

Transcription of an
Oral History Interview

with

JEANNETTE COSTO

July 27, 1998

Thirty seventh in a Series

By **Jan**

Erickson
UC Riverside

Transcription of Oral History Interview with

JEANNETTE HENRY COSTO

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Erickson: Jeannette, would you start by telling us where you were born and a little about your mother and father?

Costo: I was born in 1989, June 27th. (Editor's Correction: Birth year was 1908). My mother and father I did not know.

Erickson: Oh.

Costo: I was an orphan. I didn't know I was an orphan until I grew up. But they took care of me for a while, and then I began to go to various homes, different homes. So I was not brought up—I was jacked up!

Erickson: Well, do you remember some ... were they relatives?

Costo: No, I didn't have any relatives. They were strangers.

Erickson: Did you ever live on a reservation?

Costo: Yeh. Once, when I was little.

Erickson: Was it

Costo: I don't remember which one it was. One in the east.

Erickson: But you are Cherokee, right?

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: Well, tell me how you and Rupert met?

Costo: He was a story.

Erickson: Oh, you were interviewing him?

Costo: Yes. I was interviewing him for a story for the local paper. He was drinking and I didn't like it, so I told him. From then on we were friends.

Erickson: What were you interviewing him about?

Costo: About the Indians up there?

Erickson: Where was that?

Costo: At Anza.

Erickson: Oh. Well, you came to Southern California?

Costo: I worked there. I worked in Riverside County.

Erickson: For which paper?

Costo: Hemet News.

Erickson: Before that you had been in Detroit, hadn't you?

Costo: I was in Detroit and then Pennsylvania—a series of jobs.

Erickson: You like to write, don't you?

Costo: Oh, yes. I wrote when I was six years old.

Erickson: Oh? Do you remember what you wrote then?

Costo: It was about the sun.

Erickson: You don't have a copy of it?

Costo: Nah!

Erickson: Well, who taught you about Native American traditions when you were little?

Costo: Oh, I don't know. It was a natural thing, and you never figured it out.

Erickson: Uh huh. Did people tell you stories, Native American stories?

Costo: Everybody told stories. Indians and everybody else told stories. It was that kind of a time—no other entertainment. Even movies were rare. So that's the only entertainment they had—stories. Everybody told stories.

Erickson: Did you have a favorite story?

Costo: No, I don't remember.

Erickson: That is one of the communication forms that Native Americans are trying to keep, isn't it? Is that correct?

Costo: Oh, I don't know. They use their gestures and hands and—any way to communicate. It wasn't favorite. Anybody who tells you it was favorite is lying. It was not a favorite. You used anything that was handy.

Erickson: Where did you go to school, Jeannette?

Costo: (pause) The only school that I remember is Colombia University.

Erickson: Do you remember how you got there?

Costo: By lying like hell!

Erickson: Really?

Costo: I didn't go to grammar school. I didn't have any schooling.

Erickson: Oh my goodness.

Costo: I have no education, formal education. None!

Erickson: Except for Colombia.

Costo: And then not much. I didn't graduate.

Erickson: Did you study journalism there?

Costo: No.

Erickson: What did you study?

Costo: English.

Erickson: Well, close,
(laughter)

Costo: Nobody knows that I am absolutely uneducated. I'm self educated.

Erickson: As a matter of fact, I thought you had a doctorate.

Costo: Shaking her head.

Erickson: Not true. Well, how did you ... You are such a perfectionist

Costo: Self educated.

Erickson: How did you teach yourself? And what books were you ...

Costo: Reading and listening, (pause) And attending certain sessions that interested me, mainly mathematics.

Erickson: Oh, math?

Costo: I don't remember much but mathematics interested me. The sciences interested me. But I am self educated. Totally self educated! Which means I am better educated than anybody.

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: Because I went everywhere it was necessary to go and heard everything necessary to hear to learn any individual topic.

Erickson: That's wonderful.

Costo: In fact, I never had any fun. That's all I did was study.

Erickson: Did you have some girl friends growing up?

Costo: No. I didn't have any friends ... at all. Too busy. I told you I never had any fun.

Erickson: I know you did. Well, let's see. Did you have some memorable experiences in your interviewing people?

Costo: The cops. Anytime I had trouble, I would run to the cops. Anytime I was hungry, I would run to the cops. They always liked me. They always fed me. They always told me stories. Anywhere I lived, I went to the cops. To this day, they are my best friends.

Erickson: That's right, they've helped you here at the house, haven't they? When did you really start off on your own would you say?

Costo: My own for what?

Erickson: You said that you were an orphan and placed in different homes. When would you say that you left there?

Costo: I didn't leave. I got kicked out. You mean when I was able to go out on my own?

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: When I was about seven.

Erickson: Oh, Jeannette! My goodness.

Costo: I have a picture I've been trying to find of me and my brother. A couple of... dressed in rags going from one place to the other. I'll find it and send it to you.

Erickson: Oh, I'd like that. Was your brother younger than you?

Costo: Oh yeah. I had one sister, a step sister and two brothers.

Erickson: Oh. Did you lose contact with the other brother?

Costo: No. I lost contact with everybody. Deliberately. I didn't want anything to do with anybody. I was on my own, and that's it.

Erickson: You're a strong woman, Jeannette.

Costo: You don't know anybody like that, do you?

Erickson: No, no. Such a strong woman. What do you think that was in you that made you so strong, so self-willed?

Costo: I was mad! I'm still mad.

Erickson: I know.

Costo: (pause) The way people treat other people. Not me. I don't care, but the way they treat people and treat each other. It stinks! That's what makes me mad. I can't do anything about it, but that's the way it is. You get angry.

Erickson: Well, let's talk about the time you came to Southern California then, and you said you interviewed Rupert.

Costo: Well, I came looking for a job. I got a job—I got two jobs. One I didn't keep and the other was with the HemetNews. What's his name? The publisher, crippled, (pause) Homer.

Erickson: Homer? I don't think I ever met him.

Costo: No, he was dead by the time you got on.

Erickson: Oh. What kinds of stories did he hire you to write?

Costo: I was a general news reporter.

Erickson: So you'd go anywhere in the county?

Costo: Yeah.

Erickson: How long did it take for you and Rupert to become acquainted after you met that first time?

Costo: Well, as soon as I met him I knew that this was relative, and I immediately criticized him—drinking and carousing around. He took my criticism (pause) right away. And then I left Hemet and went to San Francisco. I had a job here (in San Francisco).

Erickson: With a paper?

Costo: Yes. So Rupert came to join me.

Erickson: He followed you.

Costo: He didn't have any work. Conditions were terrible. So he came here.

Erickson: When would that have been?

Costo: Oh, I don't remember, (pause) 1950?

Erickson: Oh, in the fifties. So, how old were you and Rupert when you met?

Costo: I was forty, and he was forty three.

Erickson: So did you get married right away?

Costo: No, about three months later.

(laughter) Erickson: Did you marry
here in San Francisco?

Costo: No, we went to Rupert's former school in (pause) up north.
Where the hell was it? What's the state directly north?

Erickson: Oregon.

Costo: No. Yes, it was Oregon.

Erickson: It was Oregon.

Costo: . He was on the football team.

Erickson: Oh.

Costo: So we got married by the Priest - no, it wasn't a Priest. It was a Protestant Minister, Rupert's friend. He married us in his living room. And his son in law was the witness, and Rupert's sister was a witness. So we are legally married. I still have the marriage certificate.

Erickson: Oh, great. How did you and Rupert decide to form the Indian Historical Society?

Costo: Well, we were in the middle of a fight with the government about Indian rights, and we were talking to a group of Indians here. We formed it with them, except that they didn't want to do any work.

Erickson: Oh, they didn't? They wanted you to do the work.

Costo: They wanted to have fun! They wanted to have parties. We rented a building down there ...

Erickson: Down the street?

Costo: 1951.

Erickson: Uh huh.

Costo: And they wanted to have parties there. We moved in and gave up our house, moved in there to keep it up, and they wanted to have parties—for us to clean it up.

Erickson: Oh, dear.

Costo: So we said "No."

Erickson: In that original group, how many people were there?

Costo: Twelve, (pause) How many are left? (pause) None. Too much like work—so they left.

Erickson: In the end, you had Jim Lewis. Who else would ...

Costo: Oh, he came long after.

Erickson: Oh, long after. At the most there were twelve members of the Society?

Costo: At the most? Oh, no. Word began to ... open up memberships.

Erickson: I see.

Costo: And finally we had about 400.

Erickson: Oh. Was it exclusively for Native American membership?

Costo: Well, we had three types of membership: one were exclusive where you could vote; second were non exclusive, they couldn't vote; and the third were "so called friends" — money.

Erickson: Um hmm. Up to 400. That's quite a lot. Did you send mailings to them, that kind of thing?

Costo: (nodding yes). We did a lot of work.

Erickson: What was your primary concern?

Costo: About the Indians—their rights.

Erickson: About treaty and enforcing treaties.

Costo: The treaties and every other kind of right. They didn't have any rights. And those civil rights, no legal rights.

Erickson: And water ... was a huge issue.

Costo: Nothing. Nothing. We fought on all fronts—for water (pause) for general rights. We fought everywhere.

Erickson: Before you formed the Society, had you and Rupert worked together?

Costo: Yes. I worked for ... Rupert worked for the State.

Erickson: As an engineer, right?

Costo: Yes. I worked for a series of corporations—typing, stenography, anything—anything to make money. That's what we both did. And we didn't have any. We just made enough to live on and that's it.

Erickson: Did you put the other money into the Historical Society?

Costo: Yes. We supported the Historical Society. Rup (Rupert) supported the Society at first.

Erickson: How did you learn ... was this also self taught... your experience being an editor and a publisher?

Costo: Oh, I was an editor for a number of papers.

Erickson: So you brought that to the Historical Society.

Costo: I learned on the job.

Erickson: Um hmm. What was the first book that you and Rupert wrote?

Costo: What?

Erickson: The first book that you and Rupert wrote together?

Costo: I don't remember.

Erickson: How many would you say that you co-authored? Many?

Costo: About six. But we published forty books. Other people's.

Erickson: Other people's.

Costo: Or a group of people.

Erickson: Would people just send you their manuscripts and ask you to ...

Costo: A lot of people sent manuscripts who couldn't get publication. But we found the people we wanted. And they were good. Our books are still good.

Erickson: Were they used as textbooks?

Costo: Some of them.

Erickson: Do you ...

Costo: We did a book on treaties, and that was used as a textbook. Nobody figured out the reason for the treaties or how or what until we had that book on that.

Erickson: How many treaties were there?

Costo: Oh, 200.

Erickson: 200.

Costo: Two hundred and forty some.

Erickson: Now I remember that Rupert went to Washington to testify. Did you go with him?

Costo: No. We couldn't. We couldn't go together—anywhere. We split off. I took care of the office, and he went. Or I went and he took care of the office. We didn't have enough people.

Erickson: Did you have any employees working for you?

Costo: At one time we had eight. We had so much trouble that we fired them all.

Erickson: Oh.

Costo: Had them for a year.

Erickson: And then you just did it yourself?

Costo: Yes. Nobody else understood. You had to train'em.

Erickson: Now that was first down the street? And then how did you move up here?

Costo: Well, we decided to end the Historian Society.

Erickson: Oh.

Costo: And we decided to sell the house. We found a house right here.

Erickson: At 1493.

Costo: Yes. Lucky. So we moved here.

Erickson: So you officially disbanded the Historical Society.

Costo: Yes. Legally.

Erickson: Legally. You kept all of your papers though downstairs, didn't you? And there was quite a collection.

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: What was in that collection, Jeannette?

Costo: The University has some but not all. I have the rest.

Erickson: What kinds of things did you give to the University (of California, Riverside)?

Costo: Correspondence. Papers. Everything. It's a very rich collection. And they'll get the rest.

Erickson: You kept some back here?

Costo: Oh, yes.

Erickson: I remember that Rupert talked with Richard Nixon. Is that correct?

Costo: Nixon was a friend.

Erickson: A friend of the Indians?

Costo: Both of us.

Erickson: Both of yours.

Costo: We liked Nixon. Rup was Republican. I was Democrat. Didn't make any difference. We liked Nixon. Smart. Smart as a whip. And then we liked the Republican whose wife was the head of the (pause) His wife was the head of the

Jim Erickson: Red Cross?

Costo: No, no. (pause) Some words escape me. The University,
(pause) The Regents.

Jim Erickson: Meredith.

Erickson: Oh. Khachigian.

Costo: What?

Erickson: Meredith Khachigian.

Costo: Yes. She's my friend.

Erickson: Ken Khachigian is her husband. He worked in the Nixon
administration.

Costo: No, her husband is strict Republican.

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: So is she. She's my friend—very good friend.

Erickson: What kinds of things would take you to Washington? You or
Rupert?

Costo: Well, Indian things that came up?

Erickson: Before Congress?

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: Or before committees?

Costo: No, before Congress.

Erickson: Would they write you or call you to speak?

Costo: No, we found out about it, and we went!

Erickson: You went. I see. You initiated it.

Costo: Yes. We were not invited—believe me.

Erickson: Really. How were you regarded when you were there? Did they treat you with respect?

Costo: With fear! (laughter)

Erickson: Would you talk about the time that the Pope was going to canonize Father Serra?

Costo: We came out flat against it, and the priest here gave sermons in church against us. And then he appeared before the State against us. Didn't do him any good.

Erickson: Well, what was that process? Did you appear before someone in the Catholic church?

Costo: Yes. We appeared regularly whenever we thought it was necessary. They always listened. We had good relations with them. But of course when you are confronted by a priest, you just keep your mouth shut. We didn't!

Erickson: As I recall, you went to Arizona or was it New Mexico, maybe?

Costo: What?

Erickson: For ... to visit the Pope. Or am I confused.

Costo: Oh, it was Arizona.

Erickson: It was Arizona.

Costo: The Pope was in it, and we were there. Rupert snubbed him. (pause) We were in the receiving line, but Rup snubbed him, wouldn't shake hands, wouldn't kiss his hand, (pause) I just laughed. I thought it was funny. He's a good looking man, you

know, the Pope. And the kids love him. He knows just how to talk to them, (pause) A good looking man. Very genial. Now of course he's sick and old, but he was very genial.

Erickson: Were you raised Catholic?

Costo: Yes. So was Rupert.

Erickson: Rupert, too.

Costo: But we really never were again.

Erickson: Did Rupert grow up on the reservation, the Cahuilla Reservation?

Costo: Yes. And nearby in Hemet.

Erickson: What did his father do?

Costo: Anything he could find—caretaker, handled animals, everything. He was the first caretaker for the Mission Inn, Rup's father.

Erickson: Is that right?

Costo: They never mention it.

Erickson: No, I've not heard it. Do you know how long he worked for them?

Costo: Oh, I don't know, some years.

Erickson: But that would have been in the days of Frank Miller?

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: Well, tell the story if you will about the parent, the navel orange tree and the Costo involvement.

Costo: Well, I don't know that story. It was his father who planted it, that's all.

Erickson: That's all.

Costo: It's a simple thing. He just planted the first navel orange tree. It was an experiment, but it worked.

Erickson: It worked. Rupert went to RCC (Riverside Community College) and was very successful there, was he not?

Costo: Went to where?

Erickson: Riverside Community College.

Costo: Yes, that's where he met (John G.) Gabbert.

Erickson: They were in classes together?

Costo: Gabbert is very sick, you know?

Erickson: Yes, except that he's doing better now.

Costo: He thinks so. He hopes. I think they took his bladder.

Erickson: I think so.

Costo: It's a bad deal. He fell into the hands of the doctors. They did what they wanted. He needn't have done that.

Erickson: Would you talk about your philosophy. Because you do avoid going to doctors.

Costo: Well, I have a doctor in case I die. And he knows that if I'm old enough and sick enough to let me die—forget it. So here I am at ninety.

Erickson: But you don't typically take medicines, prescriptions.

Costo: Oh, no.

Erickson: How do you feel about that?

Costo: I don't take it, that's all. I don't care whether anybody else takes it. They can take it, but not me. Sometimes if I have a bad headache, I'll take an aspirin. It's a natural thing, you know. Otherwise, I don't take any medication. When I got into the hospital, I didn't have any choice.

Erickson: Well, that was a different situation.

Costo: Well, I'm still recovering from the medication.

Erickson: Really?

Costo: Sure.

Erickson: You seem to be healing, don't you think?

Costo: Very slow, tough. Now what else can I tell you?

Erickson: Let's talk about Rupert. At RCC, he received the Distinguished Alumni Award.

Costo: Yep.

Erickson: Tell me other things about Rupert.

Costo: He and Gabbert.

Erickson: Oh, both of them. Where did he go to school after that?

Costo: He didn't go to school after that. He worked, and he learned engineering by himself.

Erickson: He did? Like you.

Costo: He worked in San Francisco as an engineer. Learned it by himself.

Erickson: And then what was the football experience that he talked about?

Costo: Well, he was on the football team for two or three years at universities. I don't remember.

Erickson: Uh huh.

Costo: I'm against it anyway.

Erickson: Oh, you are? Why do you say that?

Costo: Because it's not a good sport. It's a harmful sport. I don't think they should do it. I think if they continue, they should change it. It's a very bad sport, and I'm against it. If I had a son, he wouldn't play football. Do your boys play football?

Erickson: They never did. (pause) Well, how did Rupert become interested in the UCR campus?

Costo: He helped to found it.

Erickson: And would you talk about that?

Costo: I can't talk about it. I wasn't here. He helped to found it with Gabbert. When it came to the place where they needed approval from the State Legislature, I was there. I covered the news media.

Erickson: Oh.

Costo: Yes. And they appeared and I covered the news media, and Rupert and I decided to get married.

Erickson: So he was one of the early founders, and you covered it journalistically.

Costo: Of course. One of the leaders.

Erickson: Uh huh.

Costo: They wanted a university, and they finally got it.

Erickson: Do you know if he went out and talked to various groups about it?

Costo: Yes. He went everywhere. He went to the State Legislature.

Erickson: Oh, he did?

Costo: He appeared. I covered the news. At the State Legislature, I covered the news. We had one person with us, a priest, Father Phillips. And he would buttonhole all the reporters, and he would say how was it going to wind up? And he would buttonhole the legislators, and he would say "How are you going to vote?" And threaten them: "How are you going to vote?" So the three of us were the Three Musketeers.

We were pretty poor. One time we were so poor that Father knew, and he knew where we lived, on Golden Gate. So he put a five dollar bill in our letterbox.

Erickson: Oh, isn't that nice.

Costo: He was a good friend.

Erickson: Did he live here in San Francisco, too?

Costo: Yes, that's where he was located.

Erickson: You have had contact with UCR students over a period of time, haven't you?

Costo: Not really.

Erickson: Oh, not really.

Costo: Well, you didn't really get a good student body until recently.

Erickson: Do you mean academically?

Costo: Academically. And the students themselves—you didn't have many of those either, just a few.

Erickson: Talk about that, about the application to claim the status of Native American.

Costo: I didn't do anything for them. I was just there for them. I went to (pause) what's his name, the guy who left before Ray?

James
Erickson: Ted?

Costo: Ted Hullar. Ted and Carl (Bovell) and Rupert and I had a meeting. Ted had taken the students out of their office, just removed all their stuff and put it in the basement. So we asked why in the hell he did it? He said he needed the room. So we raised hell with him, and I cried. That's so bad. And that was our first encounter with Ted. After that he got a little better.

Erickson: Go ahead.

Costo: Took the student's little room away, because the women needed it. And left them in the corridor. Took their desks that they themselves supplied and put it down in the basement. No sense.

James
Erickson: Then he returned them because Jeannette asked him to change that and bring it back.

Costo: It made no sense. Stupid. Why did he want to make enemies out of the students? He did. They hate him to this day.

What else do you want to know?

Erickson: I was just going to mention for the record that the Native American student organization is housed within a building that has your name on it—Costo Hall.

Costo: It does?

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: For good reason, I guess.

Erickson: Absolutely. Well, I'd like you to talk about the experience for giving the Library to UCR.

Costo: No experience. We told them we wanted it and that's it.

Erickson: Why did you choose UCR?

Costo: Because it was Rupert's university, where he lived, the facility he had created. That's why. Very simple.

Erickson: Which Chancellor did you start those negotiations with?

Costo: Who was before Ted?

James
Erickson: Tomas Rivera. I think you started with Tomas.

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: You started with him, and Carl Bovell.

Costo: No, it was before him.

James
Erickson: Ivan Hinderaker. You've met Ivan, but I think he had already left.

Costo: Well, he had left. He was temporary.

James
Erickson: No, that was Dan Aldrich.

Costo: Aldrich. We talked to him. He was very good.

Janies Erickson:

Yes.

Costo: He was too old to serve.

James

Erickson: He actually followed Tomas Rivera for a short time, a year and a half.

Costo: Yes. And then he died.

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: He was very good. And that's how we started with him. We followed his advice on how to do it. Simple.

Erickson: But there was a ceremony commemorating that day.

Costo: Do you have the pictures?

Erickson: Yes, and I think that you have some in your scrapbook, don't you? Would you talk about that day. How did you decide who to invite?

Costo: Well, it was already decided. We agreed to have the ceremony, which we had. And the Chancellor was Ted. He danced with the Indians.

Erickson: (laughter) That was outside. Yes, that was wonderful.

Costo: It was a good thing you were ... You were pictured also in the same picture.

Erickson: Yes, it's a wonderful picture of Rupert and us walking under the Library covering. Do you remember that one?

Costo: Yes.

Erickson: I like that one a lot.

Costo: Yes.

James
Erickson: Do you remember the entertainment, Jeannette? There was a group, a wonderful group from out of the state. You might describe that.

Costo: They were from Wyoming. Good friends of ours. Yep.

Erickson: You had some special food that day?

Costo: Yes, we had Indian food.

Erickson: I remember "wee wish."

Costo: Wee wish. Mainly wee wish.

Erickson: Tell what that is.

Costo: And then some roast game.

Erickson: Tell what wee wish is.

Costo: It's (pause) what the hell is it made of?

Erickson: Isn't it acorns?

Costo: It's just acorns.

Erickson: It's all ground up.

Costo: Yes, ground up and cooked. Cooked or baked or boiled. Whatever.

Erickson: But it was a very special day, wasn't it? There was a religious ceremony.

Costo: Oh, yes.

Erickson: In the (Costo) Library itself.

Costo: Yes. (pause) The Indians did it. We have pictures. I guess you have, too.

Erickson: Um hmm. You had the different pipes that day.

Costo: It was a good day.

Erickson: It was. Well, Jeannette, you've worked with several of the chancellors, haven't you? You were naming a few.

Costo: The last four.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Costo: I worked with (pause) Who's this guy who died?

James

Erickson: Well, you worked with Tomas.

Costo: Before him.

James

Erickson: Dan Aldrich.

Costo: Aldrich. Tomas.

Erickson: Hullar.

Costo: Hullar, yes.

James

Erickson: And then Rosemary Schraer.

Costo: Rosemary Schraer.

James

Erickson: And now Ray Orbach. You've worked with five actually, five chancellors. More than half of our chief executives.

Costo: The worst one was (pause) the woman.

Erickson: Rosemary?

Costo: She just put her time in.

Erickson: Hmm.

Costo: That's all. When you wanted her opinion, she gave you the cockamamie stuff. But she was a nice gal.

Erickson: Um hmm. Who was the most supportive?

Costo: They were all very supportive in their own way. They were all very supportive. It was a real big deal for them, what the hell! Yes.

Erickson: Yes, there was national coverage, wasn't there?

Costo: In that day it was a novelty for Indians to give money. Now it's usual, they have it. Then they didn't have it when we did.

Erickson: How would you say that you continued this? You persevered, even after Rupert passed away, with your writing.

Costo: Well, you couldn't stop it.

Erickson: Well, but most people probably would have. But you didn't.

Costo: Well, I don't know why not. Why not. It's your life.

Erickson: It is your life, isn't it?

Costo: Yes, and so why not?

You see, that only took us an hour.

Erickson: Isn't that difficult for you to proofread all that material, Jeannette, because your eyesight is not good?

Costo: Oh, no.

Erickson: No?

Costo: I have only one eye, you know.

Erickson: You don't see at all (in the one eye)?

Costo: This eye is blind, blind.

Erickson: And I've noticed that you put the copy up very close to your eye.

Costo: Well, when I don't have my glasses on. With glasses, I don't need to.

Erickson: We are down here (indicating notes on a page) for the questions now. What would you say that have been the major successes in your life, and Rupert's?

Costo: The University program. We didn't meet much resistance. Everywhere else, there was resistance.

Erickson: And were there some failures along the way, too?

Costo: Not really. We got what we wanted. Even now, with the new Chairholder, we got what we wanted. Jack (Norton) was rejected. Did you know that?

Erickson: Yes, I did actually.

Costo: He was rejected.

Erickson: What do you look for in a chairholder?

Costo: How he's going to help the chair, how he's going to help the university, how he's going to raise the stature of the Indians on the campus. And Jack was the one. We were lucky to have him. But they didn't want him. They wanted some

cockamamie bastard from (pause) where the hell was he from—
Texas or Tennessee or somewhere.

James

Erickson: I think Texas.

Costo: Texas. Never met an Indian. Didn't know anything about
Indian history. Didn't care. Nice guy.

Erickson: Urn hmm.

Costo: Nice guy. I'd like to have a cup of coffee with him, but that's
all. And they did not want Jack. They rejected him. Jack was
rejected. Hah! I don't know whether he knows that. I think he
does. He doesn't care. He's a guy after my own heart. He
doesn't give a damn! He was rejected.

Erickson: Now when you started ... Oh, go ahead.

Costo: When he was rejected, I went to the chancellor, and I said, "I
want him." He said, "We'll have him." And he's been the best
we've had. A wonderful teacher. He's going to teach.

Erickson: When you started the Costo Chair, Jeannette, the Chairholder
was only for what, a one or two year period—initially?

Costo: One or two.

Erickson: Now that's different?

Costo: You can't do that. We're looking for a lifetime chairholder.
That'll be the next one. Jack will help find somebody. He
doesn't want it. He's too old anyway. Jack is 65.

Erickson: How many chairs have you filled? How many chairholders have
there been?

Costo: Five.

Erickson: And each of them has had a different perspective?

Costo: Yes, but the best one was Jack. Just like I said he would be. He's advertising UCR everywhere. Everywhere he goes, he advertises the university. He builds up students who could be leaders. Good. He doesn't work alone. He's very, very good. Sol fought the hell out of them, and he got it. I told the Chancellor, "That's what I want." And he did. He wasn't afraid.

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, comment on the other chairholders, the other Costo chairholders. They each contributed something different.

Costo: They each contributed something but none really a lot. It's Jack who's doing it. Build up the university, get Indians into the student body, get Indian teachers—and he's doing it. I knew he would.

We tried to get him five years before, but he was embroiled in a divorce with Marcie. So he couldn't make it. Now he's free and cleared. He's remarried. He's been married eight years to Jana. She's good. She's very good. And she's good for him. Why she wants an old man, I don't know!

(laughter)

It's her business.

Erickson: What kinds of things would you like to see the university do in relation to Native American issues?

Costo: Well, what I want them to do they're working on—to develop a division, an Indian division, just like history. That's what they're working on. Whatever I want, I get. I don't have any problem.

Erickson: And you want that to be an academic focus?

Costo: Of course. I only work for an academic program, by the teachers.

Erickson: Carl Bovell has helped you through the years, hasn't he?

Costo: Well, Carl is my friend. He's a good friend. So is Anna. Anna is sometimes a pain in the ass, but she's a good friend.

Erickson: She's a good person.

Costo: Carl particularly is my friend.

Erickson: He seems to understand the issues ...

Costo: And David. Carl and David. Carl and David were the first to contact us in 1980.

Erickson: Is that right?

Costo: David and Carl came together—on their own.

Jim
Erickson: Did they come to your home here?

Costo: Yes, over there.

Erickson: Down the street.

Jim
Erickson: Oh.

Costo: Who was the Chancellor then?

Jim
Erickson: Tomas Rivera was Chancellor.

Costo: They ignored Rivera and came here themselves.

The worst Chancellor we had to deal with was Rivera. He thought he knew it all, didn't know anything. Lied like hell. Promised all kinds of things but never meant to carry them out. He meant well. That's the best you can say for him.

Jim

Erickson: Was it Carl then who was following through with you?

Costo: Carl and David. They were very close friends, you know. They are now, too. You know that?

Jim

Erickson: Um'hmm.

Costo: Carl was first, Vice Chancellor. He didn't like it and didn't want it, so he recommended David. David seems to like it. I don't know why.

(laughter)

Erickson: What else would you like to talk about Jeannette?

Costo: Nothing. I'm finished.

Erickson: Ok. I just wanted to mention that you had a very nice birthday a month ago.

Costo: Oh, I had a good birthday.

Erickson: Ninetieth birthday.

Costo: I'm ninety years old. Can't believe it.

Erickson: I believe it.

Costo: I can't believe it.

Erickson: You had some really nice friends here that day, too, didn't you?

Costo: Oh, yes.

Erickson: What are the men's names across the street?

Costo: Jerry.

Erickson: Jerry and ... what was the other one?

Costo: John.

Erickson: John, that's right.

Costo: They are ... what do you call it? Women.

Erickson: Are they gay?

Costo: They're gay. Could you tell?

Erickson: No, actually I can't.

Costo: Nobody really pays any attention to them except me.

Erickson: Oh, they're very nice people.

Costo: They're very nice, sure. I don't know why. They're very nice people. They've been very good friends.

Erickson: They have.

Costo: Any time I have trouble at night, I call Jeny. I did last night. I didn't know what time it was.

Erickson: What time was it?

Costo: 2 o'clock in the morning.

Jim Erickson: Oh.

(laughter)

Erickson: What did he say?

Costo: I fell three times, and he picked me off the floor, (pause) He's a good friend

Erickson: Um hmm.

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, as a writer—you've been such a wonderful writer. You've sustained that and you've kept writing and doing research. That inner strength—what's kept you going?

Costo: It's natural, (telephone interruption)

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, I was asking you about your strength. You continue to write and do research on your books. Where do you get that inner strength?

Costo: I don't know. It's natural. You want to do it—you do it. If you don't do it right, you learn—in all kinds of ways.

Jim

Erickson: But you have sustained it long after other people would have quit. You've just kept going.

Costo: Well, sure, because it's my work.

Jim

Erickson: And in the process, you've told me that you've rewritten the real history as it should be recorded. That the schools haven't been doing that. Do you want to comment on that?

Costo: Of course, (pause)

Jim

Erickson: Have you been disappointed in what the schools were doing?

Costo: There's always disappointment if it doesn't go fast enough. But they're doing what they can. And Ray is doing a good job. He's doing what he can. If you need help, he'll give it. He still

doesn't know that one of his students, an Indian, is a lawyer,
(pause) He's a lawyer.

Jim

Erickson: A number of them are.

Costo: I don't know, but he practiced law. Doesn't like it so he's probably going into teaching. He's good. Solid. Quiet. Working with Jack. Nobody knows him—and they won't—until he's finished. Just taking the courses that will give him a degree. Very good guy.

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, the various convocations at UCR which have honored you ... Was one more meaningful? We had the chair, we had the book signings, also the dedication of Costo Hall. Was one more meaningful to you than others?

Costo: Oh, sure. It was very nice. Very thoughtful.

The Chancellor I disliked was Rosemary. She was a fraud. She didn't know anything about what was going on, and she didn't try to learn. Just this pleasant face, this smile, and the make believe. She was a fake! And I couldn't say anything. And her husband was worse. Bah. Terrible guy. Trying to keep her memory alive on the campus. I don't like him—and I didn't like her except as an ordinary person. She was a nice person. A lousy chancellor, and she didn't care. She was about ready to go. What the hell!

Erickson: You liked Ted, didn't you?

Costo: Not particularly. Oh, you

Erickson: didn't?

Costo: Lightweight. Looking for something better. I got along well with him. He was the first chancellor that paid any attention to us. But I didn't really like him. Don't like him now.

Pompous. His two boys are really a pain in the neck. You know his boys?

Erickson: I don't know them. I've met them years ago.

Costo: Pompous asses. The younger one is the worst. He tries to speak with an English accent.

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, do you remember at the first Regents meeting when you were honored, you had a message to the Regents about the student... Costo Hall, the student service building. Do you remember what it was?

Costo: pause

Jim

Erickson: You said something to the effect, "It's a student service building. Watch it! Protect the students."

Erickson: Do you remember that?

Costo: (nodding negatively)

Erickson: You just went to a Regents meeting recently, didn't you?

Costo: Did you know we did that in one hour? (meaning the interview)

Erickson: Yes, that was fast.

Costo: Sure. It's ten after ten. What time are you guys going back?

Jim

Erickson: After lunch with you. Jan had one more question for you.

Erickson: Oh, I just said that you went to a Regents meeting about a week or two ago. They all know you, don't they?

Costo: Oh, yes.

Cost

Erickson: Did you address them?

Costo: No, I don't have anything to say.

Jim

Erickson: They gave her a standing ovation though.

Costo: They always give me a standing ovation. I like the chair.
What's her name?

Jim

Erickson: Meredith Khachigian.

Costo: I like her.

Erickson: Yes.

Costo: Do you know her?

Erickson: Yes, I do.

Costo: Cultivate her. She's good.

Erickson: Yes, she's very nice.

Costo: She's a Republican, but we don't care about that!

(laughter) Erickson: We won't

hold that against her!

Well, thank you very much, Jeannette.

Costo: Well, we got through with it very fast.

END OF INTERVIEW

Following is part of a conversation we had after turning off the tape recorder. When I realized the information being given, I turned the recorder on again with the permission of Mrs. Costo. (Erickson)

Costo: During the Flu Epidemic. Everybody was sick, everybody was dying. I took care of a number of people. They were so sick. People were just dying like flies.

Jim

Erickson: Family members, too?

Costo: Yes. Bad deal. Very bad time.

Jim

Erickson: How were you taking care of them at such a young age?

Costo: I took care of myself.

Erickson: You didn't get sick at all, did you?

Costo: (did not hear or understand)

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, when did you realize that you were going to be a strong activist for causes and for people?

Costo: I didn't realize it.

Jim

Erickson: It came naturally?

Costo: Yes. (pause) They criticized me, I criticized them back.

Jim

Erickson: Do you remember the first cause you ever supported?

Costo: Well, it was in New York, and they had a program which was participated in by the schools, and I was part of it. They elected

Costo: me a member of the committee. And then the head of the operation, I don't remember his name... He came to a meeting where I was present, and I spoke. He said, "My God. I didn't know she could talk. I thought she had syrup in her voice, and here she is. She's fighting. My God. I have to remember that." He never nominated me again.

Jim

Erickson: Some time you got in trouble for your causes.

Costo: I got in trouble that time. Didn't bother me. He said it looked like sugar wouldn't melt in her mouth.

(laughter)

I was little, and I was nice looking, you know. Just a girl. He wasn't prepared for what I said.

Erickson: He didn't know the force behind that, did he?

Costo: I called him an idiot. He was. Didn't know anything.

Jim

Erickson: Jeannette, through the years, did people try to retaliate to you when you took them on?

Costo: Never bothered me. It didn't bother Rupert. They tried it on him, but he was big. An Indian. Strong. He took care of himself. I couldn't do that.

Jim

Erickson: But you were more effective as a team, the two of you.

Costo: It didn't make any difference. Do what they want. I don't care. In university work you have to be like that. Just don't let them bother you, because the chances are next semester, they'll be gone anyhow.

(laughter)