighborhood at all hours. And naturally, I ended up being the one bringing the case [for the neighborhood] to the Pentecostals, you know, and in the course of trying to speak to them once on their porch about what was going on and why they needed to, you know, because so-and-so was not well, and on and on and on, the sounds [the noise] in the neighborhood. I noticed that we could barely hear ourselves think because of the noise, because — that the loudspeakers were being connected by a little wire [right by my hand!,] so I just unplugged it so we could talk. And they took us to court. And the judge, who was very prejudiced against us, I mean, there was just this real nasty unpleasantness, so with the fact that I was ready to go to graduate school and all this unpleasantness, I personally was ready to leave at that point. I think the kids felt wrenched out of their environment. Chicago was a shock for them. But both Dick and I we were ready to move on.

ANDERSON: You sold the farm?

MORALES: Oh no, we still have the farm. No, we didn't. Aurora and Ricardo have occasional plans for it, in terms of some kind of community center. They've been back many times. Aurora did the oral history there, um, things that they've had handed back, but they got us the posters, neighborhood posters, from the history, from their own, just came back from giving them to some of these people. They have a continuing relationship, based on having grown up there. But we still have the land. [Aurora did oral histories, her husband took photos, and Ricardo drew and made posters. They gave back to the neighborhood by exhibiting the work locally and giving away posters.]

ANDERSON: But it's not working as a farm — you don't have anybody working it now?

MORALES: No. We did have people staying, but now the houses are gone, they were dangerous — and we had to knock [it] down.

ANDERSON: So tell me about moving to Chicago.

MORALES: Oh lord. I think it was an omen that we arrived in June in a hail storm (laughs), with the weather and everything. I mean it was both a really wonderful time and a really awful time at the same time. Um, graduate school never did turn out to be what it was cracked up to be for me because I did not have what Dick had gone through, which was, everyone was accepted as a colleague. Once he was accepted at the university, he was treated like a grown up. We were told, they were going to separate the sheep from the goats and we were there to be sorted out (laughs) and some of us would lose and some would win and we were treated like children. It was really god-awful.

ANDERSON: This is the department of anthropology?

MORALES: Um hm, and it was a hotshot department with all kinds of courses and most of the guys were off — and they were guys, 100 percent men at the graduate level — they were off doing research, so most of the classes weren't really available, for all their talking it up. So the dissatisfaction, you know, started right there. Um, to keep on that topic, also eventually it became clear that as a faculty wife in the department of biology, I was somehow expected to be taking these courses for pleasure, between putting out gourmet meals for my family and for the faculty. I had secondary warning that they were not treating me as a doctoral student.

And I wanted to do research based on papers. I was very interested in theory. They told me I couldn't do that but on top of that, a major discovery was, you couldn't trust the data. So many of the people who did the research were either racist or they came flying in on a government plane which had been attacking the people. What kinds of — how is that data? How can you trust what the people said to these people? Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It was not something then that I wanted to do, so I had to scramble for what I was going to do otherwise.

ANDERSON: Were there any other women in your department?

MORALES: No. What's interesting is that the department had people who had gaps in their lives, who had been in the Peace Corps who had been doing other things. They were not all uniformly quite young. Lot's of women in it — that's why it was such a shock to find a really totally male faculty facing me. Yeah, there were a lot of men. And we bonded together. In fact, I'm trying to think why we got together to complain about the department. I can't remember, my memory fails me. I can't remember the guys on that committee. But that was one of the first things, one of the papers I found, looking through, was something talking about having been to the Anthropological Association meetings, I guess, the first September after I got there, coming back, the students that met there coming back, being told, Oh, Chicago doesn't have any problems. Oh, yeah. And coming back and starting meetings.

And I think before the sit-in in Chicago, even though — it was interesting to watch history being rewritten. As a historian it would be interesting to know that by the time I left there, the lore was that everything started with the sit-in and all these other activities happened as a result. But I know it's not true. But it's a small piece of history and you see it being — you know, people have simplified events. Um, there was an antiwar movement on campus. When I first got there, I was really nervous about jeopardizing what I had been doing, wanting to do now for many years and I didn't want to be publicly out, but (laughs). And there was just so much going on. I think I joined the CWLU [Chicago Women's Liberation Union] sometime in '69, after — I started after they'd been going for a while. I joined the university chapter. I was part of New University Conference. Dick and I both joined.

ANDERSON: What was that?

MORALES: They call it the graduate — you know, the professors' SDS, somehow. It was that kind of ideology but it was graduate students only and faulty. And they were very active in the antiwar movement. The women's caucus, we were definitely asking for daycare, you know, we had all kinds of women's issues, which made it all the more ironic that when we have a summer training session camp in Marlboro, Vermont, the summer of '70, they said that no children should come. So, those who had children and were going to go were unwelcome. There was a big struggle within (unclear), in spite of putting out the slogans — as usual. It was not something that was new. So there was a lot of fighting and a lot of struggle with them. Yeah, I got into trouble with the organizing committee, whatever they call themselves, because I missed one of the meetings, because I was at the women's caucus. So there is that kind of struggle going on, but I was active in that, I was. I had two kids, had to get someone to come in and take care of my youngster, which I hated doing. That was the hardest wrench. And these other organizations — all of which was very exciting, very interesting. In the mean time, I was also very disappointed and having a hard time at the university.

It was shocking to move into Hyde Park. It was shocking to turn on the radio, and the violence, hearing young people had been shot not far from where you were walking every day. I don't know the timing of this but when women start speaking out about rape to really become totally aware as I spoke out, how many of my friends, how many had been raped, that –

ANDERSON: By strangers, you mean, in that kind of violent-crime way, or do you mean also date or spousal rape?

MORALES: Just raped. Just to speak out, and the prevalence. It was all around you, whichever way it was. It was all around me. So there was this realization for me, the being active again, and it was very exciting and very positive,

particularly because I had a hard time at the university. The women's movement was to me a wonderful ripening and development and expansion of what I'd learned. It seems so minimal and I was, like so many women, really angry that I'd stood for so much and yet I had gotten so little. That the movement had been so pivotal I thought was great. I was so ecstatic about all the many directions in which the women's movement explored women in situations and gave us power. That's when I started writing exceedingly bad poetry, but poetry was everywhere. Everything, you know, put together, all the little publications about poetry.

ANDERSON: Back up and talk about, I guess, your consciousness a little bit. It sounds like you got involved with women's liberation in '68, '69.

MORALES: Sixty-nine.

ANDERSON: Sixty-nine, but would you say that you were sort of ready for it, because you had been thinking about it and talking about it, even any sort of click of a change in consciousness that happened when the movement came along, you were just –

MORALES: No. At long last! I'd longed for it. Except for the incredible joy of not being one or two alone, which while I was in Puerto Rico, right? But having — I think I was — whenever I tell anybody, you know, when you're going to engage in struggle, find others. I mean it's just really, really hard to deal with it any other way than to have these hordes, it seems to me, of women, to have all this support and in thinking and doing and acting and teaching each other, and all this kind of business was — no, I was more than ready. Yea!

And I was tons older than most everybody around me, because I started in graduate school when I was 37 years old.

ANDERSON: Right. Right.

MORALES: That was very interesting. In fact, I was in school with people who were about ten years younger than I. And I arrived in Chicago with three kids, no winter coats, nothing. Graduate school starts, it takes your life over, what was I going to do? I had to get my kids coats? One was 13, and someone looked at me and said, "Why doesn't she buy her own?" It never occurred to me. These were younger people, you know. They weren't parents, they were young. It didn't occur to me, you know. Let them have more liberty. So the age gap was of use, interestingly. It was harder for me as a mother of a very young child because there weren't that many. I made a good friend with Mimi who was, I think, my first lesbian close friend, because I was quite unaware of lesbianism and all that, and she had two little boys. She was in the same [parents group]— because we put him originally in private [cooperative] school. So yeah, between her and

somebody else, sort of cobbled together a kind of [mutual support]— most of the people in the organizations [we were in] were childless. And so that part was hard, to have younger childless people our principal batch, because we didn't have support. I didn't have support for mothering either.

ANDERSON: Did Dick share in the childrearing at that age? Was his schedule filled up with the university?

MORALES: Both of our schedules were filled up. I mean, we shared what there was, but both of our schedules were filled up. So we used the older ones as babysitters at night. We had a woman come in and take care until Alejandro was able to go to day care — which I was never comfortable with. I didn't grow up with someone taking care of my kids, and I still have a hard time. But she made it possible for me to go to grad school.

ANDERSON: So you were somewhat isolated in being a working mother in the woman's movement and slightly older woman with three kids. What about other demographics? Were you also alone in terms of being from Puerto Rico, or were there other women of color?

MORALES: Latina? There was an Argentinean I bonded with, yeah — I'm trying to remember.

ANDERSON: Any black women in the — like Chicago, let's talk about Chicago Women's Liberation, specifically.

MORALES: No, in the Chicago Women's Liberation Union — remember I was at the university group. I don't really remember.

ANDERSON: So it felt primarily white.

MORALES: Most of where I went I always felt it was primarily white, because I remember following whatever news I could find of anything — I remember a newspaper clipping, something about a black woman. Um, and it may be, again, my faulty memory, but my sense of it was looking for news. Because it was a whole line of talk, particularly then, not about women particularly, but about Latinas and, you know, how the Latin family, the women had such much more power, and you know the American-type thinking, to assume that there was sexism there or something like that, some kind of a tripe of that nature, and having, you know, lived in Puerto Rico, I just got that sentimentalized Latin American culture the way they were doing, so I was really eager to hear about any kind of organizing among — what little bit I could get hold of. But so I think basically what I remember was being surrounded by mostly white

people and [in addition to] the white people not too many, an occasional Latina, but –

ANDERSON: Do you remember conversations in those mediums about race or racism?

MORALES: Nope. I don't.

ANDERSON: Can you describe what a typical meeting would have felt like and what was discussed?

MORALES: Now you're talking to the lady without memory.

ANDERSON: Whatever you can dig up.

MORALES: But, I have little –

ANDERSON: Any snapshots will do.

MORALES: I have snapshots, and one of them is a whole bunch of us, maybe three or four being trained in speaking. I have a shot of the CWLU rock band, going and talking to them about, you know, teaching people music and how it's all very well to talk because we were always interested in passing on things, and being told, No, sweetie, I got my university work and I've got this and I can't cope any more. But the ideal was there, whatever skills we had, we passed them on.

I remember meetings, but those were women's meetings, meetings of the department, where we were challenging the department, like a student voice, the lack of courses, et cetera, you know, lack of — we got very little except committee meetings, but we were going to push them on having more voice and having more women. I remember the first woman that was hired, meeting her, greeting her and telling her about we had worked to get a woman there. And she looked insulted. She had gotten there all on her own.

ANDERSON: That's right!

MORALES: (laughs). It was a shock. Um, what else do I remember? I remember the consciousness-raising group.

ANDERSON: Is that something you did regularly? Was that a weekly or a monthly meeting?

MORALES: Yeah. I remember two very different ones, one with the Chicago WLU, and another one, I don't remember if I dropped out or what. I remember the group meeting in the Unitarian Church. My children actually hooked up with the church. Very progressive. They did wonderful stuff with role

playing, male/female, they did great stuff around gender and all kinds of stuff, they got a wonderful education from there and it was the most interesting group because we didn't have a racial mix but we did have an age mix, from very young women to very old women, and different living situations. So it was the one where I learned the most about different women's situations and what happens to women in divorce — all kinds of stuff.

ANDERSON: What did you learn about yourself in doing those consciousness-raising groups? Do you remember some of the most significant impacts on your awareness or personal life or revelations for you?

MORALES: No, I know it was an enormous change. I mean, I think that's why it brought a lot of — I really challenged Dick a lot on how we ran our household. And it was not easy to go through. But I don't remember any of the specifics. I mean, there's a way I've incorporated it so it's as if it's always been there. It's very hard for me to shift back to what it was like before the women's movement. I just don't know.

ANDERSON: OK. Let's stop there.

END DVD 4

DVD 5

ANDERSON: So yeah, let's go back to the last question. You had something to add about your change in consciousness and the women's movement.

MORALES: I think when I thought back about it, about what was different, I was thinking mostly around my behavior. I think there's something about the women's movement and participation in the numbers of people that I dealt with and the level of ideas and stuff that I think what changed in me is that I became more sure of myself, more confident in fighting sexism and asserting myself in my own possibilities and skills. You know, that was the shift.

Once I got over my secondary pressures — because what we haven't dealt with is in that period, in order to deal with all these things and all these contradictions, especially because I had so much trouble with the university, they initially didn't pass my master's [and I was a doctoral student,] didn't accept my master's thesis. They all gave it to me as a want-to-get-rid-of-me, later, so that's all I got out of the University of Chicago. I was drinking. And I became depressed. I eventually joined Alcoholics Anonymous and popped out of my depression, but that was a very bad period. And in the course of being treated for depression was put on incredibly powerful psychological drugs with which I could have killed myself. I mean, I told them I was drinking, and I was taking these things and drinking at that same time. So I went through a bad patch in the middle there, where all of this stuff I'm talking about wasn't there because of what was happening.

One of the things I didn't tell you is that in the course of this I got a Danforth Women's Fellowship. I don't know if you know about them? They were wonderful. They gave fellowships to women, especially women if they had this gap in their education, because of taking care of children or whatever, and they gave you money for taking care of the children. And they had yearly conferences where we met other women and we showcased our own work and talked to each other, networked and stuff like that. It was a really wonderful thing to happen in that period.

ANDERSON: So that was towards the end of your graduate school at Chicago?

MORALES: That was somewhere in there. I'm not sure of the exact dates.

ANDERSON: So how long was the dark period of drinking and depression and –

MORALES: Well the drinking had started and sort of increased, increased, increased. That was what people did socially anyway, so I was being encouraged by everything around me. But I think it was a year in which I was really depressed and not doing much and not doing anything active at all. Just really in the real gloom. Really hard time.

ANDERSON: And the way out was AA and/or therapy?

MORALES: Well at first, yeah, I went down to Puerto Rico with my husband — he sort of tugged me around in the fond hope of cheering me up, so I went places with him. I went to Texas with him. He took a group of students to Puerto Rico to do field work, because one of the things I've done as part of my field work — it required a lot of information and stuff, because I've done that kind of work. And in the course of it, my sister also is an alcoholic in Puerto Rico, she took me to her AA meeting. And I went, oh, because I had been trying to get, I mean, I just was one of the few who was not in denial, trying to get off it, I tried — I have records of everything I drank, trying to cut it down. When I got back I took my last martini, called them up and stopped drinking.

Then, after that, I'm still on these antidepressants and I'm still depressed. Eventually I popped out of it because I went with Dick to the triple-A S [American Association for the Advancement of Science] meeting. I was part of the Science for the People group to the AAAS meetings [in Mexico of the] American Association for the Advancement of Science. And in the course of — you know, we were there for obviously political and scientific reasons — and in the course of it, it just lifted. It just went. Magically. So I don't know the specific causes that eventually led up to it, but yeah.

ANDERSON: And is it something you've struggled with since, or is that just one episode for you?

MORALES: Depression?

ANDERSON: Um hm.

MORALES: It's something I'm liable to, except since then I've learned a lot about it. I've learned how to short-circuit it. I immediately get somebody to talk me out of it. You know, I get really short episodes but I've learned I have to deal with it. It is a constant temptation in my psyche to drop into depression — as is a constant, too, in my sister — to drop into insanity. I think this is our common heritage.

ANDERSON: The family legacy?

MORALES: Uh hm.

ANDERSON: Aurora has written about surviving abuse as a child and — when and how did your family start to reckon with that? Did that have anything to do with the women's movement and conversations that were started between the two of you around feminism, or, how did –

MORALES: How did she find out about it?

ANDERSON: Uh hm. How did you all as a family start to reckon with it and heal from it and how did it impact your family?

MORALES: It was all right because we didn't know about it at the time. Whatever she's talked about, we just had no information.

ANDERSON: Was that during the same period she's starting to talking about it?

MORALES: What?

ANDERSON: The late '60s, early '70s?

MORALES: No, no, no. She didn't talk about it then. No, no, no. This was somewhere in the '80s, I think. It was way later.

ANDERSON: OK, so we're skipping ahead but –

MORALES: Yeah, it was incredibly painful for me to know. Here I could even cry. To know I haven't been able to protect my daughter. It was horrible. It was horrible. I didn't want to hear the details, because I couldn't bear it. So in a way my husband had to be her means of support, because I couldn't bear it.

ANDERSON: How have you two been able to heal from that?

MORALES: I don't know.

ANDERSON: It seems like the writing that you two did together may have been a part.

MORALES: That wasn't necessarily part of the healing process in any way.

ANDERSON: No?

MORALES: I don't think so, I don't think so.

ANDERSON: Uh hm.

MORALES: And it never made a breech between us. I mean, if there were breeches between us it had to do with other stuff. We are both incredibly similar and bad tempered. I don't know if she would call herself so, but so's my mother. So we have, our relationship has, as so many mothers and daughters have, a lot of trouble, but I don't think this caused a breach between us particularly, I think. The writing was just one of our — I mean, we've been like on our telephone line, our telephone bills, our telephone line and it's almost like our best relationship to be on the telephone talking to each other. That's always been true. So that when I

started writing and she had been writing before, she's the one who told me that she was in the writing group with Cherríe [Moraga], that Cherríe was gathering material, you know, [and] did I want to, because she knew I quit my job and started writing. So she got me — you know, she sort of led me into that activity. It was her. Otherwise I wouldn't be in the book, all the stuff I'm doing wouldn't have happened without her. And she was the writer, she was the one who did readings, and she taught me how to go about it, basically, because I was seeing her do it and I decided I wanted to do the same.

ANDERSON: Let's pick up the writing string in a second. I just want to back up a little bit to finish out our conversation about the women's movement. One of the things that you've mentioned and I know to be true also is that you and Aurora were both in CW all year at the same time, and you're maybe the oldest member and she was possibly the youngest member, so –

MORALES: Yeah.

ANDERSON: What was that like, being a part of that kind of a group with your daughter, with the age span between you, and talking about such intense political and personal issues?

MORALES: I don't know if we were in the same rap group. I'm not sure we were.

ANDERSON: You probably came home and –

MORALES: Oh, yeah, no, there was a lot of talk. This is an interesting time, because, remember, this is a young adolescent woman.

ANDERSON: She was a teenager, right?

MORALES: She was a bloody teenager and we had our conflicts. At the same time we were allied on the antiwar stuff, we were allied on anything that happened in her school, and we were allied, you know, around issues in the Women's Liberation Union. So, it's a really amazing time that way. It was true with all our kids, but the conflicts, always, in our family developed — we always considered ourselves lightening rods with the whole family, in a way, and I think that something was brewing and she and I would spark off around it. But again, my older son was also involved in a lot of activities and stuff and we were incredibly supportive because the schools came down on them in high school.

You know, whatever, they took marijuana or drugs or whatever and everybody was sort of — this was really a very bad period there, because what parents were doing with their kids who were rebelling politically or personally, by either taking drugs or by any kind of personal rebellion or by being political, is they were putting them in mental wards. These supposedly enlightened faculty, middle-class people — so in that sense we

were [glad] the kids brought kids home and we had some young people staying with us who weren't living with their parents at various times in that period. So we were allies in all these activities, and thought alike — and conflict, felt conflict, otherwise.

Some of our worst fights happened in that period. Eventually Aurora moved out, both of them did — she moved in with a group of young women and they both lived in the neighborhood and they moved — it was a time of people setting up collectives. But I think our conflict was, part of it was like, we were fighting so much. So it's strange for me to reconstruct it but it was really true, we were incredible allies but we were also having these intense mother/daughter battles at that time.

ANDERSON: Do you remember what the heart of some of those conflicts were about?

MORALES: No.

ANDERSON: In your memory, do they feel mostly like typical mother/daughter kinds of conflicts, or do you think –

MORALES: As against what?

ANDERSON: Mother/daughters sort of parental struggles that — or do you feel like they had anything to do with the kind of stuff that you were learning about in the women's movement? I mean what, do you remember –

MORALES: I am sure we threw around all that vocabulary, because everything was put in political terms, because we were political thinking all the time, but I think they were mother/daughter. I think they were mother/daughter, as I said. She and I were, kind of, that with, you know, all the tensions in the family, we were the ones who were doing the fights, we were fighting for everybody in some way, that it wasn't just our personal fight, it's the way the guys positioned themselves so that we ended up doing whatever struggle we may have to be. I think it was family dynamics and our dynamics. And they continue. Even though we still agree completely about most issues and stuff like that, so I would say that it was either disagreements or — and, I mean, in a sense, some of them might have been about some kinds of liberties, but I don't know — because we did ask them to babysit, but I don't think that was the crucial issue. I think we clashed about tons of stuff. And you have to remember I was drinking during this period. I wasn't the best-tempered woman, because I was drinking. So my drinking has to be taken into account in terms of balance. So yeah, I would put them in that category, rather than in any kinds of particularly feminist issue. Except in that sense, that, yeah, sure, it's the women who ended up doing the thinking, struggling, fighting for the whole family, for a family of guys.

ANDERSON: So how did you all get out of Chicago? What happened to the Morales-Levins family in the 1970s?

MORALES: I wanted to leave. I wanted out of there. You have to remember that in that period, I had gone through all this stuff with — my master's thesis was reluctantly passed. Someone had sat on the damn thing for a year. Before that, you know, the person I was closest to in the department, as a friend, had refused to pass it. You have to understand that I — you can read it in one of my poems — but I criticized Levi-Strauss, who was the god of the time. And they didn't want to say, No, you can't be critical of Levi-Strauss, [so they said.] Couldn't you do a Levi-Straussian analysis? No, I can't do that. So it was that kind of a struggle, and I ended up — I'd just had it. I had just been through a year of depression. I wanted out.

During that period we were part of, briefly, an attempt to form a collective of other older people to move in together. I remember some of us went out to Salt Lake City because they were looking for professors, and Dick was hot at that time. And we were looking to see if they would have jobs for the other people in the collective. The collective broke up, but we were looking for either the East or the West Coast. And the East Coast because we'd be closer to Puerto Rico. And eventually someone said that they were looking for someone here, and we came east to check it out and that's where we went. But I wanted out of there. Yeah. And the politics had disappeared during that period. They had really come down hard on the sit-in. They instituted ways of screening students [so] they would have a more docile student body. Yeah, things had really changed politically, also.

ANDERSON: And so you came to Cambridge in what year?

MORALES: Seventy-five.

ANDERSON: And what did you find here?

MORALES: Well, what's interesting is that we came here and we also set up another collective. We had started up in Chicago. We started with the people who wanted to come with Dick and we met to discuss what we wanted to accomplish and there were some students here and we ended up in the department, I got a research associate position, and other people [got positions as] research assistants and stuff, and graduate students who were there, and Dick and another colleague, also you know, the official ones, and set up a collective called The Center for Applied Science.

And it was really looked at quite askance, but we taught a course together, we did experimentation together. Eventually we needed to get someone to come in and do the sort of secretarial work, we couldn't from the beginning, [though] we tried to do that, too. Eventually, like all these groups, we split, ceased to exist. But we ran very interesting experiments, working within an enormously hierarchical structure.

ANDERSON: What was the experiment?

MORALES: The experiment was trying to learn in a collective, a teaching collective, doing scientific work.

ANDERSON: Were you able to be back in the sciences?

MORALES: I loved it. I really do. I always missed doing the sciences. It's really interesting to do scientific work, to help teach a course. We did corn pollination in Wisconsin, Madison. We went to the Southwest to study ant behavior together. We just did really exciting — because Dick's work has always been, you know, because he's interested in issues of complexity. So what we ended up doing really, really different kinds of science stuff. And we had a women's group, and we had a –

ANDERSON: Within the science –

MORALES: Within the collective.

ANDERSON: Within the collective.

MORALES: We had a discussion group. And within that group we did handcrafts. In the meetings of course I was always doing handcrafts. There was knitting and basket making and crocheting and cooking — all this kind of stuff going on all the time. You'd see groups of pictures of us working together in somebody's house, it was the women.

It was also very exciting and interesting period of my life. It was also difficult in many ways. I don't know, again, but I had another depression when I got here. I came basically with a built-in group of friends, so it wasn't like I had to adjust and I don't know what specifically the issues were, except that I ended up going into therapy — clearly with someone who did not do drugs, because I had been so over-drugged. I had to spend time here when I got here getting off the drugs they put me on [in Chicago.] They were really powerful. So, I started doing therapy, in my tendency to be depressed. The collective didn't have the kinds of funds to support all of us so I decided to quit because I had [Dick's] salary of — left the funds to be used for people who didn't have the money.

But before that, some of the women, we had been writing together. That's when I decided I had things to say and that experience working in the collective where it was so interesting, we didn't care whose words were whose, as long as we got it together. It was wonderful — a unique piece of writing I did with three women [who] were able to sort of lose their egos in terms of the writing to get this piece of writing. I got really interested in writing and that's where I got that to see if I could enjoy it.

ANDERSON: And did you have a job at home at this point? Was your youngest still at home?

MORALES: Yes. Yes. When we moved here he was, I think, about — born in ’65 — he was ten when we moved here. Yeah, he was in a local alternative school, eventually in the high school.

ANDERSON: And what did you find here, in terms of the women’s movement?

MORALES: What’s interesting is that for a couple years I didn’t connect very much with it because I was in this own little world here. You know, for me to sort of discover New Words [bbokstore] and to discover the women’s movement [here,] it had to wait until basically had no longer this all-encompassing — I had a job, I had my kid and I had a husband, needing to get them to eat. So what was interesting is how isolated I was from my first landing here.

ANDERSON: And then you created some more space in your life by getting rid of the post.

MORALES: Yeah, then I started getting the institutions, like New Words eventually moved here [to Inman Square,] which was a delight. And Take Back the Night.

ANDERSON: Yes, you were involved with that in the late ’70s, right?

MORALES: Yeah, a couple years.

ANDERSON: Organizing the marches, or what was your role in that?

MORALES: Yeah, yeah. A group of us got together to help organize the march. Again, I don’t remember the details or date, [but] each one of these meant whole bunches of friends that I acquired. But now I don’t remember what we did around the marches. I remember, you know, having someone just drop in and a wonderful bunch of women surrounded him with gently expanding sense of power. [A man, trying to disrupt the march, walked into the line of the march and was tightly surrounded by women who gently moved him out.] They were really great, the Take Back the Night marches. I’m trying to remember, outside, I did volunteering.

ANDERSON: Well, you said you were part of a writing group –

MORALES: I was part of a million writing groups, lots of workshops, because what New Words did was bring writing teachers. The one I remember best was [Joan Larkin] who came here and I ended up taking several [workshops], because she started teaching at Blueberry Cove in the summers and several of us went. Many of the group would go with us, but we formed a

writing group out of — the first writing group we formed was out of her class, and almost everybody signed up. Somebody came all the way from New Hampshire, and slowly they start and now it's a really mixed group. We had black women, you know, and myself as Latina, so it was the beginning of a very different kind of experience for me. The second group was a women-of-color group. And then the, I guess — no, the first group — and the first [second] group was when I found, you know, [a notice on a] bulletin board [about a group] with E.J. Graff. Do you know her at all?

Yeah, we met I think at Somerville a lot of the times, with my first. With my second one it was a women-of-color group, my second group is the women-of-color group. And my third one is the one that lasted for years and years and years, we would get together to write and to edit our stuff. And then my last one is one I started when I found myself having to deal with my parents again and all these feelings and thoughts. Everything I read was from the point of view of the parents, which is great. But I had nothing — at least I didn't find any, I'm sure it was out there but I didn't find anything — that talked about my dilemma. And so I got a bunch of women together who [were] not [in] exactly the same situation, and we started writing on that. And then we have since evolved into a completely other group, and I'm still [in it] even though I'm no longer [writing.]

ANDERSON: When you first started writing, what did you start to write? Was it poetry? Prose?

MORALES: Poetry. Prose poetry. Well, some of the stuff that was published in *This Bridge* [*Called My Back*], one of the pieces was written, one of the things I did is, for Aurora's birthday, I went to visit her one year and we went to hear June Jordan and to go to her workshop. And one of my pieces was written after hearing her in San Francisco, since it was a great experience. You know, this period is punctuated by amazing writing groups, amazing readings by people and the kind of both support and vision that they brought to me. Yeah, that was a really crucial experience. Just listening to June Jordan was so amazing.

ANDERSON: You've said that, on your writing during this time — I think on your bio form — that it was in coalition with other women of color, that's how you phrased it. What does that mean?

MORALES: Basically that's what *This Bridge* was. It was a coalition [of women of color] — it was not sort of organized —it was always talking about experience, our own [group's] as well as a common one, I don't know. Certainly the first time I had had that experience, and I think that's what was so important about it. It wasn't sort of nationalist or narrow or, you know, they call it identity politics, which is rather dismissive. I think it was, in fact, this real understanding of a larger issue, beyond our own fights against racism, our own fights as women, and fights against homophobia. It was — we were all in it together in that sense. The book

brought us together. And then, you know, readings, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, we knew each other, but I think the book brought it together and I think we were all with that kind of consciousness at that time.

ANDERSON: And did your politics change as a result of that project?

MORALES: I would think so, yeah.

ANDERSON: How so?

MORALES: Well just that real consciousness, for once — remember how much of my life has been lived in white America, except for my years in Puerto Rico. So that really connecting with black women, Native Americans, Asian women, seeing us in the larger situation, understanding, and seeing the differences, all that kind of stuff, you know, it really did change me. It changed my consciousness, it changed my comfort in the world, and it really expanded me out of that little narrow place, I think.

ANDERSON: And then how did your project with Aurora start, that was published a few years later? What are the origins of that book?

MORALES: That book was the result of a reading in Ithaca. The Ithaca Poets [a literary organization] invited me to go read and I always read Aurora's words. I loved reading Aurora's words. Yeah, sometimes it feels like she's gotten inside my head and put my thoughts on paper in a much better way. And someone at the end of that reading approached me and it was Nancy Bereano [of Firebrand Books,] and she said, "Have you and your daughter thought of writing a book together?" Of course we had, we'd both published, and I said, "Oh yeah, it's one of these daydreams." She said, "Why don't you put something together for me?" And that's where we got started. And then we spent a couple of years at it.

ANDERSON: How did you choose what went into the book? What didn't make it in, what kinds of things?

MORALES: We did have to do a lot of writing, we didn't have it written. We did a bunch of writing. I think the way we chose was in coherence with the other pieces. There wasn't a lot that was left out, but once we started, it was Aurora who basically organized it. She took a table at the Berkeley library and spread everything out and tried to make some kind of sense and flow of it. She knew the whole thing. I was the one who was the slash-and-burn person. Don't try to fit them in, they don't fit. Get them out, the book is more important than — there was not any particular logic to it. It had to do with what fitted in with what we already had, what themes seemed to have emerged. And so at this point I remembered what we left out, we just culled it on that basis.

ANDERSON: And who was your audience? When you were putting it together, who did you think your audience would be?

MORALES: I don't remember consciously thinking of an audience, but I had already been reading for a number of years. And I can only sort of make it up in the sense that mostly I talked to women. It was really, I think, my writing and reading that really launched me into women's community, feminist community. So that even to meet more different kinds of women, cities, it was that sensitive. I don't remember whether at that point I'd done some reading at the university — I'm not sure. But I think if there was an audience it was that, but I think also, as some of the stuff I had to write, I mean, the piece I wrote called Concepts of Pollution, which is the piece I still am proudest of, was to them. It wasn't to the particular people in my audience that said –

ANDERSON: I want you to sort of finish your thought about audience. You were talking about the pollution piece and –

MORALES: Yeah, the Concepts of Pollution piece was an experience. The sort of the core of my personal and political experience as an anthropologist is really tracing the incredible amounts of genocide that happened, the death that happened all over. And it's incredible to sit and study all these things and not have people really saying, This crime happened and this crime is happening. This happened, and these things — and not really be talking about imperialist expansion. And it was just massive. I don't think you can get an idea, item after item. It was massive in South America and North America, in the Pacific, in Africa, it was just incredible, just the spreading out of death and destruction. And for me to have written that piece, to have put out something that was churning inside of me, was just crucially important. And I still read it and feel like, Great, you said that!

So I think the audience — you know, it's part of like, I needed to tell the world rather than I had an audience. There were pieces like that where it was just — my mother once said, when she looked at the book, she said, it wasn't a *desahogo*, it was an unburdening. And some of the stuff that I wrote, the pieces that, you know, full of emotion, were just unburdening of things that have choked up in me over the years.

ANDERSON: What was your family's response to the book, both this family and parents and grandparents and — all positive?

MORALES: My entries in the book — one of the things I'm really impressed with is how angry I was. And one of the things I'm ashamed of is, in fact, that some of the anger toward my mother-in-law and my sister are there in ways in which they cannot fight back. I would never do that again. So both of them were unhappy. My mother and my father were very — [he] had lost his memory. He had dementia. He was not capable. My mother read bits of it and was pleased to pass it on. My sister passed it on to my

cousin, who had similar experiences — she's mentioned in the book, too. And she loved the book. You know, that kind of thing, but I don't have that much intimate family. I know that one time one of my cousins in Puerto Rico whom I didn't know, I think it was like the next generation down, was taught from that book, was incredibly excited and pleased to have been — it's his family in this writing. But that's as far as I know.

ANDERSON: How do you see your work fitting into the canon of Puerto Rican writers, or Puerto Rican female writers? Do you see yourself as part of that body of literature, or do you see yourself as part of the body of Nuyorican literature, which you've also sort of been –

MORALES: Yeah. It's interesting, because I don't usually think of myself as Nuyorican, because I'm an earlier generation. I think of myself as a New York Puerto Rican. And I think it has to do with the American — I think it's important that I wrote, because I am a woman in that generation [and] there were very few voices, particularly women's voices, from that generation. Yeah, I do see myself as a Puerto Rican American writer, rather than Puerto Rican. It's a whole different tradition.

ANDERSON: Absolutely.

MORALES: But it's really important, it feels to me, for Puerto Ricans to read about this community and know about us. And insofar as I think about those terms and the different terms of North American, U.S. American women's writing, in either way, being the Puerto Rican voice there and being the woman's and feminist's voice in the Puerto Rican American community.

ANDERSON: And the term Nuyorican doesn't mean much to you because it's a different generation's language.

MORALES: Because it's not the way we talked. I understand what they mean, but I'm uncomfortable fitting myself to it, simply because that's where I was at. You know, there wasn't this kind of writing community. As a writer, I was in Boston, I wasn't in New York, so I didn't fit in with that group. The Latino writers I met were here, that really vibrant Puerto Rican community.

ANDERSON: Let's stop right there.

END DVD 5

DVD 6

ANDERSON: OK, last tape. Is there anything, before I ask you anything [else], that you want to go back to — our topics over the last couple hours, about your writing or anything?

MORALES: I'm trying to think right now, but — university experience — but nothing comes exactly to mind.

ANDERSON: How would you characterize your experience of being here, living in Cambridge and the School of Public Health. You talked about being here initially, but now it's been 25 years or so.

MORALES: Yeah, I fell in love with New England and really with the community of the feminist movement that I'm part of. It's my home. I've become a New Englander in every way they'll have to carry me out feet first, is what I keep saying. I have this home and this community. I have a lot of good friends here, formed in all kinds of ways, I mean, my best friend — one of my best friends — was part of the original collective. She is now in Ithaca. Another best friend was from one of the early therapy groups, which is, again, an all-women therapy group. You know, things like that. I'm a member of the Women's Community Cancer Project, which is a woman's group. So I have these whole networks of friends, my writing group, of friends and groups and mostly women. I'm part of this — on Thursday I went to this exciting talk by Cynthia Enloe. Oh, she is so good.

So yeah, this is home in every way and the women's community is Dick's home, too. I mean, he has been one of the single two or three men in any women's audience for decades now, um, because he follows me around to practically all of my readings. So, you know, that is my community, in every way.

ANDERSON: You said that your dad retired to Puerto Rico. Did your mom retire?

MORALES: Both of them went to Puerto Rico. When my father went, my mother went kicking –

ANDERSON: Right, you talked about her caretaking him there.

MORALES: Yeah, and also he made the decision. She didn't want to go. But they did go to Puerto Rico and [her life was] truncated because she couldn't drive and, you know, it wasn't the same atmosphere, and he was very controlling. It's interesting how people live there with large great cast-iron grills around the houses, which are locked at night. It's very symbolic. And, in fact, when we went down there to help take care of him, when my mother was in the hospital, he would lock us in. At four o'clock he would lock us in. It was a jail. It was a jail. And he got even as he lost his mind,

even more and more, it was more important to lock things up and close himself in.

ANDERSON: So how had your relationship with them grown and evolved over the years?

MORALES: We, you know, when I visited them, I think, sometime in at least — it had been five years since we visited. It was not close. My sister maintained a closer relationship, telephone conversation. She lived in Florida and then California, and for the longest while — I didn't know, it severed at one point — but for the longest while they were, you know, my mother and her particularly, were chums, talking back and forth and that kind of stuff. So they maintained much closer relationship in the period in which I was pretty distant and estranged. I had to become undistant when something happened, when my mother fell and broke a bunch of bones in her body.

ANDERSON: And so you needed to go to Puerto Rico to care for her.

MORALES: I needed to do something. The first time I went down there and assessed the situation, and my mother said my father had to be put in a nursing home, and I said, "I'll come back in a couple of months," because both of us had responsibilities. I had gigs and Dick had teaching, and we'll come back in a few months. Immediately my mother fell and broke a whole bunch of bones. I had to cancel my gigs and get on the plane and go do something. Basically I ended up putting them both in nursing homes. No, first they put my father in the nursing home and my mother was in the house and I tried, with somebody, to help take care of her.

And my mother, being without my father, being bitter about that, bitter about the situation she was [in], and having her kind of personality, which deteriorated, um, she chased away everybody who took care of her. Eventually she had to be put in a nursing home. And we couldn't put them in the same nursing homes. My father would seek her out at all hours and, you know, he would just sort of disturb everything and we just — in a sense she always had to be protected, not in the sense that he was violent, it's just that he would wake everybody up at night because he was seeking my mother. So, they had to be put in separate nursing homes.

And in that period there was a question of — I didn't like, for one thing, [putting them] in a place full of Anglos, you know. They would be culturally totally isolated. And secondly, I didn't want [to bring] them here, especially my mother, because my mother would swallow up my life. As it is, you know, what we did was put them in nursing homes there, we went down three times a year and kept in constant telephone communication, but I don't think I could have taken care of them in any way if I hadn't had distance. Otherwise I might have flaked out the way my sister did. My sister just got weird, disconnected. She had gone down, found my mother crazy and just snuck out, basically. She couldn't bear it.

I don't want go heavy on her, though I was furious. But she couldn't bear it. My mother would probably — she was undernourished, [which is] what happens to caretakers of Alzheimer's. This is all stuff I learned afterwards, I did not know it at the time. Once we got a doctor for her, [we found out] she was undernourished. That's what happens to people who take care of — and it's usually women taking care of guys, but not always. That's what happens to the people who take care of dementia patients. They really deteriorate terribly.

So getting him taken care of was really important and if she had just a somewhat different personality, she could have stayed in her home. But there was no way. It was very hard. And then the nursing home situation was really so lousy — that's another thing. [I'm going to] burst into tears. The nursing home situation, finding better nursing homes and the things wherever it was, my mother was kicked out. My mother had, in some ways, a wonderful personality, in the sense that she was charming and she was really interested in people. If we got to our lawyer, she knew in two seconds the lawyer was married, had been divorced, and had three children. My mother, I mean, she just really connected with people. But if she was furious, she had an inclination to [use what she'd learned about them spitefully]— and so while we were here, and we didn't even get consulted, she got moved from one nursing home to another, because they all knew each other. So that was a really difficult period, and trying to find her one that was good, adequate for her, and would keep her, that was really, really hard. It was not so much for my father. But I found the nursing homes inadequate and difficult, I think they are most everywhere, but there, because they were not Medicaid-supported, they were really worse.

ANDERSON: And where did you find support for caring for them in their old age and at a distance? How did you get through that? You had a writing group you mentioned.

MORALES: First it was Dick. However much he didn't want to go down there, he really took care of a lot of the calling. I couldn't get up the courage at that time and talk to her because it was so difficult. He would do it. He just did a lot of that stuff. And of course the kids. Once we went in a whole group and visited my mother — the whole family. And I set up the writing group and that's where I started basically writing. I kept a journal in that period, so I ended up writing a piece about it which summarized a whole lot of my experiences, and just the understanding of how, and being able to do anything about how awful it is for old people and for the people taking care of them. What limited options you have, how painful the whole thing is, how particularly painful I suppose it would be if you really were [living] at [a nursing home.] But I it's even a different kind of painful if this is someone who you didn't want to be really close to anymore because of your memories. My memories were revived by the fact that my mother

was at her worst and the interesting [thing] and for me, relief, was that Dick was able to see my mother and finally understand what my childhood was like because my mother was a person most people didn't know. They did not understand.

So that was really, really hard and that's when my worst insomnia problems started. I started sort of disappearing and becoming — and then having to deal with their money. At that time I was not someone who dealt well with money. And I had to take over their finances and [cope with] my mother's suspiciousness and also trust. And she'd go from, You're the trustworthy one, [to] then sort of like, you know, she gave me her stainless steel service and then said, "Oh, you took it?" It was this kind of paranoia, at the same time that obviously I was the only one she could trust and she depended on me, entirely and completely. It was really crucial to her that I stay and help and keep connecting and take care of her. Because that was what she had. And she had sisters there, but they were old and they were not close because she spent all of her life here, all her adulthood in the States. So I mean, we were it.

The writing group, as I said, was helpful because I got that piece of writing done. It was a place to talk about it. And I talked about it to everyone in the streets. I found someone who was18 years younger than me who said, "How are you?" And I told her exactly what was happening. And she had the same problem because she was a late child. So we both had elderly parents, even though the gap between our ages was 20 years or something like that. So because of this there's nothing else to do. I would, in elevators in Puerto Rico, in banks, burst into tears. It was a very frustrating experience — any time I was there, organizing all her stuff, under this incredible emotional pressure. It was very hard.

ANDERSON: And your mother is no longer living?

MORALES: No. My father died after several years, I think three years, and my mother after five years. And the thing which I've also discussed with other women is, if we knew how long it would last we would be fine. But you don't know. My mother could have lived into her 90s. That very uncertainty I think adds pressure to the women who had to take care of elderly people in really difficult situations.

ANDERSON: Do you feel like you've gotten your life back?

MORALES: Oh yeah. Yes. Yes.

ANDERSON: But it must have taken some time. Like you said, you started to disappear too, as the caregiver.

MORALES: Yeah, I had to deal with my own health. That's where I started finding a natural process, because the medical establishment couldn't do anything

for me, in terms of sleep, so I spent a whole lot of years taking care of my own health. And yes, we always spent, between our late spring — we went in after Dick's teaching was over and then before teaching, so the summer was bracketed by two visits and one in winter. And in the summer we spent two months in Vermont. I now spend nearly four months in Vermont.

ANDERSON: Wow, you are a New Englander.

MORALES: One of the things we did with the money from the [sale of the] house we started buying in Chicago, was, we started putting it into — we barely could buy this place because we'd spent the money buying a piece of land up there [in Vermont] and building a little cabin sort of place. And that's where we — you know, the countryside is important to us and so — having it to spend the [summer] in Vermont. And that's part of being in nature as part of the healing. And I did my writing up there, too.

ANDERSON: What direction has your writing taken in the last five, ten years, or where is it headed now? What are you working on?

MORALES: What's really interesting is that I stopped. I stopped. I was writing, I started writing fiction, I was laboriously working through the writing, finding it harder, and eventually sat down [and consulted Aurora] and Aurora said, "Well, stop." I had almost felt like I had no choice. I was a writer and I had to write. But it was — and I've tried to analyze since then why. You know, I started with very specific kinds of things I had to say, joining the community, and said some more things, and then after that I was writing because I was a writer, not because I had very specific things to say. And there may have been other things involved in the decision, but I think that may be the core of it. I was pushing myself to write. So I think that was the primary thing.

I stayed interested in words, so the latest project was that I edited and almost reworked a piece of Dick's, because I wanted to work on something I understand and agree with. And of course the writing group meets every two, three weeks, and we have poetry and translation and prose writing. Jean Hardisty's part of that group. So we have this very, incredible stuff to help out with and that's really interesting. I helped edit the *Boston Women's Newsletter* for a bunch of years. Mostly that's where I use my skills. But I haven't particularly — you know, I did, in this period, write one piece about memory, because the whole issue of memory was crucial. So every once in a while, something needs to be said, I'll say it. But I haven't done any systematic writing now for a long time. I've done a lot of reading. While I was writing, I did less reading. Now I'm making up for lost time.

ANDERSON: Do you write for yourself, journal writing or any –

MORALES: When I feel the need to. Part of my, you know — I'm dealing with sleep apnea and all that kind of business — was, the minute the sleep clinic mentioned journaling [as a way to help with insomnia,] I said, "I know how to do that," so I do occasional journaling. I go periodically in and out of journaling. I have separate journals for friends and for this and for that and the other thing and I'll write about it, but not recently, I haven't done that much.

ANDERSON: What about your political priorities these days? Where would you say they are?

MORALES: As an activist, I mean, obviously everybody's political priority is — [every activist] that I know — is we have to do something about this incredible neofascist regime we have. Um, but the actual work I'm doing is with the Women's Community Cancer Project, which I've been part of for ten years now.

ANDERSON: Say more about that.

MORALES: I became interested in various health issues. Part of it was because of my own health. And partly because when I came to New England, one of the things I started reading in the newspapers was about various sources of water in various New England towns being contaminated. So that alerted me to the issue. And I had a close friend and neighbor who died of cancer, and a lot of women in my life, people in my life, uncles and stuff, had died of cancer. So when I heard about them, at that time I hadn't been in any political group in quite a while. I was looking actively and it seemed to suit me exactly because this was a group that was talking about dealing with cancer in political terms, in terms of women, and it was a group of women — which I prefer to work with at this point in my life. It wastes less energy for irrelevant things by working with women. So I was very pleased to join them. That's what I've been doing.

And one of the things I'm proud of about this organization is they were among the first ones to really push for [the role of] contaminants and toxic chemicals in causation of cancer, because that was not the original push. And [that idea] has now spread over — and part of it was —— and that's how the Women's Community Cancer Project has gotten its reputation, because through the writings of the project and activities, a lot of groups are taking up — it's given women's cancer groups, or all cancer groups now, you know, the radical cancer groups, but even the mainstream ones [as well] have begun to pick it up. So that was really an important part of my wanting to join this group.

ANDERSON: And what do you think is next for you or for the two of you? What's your vision for the next ten years?

MORALES: Oh, Lord.

ANDERSON: I won't ask you to think beyond that. (both voices) What do you think is next for the two of you?

MORALES: Well obviously, this was a major venture for Dick and I to do some writing together, and we're very pleased. I also have my little historical piece, he was correcting something in a Puerto Rican newspaper and I edited his work, so since I didn't even feel like writing, I'm editing his work right now, especially urging him to write some stuff about Puerto Rican history, particularly the history of those early years in Puerto Rico and our experience in the Communist Party. There were very few of us. And so anything you write as direct participants rather as people sort of looking off from the side, so many of the participants have died. So, you know, if I can push him into doing the writing, I would be more than happy to do the editing and rewriting, whatever, because I love doing that. So that's one aspect of what we want to do.

Other than that, life as it is. I mean, I have the writing groups and he goes to Cuba every year and does work in Cuba.

ANDERSON: You don't go?

MORALES: No. I've been on three trips. Three separate trips. I'm not a great traveler, particularly because of my sleep problems. Just in general. I mean, I've done a lot of traveling simply because I've got family who were footloose and I follow along or whatever. They are all great travelers. Um, but it's not in me. I'm glad they've taken me where they have, I love to hear about other people traveling, but it takes it out of me to travel. So, no I haven't. I have friends in Cuba that I haven't seen in a very long time — '79 is the last time I was there. We've all aged. So I write letters occasionally. That's it.

ANDERSON: What are some of the lessons, I guess, from your experiences as an activist spanning so many decades, so many times of change, what would you want to pass on to the next generation? What do you know that you want other people to know from your experience?

MORALES: God, it's hard to think of it in those terms, but — I don't tend to think in [terms of] passing on, but I can tell you things I get worked up over in terms of my history. And I think one of the things that really impresses me is the importance of democratic process in any kind of activist organization. One, because the various kinds of things [violations of their own principles of party democracy] in the Communist Party, because of the experiences in the women's movement of either sort, antidemocratic and of the really democratic sort. You know, there are problems with an

excess of lack of organization and constant processing and all that kind of stuff, but I am impressed with the importance of democracy in groups.

I guess one of the things that my whole, this whole career, has given me, is a sense of my own privilege, because I moved from my working-class childhood to middle class — we're a small percentage [of the population]— as a light-skinned person. And I really have a sense of the importance of the movement. This whole — that's the other thing, the hubris of intellectuals, typically white, middle-class intellectuals, who think of [themselves] as leaders. That also has impressed me, you know, the history of all the movements I've been in. One of the things that's so interesting about Cynthia Enloe is how she understands all layers of society and how they look and how everything contributes –

ANDERSON: She's very smart.

MORALES: Unique. But yeah, that's the other thing that impresses me, the sense of, like I said, the hubris and the fact that they really aren't the ones who need to be moving this thing along.

ANDERSON: What would you say you are most proud of?

MORALES: I guess in terms of my writing, particularly two things I'm impressed, like I said, about the Concepts of Pollution [piece], to be able to put that together and to say really clearly what it is that enterprise is, anthropology, what has really happened in the world. I'm proud of having been a part of the Bridge [*This Bridge Called My Back*] group. I'm proud of having been of service. My writing has been used by — authors have responded to what I've written from all kinds of positions. I mean, this is not writing for Puerto Rico women of my generation, just people, from immigrant experiences. It's incredible to me the people who respond to what I've written. I'm proud of having given them something to think with and feel with. I have met women who — I met a woman who just discovered suddenly she was Puerto Rican. She'd grown up Jewish until something happened and her mother sort of pushed her off on her Puerto Rican relatives she didn't even know she had.

The other thing I'm proud of, too, and I'm proud of in relation to both what Aurora and I have done, is our real understanding how mixed our populations are, really rejecting the nationalist purism — to know not only is the United States mixed, Puerto Rico mixed, every strand in every one of the mixtures in Puerto Rico or United States — this goes on historically. It's a myth that you're not all mixed. And getting that out to people [and] constantly reiterating it, that's also something that I'm proud of, that we said and reiterated [it] and people have picked up on [it].

ANDERSON: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MORALES: No, I guess not. I guess my one interesting adventure right now is old age, to sort of move my way through old age. I've always wanted to be old, actually.

ANDERSON: You did?

MORALES: Yes.

ANDERSON: Why?

MORALES: I guess because I hated being young, being dependent and young. Because my mother was incredibly beautiful when she was older, so I wanted to be 30, I wanted to be 40 — it was something I looked forward to and look like her. Because I didn't have old people in my life maybe, I always sought out old people, because I didn't have grandmothers. There's a whole bunch of stuff. When I first cut my hair short, I was cutting my hair short to, you know, I was getting older and I thought cutting my hair — and I realized, the one old woman I knew was my best friend Jane's mother, a southern woman in the middle of Puerto Rico. And she had what they called then a boy haircut. I didn't have it as short as this, but when I first cut my hair, it was not [to be stylish but to be like Jane's mother.] So contrary to sort of the general trend I've always celebrated each decade with excitement, not realizing what it, in some conscious way, what it was leading to. It's like, Oh dear, there are problems with old age. There's a possibility of disease and there's certainty of death. And so, being aware of that is part of being this age and especially for someone like me, who's always looked ahead. There's no way I'm going to let it obliviously fall on me. And, you know, Dick had a heart attack when he was 51, he had an operation — something we have to look at. So having those two ideas in fact clash. It's an interesting adventure.

And I'm exploring new things. I'm doing Tai Chi, I'm doing meditation. These are just new things in my life. I love to dance. I finally discovered that if I can't walk because it's icy outside, I just put on my dance tape, do the rock-'n-roll music that I learned to love when I was a graduate student. So, you know, all these coming back. So, watching my old age happen as well as being active in all these groups are part of what makes my life tick right now.

ANDERSON: And you are a grandparent — raising the next generation and helping to do that.

MORALES: I am not a very active grandparent — another thing where I'm really against the trend. I really had mothering by the time my third one grew up, and it had been hard raise to little kids, so when new babies came around I really didn't do that much grandparenting. And I haven't. I'm entirely grateful to my children and their partners that they made sure that the tie is

there even though I'm not a hands-on grandparent. So that's another thing that is — people congratulate me as a grandparent and I go, I didn't do anything. Because I have been sort of against the trend in the sense of not really looking forward to grandparenting. I love them all, but it's been — I guess because I wasn't grandparented. I didn't have that much of a model. I don't know. So I do some grandparenting, obviously, but not great scads.

ANDERSON: That would be an interesting thing to write about, given how overly sentimentalized it is. I mean, mothering is one thing, but even grandmothering is something that people really talk about only one specific way, so I'm sure I would be grateful for you breaking the silence about, there's more than one way to grandparent.

I guess my last question is, you had written in a bio that writing, for you — this is probably many years ago when you wrote this — that writing, for you, broke a lot of silences. I'm just wondering if you still feel like there are silences, that there are things that have [been] left unsaid. I know you don't want to write right now, but are there still silences in your life in that way?

MORALES: That is an interesting question, but it's like I've told you before, this is one you have to plant and let me think about for a couple of weeks. I have no idea. I mean, I'm not thinking in those terms, which — I covered that. Not usually. And possibly because I'm not thinking in terms of writing, it doesn't occur, I don't think — no, there are things I'm listening to other women cover. I'm really interested in what people are saying and writing, more than I am in breaking — I think for me it was really important to break that whole long sort of silence imposed by all kinds of things, including, by the way, starting to write in Puerto Rico and being told I could not write Puerto Rican literature because I was writing in English. You know, I just succumbed to a whole lot of forces that kept me from writing, but I did write. I did write a lot of what I wanted to say, and any time I think of something, like writing about memory and what it is, there are various experiences in life in which everybody shares. Not sleeping, not remembering things, being tired. If you have some really — like the fatigue, what is that?

ANDERSON: Chronic fatigue?

MORALES: Chronic fatigue. If you have a really horrible sleep problem, any of those things, or memory problem, nobody really understands these things, because they all happen to think it's like theirs. So that's why I'm thinking about writing about memory, because my memory experience was worse than other people's — they didn't realize that. And so there are things like that, that people need to write about. I just had the experience with another woman telling me what it was like for her to be so exhausted from an illness she picked up in the Philippines, and how people couldn't see that

it was not just being a little tired. So that it's interesting, those kinds of issues have become interesting as I suffered health problems and noticed the social forces around it, just the way you notice someone is around old age and stuff like that. The other old age one is constantly telling people I'm old and they say, Oh, you're not old. God, that gets me mad. The various social pressures about how you should be old, how you should be a grandparent. All of these things get me incensed, but the only thing I have written about and felt really I needed to write about was that memory piece, and maybe someday I'll be moved to write about all of these things. But right now, I'm just, I sound off. I do a lot of sounding off.

ANDERSON: OK, I'm going to turn the tape off.

END DVD 6

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Peggy McKinnon. Audited for accuracy by Kelly Anderson. Edited for clarity by Revan Schendler.