

Transcription of Oral History Interview with

**CONCEPCION G. RIVERA**

August 13, 1998

The following oral history interview is being conducted on Thursday, August 12, 1998, with Concha Rivera, the widow of the former Chancellor of UC Riverside, Tomás Rivera.

My name is Jan Erickson. I work in Chancellor Raymond L. Orbach's office. He is the eighth chief administrative officer of the Riverside campus.

Erickson: Concha, would you begin, please by telling us where you were born and a little about your family?

Rivera: Well, I was born in Mexico in the State of Coahuila, if you're familiar with that?

Erickson: No, I'm not. Where is that?

Rivera: It's a northern state. It borders Texas. The border town is Eagle Pass. I was born in a small town up in the feet of the Sierra Madre. A very nice little town—it really is.

Erickson: It sounds nice.

Rivera: It's really nice. It's very small and it hasn't grown in all these years. I go back off and on.

Erickson: What's the elevation?

Rivera: Actually the town is at the foot of the Sierra Madre ...

Erickson: Oh, I see.

Rivera: but you get up in the morning, and you see the beautiful Sierras right in front of you. The town has a little river that runs through it with a waterfall. Just a very, very beautiful little town. But I left there quite early, when I was only twelve years old.

Erickson: Did your whole family move?

Rivera: We moved to the border town of Dieras Negras, which is across from Eagle Pass, Texas. Then we came to the states. My father had a lot of family living in Crystal City, Texas, and that's where we settled down coming to the United States. He thought it would be more comfortable for our family to be with family coming into a different country and different culture. So that's where we settled down.

Erickson: Sure. What kind of work did he do?

Rivera: He worked for a furniture company.

Erickson: Did he continue that in the states?

Rivera: Yes, he did. He did that until he retired.

Erickson: Uh huh. And your mother?

Rivera: My mother was a housewife. She had three kids to take care of.

(laughter)

I have two sisters.

Erickson: Sisters. Are they still in Texas?

Rivera: Yes, they live in Texas.

Erickson: And how about Tomás?

Rivera: Tomás was born and raised in that little town, Crystal City, where my family came.

Erickson: Oh, I see.

Rivera: He went through the school system in Crystal City. He has two brothers.

Erickson: And are they living?

Rivera: They both live in Crystal City. One is an M.D. and has his practice right there in Crystal City, and the other one has his business there. Tomás was the oldest. The middle one has the degree in business.

Erickson: How about your education? Did you go to public schools in Texas?

Rivera: No, you see, I came to the states when I was 21 years old.

Erickson: Oh, I thought you said younger.

Rivera: Younger than now, yes.

(laughter)

So, I went to the school system in Mexico. I went to an all-girls school, all the way through high school.

Erickson: Was it a Catholic school?

Rivera: No. It was a public school, but that's just the way the schools were. And then I went to what you call here Junior College.

My family was and still is a very poor family and I needed to get something quickly so I could go out and get a job and help out. So I took an AA in Business. Typing. So I managed an office.

Erickson: You managed an office. Was that your first job?

Rivera: Yes, but I had lots of different jobs throughout the years.

Erickson: Well, one was in interior design, wasn't it?

Rivera: For that I went to school here. When I came to the states and after Tomás and I got married and had the kids and they were all in school, then I went to school because I didn't have any education in the states.

I went to a Junior College and finished in San Antonio, Texas. Then I went to an interior design school and got an AA in Interior Design.

Then when I started working here at the Museum of Photography, I went to Loyola University and got an AA in Fund Raising.

Erickson: So you got three AAs.

Rivera: Yes. But not a BA.

Erickson: Well, they should add up, shouldn't they?

(laughter)

Rivera: Right.

Erickson: Well, did you do some interior design work?

Rivera: No, you know, I didn't. I didn't because when I was just finishing that, Tomás died.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: And then I went ... a few months after that, I started working for the Museum of Photography. So, I haven't had the opportunity to work in interior design.

Rivera: At this time now, I probably couldn't do it. Before I'd have to take refreshing courses or something.

Erickson: Well, I don't think so. I've seen your home.

(chuckle)

Erickson: How did you and Tomás meet?

Rivera: We met at his home town, obviously. He was finishing up his high school, his senior year. We both liked dancing, so we met at a dance.

Erickson: Oh, that's nice. And how long did you go together before you got married?

Rivera: Oh, we didn't get married until four years later after he had his BA.

Erickson: He got that from Texas?

Rivera: Southwest Texas University, which is in San Marcos, Texas.

Erickson: And then where did he get his graduate degrees?

Rivera: His BA was in English. But of course, as soon as he finished his degree, he went out looking for jobs. He found out that, at that time. You know, we are talking late '50s or '60s. They weren't going to hire an Hispanic to teach English.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: So, pretty quickly he decided to change his major and went into Spanish. Before that he got his master's degree from the University of Texas in English. So he had his BA and MA in English, and it wasn't until we went to the University of Oklahoma that he changed to Spanish Literature.

Then he had to get another master's degree in Spanish Lit in order to get into the doctoral program.

Erickson: Why did he choose Oklahoma?

Rivera: He had two friends that had been to school and kept in touch throughout the years. So, that's how we ended up in Oklahoma.

Erickson: Did you have children at that time?

Rivera: We had the three children already.

Erickson: All three already.

Rivera: Yes, they came pretty fast.

(chuckle)

Erickson: Was that hard then for you?

Rivera: Very hard. We had very hard times.

Erickson: Sure. Well, what kind of money was ...?

Rivera: Oh, very, very little money. He was making \$400 a month, and that was for everything. We didn't have any money prior to coming to Oklahoma.

We were there only three years. He finished a master's degree and doctor's and dissertation—the whole thing in three years.

Plus, he was an assistant, so he was teaching, and he was in charge of the Language Lab. He was supervising the student teachers as well.

Erickson: My goodness.

Rivera: He had a full load on both working and studying. Actually what happened is that we lost him for three years. You know, the family lost him for three years.

Erickson: Um hmm. Was he just exhausted when he came home?

Rivera: Well, he would come home at eleven o'clock at night. He would take tutoring, you know, to make a little extra money, and he would schedule tutoring at night.

And I was doing typing thesis for the MAs in Spanish.

Erickson: Oh you were? Typing in Spanish?

Rivera: Yes. (laughter) So I would do that, and I did babysitting and whatever I could do to help out. It was pretty tough.

Erickson: It was a struggle.

Rivera: And the children—they say now, “We had a great time. We did not know that it was that bad.”

Erickson: Isn't that nice.

Rivera: Yes. But it was very hard.

Erickson: Uh huh. What was the first job then that he was offered after his doctorate?

Rivera: We went to Sam Houston University, which is in Huntsville, Texas. It's just about forty five miles east of Houston.

Huntsville is famous for the prison. It's the one ... all the bad guys go there.

But we were there for only two years. And the President was Arleigh Templeton. He was president at the university. He kind of respected Tomás a lot. He himself was named President of the University of Texas in San Antonio, a new branch of the University of Texas. So when he went to Texas, he wanted to take Tomás with him.

Erickson: Oh, nice.

Rivera: So there we go!

Erickson: In what capacity?

Rivera: At that time, he was just the Assistant to the President or something like that. There were only five people, because they were just planning and were in the very early stages of planning the university in San Antonio. So there were Tomás and three other professors there that were hired and working on the curriculum for the new university. They only had the blueprints for the buildings.

Erickson: That's kind of like UCR fifty years ago.

Rivera: Yes, exactly. It was kind of exciting.

Erickson: Oh, I'll say. That must have been very exciting.

Rivera: It was very exciting because we were there from the very beginning of the university. Now, I don't know ... they have something like 25,000 students.

Erickson: What do you think Tomás wanted ultimately to do there at Texas? Did he want to be a professor?

Rivera: He was. He was a professor and was teaching there later on when classes ...

Erickson: When it was established.

Rivera: When it was established. He was Dean of Disciplinary Studies for three or four years before we moved to El Paso.  
(chuckle)

Erickson: How long were you at San Antonio?

Rivera: Seven years.

Erickson: Seven years. Then how did El Paso come about?

Rivera: Well, the same way that San Antonio came up. The same president who was Arleigh Templeton was moved to El Paso as President of El Paso.

He was getting ready to retire actually. He was supposed to retire fairly soon after he moved over there, so he wanted Tomás there ... in his mind, he envisioned Tomás to lead that university. So he took Tomás as his VP to El Paso.

Erickson: And how long was that ... that you were there?

Rivera: Only one year! Before coming here! (laughter)

Erickson: Gosh, you didn't even get settled.

Rivera: No, no. I mean, I hadn't even unpacked. I had boxes in all the rooms.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: Because I really did not move ... The children and I did not move to El Paso until ... I think it was in late September.

Erickson: Because you were selling the house?

Rivera: Selling the house.

Erickson: So you moved in September and then how was Tomás contacted about UCR?

Rivera: Well, I can't recall exactly how or who wrote and said that he was being considered ... that his name had been submitted by somebody—two or three people—and that he was in the final list of three. Well, this was news to us.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: This was news to us, because Tomás never did apply for the job.

Erickson: For goodness sakes.

Rivera: So...

Erickson: And you never found out who it was?

Rivera: Oh, I think that Tomás knows, I just don't remember.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: But I just can't remember who the people were.

Erickson: Well, after that short a period at Texas, what were your thoughts about coming to Riverside?

Rivera: Well, you know, we had moved so many times throughout our years. I used to tell Tomás, "You're still a migrant worker. You keep moving every two years."

(laughter)

Early on, I guess, in our life, he wanted to go to some university, and I refused to go. I said no, I would not go. He wanted to go to Nebraska, but I didn't want to go to Nebraska. So he never let me forget that one.

(laughter)

So from then on whenever he said, "we are going," he would make his decision. I would tell him my opinion, and then he would make his decision on whether we would move or not.

Whenever he said let's move—I'm ready to go. I figured if it was better for his career, it was better for his family. Although sometimes I wonder about the children moving them so much, but they seem to be doing all right. So, I guess it was ok.

Erickson: Did they ever object, did they ever say anything?

Rivera: Oh, when they were younger. Yes, they used to cry and cry for their friends. And then when they were older, I'm sure they did the same thing. It was just one of those things that had to be done.

Erickson: How old were they then when Tomás and you were considering coming to Riverside?

Rivera: Well, Ileana, which is the oldest—she had already finished her first year at the University of Texas in San Antonio because we were there. She was in the process of moving to Austin to the University of Texas in Austin.

Irasema, who is the middle one, had to stay one more year in San Antonio with some friends when we moved to El Paso so she could finish her high school.

And Javier was in his first year of middle school.

Erickson: Oh, hard age.

Rivera: A hard age. So actually when we moved here to Riverside, Irasema, who had just finished high school, came with us and Javier.

Irasema went to RCC here for one semester, but she knew she wanted to go to the University of Texas. Tuition was a little high here, because she was considered out of state, and she knew she wasn't going to stay here. So, she went back to Texas.

They were ready to leave the nest, except for Javier.

(laughter)

Erickson: And you wanted to keep him.

Rivera: Right.

Erickson: Well, to get back to Tomás and your decision. What was the process like? I mean from the time that he received that letter saying that he was one of the final three candidates?

Rivera: He had to come for an interview. He was called for an interview to meet ... I don't know how those interviews go.

Erickson: Probably with the Regents?

Rivera: Probably so. And then they told him they'd let him know. Then later on there was another call that they were down to two people.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: And so he came back. And another interview with more people.

Erickson: And did you come with him?

Rivera: No, no. I didn't come with him until later on. After the second interview, then the notice came that he had been chosen.

Erickson: He was informed by letter?

Rivera: And telephone. By David Saxon.

Erickson: Can you remember ... what was your first thought?

Rivera: Mine?

Erickson: Uh huh.

Rivera: Oh, it was scary.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: Very apprehensive. Because he had been Vice President. He had been in the second role, you know. And I had total confidence in him that he could do it.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: But I did not know what life was going to be in that kind of situation.

Erickson: Right. It probably wasn't anything like what you thought, or was it?

Rivera: I did not know what to expect. I had no idea, because as Vice President you do what the President cannot do.

In Texas, they're not Chancellors. The chancellors are what you consider here the Board of Regents—they are Chancellors. The presidents are what you consider here the chancellors of the university.

Erickson: What did you do in Texas? Did you do entertaining as the Vice President's wife?

Rivera: No, not a lot. You did when the President couldn't do things. But Arleigh, who was the President then, he was pretty much settled in his own ways, and he was at the end of his career. He would just take care of all his responsibilities.

Tomás was more academically involved with the administration rather than the entertaining business.

Erickson: I see. All right. So approximately what time of the year that you made the decision then?

Rivera: It was around April, '79.

Erickson: April of '79.

Rivera: Yes, because we moved here the same year. It was really fast. It was so fast.

Erickson: Now did you stay behind again and sell the house?

Rivera: I stayed behind again. He came by himself July 1<sup>st</sup>, and I didn't get here until September just before school started.

Erickson: Where did Tomás live?

Rivera: He came to the Chancellor's House.

Erickson: He moved into the Residence. Did you just assume that's where you would live as a family, or did you consider other housing?

Rivera: No, I just assumed that's where I was expected to be. We both thought that, because this was the chancellor's house—that's what they call it. You know, some years ago, that was the chancellor's house.

Erickson: Oh, is that the first one that you were ....?

Rivera: Yes.

Erickson: And then later it was called University House.

Rivera: University House. And now it's what?

Erickson: Chancellor's Residence.

Rivera: Residence, yes. They moved from house to residence.

(laughter)

Lots of things had moved.

Erickson: Yes, lots of changes. So you said you came in September. That means Javier went to school here then.

Rivera: Right.

Erickson: What year was that in middle school?

Rivera: Uni. University. And Irasema went to RCC. Kane was the President there—at RCC.

Erickson: Uh huh.

Rivera: They had come around the same year that we did.

Erickson: What was it like ... looking at the Chancellor's House?

Rivera: Awesome. (laughter) Awesome.

I remember one incident that Tomás had. Tomás had ... you should have known him. He had a very good sense of humor.

We had been here ... I think it was his second Chancellor's meeting up in Berkeley, and so David Saxon, the President, asked him, "Well, Tomás, What do you think of University House? How do you like living there?" Tomás said, "Oh, I love it. We just put sheets across all the rooms and brought all my relatives."

(laughter)

I thought that was so funny. Well, it was, it was apprehensive, it was just the not knowing what people expected, being the first Hispanic. That was a horrendous burden, not only from the point of view of the Anglo American people, but as well as the Hispanic people. I mean, he was the first in the country to lead a major university.

Erickson: Did you talk about that, the two of you?

Rivera: Yes, we did. We did. But this was an opportunity that was here and that he wanted. We just couldn't let it go. He felt that he could do some kind of changes. So there we are.

Erickson: So there you are in Riverside.

Rivera: In Riverside in this huge house. My house in El Paso was the biggest house we ever had. It had 3400 square feet, pretty good size. But this is 7500!

(laughter)

Twice as big. Yes, it was scary because I did not know what was expected of me. And I did not know that they would hire one person to get two, you know. I did not know the responsibilities of the wife.

Erickson: Back in that interview process, did you come with him at all?

Rivera: I came with him, but they did not interview me.

Erickson: They didn't say anything to you?

Rivera: Well, yes. What was said was the house is for entertaining and you have to do that. But it was not to the extent that it is!

Erickson: Uh huh.

Rivera: Or what it was when I was there.

Erickson: Uh huh. How did you divide the house into your private quarters and then the public section?

Rivera: Well, like the Hinderakers, for example, they did not live in the house. They had their house in Corona Del Mar, and they would only come here for public events or when they were entertaining. Otherwise that's where they were. For us, this was our house, ...

Erickson: Um hmm.

Rivera: this was our residence. So what we did is, since we only had one child at home, we took the back bedrooms (the two, one across for the other) ...

Erickson: Yes, yes.

Rivera: and then the upstairs for our own recreation room. We had a pool table and a big sofa and television. That's where we relaxed.

And then the rest of the house was all public. But it was very different than it is now or has been really in the last few years.

Erickson: Was the swimming pool there?

Rivera: Um hmm.

Erickson: Oh, it was?

Rivera: At the time, because of the legacy that Hinderakers had left, and Tomás and I felt that we liked what they did, we were very comfortable with what they had done the years that they were here. We wanted not to do the same thing but, I mean, keep more or less the same arrangements that they had.

Erickson: Well, Mrs. Hinderaker had done some redecorating, had she not?

Rivera: Yes, she did. But I did some more when I came.

Erickson: What did you do?

Rivera: Well, the carpet was orange, and it looked like the indoor/outdoor carpet.

Erickson: Uh huh.

Rivera: So that was the first thing that I did. Little did I know that once I had ordered the carpet and were ready to install it, we found out that the floors were wooden floors. If I had known that, I would have just stripped the carpet and left the wooden floors.

Erickson: Oh. Sure. What kind of wood was under there? Do you remember?

Rivera: No, I don't.

Erickson: But it was very nice?

Rivera: Oh, it could have been very nice. We added that room next to the kitchen.

Erickson: That little sun porch?

Rivera: Because the Hinderakers were not here, we had a child, we liked to have our dinners or breakfasts together—that kind of thing—and there was not a place to do it other than the big dining room.

Erickson: Oh, that's a nice little area. Did you meet with Birk Hinderaker?

Rivera: Oh, yes, yes.

Erickson: For advice or just conversation or ...?

Rivera: You know, Birk is just ... I admire her so much and respect her so much. She's just a wonderful, wonderful person—so wise and so sensitive. I can't say enough about her. She's one of my role models.

(laughter)

Erickson: Oh, that's nice.

Rivera: Her advice was "be yourself." And there were a few things on how she did entertainment and so forth. But then we all have our own styles.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: And so once I started getting my bearings on what or how this job was taking shape, then I was ok. I think! I don't know.

(laughter)

- Rivera: But the house was very public though in those days. We felt that anybody who wanted to use the house could use it.
- Erickson: How did they go about reserving the house?
- Rivera: Well, they'd have to come through the system.
- Erickson: Through Tomás' office?
- Rivera: Yes, through the office here. Some people would call directly to the house, and then I would talk it over with Tomás. The main thing was functions of the university. If they were not taken, the dates were not taken for functions of the university, then the city or community could have events there as well.
- Erickson: Well, describe a typical day, Concha.
- Rivera: Oh, gosh. We entertained three times a week on the average. Some days were breakfast, lunch and dinner. There were many days where it would be like that. So it was very hectic—very, very hectic. I just took it as part of this job.
- Erickson: Well, how were you informed of meetings that were going to occur at University House? Did somebody in Tomás' office work with you?
- Rivera: Yes. There was a woman that worked the calendar and events as well as his calendar. When they scheduled an event, they would immediately let me know what kind of event. Then ...
- Erickson: Now did you have a say in whether or not you wanted it at University House, or that kind of thing?
- Rivera: I suppose I could have, but I didn't think about saying it. I did not know what my rights were or whether I did have any rights at all.
- Erickson: Well, you're not a person to say no anyway.

(laughter)

Rivera: I didn't know what are the expectations. Nobody said, "Well, you have to do this and this and that." You know, I was never interviewed for a job. Just all of a sudden, here it is.

I did not know that I had the right to say no, that I don't want to do it. I just figured this is part of his job, and so whatever is his job and I can help here, this is my responsibility as well.

Erickson: Um hmm. So you would sometimes start early in the morning.

Rivera: We'd have breakfast, lunch and dinner. We'd clear up one and immediately get ready for another one.

Erickson: Set the table for another one.

Rivera: And we didn't have that much help at home. I was allowed ... we had a housekeeper and allowed twenty hours a week, four hours a day.

Erickson: For housekeeping.

Rivera: I could use those four hours for anyway I wanted it, as long as I stayed within my four hours.

Erickson: That's not really very much time for that big house.

Rivera: No, it isn't. It takes that much just to clean the house.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: And forget about when you entertain. So I had to decide when I wanted my housekeeper to come. Did I want her to come and clean the house before an event, or did I want her at the event to help out? Whatever I decided—if she was going to be there at the event, which is usually where I wanted her because there is so much cleaning after each event.

Erickson: And serving, too. Did she help you serve sometimes?

Rivera: Sometimes she did, but for the most part it was all catered.

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Rivera: But she would sort of help out by telling people where things are and then clean up after that.

Erickson: You didn't have a social secretary as they do today?

Rivera: Oh, no, no, no. Not at all. Now the spouses are Assistants to the Chancellors thanks to Sue Young .... We didn't even have a title.

Erickson: at UCLA?

Rivera: In fact, I helped in some presentations sometimes to try to get the spouses a little bit of respect somewhere.

(laughter)

We were just like housekeepers.

Erickson: You were.

Rivera: We were. I think that now—I'm not sure—but I think that now even the spouses can get some kind of benefits from the university.

Erickson: (pause) I think maybe social security. I'm not sure what either.

Rivera: Yes, but we got nothing. Birk can tell you that I am sure.

Erickson: As you recall, did UCLA or any of the bigger campuses have social secretaries?

Rivera: You know, I don't remember. That's possible that they might have had a little bit more than we did, because let's face it, UCR has always been ... I don't know about it now, but in those days we were at the bottom of the pole. We were the

Rivera: smallest campus and we didn't get ... the budget ... whatever I'd get, it was less.

Erickson: What was left over?

Rivera: Exactly.

Erickson: Speaking of budget then, how did that work for University House? Were you given a certain amount (you don't have to tell me what it is) but were you given a certain amount to work from to operate through the year?

Rivera: Yeh, there was a budget, but I didn't deal with that. No, I didn't. That one I refused to do.

Erickson: Good. That would be a lot of work.

Rivera: I just dealt with the woman here, the assistant to Tomás.

Erickson: And they handled it?

Rivera: They handled it. But I know it wasn't much—obviously.

Erickson: Did she tell you ... you know, you can spend a certain amount of money for this dinner or ?

Rivera: No, but since I grew up very poor, I don't overspend. I would go to the auction and get flowers and do my own arrangements. I think they are still doing that—I don't know.

Erickson: What about the cooking?

Rivera: I did some cooking.

(laughter)

I did some cooking, too. I did my own cooking many times for some small groups of 35 or so.

Erickson: Oh, you would consider thirty five small?

Rivera: Today I consider it a BIG number, because I don't even cook for myself!

(laughter)

But in those days, we used to entertain because we wanted to entertain before coming over here to Riverside. I used to do all the entertaining. I loved cooking. We had big groups of thirty five to forty people. That was not a big deal to me.

Erickson: And you did all the shopping, too?

Rivera: Um hmm.

Erickson: My goodness.

Rivera: But today I don't even want to have four people over to my house for dinner. (more laughter)

Erickson: I understand. Well, how about Javier? When you were doing all this entertaining, did he go upstairs, or did he join you some times?

Rivera: No, he never wanted to join us. He was at that age, you know, 13, 14 years old.

Erickson: I thought you'd say that.

(laughter)

Rivera: No, he didn't want to. He'd entertain himself, and I was so busy that sometimes I would just ask Pat, my housekeeper, to keep tabs on him. I would come in and ask, "Where is he? Has he eaten?"

Erickson: Oh, I see. Did you have the same housekeeper most of the time?

Rivera: All the time, for the five years, we had the same person.

Erickson: I'm thinking about the record keeping and all this for entertaining. Did you keep records of who you entertained?

Rivera: Yes, I did.

Erickson: Did you keep menus? How did you do it?

Rivera: I had a file for the groups that would say who they were, what they were doing, what was this event for, when we did it, how many people, and what was the menu.

Erickson: Let's talk about the community. Was it receptive to your coming?

Rivera: When we came here there was a huge reception (just before we all came in September). They had a reception and dinner in the summer.

Erickson: In your honor?

Rivera: Right. And ... I don't know ... just hundreds of people came.

Erickson: Sure. Where was it?

Rivera: It was at the University Club.

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Rivera: Everybody seemed very friendly. They seemed very nice, and they seemed to receive us well. But it was always in the back of people's minds and ours as well ... I felt we were being (pause) ...

Erickson: Scrutinized?

Rivera: Scrutinized, because here this is the first Hispanic Chancellor. And Riverside is a small town. It is a conservative town. I felt, but maybe it was my own thinking and not necessarily the community's thinking, that we were well received. I mean

Rivera: everybody is so friendly, it's just a friendly town. Coming as we did, I just couldn't help but wonder.

Erickson: Oh sure. That's pretty natural.

Rivera: But the community was ... And then Tomás was the kind of person that he just wanted to be everywhere.

(laughter)

Does that sound like Jim?

(more laughter)

Erickson: Yes. Well, you have a lot of energy, too.

Rivera: Yes, I do. We both like that kind of thing, so we were all over town. Every event we were invited to—we would go to all events if we could arrange it. He would go one way, and I would go the other. We always went to everything.

The same, of course, first with the university, but we did the community, too.

Erickson: Now were you invited to speak to various groups, too?

Rivera: I wasn't much then. I think I do more now than I did then. For the most part, it was for Tomás, and I just attended.

Erickson: In your recollection, who were some of the most supportive people that you met in those early days?

Rivera: Hmm. You know, I couldn't tell you.

Erickson: Ok. That's fine.

Rivera: I couldn't tell you, because there were a lot of people that were very supportive and a lot of people that were not.

- Erickson: Did you feel that was because he was the first Hispanic Chancellor?
- Rivera: Yes, uh huh.
- Erickson: Or was it also a possibility that the fact Ivan Hinderaker had been here such a long time?
- Rivera: Well, I'm sure that had some kind of affect on their way of thinking. I probably would have felt the same. We were talking a while ago about Tomás getting his degree in English, and nobody wanted to hire an Hispanic to teach English. It's that kind of apprehensiveness from people—not necessarily discriminating, but you just don't know. And that apprehension came also from the Hispanic community ...
- Erickson: Oh, it did?
- Rivera: because ... the Hispanic people wanted ... I'm sure their expectations were that he was going to open up all the doors for the Hispanic people. And that was not possible for a person to do.
- Erickson: Sure.
- Rivera: Then the Anglo American people—they did not know how this man was going to ... can Hispanics do this kind of job. I'm sure that went through their minds.
- So there were people who were very supportive and had a lot of confidence in Tomás and some of them sat back and said, "Wait a minute. I'm not going this way or that way."
- Erickson: They wanted to see how it worked first?
- Rivera: Right. And I understand that. From my point of view, it was difficult to deal with.
- Erickson: Sure. Do you remember what were some of the challenges that the university was facing when Tomás took that position?

Rivera: We are talking about the '80s, you know. The 80s were the worst years ...

Erickson: Financially?

Rivera: Financially. You had Proposition ... what was it? It really affected the '80s and the budget.

Erickson: Was it Proposition 13?

Rivera: 13. It really affected things, and it was really tough, tough times. Tomás had a real bad time during his tenure here because of the budget. The monies were real tight.

Enrollments—we just couldn't get them to increase. He had to dismantle the Chicano Studies so that turned the Hispanic people totally upside down.

Erickson: Why did he have to do that?

Rivera: Because of the budget. Budget problems. And because the Program did not have the numbers to justify the program.

Erickson: I'm not sure that this is correct, but didn't they also have Black Studies, too?

Rivera: Yeh.

Erickson: Did he dismantle that one, too?

Rivera: Yes.

Erickson: He was the Chancellor who did that?

Rivera: Again because we didn't have the number of students in this program. And so the programs we had to cut, as you well know, are the ones that are not really working.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Rivera: The people could not understand Tomás was one of few—I can count the people on one hand—the few people that began, that started the Chicano programs in the early '60s. So people did not understand how hard it was for him to come to this university and had to dismantle it.

Erickson: Oh that would have been ...

Rivera: So it was very hard on him to have to do that and then deal with people that were criticizing him for doing that.

End of Side A, Tape 1

Erickson: You and Tomás must have talked things over. I mean, did he get your advice?

Rivera: Yes, but not ... No. And I'm not in education or administration and I don't have ... only my gut feelings that I could contribute in all this.

Erickson: But that's important, too.

Rivera: Frankly, I didn't. I just wanted to encourage him to do what he thought was the right thing to do. And he was very protective of me. He didn't want me to worry about the problems that he had.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: So he would keep a lot to himself. He wanted to shield me from all of this. Of course, he couldn't do it all. But he tried.

(pause)

Tough, tough times. Very tough. They really were.

Erickson: What were some of the good times?

Rivera: Well, I think that the good times ... there were many, many people that were really supportive and many people respected him for what he was doing and understood what he was trying to do. So that right there is probably what it's all about.

Erickson: What kept him going.

Rivera: Exactly.

Erickson: Did Tomás try to continue his writing while he was Chancellor?

Rivera: Well, that was his dream—to write and teach really. That's what he would want to do, but he felt that maybe as administrator he could do something from that perspective—that he could help out in the education system somehow. But his heart really was into writing and teaching.

No, to answer your question, no. He just didn't have the time.

Erickson: Right.

Rivera: While we were here, he did what Ray is doing now—teaching a course here and there.

Erickson: Oh, what did he teach?

Rivera: Spanish Literature and Creative Writing.

Erickson: Oh, great.

Rivera: Um hmm. But he didn't have the time to write.

Erickson: Well, sure. That's understandable.

Rivera: Right, right.

Erickson: Did you have any favorites of the things he had written in the past? Poems or stories?

Rivera: Yes. There's a poem that everybody likes because it's very touching and very moving. It's The Searchers. There's a book published called The Searchers, a book of poems. But the searchers is the theme. In fact, he has one of the verses written on his tombstone, because it's very touching. It really is.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: It's very nice.

Erickson: When did he write that?

Rivera: I never could figure out when he wrote that because I didn't ever know when he did. He would write ... I mean, after he died, we went through things and files and books and everything. We found many of those poems.

This book is put together years after he died, because it took a lot of research to find these poems that had not been published before. You would find like in a napkin a whole poem—like he was somewhere and ...

Erickson: He had that thought.

Rivera: and he would just write it down. So here and there, wherever I guess the thoughts came, he would write them down. Again, he was very protective of his own work. He did not share it while he was doing it.

I think that after he died ... I took over his files and so forth, and I had a lot of stuff published. But he didn't ... the book that he's so well known for ... anybody will come and tell him, "well, can we use your book for this and that?" "Oh, sure, sure." He never did care about that.

He wrote it for people to read it and enjoy it, and that's all that mattered to him.

Rivera: It almost got me in trouble because there were publishing rights, you know, with different ... But he was not the kind of person that would care to make money or have the “rights that’s really mine.” He felt that he wrote for everybody that wanted to read it. I’ve gotten a little more into legal mumble jumble ...

Erickson: More than you wanted.

Rivera: more than I wanted, yes.

Erickson: Did you give his papers to the archives of the library?

Rivera: Right, right. I did. There were three universities that wanted it. The University of Texas system also has ten campuses, very much like the University of California. They have ten campuses throughout the state, and he taught on two of them, San Antonio and El Paso.

Erickson: Right.

Rivera: And then Austin. There were three universities that wanted them. Austin, which is like your Berkeley here ...

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Rivera: wanted the archives. In fact, they paid some professors in Literature and who were familiar with Tomás’ work.

The university sent them over here to go through them (*boxes of papers*) because there were boxes and boxes and boxes ... of this paper. And so they came, and three professors stayed here for three weeks and went through all of it.

And who knows what was thrown away, you know. Now maybe we say we should have ...

Erickson: Um hmm.

Rivera: but, you know, I couldn't have done it myself. So, getting back to your question, there were those universities that wanted it, and then Dan Aldrich who was here then as an interim also asked for them.

I did not know what I was going to do with my own life, whether I was going to stay here or go to Texas or do what? But I gave myself a little time, and then when I decided I would stay here for a while, I decided to give the archives to UCR.

That is a little bit ... I just don't know. You had Dan Aldrich there for a while, then you had Ted Hullar for a while, and then we had Rosemary. So, during all this time, things had gotten a little lost.

But the agreement that I had with the university at the time, was that they were supposed to do something with *the archives*.

Well, what has happened is that the archives sit in a back room somewhere in the library, and nothing has been done with those things I agreed to give to the university.

Erickson: What did you want?

Rivera: Well, I can't recall. I would have to look at the agreement. I do know that one of the things that I wanted them to do is organize the archives in a proper way.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: Publish a catalog. Of course, now with the computer and fast telecommunications and technology that we have, you can just put them in the computer and somebody in Japan might be interested in Chicano literature and can find Tomás' literature.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: But I don't think it's in there either. So that was another thing. Another thing was the conference, The Tomás Rivera Conference. I wanted the university to do an annual

Rivera: conference. It was agreed to do that ... all of that was agreed to happen, but it hasn't.

The conference happens now because Jim (Erickson)—thanks to Jim. He's such a great supporter of the conference and ...

Erickson: And you.

Rivera: Well, I am the pain. I am on people (laughter) I don't mean ... Jim is ... he's always so supportive, but I have to be on other people. I think that the library should be the one to do that, but ... well, that's another story.

A lot of things have not happened with the archives. But they are here. I think that as long as I am here and can push people a little bit, I can get a few things done. But, you know, that was in the agreement.

Erickson: Right. Interesting. What was the book ... the title that I have written down was Tomás and the Library Lady. Is that one that he had written?

Rivera: Oh, no. That's Pat Mora. She's the author. This is a childhood story of Tomás that he used to tell people. And I know the story quite well. I just didn't think about publishing it until somebody else did.

(laughter)

So, in fact, Pat (the author) never did even meet Tomás. But Tomás had told this story to some people ...

Erickson: But Tomás was the little boy? He's the one the story was about?

Rivera: He was the little boy. It's a true story. It's almost exactly the way Tomás used to tell it, but not ... well, there's more to the story, because in the story, the little boy ... Have you read the book?

Erickson: No.

Rivera: I'll try to condense it. They used to travel from Texas to the north as migrant workers, working in the fields. So Tomás was just in the first or second grade, something like that. They would always live in the fields, and the kids would have to walk to town to go to school.

They would get there in April and stay through the summer. Then they would start school in Texas. They would start the year in school in one place and finish in another. It was a big mess. So anyway, in this little town in the school where he had to go, he had to walk.

His mother used to tell him not to go anywhere, just go to school and walk straight home. When he was going ... no deviating from anywhere ... he used to go to look at the buildings before school, and he used to see this building every day and was curious about what this building was—for whatever reason, I don't know.

But he was very curious and so one day, he couldn't stop because he remembered his mother saying, "No, don't stop." But this particular day he did and he decided to go and investigate what was different about it.

He went and looked through the window inside through the glass, and so out comes this lady. She asked him what was his name and so forth and was he coming from school. He said, "Yes." "Have you ever been here?" "No." So she said, "I'll show you what's in here."

She took him by the hand and took him into the library and showed him all around. She asked him if he could read, and he said, "Yes, a little bit." The sign ... what Tomás thought it was ... the sign said Carnegie. You see, in Spanish, "meat" is carne.

Erickson: Oh sure.

Rivera: And he thought it was a meat packing place, and he thought maybe when his parents finished working over there, they could find a job here, because he was the interpreter. His parents didn't speak English.

Erickson: Hmm.

Rivera: So here he is in a Carnegie Library, and the woman librarian took a book and asked if he had read this book. She read him a book, and then she encouraged him to take some books home and stop the next day.

Well, that was the beginning. She just opened a whole different world to him.

He used to take the books ... he would stop there and pick up some books, take them home and not only read them to himself, but read them to everybody ... they lived in real poor conditions, and there was nothing else to do at night, so he would read to everybody—his mother, his father, his grandparents, everybody—bring *the books* back the next day and pick up more.

Erickson: Oh my.

Rivera: It's very ironic, very ironic that thirty-some years later, he was Trustee of the Carnegie Foundation.

Erickson: Oh my goodness, is that right.

Rivera: And he was Trustee of the Year one time. Tomás had told the rest of the trustees about the story because it was the Carnegie Library that no longer exists any more.

They were going to surprise him, and they went to this little town in Iowa somewhere—Denton, Iowa—looking for this library lady. Well they couldn't find her. They wanted to find her and surprise him for his night.

Erickson: Oh, wouldn't that have been something.

Rivera: That's the story of that book. It's Tomás as the little boy, but he did not write it. And as I said, I had told that story to grade school children.

Sometimes they invite me to come and talk to schools, and I tell them that story, because it's something they can relate to. But I never thought about publishing it myself.

(laughter)

Erickson: Too bad.

Rivera: No, I'm glad somebody else did it.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: It's a nice little book and nice illustrations.

Erickson: You talked a little bit before about the possibility of your returning to Texas after Tomás had his heart attack. What was the determining factor then for you to stay in Riverside?

Rivera: After Tomás died, I just read all kinds of books on grieving.

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Rivera: One of the things they recommend is that you do not make any decisions right away, because you are not in a state of mind to make the right decisions.

So as much as I wanted to go back to Texas, because of course, I had my two daughters in Texas and Tomás' family was in Texas and my two sisters were in Texas—where else would I go.

But I decided I would stay a little while and see how I feel. Because after all, I felt that with all the problems that we had ... not necessarily caused by people, but circumstances ... you know, the budget. He had a hard time with that.

Erickson: The stress of it all.

Rivera: But yet the community ... I liked the people in the community a lot, and so I thought I would give myself some time. I thought I'd rent a little apartment somewhere and stay for a year and then see how I feel.

In the meantime, I started working and got involved in my job more and more, because I had never done that kind of thing, and I tried to go to school for fundraising ...

Erickson: For CMP.

Rivera: Um hmm. For the Museum of Photography ... and going to school trying to educate myself, and so on. I just got too involved and after a year, I thought, "Well, I don't know whether I want to move to Texas or not." Then I bought my little house and (pause) here I am.

Erickson: Here you are. Well, after his heart attack, after he died, you were still trying ... in addition to your working ... you were still maintaining some of those obligations. I mean, he was honored in Washington, D.C. and that was just months after.

Rivera: Six months after, yes.

Erickson: Would you talk about that?

Rivera: Well, it was a surprise to me. Even today, I have absolutely no idea ... I had no idea how involved he was in so many areas. I can go clear to South Dakota, and if I mention Tomás Rivera's name, somebody knows about him.

Erickson: My goodness.

Rivera: I mean it's incredible. It's just totally awesome. So many of these things just came up, and I had no idea he was involved in so much. This was a surprise for me, yet not really a surprise, because I knew.

Erickson: What was the honor?

Rivera: Well, he was Hispanic Educator of the Year, and it was awarded by President Reagan. Actually it wasn't only Tomás. Escalánte from LA was in the group, and I think there were about six or seven people that were honored.

They had a nice little ceremony in the rose garden. It was very moving for me because ... (pause) *I asked myself* why am I here doing this? He should have been there.

Erickson: Did President Reagan talk with you?

Rivera: Yes, he did. Actually, he talked to me before we went into the garden. We were all in a little room and (pause) I'm trying to remember who was the Secretary of Education. (*Bell was Secretary of Education*) (pause)

Erickson: Gosh, I don't remember.

Rivera: He's the one that was entertaining me. He was with me when President Reagan came in. We were in a little room before going out to the garden, so he came up to me and told me how sorry he was and that he had met Tomás and he was a great man and it was a terrible loss and so on.

Erickson: Oh, he had?

Rivera: Yes, he had met Tomás. In fact, they were scheduled for another meeting.

Erickson: That was a formal ceremony in the Rose Garden? Was there a dinner or something?

Rivera: No, I left right away. But that was all there was. They had refreshments there. It was early in the morning that it took place.

Erickson: Um hmm. Let's talk about CMP.

Rivera: (laughter)

Erickson: What would that have been, about '85?

Rivera: '85, I started in February, 1985. And Tomás died in May of 1984.

Erickson: Who was the director when you started?

Rivera: Charles Demaris.

Erickson: And what were you hired to do?

Rivera: As a fundraiser, as a development person.

Erickson: Now that ... help me with the timing on that. Was that before the renovation of the building?

Rivera: That's way, way before.

Erickson: So where were you housed?

Rivera: In Watkins House, which is now the Art Gallery.

Erickson: Oh, ok.

Rivera: We didn't start that ... when I started working there, I think we were open for about two years, and then we closed because we were going to move downtown and we needed to prepare packing the collections properly. We had the Keystone Collection which is nothing but glass.

Erickson: And is it huge?

Rivera: Oh, yes. It is huge. So we were closed for about three years before we moved downtown.

Erickson: What was that like in getting all those things packed? Because there are all kinds of considerations, aren't there?

Rivera: That's why we took our time.

Erickson: But you did it, too?

Rivera: Well, I didn't but it was taking place while I was there. I didn't really go and do the packing.

(laughter)

Erickson: Oh ... because I thought you would.

(more laughter)

Rivera: No, when it gets to glass negatives, I stay away from that. But I did many other things like scrubbing floors and washing windows.

(laughter)

Erickson: He didn't know you did windows, huh?

Rivera: Every time he sees me, he still makes fun of me.

Erickson: Well, talk about that ... the night that you're talking about when you worked so hard to get ready for the opening.

Rivera: Well, you know that is something else. I wasn't even there for the opening. I worked so hard, so hard to make this a grand opening of the museum.

Erickson: And tell what it was, the event.

Rivera: Which event, the opening of the museum?

Erickson: Uh huh.

Rivera: We were to have this big ceremony, which we did.

Erickson: It was very formal.

Rivera: Yes. And what happened is the day before, I am going to pick up something from the Chambers of Commerce to have it ready for the opening, and I had a car accident, and I ended up in the Emergency Room—I couldn't be there for the opening.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: So I missed the whole thing. You probably know more about the opening than I do because I wasn't there.

(laughter)

Erickson: But you did scrub the floor and the steps.

Rivera: Yes, but that's not the only time that I scrubbed. Listen, what I did when I was working for the museum nobody would believe it, but some people do because they were with me. We had, before the museum was opened and was under renovation, we had a huge party over there. We had a construction theme.

Erickson: Oh, I remember that.

Rivera: Yes, the 5 & 10¢ store had just moved out, and they used to put all these little flyers with tape on the windows to advertise, and when they left, they just pulled it and we had all these pieces of tape all over.

Well, I like to do events, I don't know whether I'd like to do them now, but I did then, and I was very detail oriented—one of those picky persons that like everything *done right* ...

(laughter)

I've changed my mind at this time in my life. I think differently now. So I had to scrub windows, we painted walls. Cathy Crane, one of my right hands—we did everything. She never left me to do things alone. We painted the inside of the

building to have the party. We scrubbed the floors—we did so many things I couldn't even tell you.

I have been up to my knees in mud in the Botanical Gardens getting flowers and plants for an event at the museum.

Erickson: Is that right?

Rivera: Yes. (laughter)

Erickson: How did you organize the office as the fundraiser.

Rivera: They had never had anybody to do anything. They had never had an event for the museum. Nobody even knew that the museum existed. The first thing I did because frankly, I took advantage that people knew me ...

Erickson: Oh well sure.

Rivera: the first thing I did ... I just came out with this letter to tell everybody that I knew what I was doing and where I was, working for the Museum of Photography, and told them what I would be doing and "I'll be seeing you." (chuckle)

Erickson: Yes.

Rivera: So that was the very first thing that I did. One of the things I wanted to do was start a membership. They had a membership, but it was very poor and hardly any members. So I started building on that.

Erickson: How did you do that?

Rivera: Oh, I just went through the list. It wasn't hard to see who was a member and who wasn't. And then I had my own list of people that I knew.

Erickson: You just invited them to be a member?

Rivera: Exactly. Then I decided, too, to bring people into the museum. One way to bring them is to have some kind of event, some kind of party and invite all these people. See, they (*the museum*) not only needed money, but they needed friends. Nobody knew anything about the museum.

Erickson: Right. So did you work with the director to determine what displays he would have?

Rivera: Right, right. Some things you can work with, some of the exhibitions, some you can't. So you just have to come up with something of your own. You just stay away sometimes from some of the ...

Charles was very, very creative, and he was a good director in the sense that he was very charming, very good with people. But he was difficult to work with.

But I think I was good to the museum. I do feel that I did a lot for the museum, and the museum did a lot for me, because I went to work there when I really needed some challenge.

Erickson: Right.

Rivera: And that was a challenge.

Erickson: Did it give you confidence after you had succeeded so well?

Rivera: You know, at the end when I was ready to go out to retire because I did want to retire. I didn't want to do this. I admire Jim (Erickson) for what he does, but I didn't want to do this *anymore*.

(laughter)

I felt pretty confident, I really did. Even today, I feel confident that I can get funds for organizations. And I'm still doing it. I volunteer regularly.

Erickson: Right. Didn't you form an advisory committee?

Rivera: We had a faculty advisory committee, and then of course, we had another committee for the entertainment and fundraising events.

Erickson: And what was that called, that group?

Rivera: It was called (pause) let's see, what did we call it?

Erickson: I don't remember.

Rivera: Planning Committee.

Erickson: Planning Committee. But you were very selective in that group.

Rivera: Yes. I wanted the right people to be in that group. Because it's important. Many people go to these events because somebody else is going to be there.

Erickson: That's right.

Rivera: You have to do it that way. I was very, very fortunate to have the people I had on my committee. They were always very supportive and very good to me. I mean, I didn't do it by myself whatever I did.

Erickson: How often did you entertain?

Rivera: We did only two big events, but we did very well when I look at other organizations—not the ones that make \$100,000. Like Younglove, you know. He did those events where he'd net \$100,000. But we did very well. I got a lot of support from businesses to underwrite the whole event.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: I never did an event that was not underwritten.

Erickson: Good for you. How about some of those ... Well, first I should ask you how long you did that at CMP?

Rivera: Ten years.

Erickson: Was it ten years?

Rivera: Ten years. Seven years as half time and three years as an interim director.

Erickson: Oh, that's right. Oh, talk about that, Concha. Charles left ...

Rivera: Charles left. We were closed down then. We were not open to the public. We were just doing the fundraising for the building. You know, Jim was so instrumental in that and (Esteban) Soriano.

The reason I took the directorship is because I felt that I could do it. I don't have any background in photography, because doing fundraising is not necessary for me to be an expert in photography. I don't have a degree in photography.

Erickson: Right, right.

Rivera: As long as I know what's going on in the museum then I'm ok.

Erickson: The workings of it.

Rivera: Exactly. The reason I took the job is because I thought I could do it while we were closed because we were doing nothing for the museum at that time other than fundraising and getting ready to move.

Erickson: And how did you get the position? Did you interview?

Rivera: Rosemary (Schraer) appointed me. Bless her heart, she had a lot of confidence in me, I guess. And Jim did, too.

Erickson: She did.

Rivera: It was not an easy transition there. It was very difficult because the museum staff were very apprehensive about me being the director at that time.

Erickson: And did they let you know that?

Rivera: Oh! Did they let me know that? Everybody let me know! It was pretty tough. Charles was very, very outspoken, but he had his eyes on Ed Earle. He wanted him to take over after him, and so he was very upset that I did. And so was the staff, so it was very hard, very hard for a long time. Actually I think that what they wanted me to do is resign.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Rivera: And when they found out that I wasn't going to do it, there was nothing else they could do. But it was very tough. At the end they found out that yes, I could do it, and they had a lot of respect for me at the end.

Erickson: You won them over, didn't you?

Rivera: Yes, I did. But at the beginning, it was really hard. And it came at a very tough time, because at the time my son disappeared and I was always dealing with this at home, and they were really—the staff was really bad.

Erickson: Did they know you were going through that personally?

Rivera: Oh yes, yes. But you know, they were looking only at what they wanted not necessarily what were my problems, and I understand that.

Erickson: It makes you a stronger person, doesn't it?

Rivera: Well, I know I can deal with tough things and that I can deal with difficult people, too, without having to be ugly or rude or anything like that. You just have to prove yourself.

Erickson: Is that how you did it? You just ...

Rivera: Right, right. Whenever I went in and talked about the museum, I always put the staff first, because they are good—they are really good at what they do. So there's no need to behave in such a manner, you know. I always gave them credit for their good jobs, and I never put them down. I could have but that's not necessary. You have to give credit where credit is due.

Erickson: Ten year. I didn't realize it was that long.

Rivera: Ten years!

Erickson: So what year would that have been when you retired?

Rivera: I think it was '92 or '93, somewhere in there.

Erickson: I was wondering if there were any VERIPs at that time?

Rivera: Yes. I took the last one. (laughter)

Erickson: Great. Well, perfect timing.

Rivera: Well, Jim knew that I wanted to retire you know, and I wasn't paying too much attention to the VERIP, so he brought it to my attention, so I grabbed it.

Erickson: Oh sure.

Rivera: You know, Jonathan is a wonderful person .

Erickson: Jonathan Green.

Rivera: Jonathan Green, who is the director now and a very easy-going person. I love working with him.

But it was time to move on. I didn't know where I was going. I thought I was going into something else, but then I had a year free ...

(laughter)

Rivera: You know, I don't want anything any more.

Erickson: You like this life.

Rivera: I like this life.

Erickson: It's a busy life, isn't it?

Rivera: Oh, it's so busy. I just can't believe it. I just can't believe it. Sometimes I wonder why am I doing this?

Erickson: You didn't consciously plan to get involved in so many organizations?

Rivera: No, I was very involved because of *my job*, I needed to be involved in many things, but when I retired, I thought I'll drop out from most of these things and I'll just do whatever I want to. I'm still doing that, but when you are asked for this cause or that cause, they all look good and they all need help.

Erickson: It's hard to say no, isn't it?

Rivera: Yes, it is.

Erickson: Well, talk about some of the organizations you are involved in.

Rivera: Right now I'm with the Riverside (pause) which is changed from Riverside Community Foundation to Riverside County Foundation.

Erickson: Oh, I didn't know.

Rivera: Yes. Not too many people know yet. That's another well-kept secret. The Foundation is a great foundation. I've been there six years, I guess. I probably will just finish this term and then I'm going to leave. That will be eight years.

Erickson: Oh, that's a long time.

Rivera: And then I still help with the Y. I get pretty involved with them and with the California Baptist College and ...

Erickson: Are you a Trustee at Cal Baptist?

Rivera: Yes, uh huh. And I'm a Trustee with the Riverside County Foundation and with the Botanic Gardens as well. I'm hoping to do good things for the Botanic Gardens. I was there for one term before, two terms ago, and I couldn't move those people to do something.

But I'm back on the board and hoping to do something. Again, that's a very good cause. The gardens are so beautiful and nobody knows anything about them, so I want to do something for them.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Rivera: So one of my goals is to hopefully do something, and one of the things we were talking about is expanding that parking lot. We only have parking for about twenty cars.

Erickson: You mean you would cut into the side of the hill?

Rivera: Yes, and we have a median that we can just fill in and open up more. We can probably get at least fifty cars in if not more if our architects do it. And we could cut a little on the hills on both sides.

Erickson: It's a long walk in there.

Rivera: Yes, it is. We want to do a nice entrance, and I would love to have a gift shop for them. I have a lot of plans, but I don't know ...

And then of course, there's the Hispanic community that I work with, too, with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce trying to help some of the political people that come from the Hispanic community.

Rivera: I'm involved with the *Hispanic Style* magazine. I'm on the advisory committee.

Erickson: Oh my goodness.

(laughter)

Rivera: And then my church. And I love to travel. I love my aerobics, and I love my dancing and on and on.

Erickson: It fills up the whole day.

Rivera: Oh gosh, and then some. My life is pretty busy actually.

Erickson: And then you're involved in so many of the dedications of facilities that carry Tomás' name.

Rivera: Yes. Next month I'm going to the University of Southwest Texas for an annual ... they call it The Tomás Rivera Children's Award Book.

Erickson: Oh a book award. How nice.

Rivera: What it does is encourage Hispanic writers to write more books for children, because we don't have that many. You know, we have a lot of children's books written by everybody else but Hispanics. So this is to encourage them. Then we have an advisory committee, a national advisory committee, form of literary people that judge the entries, the books, and then they choose one ...

Erickson: And award it?

Rivera: and award it, uh huh. When I go there, I do a two-hour workshop for Hispanic women trying to encourage them—I can do it, you can do it—kind of thing.

Erickson: Oh, that's great. Let's talk about some of the things that carry Tomás name. We have the library that's here, The Rivera Library. What are some of the others?

Rivera: We have the Rivera Plaza.

Erickson: Oh, the area right outside Hinderaker Hall—that's right.

Rivera: And here we have the two schools: we have the grade school over on Van Buren, Tomás Rivera Grade School; and in Perris, we have the Tomás Rivera Middle School. We have the Tomás Rivera Middle School in Crystal City (his home town).

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: And the Tomás Rivera Student Center at the University of Texas in El Paso.

Erickson: Oh, that's nice.

Rivera: And the Tomás Rivera Student Center at the University of Texas in San Antonio. The Tomás Rivera High School in Denton, Texas. (pause) Let's see what else. We have the Tomás Rivera Center in Claremont.

Erickson: Yes, yes. I was going to ask you about that. That's a whole center. I mean a working group.

Rivera: The Tomás Rivera Center is an institute of policy. They don't make policy, they study policy. What they do is the research on issues that affect the Hispanic community.

They research it, they study it, they come with solutions and proposals to the people who are the policy makers. Not propose it—that's the wrong word. They inform them of the results. That center, when we started, there were five of us, and I came in because Tomás wasn't there. Actually this was Tomás' idea.

Erickson: He was alive then?

Rivera: Yes. There were four people: Arturo Madrid, who is now at Trinity University in San Antonio; *Alfredo* de la Santos, who is

Rivera: Provost in New Mexico or Arizona (I don't know which. I haven't kept in touch with him.) *And Tomás Arciniega, President at Bakersfield, Cal State.*

Anyway there were four of them that had been thinking about this idea for years and years and years.

On precisely the day that Tomás had his heart attack, they were going to meet with McGuire, President of the Claremont Colleges, because they had been sort of talking to him and were going to see if they could house it over there. McGuire was going to provide the facility and look at the curriculum and what they have.

Then the Times Mirror Company came in as really the cornerstone for it with the money to start it.

End of Tape 1

Rivera: Our budget was \$500,000, and now it is \$14 million I read the last time.

Erickson: Is that right? And are they affiliated now with the Claremont Colleges?

Rivera: Not in any way other than their house. McGuire has been really supportive and really believes in the project. But you know, there are many, many companies.

I'm not as involved as I was when I was a Trustee. I am now an Honorary Trustee, because I was there for many years. So I'm not as involved.

Rivera: I get invited to all the things, but they've gotten so big that they don't meet at the Claremont Colleges any more. They meet in Los Angeles. I don't like to go into LA, so I just pass.

But they've just grown so much. They had the backing of all these huge companies: The Carnegie Foundation, The Times Mirror is still there with them, the Ford Foundation. I mean, it's just on and on and on.

Erickson: Well, Tomás would be so proud, wouldn't he?

Rivera: Yes, he would. It's too bad he didn't get to see the product of all of it.

Erickson: It is. Would you talk about the movie that was made about Tomás?

Rivera: That came about in a very nice way. Tomás had given the rights of the book just by word ...

Erickson: Oh, nothing written?

Rivera: nothing written ... to a producer. So when he (*Tomás*) died, this producer had the book. And then I had to deal with that without knowing anything about it—nothing at all.

So I asked for *something in writing*. Well, he didn't have anything—an agreement in writing or anything—absolutely nothing. I had to honor Tomás' wishes, so I worked with this man for a long time. But one of the things I wanted was to see the script. I wanted to read it before I agreed to anything else.

Erickson: Sure.

Rivera: By the time he finished with the script, we met a hundred times, and I read it. By the time I finished it didn't look at all like the book, and I knew what I wanted for the movie. I knew that the book had not been written for a movie—it was just a literary piece of work.

Rivera: But I still wanted it to be as close to it (*the book*) as they could write a script. And I don't know—I am not a writer—so that was their problem.

So I had to pull the rights away from him. When we finished I said, “I can't do this. I don't like it at all, and this is not what I envisioned for it.” Then I started dealing with it myself. I thought there's a potential here for a movie, so I started working with another producer after, who was the one that did it. I had like three other people, but we had an agreement with each of them. I gave them two years to write the script, and I either approved or disapproved. Finally Severo Perez did it, and he did a very good job. The movie is very close, with a few exceptions to the book, and I'm very pleased with it.

Erickson: That was a wonderful event, the screening of it here.

Rivera: Yes, yes.

Erickson: At the Fox Theatre.

Rivera: Right. We had a reception ... the cast came out and we had a reception in the Mission Inn, and then we went in limousines down to the theatre so it was very *nice*. (laughter)

Erickson: What year was that?

Rivera: That was in (pause) five years ago.

Erickson: And the film is being shown on public television, isn't it?

Rivera: Yes, and theatres, too. In fact, I was talking to my daughter who lives in New York—Irasema. She had gone to Lincoln Center where they had shown it about two weeks ago.

Erickson: Oh great.

Rivera: So it's still showing. But it will never be a commercial movie. I never thought of that. I wanted a movie to be an educational one. I'm not interested in making money on the movie.

I know Tomás would never even think of making money out of it just because of the way he *wrote* the book. If somebody can benefit or get some ideas out of it, that's all that matters. So it will never be a commercial movie—it'll be an educational movie.

Erickson: You know what we didn't talk about earlier—what are your daughter's doing now?

Rivera: Well, Ileana is married to a very nice young man. I love him. He's just a terrific guy. She's a teacher in high school. She teaches Latin and is very happy being a teacher. She went to the University of Texas and got her BA and MA and started on her doctorate, but she didn't finish.

Irasema got a degree from the University of Texas in Psychology and went out into the Houston area and worked for two years as a counselor. Her specialty is juvenile delinquency, very interesting. Worked for two years and got burned out and went to Parsons School of Design in New York. Now she's working for a big company.

Erickson: She's doing quite well, isn't she?

Rivera: Doing very well. She's the Director of Art, which means she does all of the layout of the magazine and goes to photo shootings and all of that.

Erickson: And she does the ... we should mention that she does the design for the posters.

Rivera: She does the design of the posters for the Tomás Rivera Conference which we didn't mention before, but between ... Jim and I are doing this conference every year. (laughter) We are now on our 12<sup>th</sup> year. It's incredible.

Erickson: Is it? How do you come up with a speaker for that, Concha?

Rivera: We have actually two major speakers and then we have panels. Well, we chose the subject of the conference, and then we find the best person that we can afford because they're very expensive.

Erickson: Are they?

Rivera: Oh, very expensive. Speakers are very expensive, and we don't have a lot of money.

Erickson: But you've known most of the people throughout the years. Have they probably made some special arrangement for you?

Rivera: They do, but it's still very expensive. You know, Tomás used to speak whenever they'd call him to speak, and sometimes he had to pay his own way. Some times he would sleep in the dorm with the students. He would go to the fields where the migrant workers would be reading out of his book ...

Erickson: Did he? Oh my.

Rivera: and he never thought about going for money. But he was a different person, and now we have so many good people—I'm very critical about that—many good Hispanic people in all areas of science and education, health.

We have very good people that can inspire young people, but gosh, if you don't have the money to pay them and bring them, you can't have them. So how can you show these young people a role model?

Erickson: Right.

Rivera: That aggravates me.

Erickson: That's the challenge.

Rivera: Yes, it's a challenge. Yes, I do know many of the speakers that come, but we still have to pay them. They do make exceptions for us, but still it's very costly.

So according to the subject of the conference, we find the best speaker that we can afford. For the evening, we find a person for the banquet. We have all-day panels and a banquet in the evening.

It's been a very good event, and I'm very fortunate that so many people support it.

Erickson: And how many scholarships do you give from that?

Rivera: Well, I should clear up that the conference is totally separate from the scholarship fund. They are totally different.

Erickson: Oh.

Rivera: They have absolutely nothing to do other than they have the same name. The conference only pays for itself—barely. And that's thanks to Jim's hard work. But we just come out of it even. We don't try to make any money.

The Tomás Rivera Scholarship Fund—the \$25,000 seed money came from The Times Mirror because he was a Trustee of The Times Mirror. They set that up for a scholarship.

Then we put an announcement in the paper that anybody who wanted to send flowers, since he was buried in Texas, that they would send money for scholarships.

We started with a fund of about \$30,000, \$25 from Times Mirror and the other from flowers. Then I've been putting my own money into it, and I'm so happy to say that we have \$100,000 today.

Erickson: That is great.

Rivera: But it's totally different. It has nothing to do with the conference and nothing to do with the Tomás Rivera Center. A lot of people think that it's all one thing, but it isn't.

Erickson: I'm glad you cleared that up.

Rivera: The conference, I think, has been great. Great response and it has turned into an event—I want to get out of it, but I can't because people won't let me get out of it. I'm getting to the point where I don't want to do it anymore.

Erickson: But you are synonymous with that.

Rivera: Yeh, well I don't know. I think it's good for the community and it's good for UCR, because a lot of these people—many of these people—that come for that day conference probably wouldn't come otherwise.

It just makes me so happy when people come and tell me they've never been on the university campus. And I think, well, if I've done that, to bring them over here to show them there is such a place where they can come and their kids can come ...

In fact, the committee want me to move it somewhere else because it has grown so much, to move it out of the campus. I've been fighting them with teeth and nails, I don't want to do it. I don't want to move it. I'd rather keep it small, because to me we are showing the university.

Erickson: Right. It's such a positive light.

Rivera: Yes, it is, and the people that come to it can see that there are these places and it is an opportunity for them. So that's where we are ... twelve years already.

Erickson: Gosh. What do you think Tomás would think of the campus today?

Rivera: Oh, gee. That's a good question. (pause) I don't know what he would think, but I think he probably would have preferred the university to stay small like the founding fathers would have preferred the university to stay and what the founding fathers thought of ...

Erickson: When it was a liberal arts college?

Rivera: Yes, uh huh. I think that he would have liked that. He envisioned a very nice, exclusive and very good education. Because it was a time when the ratio was 12:1, you know. (chuckle)

Erickson: Was it really? Gosh.

Rivera: That was marvelous for the students. When you interview someone like Charlie Field, he would tell you the same thing. So I think that he probably would have liked that.

I don't know that he would still be here as Chancellor today. I don't think he wanted to stay forever as Chancellor. He wanted to write.

Erickson: Oh, do you think he wanted to go back to the classroom then?

Rivera: Oh, yes. For sure.

Erickson: How long had you planned?

Rivera: Well, I think that he had it planned the year before the year that he died, but David Gardner who was the President wouldn't accept his resignation. He said, "No, you can't do that."

Erickson: Is there anything else, Concha, that you'd like to talk about that we didn't bring up?

Rivera: Oh, gosh. I think that I talked more ... (laughter)  
than I thought I would.

Erickson: This is a great interview. I thank you very much. It was really interesting.

Rivera: Oh, thank you. I just brought out so many memories ...

Erickson: Oh, I'm sure.

Rivera: I mean they'll always be there, but some times you just ...

Erickson: You just don't think about it.

Rivera: Yes. So it was great. Thank you very much.

Erickson: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Text in *italics* has been edited by Mrs. Rivera.