

Cherrie Moraga
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Interviewed by Unknown

Transcribed: Marianna Lopez and Maxwell Wallace

[Tape 1 of 1, Side A]

Interviewer: [Whisper] __?__?

Cherrie Moraga: Do you need any help? [Sneeze] Excuse me.

Inter: That's a good start

CM: Do you need to hear yourself?

Inter: Not as much, no. I have more interviews were you can hear me loud and clear, and the answers are...

CM: Oh okay, so you wanna check this or you feel comfortable?

Inter.: No as long as the light is red, okay and on and it's rolling.

CM: Oh okay, cool.

Inter.: It's fine.

CM: Okay. As I was gonna ask you, umm can we, can I see it before it is published?

Inter: Oh yeah.

CM: Yeah?

Inter: Absolutely.

CM: and umm, well I wanted to, when you, I would like to have a copy of it obviously. To __?__?, so you know, so when your working out your negotiations with your publishers. You might use what I did, what I've done, is to just make sure that all the contributors get complementary copies.

Inter: That was always my intention.

CM: Yeah

Inter: I don't know what the business end is,

CM: Yeah.

Inter: But if I figure if I have to buy twenty copies...

CM: Yeah

Inter: That was always my intention.

CM: Yeah yeah, that all I wanted to read it and to get a copy of it.

Inter: That's great. Well, that was already

CM: Okay

Inter: That was already my minimum list.

CM: Oh okay.

Inter: No problem.

CM: Okay. That's cool.

Inter: I have a release form for you to sign, which includes, it covers the back of...

CM: Okay.

Intern: You'll see a copy.

CM: Okay

Inter: Great

CM: Thank you.

Inter: Well I'm going to start real basic. How did you first begin writing?

CM: How did I first begin writing? I wrote some in college very poorly, largely because I ___?___? other places. But largely because when I was writing in college I was writing in a secret, and, so I was very, I kinda always wanted to write about lesbianism. And so always wrote this kind of homophobic horrible stories. You know that, kinda you know, you know that touched the subject and then there was always some kind of freaked out young women running out away from the lesbian, and you know, they were bad terrible stories, but I, I wrote a little, very little bit in college. And I didn't really start writing seriously in till I was out of college and largely because I began, I came out, and it relived a great burden on me. When I came out I didn't have to keep this thing secret and so suddenly I was able to write in a way that was full bodied you know. And also because

there was, I've always written in a kind, in some kind of political context and also because I began to be a feminist who, there was in that context in which to write. So that's how I started writing.

Inter: Which part, coming out as a lesbian boost your writing? How did coming out more in quotes of as a Chicana boost your writing?

CM: Well I don't, I didn't come out as a Chicana. I mean their not comparable. Their not comparable.

Inter: The thing I am referring to, you talk in your writing about feeling that you have a choice, about identifying as a person of color, and these are not ghetto clichés. And just...

CM: Oh about putting, making becoming conscious, conscious of the impact that my culture had on the formation of my, my sexuality, my self, my women hood all of that was very significant to me. And when, when I became, you know, aware of that it sort of just exploded my writing. It had the same impact that relieved of the revelation of my lesbianism had on my writing and since then they actual came really at the foot of each other. You know because by coming out as a lesbian and getting actively involved in the women's movement. I began to encounter, for the first time, racism like I never had in my entire life, ironically enough, through the women's movement and also became really conscious of class in a way I never had either 'cause I was dealing with you know middle class white women. And, so, so one came on the heels on the other, so, and, and, since that time the combination of my lesbianism and my chicanismo, my Chicano identity, fundamental to everything I've written, since then. So they both are like power sources for me, you know, they drive me to write and I think probably more than anything that's right to unravel sort of what I have been told is a contradiction in those identities in those two identities, existed in the same person was what continued to propel me to write. Did I answer the question?

Inter: Yeah

CM: Oh okay.

Inter: you were raised to be educated, being your wealthy yourself. How did writing enter the picture? How did writing enter to this was it ever expected of it as an educated woman? What expressed yourself to writing and if so will it be only more academic or objected? Is there a tie?

CM: No, there's no expectation other than to write whatsoever. Writing does not, I in fact my whole relation to books is unlike even a lot of women of color writers that I know have had a very different relationship to book than I did, a lot of them will tell these stories as children of applying only through book could they sort of escape the world of, the kind of oppression they were experiencing as children either because of being women or being brown or whatever. I was a terrible reader, hated to read, was a very slow reader although grade school and then in high school I was a much better talker than I was a

reader. So I like read one book in high school, and you know I can just kinda talk my way through stuff. You know it was, I was an excellent talker. And so, so my relationship to reading and writing were pretty removed. My sister was the one that was the avid reader and who always told me stories she would tell me the stories she read about. And you know I loved it you know, but it wasn't really till I got into college that began to feel really ignorant and I think it's because for the first time I was really going to school, like with middle class, upper middle class not just middle class people but upper middle class people, and I had gone through this part of college and so there was nothing, for me to write was just out of pure *ganas*, you know, desire. For me to write was out of the pure desire to express myself. When I was very young I drew, when I was a little bit older I played music, I played the trumpet. I mean anyway in that I could express myself, so writing was just about expression it was no expectation attachment to my family nothing like that, because there was essentially no books in our home, growing up you know, so for us to be educated and the value of around education runs very high in my family, other thing my mother is doing, and and, that value had to do with securing a descent job in which one didn't have to work factory, and you know, you can dress nice everyday and you know, go to work and have, and if you could read and write well, you were secured a descent living, you know. And so there weren't even expectations necessarily of us to go to college, and so but they always encouraged us, you know, if you want to go to college they encouraged us, you know, I never had anyone tell me you shouldn't go to college. But it wasn't an expectation, so my writing there are, it...the difficulty in the writing for me particularly in my younger years, is that it wasn't going to make a living. What was valued is those professions, those occupations that would secure you a good living. So, so even, I taught high school and they were pretty happy with me, you know I had like credit and shit. You know it's like you know I had arrived! I had achieved what in my family, and I say this with respect you know for them was a great achievement, you know, to become college educated and I had a profession, it was incredible. So the whole notion of art writing for art sake, you know writing for political change or any of those kind of things. Those are things that kind I think just emerged out of my own spirit, you know my own hunger as a human being. And so what I had to fight a lot was the fact that it wasn't going to secure me a living, that it is you know I'm thirty-eight years old now and I've been writing seriously for fifteen and to me I wake up every morning marveling at the fact you know that I have managed to make a living in any remotely, in any remotely, in a remote way related to my writing. You know, the fact that you know I can, you know that I, I publish and that I get paid to read my work and all that remains sort of miraculous you know, in terms of my point of reference and it's only been in very recent years. So that I can in terms of my family so that they see that, I mean it hasn't made a lot of sense to them because I'm not getting rich yet not even regardless it's not my living, you know what I mean, and the more it becomes my living, which it has you know over the recent years, the more it makes sense to them, you know because then it becomes like a job, right.

CM: Let me turn on the light. [Laugh] [Gets up and walks away] If I'm ranting on, just let me know.

Inter: No, I think this is good contribution, Inside my head I'm coming up with __?__?

CM: Oh, oh good. Oh okay.

Inter: It's either ___?___. She was wonderful, I was going through hours of tape, and I still had all these questions.

CM: Yeah my emphases on interviews, because of the whole transcribing stuff. Is all that ___?___?

Inter: Yeah [Laugh] I want to cover what I want to ask next. What you have written about writing separated to coming to your family and also brings you closer to them.

CM: Well, I mean the thing is that my writing, is very much informed by my by I really do feel like, writing for me is a great act of love. I feel like I'm the best person, I am when I'm writing. I can't live up to it in other aspects of my life. You know but when I'm writing and I'm writing well, then I know that I'm trying to write out of a place of love and compaction. For my characters, for myself, for all those that influence me. And since, but it's usually in the last five years I primarily been writing theater, I continue to write poetry but primarily I have been writing theater and most of it, all of it is basically connected to Chicano culture and the side of the Chicano content, Chicano family. So I feel like that the act of writing always reveals to me, it brings me closer to my family the virtual (?) the fact, and my extended family in terms of talking about my family, my tribe my Chicano people right? By the virtual fact, that it continues to open me up more and more, to the significance of that way of viewing the world. You know had on me, continues to have on me. The separation that I feel has to do with the fact that the act of writing itself and particularly as a lesbian and the way I view issues of sexuality it's so dangerous on some level. And so private and so unheard of, you know there is no context to really understand it. In relation to my family possible there are middle class people or something you know, then they say some ___?___? to be a crazy artist or something like that. But that's not in my family, what there is in my family is a great, a huge amount of support for me just as a human being. And I think when I was younger I felt that it that the question you asked me comes more out of that book, which was quite a few years ago ___?___? that as a young writer I felt much more that I had to separate from them in order to be able to, to write those wounds, you know. But I left that way now, and the writing has always brought me closer to them, because once you touch the wound once you touch that place man, it's healing that happens, right so your closer it's only when harbor with unexpressed emotion, that when the walls come up so much, you know. But even as a, as a functioning right now, I feel less, less that I have to be separated from them, except to the extended as an artist it's a very private act and you know my family doesn't understand it, they would understand it much more if I was you know doing something like, if I was a lawyer or something, you know. But that's, I don't have any problem with that, I appreciate that I mean sometimes I really it would be horrible I think to have my parents understand, because then they would be in your business, there would be expectations attached to what it is, and all that. I think your real question is, so you can cut all the rest of the stuff is that, is that the act of writing itself opens my heart and so opens my heart to them, and the ways in which I have been affected by them both

positively and negatively. And it's also forgive them you know, so in that level it makes you, it makes you more able, makes me more able to connect with them in the real world. But of course the writing process and the kind of lifestyle that it evokes, and also because I write so much about lesbianism and sexuality there's a separation that has to happen there, because there's not a lot of why I have to write about those kind of things.

[Pause]

Inter: Your answers are overlapping to my next question, but just I'm think about asking, if I'm repeating myself. __?__? I want you, what's changed since you wrote *Loving Through The War Years*, in terms you said there's nothing allowed to express ourselves because we're female in Latino ways, or even explore what those ways are? It seems as though the exploration and the expression of are greater than they were ten years ago. But is this so in the ways that you have changed? (??)

CM: I don't understand the question exactly. What has changed?

Inter: Ten years ago, you've has written, "We have not been allowed to express ourselves, specifically female and Latinas roles or even to explore what those rules(?) are." It just seems to me looking from a man's (?) side of the way that this has changed over the past ten years, since you first wrote this, that women in general and women of color have been more exploring, in their lives and __?__?

CM: I think in terms of Chicanas, I mean __?__? in terms of Chicanas, I could barley be able to describe their searches. (?) You know, I don't, I feel like for example I encounter on very regular bases, since I've been writing large in theater that it fits me sort of in, in relations to a whole different community of people. The theater world for one in general but also the Chicano theater world in particular. And I sudden, you know it's like I am ever reminded by, by how resistant are really to kinda not people but the people who are in positions of __?__? etcetera. How resistant they are to looking at things that are really Chicano themes, you know. That really deal with the complicity of being both female and a women of color at the same time. It's like, they you know and you can tell this from reviews of my plays and stuff like that, and it's like, it's it feel like unheard of. I don't know how to explain it, cause I think you know it different for our various groups, you know. Chicanas for the most part this year, will be the first year a Chicana has ever published in the mainstream house and she's not a lesbian. Sandra Cisneros will be publishing a book in New York __?__?. We only began to publish seriously beginning in the eighties. You know so we have barely a decade of publishing and the writers who have published more than one book of any significance in terms of sales, you know you can count on one hand. And there's only two of us, that are well published and are out as lesbians. Like really out. So you're talking about two Chicana lesbians, in the nation and even the ones that aren't out as lesbians that are dealing specifically with issues of sexuality you know it remains so taboo. It remains taboo within the Chicano contexts and it remains taboo in a mainstream context because even how we are interpreted by the white mainstream or white feminist even, you know white lesbians, is all is never multiple, it's never a multiple consciousness happening at the same time. We are still

fragmented so that even in terms of how we receive cause I've heard criticism of my work, you know. If I could still fragmented if like no body will allow us to be all of those things at once together and so yes I feel like there has been some progress in terms of change but I remain ever so sort of odd by the fact that that how taboo it still is, you know for us to just open our mouths and to talk very specifically about the ways in which both we have been damaged and also the joy and the pleasure in the affirmation of being our multiple ethnicities, you know. Which is just one identity, it's one identity because we just think of it as multiple because ___?__?. And I feel that way I can tell you this from today, you know working on a play that I'm working on now. I was, there's a character who is just ahead she's the head on and she represents a lot of things to me that at one point she's saying to, to a priest who's befriended her, that she does have a body that she's been denied one. And when she says that about she misses her body she just hungers for her body. Right? To me she's the Mexican woman. You know she's a Chicana. And when we bare to have a brown woman to be sexual and to be the subject of our work it is still unheard of you know it's not unheard if you do stereotypical you know to do it in some sort of tocomystical (?) way or you stereotype your self. You put your self in some kinda category of behave meant like the suffered mother or the virgin, you know or the ___?__? whatever but if you like our men have done about us. You know but if you write about like we're really like in all our complexes no one wants to hear it. And so to me [laugh] ___?__? it's just the beginning I mean it's just like I, I look forward to what a generation coming up are going to do. 'Cause the thing is like for example ___?__? published by good women press on Chicana lesbians many of those women are under twenties there are writing stuff that I'm never even peeped you know, so that gives me hope, that gives me a lot of hope. But they have role models they have someone to read we didn't we haven't had anyone to read. You didn't have anyone to read.

Inter: That's my next question. What do think would have to happen make it better do you think that generation of ___?__? might get better just because the young woman do have somewhere to get ___?__? from?

CM: Well I think that has some affect but obviously it has to be a better world you know, you know I don't have great faith in [pause] I think that when you're talking about being writers that the grassiness (?) of censorship is very great anybody could grasp this. So when we're talking about color writers in this case, well in this case lesbian color writers, Chicana lesbian writers. It's like you know it's the token writer doesn't change things, you know. It has to, you know I really believe in the power of words. In terms of social transformation, you know what I mean, that I could think that there's really a relationship between artist and, and a changing world that artist kind of anticipate where we need to go. But, but an I believe that Chicana lesbians you know just speaking about my own people that that, that a kind of sensibility that can come from that has a lot to offer in terms of healing our families and making us a stronger people to resist the kind of assimilation and neutralization, and white washing that this country wants us to do to us as a people and all people of color, you know, But, but you know, what has to change obviously is that, is that, writers, it's not that Chicana lesbians just Chicana lesbians have to write they have to write then a political contexts, they have to write within a social movement they have to be activists, you know and by that I don't mean that then they

should be out on the street organizing necessarily, you know. But they have to see themselves as writing in order to alter the planet you know save the planet and, and I say that because you know I see you know I see lesbian writers Chicana writers you know, black writers you know, all kinds of writers, just, just because your published doesn't make that big a deal difference, you know. It's what you're saying and it's if, it's whether or not you're writing to resist, writing as an act of resistance, of all those things that want to make us deformed, you know what I mean. Or you're writing to just get yourself published by New York; you know what I'm saying. So, so to me identity in of it's self will not save us, you know what I mean. So I, a Chicana lesbian or barrio of chicalies (?). If these young Chicana's writing just want to be sort of assimilated into the mainstream with a whole Chicana lesbian twist, it doesn't make a difference you know. But if there identity than forces them to raise issues that no one wants to deal with you know which has to deal with race and class and sex and sexuality and you know, and you know. Get rid of this family phenomena etcetera, etcetera. You know it's why then there's hope, you know and I have hope in them because the ones the people I'm talking about are you know they are radical at twenty-five, if their radical at forty-five then we got something going. You know what I mean, so that's where it's at.

Inter: So what you just saying now, deals with something similar of preps on gold edition(?) of *This Bridge Called My Back* about the political writer, the ultimate activist these people are capable changing this words to try to penetrate the privatism of our lives. And talking about believing that we actually have the power to transform our experience other wise drive this book and might even Sarah showman she was saying that writing a book is not the same thing as taking action because writing book is no longer a thing that change the world. Fewer, and fewer people read. But what I see it's the people's responsibility is to do whatever art form they like and then they have to go out and take a stand with everyone else and go to demonstrations. And then lick envelopes and carry signs like everyone else.

CM: You agree with that?

Inter: you still think that writing itself, if it's the kind of writing to be described is enough that...

CM: Well I think that, that running demands is so, to write well I don't know about other people but I found that to write well, is so demanding you know what I mean, time wise and spirit wise and everything. But it is a life it's a life commitment, you know. And it I think that it some place fundamentally it has to be the thing that drives you to one point to anything. And but if your but what I said about writing within a context you have to, have to be in the world. You know, you have to live in a world. And you know, like with the I'm noticing with the interview with James bald, some one interviewed James Bald and they said 'Mr. Bolden, Why is it that you know that your acknowledgement didn't not come very quickly' I mean their have been five year gasp between your thesis, you have to live. If I don't live I have nothing to write about. I guess that's basically what I feel is that is that the thing is that to me is how one perceive one self and I know that there is some kind of separation that I have to do because I done political organizing and

demonstration are one thing, and demonstrations are not political organizing. I mean their important, you know what I mean, but I mean but political organizing has to do with being in the community sticking into that same community and working on a project and trying to see it into completion, you know trying to, it's a very a hands on know thing, it has really a lot with identifying with a certain community and working with them and, and that, that's very demanding. You know, when times, I, my sense is that when coming to my life, is that I know that just because I have I have been an organizer and I'm good at it, you know what I mean, like I know that, that I can do it well you know. And I get an itch when I know that I got to get in there and do something. You know and I would like to be able work out better ways to sort of combine my role as a writer with my role as an activist or an organizer. I commentate this kind of things in terms of in terms of theater, you know trying to do theater that has to do with community, community theater, you know. And around women's issues partially Latino so there's but think that that pull and tug between being an activist and being an artist is something that for me in my life will always be a pull and a tug. You know what I mean, because I know that I can be, there are certain times in which you are called to act and you don't have any choice, you know just like how you have to respond to what is happening. You know just like when war had just broken out and it's like who could work? You know what I mean you were on the street. And I feel that politically things are coming to a place that, which I have anticipated that, that you know that it'll just be a time when you will have to act. You know but I also know that without that separation without that solitude about being a writer, you know the real stuff you know the deepest stuff, the most difficult stuff will never be gotten to. But without a relationship to a community without a relationship to the flesh, you know to the world. You, our writing becomes very meekest. So I guess I feel like it is, I guess I'm agreeing with her ultimately to say that it has to concisely seeing yourself as writing, that's why I said writing within a political context, writing within a social movement, you know I feel like I write within a community, you know. Whether they accept me or not I don't know, but I write within this community, you know. Like largely I've only been only identify as a lesbians, I identify now, you know much more in terms of colors specifically Chicanos or Latinos and a kind of Latin American volts and also indigenous people. Like I feel, when I am writing I feel that really strongly, you know and the thing about being a lesbian you know and being queer, just thinking about being queer you know in the sense of times of fuse the __?__? sense of sexuality, and whatever like that, that's my passion. And you know where I am at, or where I'm at home but that happens in a cultural context, you know, so I guess I am just saying that what I see I consider myself somebody that will always be writing in a political frame work. That's why I call myself both a Chicana and a Lesbian writer, other wise I could Hispanic and I don't know a Hispanic who writes about sexuality or something. Just claiming myself as a lesbian and claiming myself as Chicana which is a political term you know I'm not Mexican-American I'm Chicana. To claim that, that came out of the sixties. You know the naming of our selves. That which would have been a kind of derogatory term, you know. It's like calling yourself a dyke, you know if I'm saying that I'm Chicana and a dyke that I am writing in a context in which those two among other realties that I'm trying to shape a world in which those one can be free in both of those areas, and then your on the street and your, you know. Then you would have to have a relationship to an active life of doing that as well. It's a long ass interview.

Inter: Who do you think your audience is? There's a question that you asked your mother in four, ten years ago, and also in terms of Chicana community that is central in your writing are they what you are really writing or seeing in the theater?

CM: Yes. Yeah. I mean part of is that you know being back in California, I've been back in California since eighty-five, and that's been very good for me to be back where there's real Chicano culture, you know. Oppose to New York where I lived for five years, before where I finished writing *Loving In the War Years*. There's kind of lag time often times, for example *Loving In the War Years* is now being read like all over the place by Chicanos, you know like largely of course universities etc. because that's where people read books right? But Chicano studies departments are using it all over and when I wrote that it was published in eighty-three I think and so I was writing that in eighty-one, eighty-two. And I never thought, I left the country and the book came out. 'Cause I just thought I, I don't know what I thought. I was so afraid you know because it was so taboo to talk about being a lesbian within a Chicano context. And so and the irony or the joy really to me I kinda laugh a little bit, you know to you it's past day so your going on to other things. But the book now is really being used like studied in Chicano studies programs and you know young men and women, everything in the and my theater is cause I have a good fortunate of working with a production company bravo, women in the arts, which is a multi cultural women's theater company, art company, there very good about __? __? my place has had a very strong Chicano/ Latino audience you know, lesbian and straight and families, and all this kind of stuff. And I think it's because a certain level the material looks like it's sort of normal right? In quotes because it's about a family and all the sub things in it deal with sexuality and machismo and critic of machismo, and all these kind of things that are basically my own feminist and lesbian politics you know. But within a context in which they see their lives reflected, you know. And that has been my greatest challenge you know is to try, you were talking about audience, it to try to reach a Latino, Chicano audience male and female. Because obviously my heart, my first heart you know like my first people, of course there's other Chicana lesbians. You know, other Latina lesbians and the pure joy of making that connection and providing that space for them you know that's just a blessing to me, it's always a pleasure and it's rescipicle relationship you know cause I teach in Chicano studies and I go to a lot of places where I meet a lot of students and their like reading my books, and when you see the lesbians is like a charge. It makes you feel really great, you know that's a given to me you know, and that hunger I really know that hunger is like. And so I'm very happy when I can feel it for other Chicana Latino lesbians but the hard work is trying to get what I believe to reach you know a much more traditional people. You know, to reach heterosexual men and women, to reach families you know. That's the, a big challenge to me and it, I think of them when I'm writing. And when I see them like it, I just had a production of *Shadow of a Man* one of my plays last November, December, no one knows your there right cause your not the actor so know one knows your there, so I'd sit in the back of the audience and I'd see these older women and you know kids, and I mean all these people you know in the play and in the audience it would just make me, reward me in such a deep way because that to me is really my work. My work is not to convert, but to reach those who need it the most, you know. In the context

that they understand and I know I can do that, you know. So I guess that's my audience and and at the same time all kinds of people, you know __?__? the theatre that's what I'm closest to right now, you know. But you know white men, white women, different cultures and you know black people, black lesbians, and yeah I mean just like you know heterosexual middle class white theatre goes even, will respond to the work. So when I say so and so you know one group of people are my audience I say that because when I'm working this is what I'm thinking about you know, kinda where my heart is. But I believe fundamentally as a writer that if you write well enough and you write specific enough and not stereotypically but specific about about the reality that you want to communicate you know it can reach anybody, it reaches through class, it reaches through culture, it reaches to present (?), you know. And in that level my audience is anybody that will hang in there with me, you know what I mean? Who will do the work with me, who will go the long hard road with me, because it's not easy I feel like the work is that, that my work is pretty confrontational, you know. And that I, I think there is a lot of generosity in it too, kindness in it too, you know. So that's my audience.

Inter: Isn't shocking that you prefer writing in __?__? you can best say what you want to say?

CM: Well I mean for recently it's been, you know it's really been theater, you know. Because you can have characters, do all the talking for you, you know. And it's sort of like *Loving Through the War Years* really kinda gave me, since it was an autobiography, it really gave me the permission to not have to right about myself anymore. It was like I was relieved from the burden of myself, you know. You know, I was really glad that I did it because I had no idea that once I had done it, that I wouldn't have to write one again, you know. That you know, I now continue to write essays, when I move to do so, you know out of usually out of some kind of political urgency, you know. But I started writing theater immediately after that book was done and it was because characters began to talk to me, you know. And it was, like instead of writing poems it's like they turned into people talking and those voices weren't mine, you know. And so but, but the thing I like theater it why it's a genera that really works for me so much is that it's oral, you know. So it kinda goes back to the days when I was in high school and I was a good talker, you know what I mean? That people, and also because I, I was a much better listener than I was a reader you see and I heard always great stories and great poetry and how people express themselves and I know this to be true about my people you know. And so the writing is very, gives me great choice sometimes, you know, and also because you can bring up all these contradictions and characters. Characters can be so complex and so contradictory you know that they can, and they just have to be themselves. You don't have to apologize for them you know what I mean? And so sometimes things that you can't really resolve in writing, like in essay or something else, you can simply show in through character you know. It also, but there's always you know, the thing that's good about theater too is that it's you have to kinda take things to the extreme in order to make a point or to make drama, to make it happen on stage, you know. So I just find it kind of, it's really been __?__? when I started in theater I really just began to flow and I found that I could speak through different generations and men and women and children and all of this stuff, because they were doing the talking it wasn't me anymore, it wasn't my ego,

you know. I still love poetry very, very much and I find that good poems are fewer and far in between.

[Tape 1 of 1, Side B]

So I, I always read poetry and I go to poetry for very different reasons. Cause poetry is always me, you know, and it's always my voice and __?__?.

[Answering Machine, Voice mumbling]

CM: __?__? Just trying to get home you know to come.

Inter: You want to answer it?

CM: No. Hey, you know how I am with it.

[Both laugh]

Inter: __?__? When I'm at work. I hate talking on the phone. Until I go home

CM: Yeah I hate it.

Inter: __?__?

CM: Yeah I hate it. Well actually let me get it.

[CM gets up from the chair] [Recording is stopped] [Recording continues]

Inter: One thing I want to ask you is about all the recognition you've been getting lately. You were honored by Out Right this year, where part of the __?__? of California understanding,
What do you consider a success for you?

CM: well actually, it's funny because I feel like when This Bridge Called My Back came out, I got a lot of attention very very quickly because of that book. And I wasn't at all prepared you know I had published like two poems in life before that book and suddenly the book was selling like hotcakes and you know. And it really sort of confused me because I felt like the book was done out of a real, very much out of a political urgency and I didn't feel like a spokesperson and any kind of that stuff, which the book kinda put in a position of being very quickly and I wasn't prepared and after kinda like a year of doing talk and stuff like that I stopped doing it. And finish loving in the war years. And then it was very interesting for me because it was sort of like when I had done loving in the war years and which was very specifically Chicana not women of color, not you know kind of more generic kind of thing. It was like the book came out and it was like not you know I think since largely that the attention and had come initially from all those consistent women of color in response to just being that sort of all the sales and

audience I mean university you know reading and all this kind of stuff was already ___?__?. Actually wasn't ___?__? writing by really being Chicana wasn't that interesting, you know it wasn't that fashionable it wasn't that, and I saying this understanding the racism in this country that the racism in this country is very not just about black, white kind of stuff. So black women are seen as more interesting and I'm not being sarcastic you know when I say that I say that with respect, for the African American women. But that not only there's a kind of invisibility that the other women of color groups have come out the history of racism in this country. So there is a really a kinda, I had gone under ground to do the book, and, and then uh, but then when the book came out it was like, I sorta, I started to really see that, and I thought, "Well, this is alright, you know." I also felt like I needed to do some organizing and that's when I also started Kitchen Tales of Women of Color for us and I started, you know, do women of color organizing around violence against women and that felt right to me. It felt like, on some little elements I had to live up to what Ridge (?) was reporting, for myself personally, you know, and, and so now, you know, um, you know and then, you know, and I, at the same time that I really got back to the business of being a writer, because to me that place in myself, that writes out of, out of deep need to write has nothing to with whether I'm published. Whether people like it. Anything. Whether I make money at it. You know, it's never had anything to do with that. And, um, so when I kinda got back into that place, that's how I got into writing theater, and I worked in New York with ___?__? And then I came back out to California and I just said. I stopped do any gigs, you know, I mean it's like I just would not do readings, I just would, would, or very few, you know, and I just got into the business of being a writer and I published Skimming(?) of the Ghost(?) and, and since then have written these other plays that have not yet been published. But now, I feel like ready to publish this book of plays and a new book of poetry and suddenly, and I've sorta like come out of, come up out of, out of underground I guess, um, or out of hiding and, and suddenly to, at the same time, you know, I have gotten various kinds of recognition, you know, and uh, and it's, the thing is that's been really, really good about it for me, is that it feels, um, solid, it doesn't feel like it's a bridge, you know, I go: gewgaw. You know, it feels like I've done work. You know I've really done the work. And I don't mean just, I don't just mean, um. The bridge was a hell of a lot of work. But I mean, the life, you know, the life of like, like, but again goes back to the thing about the division(?) of writing and life, you know, of just feeling like, um, that if anybody acknowledges me, for my work. This country scares me, you see, what, what this country can do, like, like, to its artists. It's very frightening, you know, to try to be an artist under capitalism, is like crazy. You know what I mean, 'cause, 'cause they consume you. You know like they pick people, you know it's like they, they'll pick certain types of people and then, um, uh, they let one in kinda thing and, and, um, particularly for people of color, you know, and that can kill you as an, as a artist and a writer 'cause it disconnects you from your people and stuff, you know. So for me, I have, I feel really, um, good that, that it's not about hype, you know what I mean? That it's like, that I work, I work really, really, hard. You know. And I am honored, you know, that, that people would, you know, respond to my work. I'd love to get an Annie A(?).

Inter: That would be nice, I've never got one of those.

CM: But you know, so, so, but I mean, um, but in terms of these awards and you know, I got a lot, an award for theater this year and that was like, to me, was just, The New American Plays Award, and that uh, to me was, it was, it was really good 'cause I know how hard I work, you know. Um, but at the same, by the same token, you know, I get a New American Plays Awards and then I got to New York, to get the award and I come into this dinner, this brunch they have, and it's all full of white people, right, and the only people of color there were me and this, um, Asian man, who got the award, and I, you know, I say, I feel like, and so then I go up to receive my award and all I can talk about is that there idea of what America is, is not who's here in this room, I mean, is who's in this room and that ain't an accurate picture right, so that your constantly dealing with this contradiction, you know, um, so, I feel lucky on the level of that I feel like, it's affirming to me, it's very important that you get affirmation so that you continue to do the work, because I feel equally, I encounter obstacles, equally, I encounter rejection, equally I encounter people who basically let me know that by virtue of being a Chicano lesbian, they aren't interested in me, that I'm too much, you know, in the wrong ways. Right? And so to get, to get expressions of affirmation on the basis of my work is really what you need to just balance the picture, you know, and so you'll continue to do the work. So it's good.

Inter: Last question, you just kinda touched on, and it's one I'm a little afraid to ask you, because I really hope I'm not doing it, but do people interview you or ask your opinions expecting you, that your answer is thee Chicano answer. Thee Chicano lesbian answer.

CM: Well they might be expecting that but they don't get it. I mean, they might be expecting it and they might, uh, yeah I think people do, do that. You know. That they expect you to be representative and that's not only from white people, it's, it also happens among your own kind. That, I mean like Chicano lesbians, I remember when I was giving a ___?___? That, which is not an easy kinda play. It's not a positive happy go lucky picture of what it means to be Chicana and Lesbian. I felt like it was a really stupid show. I felt like it dealt with the complexity of our lives, right, and to me that's great, you know, I mean, like I feel like "Yeah great!" You know, it's really dealing with stuff that's like real, you know, and there were a number of you know, I encountered at various occasions, you know, Chicana lesbians being very upset that it wasn't a positive portrait and they would say to me, "But don't you see you represent us." And I'd say, "No, I don't. You know, I'm sorry, but I don't, because the day I start representing any group I'm dead as a writer." You know, you're just dead. Because then you feel like you have to be, I mean I'd be a politician, you know, if I was going to represent people they could elect me to office, you know. I mean, that's the thing, if you try to write in any way that's representative you write stereotypes, you know what I mean, and you write bad. You know, so, ah, in terms of people interviewing me, in that sort of thing, you know, I mean, uh, YES! You know, yes I, I'm often a, maybe this book'll be another example of it, but I'm often like the one, you know Latino Chicana in the collection, uh, for the most part in, you know, I try to insure that that doesn't happen. You know, but, when it does happen my, you know, my senses, I do these things, because I think about the Chicana who's gonna find the book, that's all. That she'll at least read me. You know, and not that I represent her, but that, maybe something, of what I have to say will speak to her and she

won't be so alone somewhere out there in Las Vegas, New Mexico, or something. You know. So, uh, but the thing about tokenism and uh, and all of that, that's, that's not my problem. You know that's the people who tokenize you. That's there problem. And it happens a lot, you know, it happens, you know, recently, there was an issue in the San Francisco Chronicle of the image magazine, you know, this totally main stream thing right?

Inter: Yeah.

CM: Woman interviewed me for two hours, and two lines, were included in the essay, in her whole article.

Inter: I, I actually had that as a question for you, that it seems very abrupt.

CM: Oh, yeah.

Inter: I heard that and said, "I think she said more then that."

CM: No, it was a two-hour interview. And so, um, situations like that. And then it wasn't just that, you read the entire article and you realize the entire article is framed from a very, very middle class, white, mainstream perspective, basically, even if it's lesbian. It's still mainstream. And, and many of the questions that she asked me were framed in that way. For example when she asked me how I felt about that fact that the supervisors were, the two lesbian supervisors had gotten elected, I said, "It didn't really impress me." And that sorta didn't fit with her agenda. I said, "Didn't matter to me." See, I don't relate, I don't identify with those women, and I don't, I don't. You know they don't, you know, and so basically that's saying is sort of like, now if you, if a progressive Chicano got elected I probably would have got more excited about it. You know, that's just, you know, my point of reference, you know, like, which then makes the issue of lesbian identity a little more complex. Because, well here she's a lesbian, she's out and she's totally committed and she's really identified the lesbians, she's not in the closet, she fights for lesbian rights and, and she's not that impressed that two lesbians, white, middle class women got elected to the supervisor. So to me that's an interesting thing, because it makes lesbianism complex, right. Um, but, but since so much of it's, then you read the whole article and it's all framed within that perspective and then you realize you were just completely used. You know, to have your mug, and then have your picture in there and so that the, the question is not simply, the tokenism is not simply that the, uh, that you're include, but also the whole sort of social, the whole sort of frame work in which the questions are asked in the first place. You know, and like, for example, the, you know you don't have to, obviously you don't have to deal with this, but, but the fact like you come in and you ask me questions hasn't read my book. You know what I mean, that is, that at least, you know, then what we're doing, is that you have informed yourself. You have informed yourself about my point of reference. So when you're asking the questions you're asking them from, from an informed place, you know, from place that at least has some meeting, some juncture with what my point of reference is. You know. And that's the point. You know, that's, and, you know, and the whole thing, I, I just am going back

to the stuff about representation is that people may in fact try and use you that way and I just feel like the real issue is always, always to be kind of insisting on your own specificity, you know, and, you know, but still do it, you know, who they, how they describe in the book and who you are in the flesh are two different people, so I mean they don't got me.

Inter: Thank you. Um, this definitely was worth waiting for.

CM: Well good.

Inter: You were a wonderful interview.

[End of Tape 1 of 1, End of Side B]