

Interview with
ZAHANDRA HUTCHINGS

August 16, 2023

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ZAHANDRA HUTCHINGS

Content Warning: Domestic violence.

Zahandra Hutchings was interviewed by Caitlin Grimm on August 16, 2023, in St. George, Utah. State. She related her story of coming to St. George, making a life, and being an advocate for her community. Cameron Nielsen also participated.

CG: Hello, today is August 16th, 2023. We're at Utah Tech University Library. This is Caitlin Grimm, and Cameron Nielsen is acting as the recorder today, and we are interviewing Zahandra Hutchings.

So, Zahandra, can you please state and spell your full name for us?

ZH: Z - A - H - A - N - D - R - A, Hutchings, H - U - T - C - H - I - N - G - S.

CG: Thank you. And what languages do you speak?

ZH: I speak Spanish and English.

CG: And where were you born?

ZH: I was born in Mexico, in the state of Michoacán. And my city's name is Apatzingán, which is similar to here in the way of the heat is, it's like very hot over there, but it's a lot of rain. So, we have a lot of variety of fruits and vegetables that go over there. So, it's just very green when the time of the rain over there.

CG: We'll move on to kind of the more open-ended questions now. Can you tell me about your childhood and family?

ZH: Okay. Like I said, I was born in Apatzingán. I have six siblings. I'm the second one from the bottom [I was the second youngest]. And one of my brothers passed away already, [he] was my baby brother. I was the one who was playing with him, because my sisters, the older sisters, two of them, they were the oldest and I was the younger girl, you know. I was little, so I had to play with my brother all the time. I think we had a happy childhood, because as a kid, you don't realize a lot of problems. You know? We're just playing in the dirt, playing with whatever. We didn't have a lot of toys that I can remember. But I remember just having fun playing in the dirt and making things in there. So, just having fun. We both went to school together. I was older, so I was in a different grade. But we [would walk to school together], okay?

My mom, she did not go to school because in her time, the woman [was] supposed to learn how to cook, and do all the chores, to [tend] to your husband. So, she didn't have the opportunity to go to school. But later in life, she went, you know. My dad was a truck

driver type of thing, you know, he worked for a company. And he wasn't available to us a lot. So, I mainly don't remember having a good relationship [with him] there, because he'd get there, I don't know, one time a week or two weeks, one day, one night, and then he'd go back to the bus and go places. You know, that was his job. So, my memories of him are not that great because he was kind of macho. [Laughter] Our community, you know? And every time that we know that he was coming, you know, we were kind of scared because he'd demand things and we were poor. We did have our little house because my mom's family got that house for her. But everybody like, "Your dad is coming? Okay, let's go sleep early." [Laughter] So, we don't have any confrontation or if he usually get upset or mad, as kids, we were kind of scared of him. So, my mom and dad did not have a great relationship, I don't think, because my mom was so quiet and submissive. Now that I'm an adult and I've been working in families, there was a lot of abuse, I can tell. If not always physical, verbal, you know? And money was short. You ask for stuff for your school, and he will say, "I don't have money." Or "Next time I come." Yeah. But like I say, now I realize a lot of stuff that when we were kids, we used to go to school and do our thing, play, and that was it.

We always had a little food on our table, because my mom always provide when the money wasn't available to buy. She used to iron people's clothes to get money, or sew. And that way, she keeps food on our table for us. So, I admire that for her to being, you know, able to take care of us because she was the one at home all the time with us. Even she didn't know much about school, you know, anything. I think we were good kids. Because she would say, "Go to school, you know, it's ready. Go to school," and we'd just go walking, and we'd come back. And "Do your homework." And we did what we need to do. So, that's part of the thing that I recall, mostly, you know? And she was just quiet, and when we have to see my dad, he made her cry a lot, you know, because he come from driving or whatever, and he wanted my mom to bring some food to him. And sometimes she gets late in there and he gets upset. And I witnessed that, personally, because I went with my mom. And it was one thing I always remember that he was just upset, because "You get here late, I have to go to the next trip, and I cannot even eat." [Chuckles] But yeah, my mom was kind of the type of person, like in the olden days, very submissive, very quiet. Yeah, that's part of my childhood.

I have a good relationship with my brothers and sisters. My oldest sister was the one who, I can say that, took over the role of the dad because she started working a very early age. I don't know if she was thirteen, fourteen that she started in the radio station. She'd dust and do little things like that and earn a little money. And from there, she always started working and taking care of us, helping my mom, mostly, to help us. So, until today, she's just like the mom, the second mom. Yeah, but that was one of the things that I always remember. Even though we don't have much, but I think we were happy with what we have.

CG: Thank you. You touched on it a little bit, but what can you tell me about school?

ZH: Okay. At school, I wasn't a great student, I have to tell you, because I was good at first, kindergarten, next. And then I went to high school. I did okay in high school, and went to

high school, because in my city was only one high school. And it was a private one. You had to pay to go to school. And we didn't have the money. So, all my friends, when we were supposed to be starting, they went, but I cannot sign up for it because every month, you had to pay a certain amount of money. So, I just went because I liked school, you know. I just went, and I was just there but without signing up, anything. So, I spent a year just listening to the classes, because my friends was there. And I was just listening in there. The year went by, and they got the certificate or whatever. Me, I didn't, because I wasn't paying the money for me to go to school.

So, my older sister, she was married, and her husband knew that I wasn't going to school. And he say, "No, she needs to go to school. She needs to go to school." They were living in the capital of Michoacán, Morelia. And they have a house. He worked for the government back then. And he said, "No, she has to come with us because she needs to go to school. She needs to continue going to school." So, I talked to my mom and everything. And there I went, yeah, I was like fifteen, sixteen. It was a big change because I lived in, back then, it was a small town. And to go to the capital, there was a lot of students there. It's like here, you know? A lot of students come from another state to go to school there. So, I went there. I finished my high school there. And before I finished, I believe my sister got me a job, that I was combining school when working because that's what we need to do. Even here. So, I went, and I finished.

I finished my high school, I was ready to go to the next step, which is college. So, I choose the wrong career, because after that I signed up for accounting, I think because I have a friend, we were best buddies, and I think she was going to there, and I said, "I can sign up there," but I don't like math, so [laughter] –

CG: [Laughter]

ZH: I think I did one semester. I just did not finish there. So, I went back to work. Back in those days, I did not work more for the government, because I worked for the government a couple of years. And then I went and worked for the university of my state as a secretary. So, I was at the library, an old library, because my city is a colonial city. It's very pretty. And there was an old library. So, I was there, I went to school, went to school and just kind of working there. So, I can't remember how many years I worked in that library, but then, got another opportunity to go to another government job as a secretary. So, I went there, too. So, I got hired, went there. And the place is like when you fight for the employees, when you have a problem with your boss, and they don't want to pay you, and they take you to court, and you have to go, you know, to do all of that kind of process. So, that specific office, that's what they did. And then, I was there as a secretary, hearing all the complaints of the workers, that they fired them, they didn't give any compensation or anything. So, that place is specifically for that. So, I worked there for a few years, too. And when I was there, I was just kind of – I don't like that people take advantage of another people. So, I was just like, I worked with a lot of lawyers, so, I was like the scribe, because back in the day, there was no computers, we used typewriters. So, I was just typewriting everything and hearing the whole stories. So, I really liked that. So, I say, "Oh, I think I would like to go to school for this and be a

lawyer.” So, I have, like, my certificate as accounting, I don’t know, it’s different here. I cannot go, I have to go back to that and finish another one for law school, another subject. So, I signed up and I went [laughter].

I was going back to school again. So, I went, and it was interesting, because I already have like a couple years I didn’t go to any schools, but I was working and then the school was just kind of close by and I didn’t have to study a lot, all my subjects, because I already have previous [experience], so, I just had to study the ones who would take me for the law school. It’s not like generals, no, it’s just like, you have to choose this, so, you’re going to take all these subjects. So, I did that, too. And I got my certificate on that. So, I was excited about getting through the university, college, studying to be a lawyer. And since then, I just recall that, that’s why I’m here, because I think I’m – not think, I’m sure – I’m advocate for me, my people. And since then, well, I signed up for the school of law or law school. But I didn’t finish it, either. So, I have a lot of experience, you know, in a lot of things. But I didn’t finish. I got pregnant with my daughter, my second daughter. And then, I didn’t finish that, which I regret. Because I say, “I should.” I used a lot of this, a lot of that, and didn’t finish this or that. But that was experiences in my life, about education, and know how you can do a lot of things when you learn things, when you know your rights, when you know to fight for the rights, and fight for who you are.

And I came to the States, not because I wanted to come [chuckles] because that wasn’t my dream, like a lot of people, it’s their dream to come to the States and work here and get a better life, which I’m just grateful for it. But back in those days, I just had to get out of that place with my little baby and came to California. My sister was living in there. And I came there. So, I came to California, to Sacramento, for a few months. Then, we moved around that area. And what bring me to St. George is because I missed family. My sister back in the day, she had to go back. They already had their dream home over there. They came here to work and work and have their little house. So, when they have that goal met, they went back. It was when I came. So, I didn’t have nobody. I had no family.

And I marry a guy, you know. And I cry a lot, because I miss my family. I miss everything. The language; I always was good in English subject in the school, because I always liked it. So, they give us classes in the school. But it’s just like a lot of backup vocabulary and a lot of sentences that you can just kind of get used to that. But yeah, I always liked it. So, for me, that was hard, because I know a little tiny bit, not to have a conversation, like a long conversation, short conversations. And I was a stay-at-home mom. I didn’t have to go to work. Back in that time, my daughter was little, so I stayed home with her. And what I did with her is, I watched a lot of cartoons with her in English so I can practice. I have my notebook, I didn’t bring my notebook, but I have a notebook with a lot of notes that you can see how it’s written and how you can hear it when you have closed caption. So, like I say, I liked school [chuckles], but I was not very great in school. But I really say, I’m in this country, I have to speak the language, you know? Because what good is it going to be for me? So, I did. We watched a lot of princess movies, and a lot of kids stuff. So, I grabbed my notebook with my pen, and every time I see something that I don’t know, I write the word in my notebook. And then, back in those days, I have a dictionary, Spanish and English, English and Spanish. So, in the

commercials, when we don't have the whole movie by yourself, you're watching something else, I go and check the word, and I just write the word. And I have to tell you, I have a lot of notes on that. That was my wish to just kind of learn. Now I see them, and I say, "Oh, I know more words than that." I can have a better conversation than back in those days, you know? But yeah, that was a way for me to learn the language with the little background I have in Mexico.

I came, but it was hard. Because we have an accent. You know, we all have an accent. We are not born here. But I was proud that I can even communicate. But I was blind in a lot of things. I didn't know rules in here. I don't know anything how life is here. I don't know anything. And the places where after we live in Sacramento, we lived in Grass Valley, California. It was a beautiful place with a lot of pines, snow, and beautiful area. But there wasn't Latinos, any Latinos in there. When we used to go shopping at the stores, you just see blonde people. And I'm just, like, looking around. I don't see Latinos in there at all. So, yeah, of course they looked at you like, what are you doing here, you know? Yeah. So, yeah, that was part of my life in California. And I was concerned about my daughter did not speak English either, my little one, by the time she was – I'm jumping on things, okay? [Laughter]

CG: It's great.

ZH: I was worried because she was going to go to kindergarten, and she doesn't know the language. We hear a lot of music, she knows a lot of music, she knows a lot of stuff in Spanish. But English, no. So, that's why I decided to watch a lot of English TV, movies and everything. So, this one, she learns so quick. By the time school started, I was just so worried. I say, "Oh, I don't know how she's going to handle this, you know?" But she learned a lot! I went and dropped her off and she was fine. She was the only [brown one] [chuckles]. Everybody else was just blonde, very blonde. And she got some friends. And she was very outspoken. She was just like that. And I just said, "She did it good," because she didn't have any problems to integrating herself in a different culture. For me, that was more hard. The food, the people, the music, everything. But I survived. So, then from there, when she was, like, six years old, because I cry a lot because I miss my family – We didn't have technology to you can video chat or anything. So, I was just thinking, "What am I doing in here? How come I came?" It wasn't my dream. I have my place over there. I have work. I have my family. What in the heck am I doing in here? And then I have just to think, well, I just have to be here to better my daughter's life.

There was a little one [she was the youngest one], but I have another daughter, which was the oldest one, that I left behind. Yeah, I left her behind. I bring her with me to Sacramento, and she was, like, eight or nine. And she say, "I don't want to live here. I just don't want to be here." Hard for an eight-year-old to move away. She said, "I don't want to live here." And I let her go. Which I regret. You see, she was not old to make that decision. And nowadays, we talk, and she say, "Mom, it's the best thing that you did to me," because my relationship with the guy wasn't a healthy one. Okay? There was abuse, verbal abuse stuff that happened to me a lot. So, she knew, later on, you know? She say, "No, Mom," nowadays, she says, "That was the best decision that you left." But she

suffered a lot. Because she was with my sister, then she was with her dad and stepmom, and she paid the consequences of my choosing for me to come over here. She's a psychologist. I'm so, so proud of her. [Laughter] Yeah, she has a kid, an eleven-year-old boy. She's divorced. And she's in Mexico. She does her practice over there. And it's the only grandchild I have. My little one who was here, she's married, too. She's thirty-two, now. She does not want to have kids, because she works at the Dove Center. She sees a lot of crisis and all of these things.

Yeah, but yeah, moved here because my ex-husband, late ex-husband had an uncle, and I always cried, because I don't have family, I need to go and see somebody. And they say, do you want to go to St. George? I have an aunt and an uncle. Can be your family, you know? And he said, "Let's go and see what's going on over there." So, he brought me here, I believe, in July. That was so hot. And I wasn't used to that, because I have a nice, over there, cool and snowy in the winter, and the pines. And now, you see all the red [inaudible] and the heat. And I say, "What are we doing here?" He said, "Well, I have an uncle here!" St. George was smaller, of course. Yeah, we moved over here. So, that's why I'm in St. George, because I wanted to have family. But later on, we didn't work out together. So, we separated ourselves. So, he now recently passed away last year. He was good with my daughter, because he knew my little one since a baby. And he took her as his little girl. He was like her own, you know? He has another kid, but he was also divorced. Yeah. That's part of the things of why I'm here, right now.

So, I came here, and I tried to go to school, I got my paper [diploma/certificate] from there, came to the college, you know, it wasn't as beautiful and nice like now. [Laughter] And they just checked what I have done over there. And they told me I need to redo my GED here, again. They didn't validate all of that [accept those credits], even I have two different careers. And I said, "If I have to do it, I will do it." [Laughter] As an adult, I went. And I have my notes. When I was searching for my stuff to show you guys, I find all of those, "How come I have all of my classes in here, my books, you know?" Now, with everything online, I guess, [but] yeah. But yeah, I came, and I say, "Okay, I have to study, know the story of United States and all that? Okay, I will do it." So, that what I know, I like school. Yeah, so I went back and studied, and when it's time for me to take the test, I know they don't allow you to have anything, just your pen back in those days. Now, it's different. But yeah, you don't have to take anything. You just go yourself with your knowledge and you get your test. So, I went and did it. And got it [laughter]. And it was done. [I graduated]; I have [got] my cap and gown. It's been like twenty-two years, because I did it in 2001. Yeah, I just saw that the other day. It's like, how long it's been? Too long. So, but I got it. I got my GED.

And from that, from there, I'm talking to you, I'm just going to lay the education piece and life stuff. But when I came here, I didn't have a job, either. It was [???people???] and this guy, and we didn't have a good relationship and everything. And I'm just like, what am I going to do here? There's nothing to do. And like a lot of our people, Hispanic, I say, "I don't care what I need to do, I just need money to pay bills." I went and worked in the hotel, cleaning rooms. And I started doing that, I think for a year, until I just kind of talk about with him, about, I need to do something else. And when working in the hotel, I

knew some of the girls who worked there. I get very good friends there. And since I was the one who spoke a little bit English, I was interpreter, [laughter] you know, with my broken English or whatever. But it's a hard job. And it's just hard to work in that kind of place. And I told my friends, probably after a year, I said, "You know what, guys, I'm not going to stay here for long." "Where are you going?" "I don't know. But I know. I know myself. I have to get better." I'm not saying that it's a bad job or anything. No, I'm grateful for it. And it gave us money to eat and pay bills and everything. But, uh-uh, I have to look for something else. I'm not going to be here for long.

So, yeah, that was a time when we [separated] with my ex-husband. I have a little bit of domestic violence there. And when I went to college, I met this guy, because I was going to classes, English classes. And his son was our teacher. And they give you the test to see what level you are in your knowledge of English. So, I just went and take the test, too, to see where they want to place me. And I got the highest, because I have some background, you know, knowing a little bit of English here and there, a little communication. And yeah, I went to my classes. I just went to my school here to learn more conversation and everything. [There] was this old lady, very nice lady, Laska [Laska Keel], I can't remember her last name, but her name was Laska. She passed away a month ago. And one week, she say, "Next week, I won't be here. I've got to send a substitute. So, you guys show up, please, because I want to send my nephew." And she started describing the nephew, okay? She said, "My nephew is so smart. My nephew is so handsome. [Laughter] My nephew is very tall. And he's a people person. You guys come. Because when we have substitutes, people don't show up." And the day came, I think that was a Wednesday that we had the classes. And I was still married to that guy. We used to live in a trailer park and gypsy towns, back in those days, that don't exist anymore. And well, we didn't have a good life together. And he knew that I was taking classes, all of that. And that day, I say, "I'm not going to class. No way I'm going." And this is the same thing, I don't have to go back to whatever we've already done. It's going to be the same story. I'm not going. So, I decided not to go. But last minute, I say, "No, I'm very pissed off, so I have to go to class."

CG: [Laughter]

ZH: I cannot miss my classes. So, I hurry up and left, saying, "I'm going to my class." So, I came, went to my classroom. When I was walking, I can't remember the name of the area. But you can see through the windows, you know. And it was like this [indicating window wall]. I was walking through the hall like this, and I see all the way there, the guy, the substitute. And I say, "Oh my gosh. That's the substitute? [Laughter] He's handsome." Yeah. But his son also told me that he was a handicap, because he has a motorcycle accident when he was very young. So, he was standing in there. And he was very handsome to me. So, I came, and "Can I come in?" "Yeah, come on over," and very friendly, and there was, like, five people in that level. And, "What's your name?" And we start chatting. "Where you from?" Just the normal stuff. Yeah, and we talked a little bit and just happened. And then, he gave us a little recess, like ten minutes, we have a ten-minute recess. So, he start talking to me and say, "Tell me more about your city." And we started just talking. Yeah, where are you from? How your city is like? Yeah. So, in the

end of the class, he say, "Here's my number if you have any question," because I told him I went to school over there and I want to do all these things. He says, "I work in AmeriCorps. I am –" How do you say – "volunteering." He said, "I volunteer in AmeriCorps. If you have any questions about any homework, anything, I'm there. I'm available to you. There is my number. That's my name. Anytime, or anything, if you need anything, you just give me a call." I keep the book and put it in there and forget about that. I forget about him, you know? I continue on my life.

But one day, the guy I was married got kind of aggressive to me. So, I get out of that trailer, and I start walking, all the Dixie Downs, Dixie Drive. Dixie Drive, it was just a field back in those days, not anything like today, because it was just field. And I was walking, and I was crying and walking and thinking, "What am I going to do?" Well, another [more domestic violence] stuff happened [with my ex-husband]. One day, he just grabbed my neck. You know? He was from here, but his mom was from Mexico. That was the reason he was here. And I was just like, "What am I going to do?" And I just remember that I had this guy's number. And I called him. And he say, "Where are you at?" I say, "I live in Dixie Downs." He said, "I live in Dixie Drive," one of the senior apartments, they are right there. And I stopped by to see him. And he says, "No, no, I'm calling the police." I said, "No!" you know, "Don't do that! He is going to kill me when I go back. Don't do that." He says, "Look, girl. You are not in your country. We have laws in here. One of these days, he's going to kill you. I need to call the police and report this." I said, "No. If you do that, I will never call you again for help. Please don't do it." Because we are scared. We didn't know the laws. Now I know a little bit more than back then. And I say, "No, don't do that." So, I say, "Okay, we'll see you," and I left, went back to the home, and continued with my life like that. Yeah, but he was kind of worried, and he called me and say, "How's your life going?" "Um, this is not working, it's not going to work at all." He says, "How come you don't get divorced?" I said, "I don't have the money. I don't have, you know, I don't know where to go. I don't know anything." He say, "I'll help you. You want to get divorced?" "Yes, I do." "Okay, let's meet and we'll plan." And I'm just like, "What plan?" [Laughter] I say, "Okay." So, we met and he said, "What if I find somebody who you can clean houses for? For two weeks, you have vacation time," because I was going to have my vacation time. "What if I have you go somewhere to clean somebody's house and you disappear? And in the meantime, how much money you have?" I don't have much, I have a few dollars, or whatever. He says, "I can help you, because I know the lady here in the area, where the apartments are, Canyon Pointe Apartments." And he used to live over there. He said, "And apply for an apartment. I can talk to the lady, the manager, and see your situation. But you need to get out of there." Well, then I feel empowered, because I'm not by myself. I have somebody who is advocating for me, you know? And I got all pumped up. And I said, "Yeah, I go to do that."

So, I went and asked for my vacation time, one week vacation time. I have everything planned. And my daughter was like, seven years [old], probably, and got ready, have somebody to go to clean the house, which was his mom who lived [in Loa, Utah] along, I don't know, I can't remember the name of the place she used to live, up north. And then, I disappeared. I cleaned the trailer, and packed a couple things. And this guy who I

was running from, he used to come home for lunch. And he came for lunch when my car was already packed, and little things. And he came, and I said, "Are you having lunch?" He said, "No." "Oh, you are hungry. Food is there," because I left him food. I left everything clean, everything. And I grabbed a couple of bills I had to pay. So, he saw me grab the bills. And he said, "Are you going to pay the bills?" "Uh, nope." "Where are you going?" "I'm leaving you." , "What?" he said [Laughter] You know, I was so empowered. Because I already had somebody backing me up. I already had to disappear for a week, and I already had an apartment. I didn't have furniture, I didn't have anything. But I planned everything with him. And he said, "What?" "Yep. There's everything in there. I'm not taking much stuff. Your trailer." I get in my little car, get my daughter in there, back up, and I look in the mirror, and he was smoking, smoking, and just, like, frozen, like, "What the heck?" You know, I'm proud of that. I'm so proud that I did that. I can tell him to his face I was leaving him, you know. And I left. And I went for a week. I didn't still have to go back to work the following week. [My ex-husband] went and asked my friends at the hotel, "Where is she? Where is she?" Because I didn't tell nobody. Nobody. So, they say, "We don't know where she went." [My ex-husband also] called Mexico, with my family, my sister. But I told my sister ahead of time about my plan. I'm not going to be there anymore. I'm just going to leave. [My sister says,] "Where are you going?" [I said,] "I have somebody who's helping me and I'm going to just disappear for one week." So, I said, "Okay. So, if he calls you, just say she is not here anymore. You know, you already know, I talked to you about this." Yeah, I grabbed my daughter and I left.

So, [when my vacation was finished] we [came] back to the same area, at Canyon Pointe Apartments. [We didn't have anything] No anything. But we didn't care. You can get stuff easily here. So, yeah, then he start calling me. "I want to see my daughter. I want to see her. Where are you at?" I say, "I'm not going to tell you." "Can we meet somewhere? Can we talk? Can we meet somewhere?" "You want to see her, I can take her to McDonald's here, on the corner. You'll see her, but it's done. This is done." He say, "Okay." So, I went and saw him, and he saw my daughter. And I said, "I'm done." He said, "Well, you're going to have to pay the lawyer." "I don't care. I'm going to do that [laughter]." So, yeah, I went and contacted a lawyer. And since we do not have kids, the girl was my girl, you know [I had sole custody of my daughter], he adopted her, you know, with his last name and everything. But he has none, after that. I look back and I say, how many people stay in a relationship just because you're by yourself, you depend on the guy or wherever, or vice versa? Because mens are abused, too. You know? But I'm just like, no, this is done. So, I just start new again.

And this guy, his name is Steve, he passed. He's asking me to go out and date him. And I liked him. He was [such a] nice guy. But since he give me [his number on a little piece of paper] the little number in his name and everything, I just kept it in there [my book]. Later on he started to say, "I'll invite you here, invite you there." And he was nice. He was a handicapped guy. He had a problem with his leg. And I didn't care, because he had a beautiful heart. And we started dating. But he wants to marry right away. I say, "No, thank you. [Laughter] I'm not going to do that. Thank you. I just came from a divorce. I'm not going to do that. I'm not ready. And I don't want to, at all. I have my daughter

and I don't need that." "I'm not like that." "I know. But who knows?" I end up marrying him after three years. He goes, I told him, "You have to wait." He say, "I'm not patient." "Bye, then. If you're not patient, too bad, but I'm not going to marry you right away. Uh-uh. I'm not like that. And I don't want to get into that again. If you're patient, you will wait for me." He goes, "I'm not doing it." He say, "Okay, I have to learn patience, then." "Okay, good enough."

He helped me a lot with my daughter. She was in Dixie Downs back then, Dixie Downs School. And he used to live, by that time, he moved to Valleyview area, and he'd pick [up] my daughter on Fridays because I was working [late on] Fridays because the hotels were busy on Fridays and schools got off early. So, he started to pick [up] my daughter from school, and bringing [her] to his house. It was a townhome. And my daughter just got good [felt comfortable] with him. They have fun together. [On] Fridays, [Steve would pick up my daughter and take her to McDonald's to get a happy meal] it was like McDonald's, going to get the Happy Meal, and go to do this [they would go do errands together], and he knew how to [take care of her even though he didn't have kids of his own] – and he never had kids. We kept dating, we watched movies, he made a specific room for her, you know [fixed the room just for her]? He used to call her, "My sunflower," because he said that she make him happy, makes him smile, because he was living by himself for too many years, too. He was, like, seven years older than me. He was dating back in those days, but you date people differently. You know, and he said he went to too many dinners, too many girls and no, nothing happened. And he said, "I guess I have to live by myself for the rest of my life." Sometimes I get there [laughter].

But yeah, but he had to wait for three years for me to be ready. And then I say, "Yeah, but I never got married the right way in Mexico. So, if you want to get married, you have to go and ask for my hand in marriage, like, in my country, to people, my culture." He said, "I don't care. I will do that." So, he did. He didn't speak Spanish. But he said, "Write me what I need to say to your mom." And he designed a ring, you know, and he proposed [to] me there. He rented half of the room from the restaurant [and planned it] with my nephew. I didn't know it was going to happen. He had music, he had flowers, he had all these things, this guy. Very different from [my ex-husband]. So, I ended up being the interpreter for him with my mom and my brother. He had a paper, but last minute, [laughter] he tried to say things and he didn't do it very good. So, I had to told my mom, "He's asking you for my hand in marriage." And my mom was like, – she's always been so quiet, said, "I don't know. If you want to, it's okay. Do you want to?" And he's saying, "What's she saying? What's she saying?" "My mom says that it's okay. If I want to marry you, it's okay." [Laughter] That was a cute thing, you know, because he was very romantic. He wrote me [a lot]. I have like a file full the love letters [that] I read them once in a while. Because I don't have patience, I never write love letters, either. When I met [his] mom, she say, "Yeah, he never did that. But he did it with you." So, I was very pleased to hear all of that. He was a very nice guy. It's been eight years since he passed but he's still in my heart forever. So, we got married here in St. George. Yeah. And he came in our house [moved into our house]. Yeah.

I'm missin' a lot of things, but I don't want to make this longer than it is already. [Laughter] But talking about traditions, I don't know, now, the younger people here, how they are dealing with that because [a lot of children] are born here, and I don't know if the parents have the opportunity to keep teaching about culture. You know? I did with my daughter. When she was little and she learned English quick, [when she started speaking] she did talk to me in English when she started, and I know some English. And I just don't answer [I didn't answer her in English]. [Then she said,] "Mom, I'm talking to you." I'm just like. "Mom, I'm talking to you!" "No entiendo Ingles."

[Laughter.]

ZH: "Yes you do!" "Mm-mm [negative]. Habla Español? Habla Español?" So, she learned to speak Spanish. Every [summer] vacation, I would send her back [to Mexico] since she was eight or nine, put her in the plane and go back for summer vacation. Go there and see how people live. Now she's so grateful [laughter] that she learned the language and she's proud of the culture, too. So, I'm happy for that part, too. Because some kids don't want to go back. It's too hard. You don't live with the same air conditioning in your home. You don't have a lot of things to do there, depending on the place your parents live. It's hard for kids and for some people, too, older people, that they don't want to go back there. But I do. I have all the time used my vacation to go to Mexico, all the time. So, yeah, I'm building a house down there, after so many years. I never had a house there. So, my daughter is helping me, financially. And with my savings, we are building a house. And we are going next month to see how things are coming along. That's the dream. A lot of people have the dream to have a home here. I do have a home here. That's another part of my story, that when I was single I applied for Habitat for Humanity.

CG: Okay.

ZH: Yeah. I was blessed with a home. That's where I live now. It's not paid off, yet, but getting closer. But yeah. Most of the people come here for living comfortably, giving opportunities for the children to do better. You know. Even you miss family, miss parties, miss people, miss everything, but you want to give the opportunity to children to better themselves, do better than we did. Yeah. So, that's some of the things.

CG: You covered a lot of our questions already. So, I'll try to just ask you ones that are more specific. I'll move the mic a little bit over if you're willing. But can you describe some of your favorite religious or cultural traditions? I remember you mentioned food, and you just mentioned parties, and stuff, but what are some of your favorite traditions?

ZH: Okay, religion, we were Catholic, you know, because that's what your grandma did, your mom did, and you did go to church, and go to church, and we were going because we liked that they were singing in there. You know, they have music and we go there. But later on, when I'm here, I baptized into the LDS church [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. That's where I married my husband here, in the temple, here. I was going very good when he was still alive. I was going to the Hispanic church before I got

married and know him, so, I was in the Hispanic branch. But then, I left. I get married to him and started going to the English one. And I stopped going. My daughter stopped going. Because we see people, I'm not judging everybody, not everybody the same, but when we were there, there wasn't too many Latinos in that branch. And people are nice to you when you're there. But then, when I see people in the store, they don't even look at you. So, I'd say, no. They are so nice in the church, and when they see you, they look to another side, you know? What kind of church is that? And my daughter explained some things, too. She was going, she was baptized there. And she recently sent a letter saying she don't want anything to do with any churches. So, yeah. I just say when I was playing on the women's, whatever, I can't even remember now, [young women's], of playing basketball, and the girls throw basketball on her face. And they laugh at her. Just various stuff like that. And she say, "No. There's discrimination in there, Mom. I don't want to go anymore." And I was just like, because I was going, "No, you have to go," and my husband say, "No. She doesn't have to go if she doesn't feel comfortable going there, she does not have to go." And she stopped going. Later on, I stopped going, too. Even I'm married in the temple and everything, and I stopped going. I didn't go to the English or the Spanish branch. So, I just say, you know what? I know I am a good person. I know I try to help others. My job gives me an opportunity to be an advocate for my Hispanic community, mostly I work with Hispanic. And He put me in this place, because I didn't look for that job. That job came to my door.

I didn't tell you about that part, but I didn't sign up or went and looked for this specific job. Never. It came to the door, just supposed to happen for me. I was in a Mexican store, and a lady was there, we start talking. She spoke Spanish. Still, she speaks Spanish, and asked me one question. And then, she asked for my number, and where I was from, because she was living in there, once in a while. And she adopted two kids with disabilities from Mexico. And it just happened like that. And one day, she called me, and she say, "Hey, can you translate some paper for me? The flyer from the place I work?" "Yeah, of course." I'm always like translation. I translate all the papers. Back then, there was the Learning Center for Families. Now, it's Root for Kids. So, she say, "Yeah, you need to put some flyers around, and we need it in Spanish, too." Okay. So, she gave me the information. And I was just doing it. And the next day, I call her, and I say, "It's done." "Okay, I will stop by to your house," my apartment, "and pick those papers." Yeah. So, she came the next day, and I just hand the paper to her and say, "Yeah, they are done." She say, "How much it is?" "It's nothing." "No, you have to charge me." "Why?" "Because it's not my job." I say, "But I don't want to charge anything." "You have to say something, because I have to prove that that was translated, and I have to pay." "Oh, give me ten bucks." [Laughter] "Ten bucks?" "Yeah, just give me ten bucks." So, yeah. So [so she did], she left.

Later on in the week, in next week, she called me and she said, "Hey, there's an opening here. Do you want to work for us?" I say, "What am I going to do in there?" "Just come and check." The office used to be in Sunset Boulevard. There was a small place. And I went. So, I went and started paper, went into the office, they gave me papers, there was another lady in there. and I fill out papers. And they say, "Okay. Good enough. We'll call you later." I say, "Okay." So, she called me almost every three days, "Hey, we're

interviewing people for this position.” I remember the starting pay, I think it was, like, seven bucks or something, back in those days. And I’m just, “Okay,” I was still working in cleaning in the hotel. And I say, “Okay.” So, she called me and say, “There’s two more people and you’re still in there. We’re just deciding which one it will be.” “Okay,” given like nothing. Okay. So, later on, she called me, say, “Hey, we picked you. You have to come and work for us.” “Really? What I’m going to do here?” [Laughter] So, I went and signed all the papers and everything. And I was very nervous to start that job because I tell my English wasn’t that great, either, back in the day. I’m talking to you about 1999.

CG: Okay.

ZH: Okay? I’m still with the same company, twenty-four years later. Because why? Because the community. The Hispanic community. I was the first Hispanic working in that place, a nonprofit organization. And I just think, if there’s a God, just put me in there, in that direction to advocate for my people.

So, yes. I did not know much about early intervention, much working with disabilities. I didn’t know much about that. And I told my husband back in the days, you know, “I don’t think I want this job.” “Why?” “I don’t know anything. They talk about a lot of kids with disabilities, and I don’t know anything. There’s PT [physical therapy], they all do the therapy, and this and that, I don’t know anything about that.” “You will learn.” “No, I’m desperate, because they talk about things that I don’t even know.” Well, as he say, I started learning. We have trainings, so I start learning, and then I had to go – In those days, my English was a lot better, I have to interpret for the therapist. – So, go to the people’s homes, and work with kids who have delayed language, or physical problems. We had a physical therapist going, a special therapist going. And then I just go and interpret, and do a little cleaning in the room, because we have classes for the little ones. Moms drop the kids and then we do a little class with six or eight, we sing songs, we talk about, we do activities for language, or social emotional, stuff like that. And I started learning. And training, I started learning. I say, “Oh, I kind of like that.” And we have files, actual files. And after I do my duties, I go and go and grab the files and start reading about what condition this kid have, autism, Down syndrome. And I start getting myself, I like to learn, so, I started learning about those things, it interests me a lot.

So, I later on get my credentials from the state for early intervention specialist to work with kids with disabilities. So, I did that. And then we got a grant for Early Head Start, not Head Start, Early Head Start, working with pregnant moms [and children] until after delivery, we’re still working with the family until they are three. And most of my work is in the community, the Spanish community. And we see all kinds of stuff that I know, because I went through a lot of stuff that they’ve been through. How they came here, you know, all the things that happened to them. All those things that happened to them. Some of the things I relate to, and I know what happened. I know how that feels. So, until today, I’m doing that. I’m still there, working in the Hispanic community. Now, with more resources than back then. Now, I know more resources, now I know more about the law, I know what things they can do if you have an abusive relationship. I know child development. I have my Child Development Associate, now. So, I had to study to do that

one, too. [Laughter] It's just constant learning. And life experiences. You know? But I'm happy that I can be that person to help my community. Because back then, I didn't know where to go. I didn't know who I need to reach to, how this works, it's another world. Completely different. So, when they asked me, why are you there too long? Because I love what I do. I love helping my people. I know if I know resources I can help, I will help them. You know?

I told you that we did a parade. We tried to do an organization, back in, I can remember even, '96, '90-something. That we did. We're trying to help our community when the police, we did the first Hispanic, Spanish Academy in the police department. They tell you what they do. It's classes. It's not one class, done. No. I think it was, like, a month and a half of classes. And we have people in our community going because that was going to be in Spanish. We have an interpreter to do all that. And we graduate. I graduate for that, too, at the police, because I want to know how they managed themselves in the community. And we have a great relationship. We were a little group. You guys are too young, probably, Bob Flowers, that was the chief back then. He retired already. But he was a lot of help because he wanted to get immersed in this culture. And we wanted, too. We did a parade. Stephen Wade provide cars, the new cars. I have pictures of that. And we did that parade in here, and we have flags from Latin American, Mexican flags, [???Bolivians,???) all of that. And we tried to do good for our community so that they can see us in a different manner. You know, because we experienced a lot of discrimination. Yeah, even I have a piece of paper, back in 2008, the Arizona, they're having this big thing about the Hispanic. Yeah, I have like – yeah, that was bad. They were just assuming that you were illegal and they're stopping you. Do you remember that? Probably you were young, very young. You're still young.

CG: [Laughter] I remember that.

ZH: You remember that? And I was there, I have my flag. I was that kind of people. I have my flag. This is the first Citizens Academy presentation of Hispanics. That was back in May, I can't remember what year. But it's here, you know, telling the story. I have the picture from the parade. I think we were, like, five people involved in trying to lead an organization. We were there, by the library.

CG: That's a great picture. Is this you?

ZH: That's me, I was proud of my place. I'm always proud of my country. And I'll always be. We even did a little – oh, here is the chief. This is my – there's that Bob Flowers, the chief back then, when they're giving me my certificate for this academy. So, proud of everything, you know, that I've done. I know it's not a huge thing, but for me? It's huge.

CG: It is.

ZH: It's my story. Yeah. And I did have – oh, I also went and trained on baby massage, and for my community, I did a baby massage class, also. And here is the rally. We used to

have – *Spectrum* used to have a little thing about the Spanish. Do you remember those things?

CG: I remember coming across it once.

ZH: I'm here because I like dance, folkloric dance. Now, I don't think I can dance too much, because I'm just tired. But we have that. We have the fiesta, Fiesta de Hispanidad, that was, but I was going to show you something else that I told you about the discrimination. Okay. Yeah, here's my name right there. A lady told me to get out of this country and go to my country. You see? I think that folds in here. I have just pieces [clippings]. Yeah, I think I put it there. Because I go out and get my flag, and wear my Mexican clothes. And I don't care. I'm proud of that.

CG: Right.

ZH: Yeah, she told me to go back, because once, I wasn't legal, too. I wasn't. Yeah. I have a story to tell. That's why I accepted to have this interview.

CG: Thank you.

ZH: I know I spent a lot, sorry.

CG: It's okay. Jumping off of this stuff you're showing us, the articles about discrimination, [pin-back button wobbling on table] how would you describe your relationship with white Americans?

ZH: Friendly.

CG: Friendly?

ZH: It's like everything else. You have people that probably you like, and people who you don't like, people who are meaner than another people, people more dependent on the class of people that you talk to. Some people love Hispanic, some people don't, especially nowadays on the social media, you can tell the comments. And sometimes I don't like to see what I see or what I read. But friendly, whoever is friendly, because I think we are very friendly people, very hardworking people, and we care about others. Of course, it's like in every country, you have good, and you have bad, you know? So, all Hispanics are this, and that, no. Not everybody's like that. And it's in every culture, you know? You have the good and the bad. But I think friendly people are friendly, I'm friendly. If people look at you like, what are you doing here? I'm not ashamed to say, "Hey, why are you looking at me?" I learned that, because I wasn't like that. I was more like my mom, quiet, when I used to live over there. But I had to learn to be like that. Because if you don't do that, it's not good. You have to defend yourself. I'm not saying that you have to say bad words and do bad things. No. But you have to stand up for your rights, you know? I have rights. And as a person, you have to be respected. No matter if you're Black, white, or whatever race you are, you have to be respected. That's the thing.

A lot of people like to pick on Hispanic community. And I know that some people work, and after they work, they don't get paid. Because I visit ten families a week. And I see all the things that they are going through. So, I see. But yeah, I think I'm friendly, they are friendly, if they don't like it, [inaudible]. Yeah. Yeah. So.

I have my notes from back in the day, when we want to do an organization, we didn't know how to start, where to go or anything. But I have my – back in '99, August '99. And I write. I was secretary, so I was writing what we talk about, who we need to contact for the parade, who we need to thank for the parade, what is the next steps? I have it in here. I find this in another page. Or we have one of the girls back in the day who used to be, she used to write, and we wanted to do a little magazine, Hispanic magazine for her. And we did, one or three, only. And in one of those, she interviewed me. And that was for the pay for the women. And I talked about romanticism and technology, saying about nowadays, kids are going to say, "Back in those days...", you know, romanticism is probably gone. It's not going to be like flowers, love, or singing like in Mexico, you know, serenades and all of that." So, I talk about that. And I can even find the magazine because we had that magazine. And I used to make a copy of this, because I don't know where it went. But yeah, I have good memories, good stuff, I think, my story. I don't know what else. I don't know what else. Do you have anything more? Because I think –.

CG: I have just one more question. Do you have any questions you want to ask? Okay. Then, I think we'll end with our last question. What would you like people to know about yourself or your community?

ZH: That we are people. We are here among a lot of races and cultures. And we need to be nice to each other even if we don't think the same. You know? Every people have feelings. Every people have hopes and dreams. And a lot of people want to reach the stars and the moon. And sometimes it's impossible. But sometimes you give hope to everybody you know, that you can do it. You can do it. People need to be nice to each other. People need to support our community, too. Because I think we give a lot with our jobs, with our hands, our force, you know, our bodies, and our minds. You know? We give to the community a lot. So, we want a little respect back, too, because we are good people. We don't come here to do bad. Like I say, everybody's culture is good or bad. But mostly, I can speak for my culture. We all have those hopes and dreams to better ourselves, better our kids, get a better life, a better future for the kids. You know? And just encourage them to go to school, and help that support. When somebody wants to school, give them the resources to go, if you know somebody, you know, it doesn't cost anything. And it's one thing I go always with that, like if I can help somebody, why not? That's me. If it's my hands to help you, why not? It doesn't cost me anything. I'm making somebody happy. That's how I think. It doesn't cost me anything if somebody asks me for a favor, or if I know something that can benefit them, why not? I'm not selfish. I give it all for my people, for my culture, and for my beliefs.

Yeah. It makes me happy. Yeah. It makes me proud to know who I am. And even though I didn't have the dream to come here, I'm making my house here, too, that I have opportunities to be better in a lot of areas, to learn a lot of things. And I cannot pay with

money, but I can pay with my actions, being who I am. Yeah. And probably be an example for somebody. [Laughter] I don't know for who, but I hope, you know? Like when you do what you love and what you want to do, that's it. Don't do it – I know money is tight and finances are hard, but do it with your heart. Just give with your heart.

CG: Okay. Well, if that's all you'd like to tell us today, we'll stop the recording.

ZH: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]