

An SfAA Oral History Interview with Nancie Loudon Gonzalez

Family and Household, Migration, and Conflict Management in Central America, the Caribbean, and the US Southwest

Nancie Loudon Gonzalez is Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the University of Maryland, College Park. She served as president of the Society in 1975. Originally trained in dietetics, she discovered anthropology while completing a dietetic internship at Florida State University. She earned an MA in anthropology in 1955 from the University of Michigan where she cultivated a strong interest in applied anthropology. Her first fieldwork was done among the Garifuna, earning the PhD at the University of Michigan in 1959. In Guatemala, she worked for five years at INCAP (Institute of Nutrition of Central American and Panama). Her interests have included theoretical work on the family and household in Central America, the Caribbean, the American Southwest, and mainland China. Other interests include urbanization, agricultural development, and conflict management. She has published on her research extensively including *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna* (1988). Other important publications include: *Black Carib Household Structure: A study of Migration and Modernization* (1969), and *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle: One Hundred Years of Palestinian Migration to Honduras* (1993). She also had a long academic career, teaching at Boston University, the University of Iowa, University of California-Berkeley, and the University of New Mexico. She was Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Maryland from 1977 to 1993 when she retired. The interview was conducted by John van Willigen in Glen Allen, Virginia on April 15, 2011. It was edited for accuracy and continuity by Juliana McDonald.

VAN WILLIGEN: This is an interview with Nancie Gonzalez. I'm John van Willigen. It's April 15th, 2011, and this is Glen Allen, Virginia.

GONZALEZ: Which is really part of Virginia. (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: We're in Greater Richmond, in case you're wondering. (laughs) I really appreciate you taking the time to--

GONZALEZ: Oh, no, it's fine. I'm honored. I think it's great. Fun to see you again, too.

VAN WILLIGEN: Well, thank you. In this interview, I wanted to focus on, first, how you got involved with anthropology influences, and how you began to think of

yourself as an applied anthropologist and what that meant. And, there may be highlights of your career which are interesting, that you would identify what you would want to share with us. But I also want to talk about your experiences in leadership in the Society for Applied Anthropology. And I recall vividly the meeting at Amsterdam, it was a very positive experience for me to go there. And so I know that you were the president at that meeting. So anyway, you could start by telling me a little bit about your family background, and then how you got involved in anthropology originally.

GONZALEZ: Well, my former background didn't have anything to do with it. My mother was divorced from my father very early. I never knew my father.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: But my mother was a very successful woman. She had a degree in home economics and nutrition, and then a dietetic internship. And I had her as a role model, but I didn't live with her, so I was always trying to look up to her in, in absentia. And I--when I went--she was in the Army during World War II--and that's important too. She was a dietician. I thought I was going to go to the University of Yokohama, because she was to have been a member of the Army of Occupation, but then she became ill, and so I ended up--(laughs)--not knowing where to go, and that's another story. But I majored in dietetics, because--

VAN WILLIGEN: --oh, interesting--

GONZALEZ: --of my mother, okay? And I went ahead and--I never took a course I didn't like. I took everything. I loved everything. I was a good student, I was scholarly--and I was interested in everything you took. And, I don't know, I just kept on in dietetics because I took a lot of chemistry and everything else.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

GONZALEZ: And then I took a dietetic internship at University--at Florida State. And there, I took some seminars, which were my first graduate seminars. In, first of all, nutrition. A remarkable woman, who was a scholar of nutrition, and we studied how come the basic seven, as it was known then--where did it come from? How come we think those are the things that people should eat? She had us study the original research that led to these things and talk about it. Turned out, of course, that the research didn't match the recommendations.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: And then you look at, well, who funded the research. And, for example, the one that said we needed a quart of milk a day, really suggested that we didn't really need that, was funded by the National Dairy Council, and so on and so forth. So I think that was probably a very important thing--even though it was outside of anthropology because it led me to think about, well, what's the relationship between research and activism? And politics enters into it all along, and you know, is this really good for people--a quart of milk? Or was it a bad thing to make people spend that money?

VAN WILLIGEN: So you were a graduate student in nutrition in Florida State?

GONZALEZ: Yes, I was. And I, in addition, was [on] a dietetic internship in this big dining hall. It was in a Gothic-type building.

VAN WILLIGEN: On campus?

GONZALEZ: On campus. Well, yeah, the whole thing was on campus then. Up above, there were these windows that opened up from the upper floor, because our dining room had--open up above. And who was up there? The anthropology department was up there. And they used to lean over, you know, and kind of flirt with us. We were young, still, and we would go up. They'd say, "Come on up and see some of our masks" or something. (laughs) We would go up. And I got to know them, and they had two anthropologists is all. And they were both PhDs from the University of Michigan, and they had been students of Leslie White.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

GONZALEZ: And I took some courses in anthropology then, because we had to take courses, along with our work as dietetic interns, and I became really hooked, and I combined--I remember doing a study for one of these things of nutritional habits of--because it still was isolation--segregation. No black kids anywhere. The black kids worked as helpers in the dining room, waiters and so forth, but there were no students.

VAN WILLIGEN: They went to Florida A&M if they went any[where].

GONZALEZ: Anyway, I then went into the black areas of Tallahassee to study the stores and what they sold. And especially the meat markets, and I found that, you know, everything was different from what you got in the white section. And I talked then about the different ways that the black people in Tallahassee--and I grew up in the North. I never knew a black person.

VAN WILLIGEN: Where did you grew up?

GONZALEZ: In North Dakota. And Chicago, the northern suburbs of Chicago. I don't remember any black kids in my neighborhood at all.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: So this was fascinating, and I made friends among the guys that worked for us as well, and they led me to, you know, into the, even though it was frowned upon--I did go into these areas. And I ended up writing my first publication, which was published in *The Florida Anthropologist*. And it was on geophagy--the eating of dirt. Which the black people in Tallahassee did, the poorer ones. And it had been--when it was treated by nutritionists, it was as if, well, there's something their body is telling them you need, da, da, da. And I had had enough anthropology by then, and especially Leslie White--evolutionary stuff, and I said, I don't think so. I think that it has to do with poverty and culture. That, you know, this is something, if you haven't got any money, and dirt tastes pretty good, and yeah. And so I wrote this up, and it was for a class, but then the guys in anthropology said, "Oh, no, this is publishable," and they got it published.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

GONZALEZ: So that was my first. Well, I then still thought, I don't think I want to be a dietician in a hospital or whatever. I want to do research. And I applied for, and received, a fellowship from the University of Wisconsin, to do a PhD in nutrition. And then I got a letter saying, "Congratulations, you have this fellowship, and you're going to be working with Dr. so-and-so, whose research project is on the nutritional requirements of canaries." And I thought, canaries? Canaries? I'm not interested in canaries. And of course, I was so innocent, I didn't realize this was just to make money. I mean, he didn't have to be studying canaries, and so--but also, I have a phobia about birds. Which comes from, probably, my babyhood. But I thought, no, I can't do that. I just can't do that. So I turned--and besides, I was much more inclined, increasingly, towards anthropology.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

GONZALEZ: So I thought, well, I don't have anything to offer anthropology. I'll never get a fellowship, so I better go to work. So I worked for a year as a dietician in a hospital, and I taught nurses, and I was scared to death. I grew a lot. You know. I didn't like it. I did a very good job, though. I wrote a wonderful diet manual, which they had never had in a--they wanted me to stay on. They paid me very well, and I saved my money, applied to Michigan. Got in, but of course, no money. So I went to Michigan. And I typed, and I babysat, and I acted as a guide in the museum, and I did whatever I could, and my mother helped me, and she thought I was out of my mind, but--poor thing. She never did really understand what anthropology--(laughs)--was about. And I went ahead, and the fact that I was still interested in nutrition, and in, from that one course, the relationship between your research and what you do with it later, in terms of the public.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see, yes.

GONZALEZ: So Pete Kunstadter, who entered the same time I did, we had a little coterie--

VAN WILLIGEN: At the University of Michigan?

GONZALEZ: Michigan, yes. And we had a little coterie of people, you know, students that get together the first year, and study together, and hang out together. And Pete and I were interested in application of anthropology, but nobody else was. And none of the faculty were. None of them. And finally, Pete and I did get a little other interest--oh, yes, the students did a study--(laughs)--of employment of anthropologists in the United States, and it looked pretty grim. This was 1953. (laughs) Well, they did a survey of colleges and universities where anthropology was taught, which weren't very many. And if it was being taught, it was often with soc. And, well, are you going to be hiring anthropologists? No, no, no, no. (laughs) So we got them interested a little bit in application. But when we asked the faculty at Michigan to please give us a course in applied anthropology, they didn't know what to do with this, and they kind of hung onto it for about six months, and finally--they never replied. This was the formal anthropology graduate student group, too. They never answered us, really. They finally, in effect, they said, "Well, we're going to teach you anthropology, and if you want to apply it, that's your business." (laughs) So we just went ahead and did what we were doing. But then I--after I got my master's degree, I thought, what if I don't like doing anthropology, like I

didn't like doing nutrition--(laughs)--and so forth? I better go to the field and see if I really can do this.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: And they said, "No, no, no, you've got to wait until you have the PhD prelims."

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: "You're never going to get any money," and et cetera. I thought, well, I don't know, I'll have to try. So I wrote some letters, and I talked to people, and I ended up--just to make a long story short, I got five hundred dollars from the Daugherty Foundation to go to Guatemala, because I had been told about the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama.

VAN WILLIGEN: INCAP.

GONZALEZ: INCAP. And I wrote to them, and I said, "You know, I am a dietician." I was a registered dietician. It's like an RN. You're an RD. "I'm a registered dietician, and I have just finished my master's degree in anthropology." Well, Rick [Richard N.] Adams was already associated with them. In fact, it may have been because of that--I can't remember who told me to write there. I don't think I knew Rick quite then. I might have. But anyway, they wrote back and said, "Oh, we would love for you to come for the summer." That's what I said, "I want to come for the summer, and, you know, how can I get money to do that?" And they said, "We can give you transportation in the field, and an office space, and collegiality, and da, da, da, da, but we don't have any money." But they said, "You can use this letter--(laughs)--in trying to get money." And so I did. I got money. And then I wrote to the fruit company, and they gave me free passage, because I had heard that they liked scholars, and did, and they gave it to me. And then I learned that you could drive a car from--if you were at Michigan in Ann Arbor, you can drive cars for the various car companies and I drove a Cadillac for them to New Orleans. (laughs) And then I got on the boat. And then they also--the fruit company owned the railroad from Puerto Barrios to Guatemala City, so I got there free. (laughs) And I got--

VAN WILLIGEN: --that's quite a good story--

GONZALEZ: --I got up there, and Rick Adams and Betty Adams, his wife, who was Guatemalan, had an aunt who owned a B&B. Well, you know, *un pension*. And I got

a room for seventy-five dollars a month, including my board. (laughs) I mean, it was-- and then I said, "Yeah, but this is the city, and this is fine, but I really want to go out in the field." So they had a clinic. INCAP had a clinic out in a village, and they said, "You could stay at the clinic," and they gave me a cot, and a lantern, and a flashlight--I guess I had a flashlight--and I went out and lived in this village for two months. Got terribly bitten by fleas, and froze to death, because it was very cold, and discovered that the Spanish I had learned--(laughs)--in college and high school didn't work with Indians. And somewhere along the line--and the--and Nevin Scrimshaw, who was the head of--you know, the director--and Rick Adams, and there were some others who were not anthropologists, but there were some Guatemalans who were anthropologically related. And this was interesting, too, because that was 1955. It was right after the counter-coup in '54 that got rid of the more nationalistic--what the United States considered Communists. Okay? And a lot of those anthropologists that I knew then were leftist-leaning, and fled the country, or disappeared, you know, but I did meet many of them, and this was important later on, too, politically and in terms of what do you do with what you learn, and how can you make it better for--make life better for people around you. So anyway, I wrote two more articles with Nevin Scrimshaw, and those were some that got into these other journals. And then I wrote some by myself that he helped get into these other places. And I wrote--well, later, I wrote one with a local medical doctor. I did some research with medical doctors in Guatemala, and that always led to, you know, not the anthropological journals, but others. So my first one was in *The Florida Anthropologist*. (laughs) Where have I heard that? Okay. So there I was, but I was so flea-bitten, and, ugh, my Spanish--the Indian Spanish was so different. And someone said, "You know, there's this group of people that live on the coast." I had to go back to Puerto Barrios, remember, to get the fruit company boat. Which, by the way, had stopped in Havana on the way, and so I was one of the first people that got to--um, was before Castro. (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: That's another story. But anyway, we spent two days, and I took a train across the whole country on that train during those two days in Havana, not that I did very much, but I--

VAN WILLIGEN: --it sounds really interesting.

GONZALEZ: It was. But anyway, someone said, "You know, there's this group of people. They're cannibals." And I said, "Cannibals?" I couldn't believe it. "Oh, yeah,

they're black, you know, they're African, and they speak an African language, and they live in this town called Livingston, which is near Puerto Barrios." I thought, oh, that might be interesting. I was always, like I say, going across the island--(laughs)--and everything. So I went down to Puerto Barrios a little early and decided that I was going to go to Livingston. And so I checked the baggage, and I took just a little string bag with me, and I went down to the pier about four o'clock one afternoon. And I said, "I want to get a boat to Livingston," and they said, "There are no boats for Livingston until tomorrow morning," and I said, "No, I have to go today." "Well, you can't." Nobody told me why you couldn't and I said, "You know, I want to rent somebody to take me, and I'll pay." "No, no, can't do it." Finally, these two kids, teenagers, said, "We'll take you." (laughs) And I said, "Okay." I jump in the boat. Well, I discovered pretty soon why. It's because the tide--the waves come up in the afternoon. Big waves. (laughs) And they had a little--kind of like a rowboat, with a motor on it. It was more like a Boston Whaler, you know, boat. And we're not very far off the shore, and I'm looking, and I think, well I can swim easily to the shore, but there was nothing but mangroves there, and I thought, well, we'll worry about that when the time comes. When, indeed, a wave came--(makes sound effect)--and the motor just stopped, and they could not make it go. And I'm thinking, hm, this is going to be interesting. (laughs) Now what? When along out there--here's the land, and out there we saw this yacht go by, and I thought, oh, well, let's see, and I said to the kid, "Take off your shirt and wave it," and he did. And they saw it, and they--I can't remember now if they came in, or if they sent a boat, you know, a smaller boat, or what, but anyway, when they saw me, they almost died. It turned out that it was the Guatemalan Coast Guard. This was a yacht that they had purchased from someone in the States, you know, and it was the only vehicle that they had, the only craft. And onboard were four medical doctors who were heading up into Lake Izabal to do a malaria survey. Well, you know, I was used to medical doctors. (laughs) I had been, you know, working with them and everything. And so they were fascinated. You know, "What on earth are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I just wanted to go over and see this village and these people." And they said, "Oh, you're talking about the black Caribs." And they said, "The cook onboard is--he's a black Carib. He's from Livingston." So they bring him and I had wonderful dinner and scotch. You know, they treated me beautifully. Gave me dry clothes to wear, and their shirts and things.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. Right, right, right.

GONZALEZ: And the cook, who--whose family became my family--when we got to Livingston, he took me up to his house and introduced me around. It was just marvelous. And here it is. It's warm. There are no fleas. (laughs) And they speak

Spanish that I could speak, as well as English. I mean, not a lot of English. Some spoke English, but they spoke regular Spanish. They also spoke their own language, you know. But they were used to so many languages. Some of them spoke French. I mean--they were very--

VAN WILLIGEN: --and so some would speak English around the town?

GONZALEZ: The thing was that Belize was right there. And they would send the kids over there for--they valued knowing English, and, you see, I started publishing on that right away. The men migrated. And so that's where all of my early theoretical work on the family and household came from that work. Because these households were bereft of men and I invented the term, you know, this non-unilineal household, where you had married couples. You had men and women, but the men were brothers or fathers or sons of the women who were in charge because the men moved around a lot. And the men had many women in different places, you know, and the woman never was sure whether the man would come back, and they didn't get married. And I spent the rest of my life, you know, doing research on this. In fact, I published an article just this January, while I was in the hospital, in *The American Humanist*. I can show you a copy or give you a copy. I may have extras. Called "Matches Made on Earth" in which I argue that the notion that there is such a thing as a family or a marriage type that is either genetic or decreed by God is foolish. That it has nothing to do with either one of those. That it's not in our genes, and it's certainly not God-given, but it has to do with the needs of the culture at the time, and that you get variations, depending on what kind of society you've got. So that was just published. It's going to be republished in Poland, by the way.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, that's good. That's always very satisfying, isn't it?

GONZALEZ: Oh, yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: When something is republished somewhere else.

GONZALEZ: That just happened now. I mean, it was just this January that I finished it and sent it off the day before I went to the hospital. So anyway, that's my latest application. But at the time, I said to myself, and to the Garifuna, as it turned out they were, I said, "I'll be back next year." And, at that time, they said, "You can live in that house right there." You know, they had a little house that was sort of an extra part of a larger compound, and that's where I lived. And the next year, the same charity group--they're called the--oh, I forget the--long title. The somebody-and-somebody

charitable--whatever. But they gave me five thousand dollars. And the fruit company gave me transportation again. And so by now, I am an anthropologist--not applied, necessarily--

VAN WILLIGEN: But the roots of your applied anthropology--

GONZALEZ: --are right there from the beginning.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, it's because you were socialized to a discipline, nutrition, that it has a fundamental applied aspect.

GONZALEZ: Yes, exactly.

VAN WILLIGEN: It's application first is what it is.

GONZALEZ: Because my mother was an applied--she worked in hospitals and so forth.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure, sure, sure.

GONZALEZ: Yes.

VAN WILLIGEN: So it's a very natural thing, and you probably really felt uncomfortable, even, not--I mean, I may be putting your words--

GONZALEZ: --well, but yeah, maybe. I don't know. I mean, you know, happening upon INCAP, which was a research organization at that time, but it has since--I don't know if you're even aware of this--it has since become almost totally applied, and many people have criticized it for that reason, maybe that the research is not any longer quite as fundamental as it once was.

VAN WILLIGEN: I remember them from the standpoint of something called Incaparina.

GONZALEZ: Yes, they invented it. Of course. And, uh, that--I was there at the time. It only began in '52 and I was there in '55. That's why they were so eager to have me, because they were really just developing. And there were only, I think, ten of us who were considered to be senior researchers. And Rick Adams was the anthropologist, and then he actually left, and I was, in a sense, you see, I didn't

actually become employed by them until after I finished my doctorate. But I was there, kind of intern, or something, when I had my master's degree. And then when I came back, of course, to do my research for my dissertation--even though I was down in--in fact, I encouraged them to come down and do some studies in Livingston with me. And we did a study on sickle cell anemia, for example. And I published with a medical doctor on that, in the medical journal of Guatemala. And later, well, you see, I met this Guatemalan and got married. (laughs) And that's why I--

VAN WILLIGEN: --Mr. Gonzalez--

GONZALEZ: --Mr. Gonzalez. And that's when I went back to live. After I had the degree, I went--you know, I stayed there--that was in '56 and '57. Yeah. And I went back to Michigan and wrote my dissertation, and then moved to Honduras with--I married Carlos. I get fuzzy in terms of the exact dates, you know. We lived in Honduras--no, we lived in Guatemala. No, that isn't right. That's not right. Stop it a minute. [Pause in recording] (laughs) I have to get my dates right. It wasn't--that I think was the one primarily. He said, "Well, Berkeley. You're not going to San Francisco; you're going to Berkeley." And he wrote to them, and by chance, George Foster, whom I had never met, had just been appointed the chair of the department. And he had taught applied anthropology, and he had taught, of course, Latin America, and that was my area and some other things. And Kroeber was still alive, but no longer teaching and he had a course called The Nature of Culture, which was one of these big things, uh, that was open to anybody, and had a hundred-and-some--you know. And so they had a need for somebody Latin America, and they said, "Could you teach applied?" I thought, of course I can teach applied. (laughs) So I was hired.

VAN WILLIGEN: So this is, this is Foster speaking, all the--on behalf of the department at Berkeley?

GONZALEZ: No, I think it was [David M.] Schneider who was then on the faculty, and he was a good friend of Dave [David F.] Aberle, and I think Dave Aberle wrote to him and said, you know, "She's coming up, and better get her, because she's good."

VAN WILLIGEN: And so, so you had an awareness of yourself, at that point, as an applied anthropologist?

GONZALEZ: No, I just knew I could do it. (laughs) I could figure it out. I mean, I knew enough--you know. I was a good student--(laughs)--and researcher. And what I

did was study the literature. I just went through every single copy, I mean, from the beginning of, what was the name of it? The journal.

VAN WILLIGEN: Applied anthropology *Human Organization*?

GONZALEZ: Exactly. So I went through it, and so I organized this course, and George was wonderful, very supportive, too, and we became very close friends, he and his wife and so forth.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: It was wonderful. In fact, the whole faculty out there really treated me like one. It was great. It was super. Even though I was hired originally just as lecturer. You know. And, I taught *The Nature of Culture*, which had been, Kroeber's. And the apartment we got was across the street from Kroeber's home, and so I got to know him very well and--

VAN WILLIGEN: So what was he like?

GONZALEZ: Oh, he was incredible. Yeah, he had been important, and he told me that. Uh, how was it? Dave had recommended--as soon as I got out there, and I think it was even before--I had, like, a month before the baby was born, and my mother was with me, to take care of me, because Carlos didn't have a visa yet. He was still in Guatemala, or in Honduras. And I remember that, that they had me to a luncheon at the Faculty Club, and Kroeber was there, and he had already seen my CV, or my vitae, because he said, "Oh," he said, "I'm just fascinated by the Garifuna and your work." He already knew that I had done this. And George was happy, because I was a Latin Americanist, and I could teach the course, you know, *Social Anthropology of Latin America* or whatever it was called, and then the applied anthropology. Those were the three courses that I taught while I was there.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so tell me about the applied anthropology course that you taught. What level--was it an undergraduate or graduate--

GONZALEZ: --undergraduate. Um, I'm trying to remember. I did have a couple of graduate students. One of them was Cynthia--oh, what was her name? She later went to--I don't know if she's alive, even, anymore. In Cairo. You know, the American University in Cairo.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: And then I had another student who died. His name was Nuñez. He was, I think, in Florida. No, it was later. You may be ready for another question, I don't know.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um.

GONZALEZ: Where we were. That's how I got into applied, is because they--

VAN WILLIGEN: I was talking about this course that's really interesting to me. You know, anything that you can remember about the strategies that were involved in that course. Well, how many students were in it, do you remember?

GONZALEZ: Oh, a good number, like thirty-five or so.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

GONZALEZ: Oh, yeah. But George had started it. Actually, some of the kids told me they were thrilled with my course. It was a bit different. He didn't expect me to do exact--I was open to do whatever I wanted to do. And what I did was I had talked a bit about the history I used--you know, Margaret Mead, and the Japanese--what's his name that did the Japanese study of the camps? I can't even remember a lot about it now. Isn't that interesting? What else did I emphasize? (laughs) I don't remember. But it was a course in how to apply anthropology. I don't think that I had as much theoretical input at that point as I did in my courses later on as when I went to Guatemala, for example. And then I taught--well, that's interesting, because I don't remember that I taught courses on applied anthropology, per se, anywhere else. Until I got to Guatemala, where, again, I taught applied--you know, how to apply anthropology. I used it in all of my courses in a sense.

VAN WILLIGEN: You talked about some of your early applied work at INCAP. And I wanted you to talk a little bit about the applied projects that you think are most representative of your work, or that you're particularly interested in, or you like more. You know, and so if you could reflect on--

GONZALEZ: Surely. The breastfeeding was the first kind of thing that I dealt with when I worked at INCAP. I was concerned, uh, also about the effort of the United States to push milk-drinking. (laughs) Which the people hated. They didn't want

it. And they would send these big containers full of dried skim milk. And then, at INCAP, they would have them, and this was one of the reasons they were eager to have me, is that they couldn't get the people to drink the milk. And of course, as an--(laughs)--anthropologist, I explained that this was not part of their culture. After you are through breastfeeding, that's it. They didn't have cows. They ate cattle. They didn't use the milk. And they began to develop some very interesting tales that actually Rick Adams had recorded as well. One of the tales--and I discovered the same kinds of tales. They said, well, you know, what is this powder anyway? You say that this is going to make our kids have nice, healthy bones. Why? This is bones. That's what's happening. You make the kids grow big and healthy, and then they eat them. They take them and they kill them, they eat them, and they send--they grind up the bones and send them back. Yes. This is a tale that I heard in various of the villages, because I didn't work in just one village for INCAP. After I lived in that one for two months, I went various places. And I was the one that chose where to go. I was the first one that encouraged them to go to Ladino communities as well as Indian and to compare the--you know. And I also urged them to go into some of the urban poverty areas around the city instead of going just to the Indian. Those were things that I was --(inaudible). I mean, I did. I worked for them for five years.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: And during that time, I looked at the thing about milk and protein because kwashiorkor was one of the big problems, you know, of lack of protein. And I was constantly interacting with the other physicians and our chemists, and, you know, all the people that worked. I mean, we were all into it, and that's where--the development of Incaparina.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: There were other things that they were trying to encourage, was more use of cheese, for example. One of the guys turned out--(laughs)--his family--he was, um--a family that--I don't know--you don't know Guatemala? It was a family that has since become the primary cheese producers--(laughs)--of the country. They sent a couple of their grown-up kids to Europe, to study how they made cheese over there, and now you get wonderful--you get feta, you--(laughs)--almost any kind of cheese made in Guatemala because they studied how to make it. But, you know, this is a use of milk that is not--well, it doesn't--(laughs)--you don't see the milk--you don't see the bubbling in the powdered milk anymore. Then breastfeeding. I did that. That was more of the theoretical thing--and a lot of people have told me, I was the first person--

and this, I published, unfortunately, in *The American Anthropologist*. It should have been published in the medical things. Because I was the one that said the reason that breastfeeding does not protect Americans and other wealthy, urban people from having babies is that their children are not just breastfeeding. Whereas I found, among the Indians, two years--I mean, nothing but the best--and they did not conceive. And I discovered why. And I did it by looking at the literature on cows and other animals. And I published a note on this in *The American Anthropologist*, way back in 1960 or '61, something like that. But it didn't get noticed beyond, I mean--actually, it was only published, too, as a research note or something. But I said it's because, among the Guatemalan Indians--and I even did some research in the city, with Ladino middle-class women--Juan Jose Erdano--did you ever hear of him? He was a Guatemalan who did get--I don't think he ever got a PhD in anthro, but he did get a master's. He left, I think he went to Kansas and he got a master's in anthropology, partly because he had worked with me at INCAP, and I had asked him if I could look at his records. And he was a pediatrician/obstetrician. No, not obstetrician. He was only a pediatrician. And he had these women who would come in and, and, you know, they'd say, "But I'm breastfeeding. How come I'm pregnant again?" You know. And, he wanted them to breastfeed because he thought also that this would prevent [pregnancy]--but it didn't. And it was because they fed them, they started giving them solids right away. And as soon as you start giving the solids, what happened--two things that happened. One, your milk supply declines. And as it declines, the body--the hormonal distribution changes--and the woman is in ovulation again.

VAN WILLIGEN: Wow, that's really interesting.

GONZALEZ: And that later has been confirmed, and is now well understood, even among, you know, physicians and others. But at the time, it was not understood, and physicians were recommending, you know, that you breastfeed and you won't be pregnant, but they were, because they didn't understand that it isn't just breastfeeding. It's the amount. And the intensity. And that does seem to keep it, you know, keep it--

VAN WILLIGEN: --that's really interesting. And so what were all the different places where you published those materials? You said *The American Anthropologist*.

GONZALEZ: The first one was--yeah. Well, actually, I left it at that. I think, in *Human Organization*, I published. And then we went back to Guatemala. Now, wait a minute. Then I got divorced. That's what it was. Then I left Carlos, and this time,

again, Dave Aberle, who had been in touch with me all this time, and I had been publishing, and I left Guatemala. This would have been in 1960--when was Kennedy killed?

VAN WILLIGEN: Sixty-three, I think.

GONZALEZ: Okay. Then--no, then--I'm forgetting the exact date. It was '61, I think. 'Cause I was in Guatemala from '55 to--'56 to '61. Five years that I worked at INCAP. And then it was for personal reasons that I don't need to go into, impossible to stay on. But anyway. I went back, and it was Dave Aberle again who had a friend named David Varley, who was the head of a department of sociology at the University of New Mexico. And--

VAN WILLIGEN: --and that's where you met Tony [Anthony] Paredes?

GONZALEZ: Oh, yes, of course. Because at first, it was a one-year substitute for a man who later went to Baltimore. What was his name? He was--Japanese name. Tom.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sasaki.

GONZALEZ: Sasaki. I replaced Sasaki, who had come out of New Mexico.

VAN WILLIGEN: He was a sociologist, right?

GONZALEZ: He was a sociol--well, this was the department of sociology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, right.

GONZALEZ: And so Dave knew both Varley and Sasaki, and recommended me, and I got a cable saying, "This is an offer to come." And so when I went first, it was with the department of sociology. Then I went to the meetings in, I think--I don't remember which meetings they were. Chicago, I believe. The Triple A meetings to find a job because I thought this was only going to be good for maybe one semester. And they were hiring anthropologists like crazy. And here I was, had five years of research experience. I had a lot of publications. And suddenly I had all kinds of offers. But the fact that I was going to be in New Mexico, you know, with my kids and all, and I thought, be neat if I could stay in New Mexico. But I didn't want to be in the department of sociology. I wanted to be an anthropologist of course, and they

were recruiting, but at first they weren't interested in me. And--(laughs)--I remember, what was his name? This archaeologist of the Arctic. Forget his name. He was the chair. And I remember him buying me a drink, and he says, "Well, I have to look at your vitae. I have to look and see, you know. Look around. Just keep looking around." Well, I had all kinds of offers. And finally I went to New Mexico before anything really developed, you know, and I remember that there were things on the East Coast. God, that's a long way away, and I had these two little kids, aged four and six. And then I get out to New Mexico, and suddenly the whole campus loves me. (laughs) And, the people, the other people in the department of anthropology, said to this archaeologist, "You're crazy, you know. She's better than these other people you've got here." And--Campbell, that was his name, something Campbell. But anyway, as it turns out, they then hired me, and I think maybe the first year, I was joint between the two--soc[iology] and anthro. I can't remember when I quit, because finally I was just anthro.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: But, yes, and Tony Paredes was one of my first students there, and immediately, I became involved in the study of Spanish Americans. And this was, first of all, a smaller thing that came out of a study that was going on in California, and they wanted sort of the sideline, you know, what's going on in New Mexico, too. And so I did that, and then I ended up writing this book. My first published book was on New Mexico, the culture of New Mexico. And during all those years that I was teaching and everything, I became involved in such things as language. Problems of kids who learn Spanish at home and come to first grade and, you know, and at what age do you learn to--in what language should you first learn to read--and a lot of that kind of thing. But I was also at the, the medical school, because I had been so involved in medical--you see. Used to have me come over and give lectures to the medical students, and the Peace Corps trained people there. Now, you're getting closer to the applied thing here, about the society.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, but during this time, were you going to society meetings, or--

GONZALEZ: --hm, don't think so. No. I can't remember exactly where or when I went to my first meeting of the applied anthropologists, but you're right. It was before that. It was while I was living in Guatemala that I was asked to go to Puerto Rico--must have been towards the end of that period--to the Outward Bound program of the Peace Corps that they no longer have, and it was quite an experience. I was there for about a week and I gave lectures on the Dominican

Republic. And I remember when they called me and talked to me, and I said, "But I have never been to the Dominican Republic. I can't." You know, and they said, "No, but, you know, we understand that you are a very good ethnographer, and we can't find anybody that's ever been to the Dominican Republic, an anthropologist, and we need an anthropologist." So I thought, well, I'm a scientist. And to the extent that this is a culture that is Spanish, and Catholic, and insular, growing sugarcane and all these things. And so I said, "Well, all right, I'll, I'll come, if you're sure." I said, "But I'm telling you, I've never been there." And when I first got there, I started to lecture, because it was over a period of several days. I said to the big bunch of kids, I said, "I've got to start out by telling you, I've never been to the Dominican Republic. But I'm a scientist." (laughs) And do you know that, at the end, there were a couple of students that were on their way back from the DR. They had been there for two years or whatever. And they said, "We couldn't believe it. Everything you said was exactly the way it was there." (laughs) And, you know, I just talked about culture. And problems of poverty and broken--quote unquote--broken homes, that were really because I--later, one of my students, who's a real applied anthropologist up here in, in New York, and she did a study in the Dominican Republic on this matter of the female-headed household.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: That was something that I had come from the Garifuna, and in the Dominican Republic, she discovered, by using what we would call formal measures of poverty--such things as your diet and what kind of house did you live in, and educa[tion]--you know. She discovered that the women who were alone, that they were doing better than the women--than the families with men. (laughs) And, this led me to think, well--I got so interested in the Dominican Republic in giving that lecture that I decided I wanted to go there and do some research. And so I did that from Guatemala, but it wasn't until I got to New Mexico, after I had done the study of the Spanish Americans in New Mexico, although I had really been--I guess, maybe, it was my book on the Spanish Americans. Somehow, then they invited me, because I had been lecturing to, to Peace Corps all the time in the local thing, because they had training camp in New Mexico. That's probably why they said, "Come to the Dominican Republic, because we know you can talk about culture."

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

GONZALEZ: And so then I thought, well, I've got to check myself out. (laughs) And, from an applied point of view, by this time, I had delved into the whole question of

who is it that we're serving, and somewhere along the line, this is where it became part of the Society for Applied Anthropology and the leadership thing that you're asking about. Because I can recall--oh, and you asked how did I first get involved?

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: It was at a meeting, and somebody nominated me for the board. And I don't even know the person who nominated me. It was unknown person who had only read my stuff, I think. And they weren't happy with that--during those years, they didn't have committees. The leadership people would nominate the ones that were to follow. And I think it was in Mexico, at the meeting in Mexico. And here we all are, and they said, "Are there any other nominations?" And somebody stood up and said, "I nominate Nancie Gonzalez." And so they put me on, and I'm on. (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: You were at this meeting?

GONZALEZ: Sure.

VAN WILLIGEN: And, uh, that was one of your earlier SfAA meetings?

GONZALEZ: Yes. I had gone to one or two. I remember Vera Rubin. Now, if we know when she was the president.

VAN WILLIGEN: Vera Rubin was the president at your first meeting or one of the early ones?

GONZALEZ: I think one of the early ones. We can find that out.

VAN WILLIGEN: And what was your impression, not of Vera, but what things did you like about--

GONZALEZ: It was exciting. I mean, I found that, you know, what can I say? I loved it. I mean, there were always the kinds of things I was interested in, there were other people doing those things in a different way, and I can remember--it was a smaller group by then, too, you know, than Triple A, and I loved that. And I can remember meeting people from other countries. Holland. The Netherlands. And, and a lot more from Mexico and other places where they were really more involved in applied.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

GONZALEZ: And Vera was important. And Margaret Mead, too, was--(laughs). I remember one time, Margaret Mead--she was something. I don't remember how I actually met her, but, you know, in the applied group, I think, is where it came together. And we were to be on together, some kind of a panel in one of these meetings, and I hadn't seen her in maybe a year or so, and as we're walking in together to go up and it was one of these big room things, you know, and we were elevated. And she says, "What have you done with your hair? It looks terrible." (both laugh) What a thing to say to another woman as you're about to get up in front of a group. I said, "Margaret, you know, why don't you keep your mouth shut?" (laughs) We, we were good friends by then. And later, she came out to Iowa when I was there one time, and I was in my forties, and she was in her seventies, I guess. She said, "When are you going to do your next field work?" and I said, "Oh, I don't know." Stupid me, I said, "I don't know. As I get older, I said, the risks get bigger and da, da, da, da." And she says, "Nonsense. I rode up the Sepik River with a pack on my back last summer." I said, "Oh, well, yeah, I guess you're right." (laughs) So she was something else, I tell you. She was a mentor in that and other ways. And I had, in fact, I've even got some letters that I've saved of hers that she wrote me. That are, are very nice. And I liked her a lot.

VAN WILLIGEN: So are there any other people that you recall from those, those early meetings?

GONZALEZ: From the application point of view, applied?

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, SfAA.

GONZALEZ: Well, yeah. I mean, Art Gallaher, you know, and all the people that I was with on, for many years, first, I was on the board. Then I was elected president, and of course it's a three-year kind of thing. There were many people. I mean, these were my best friends. And we still hang together a bit.

VAN WILLIGEN: I just interviewed, um, Tom Weaver, by the way. I mean, it's probably six years ago.

GONZALEZ: Yeah. They were close friends of mine, yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, really nice guy too. And I interviewed Art because we live in the same town. And I've interviewed him a number of times, actually.

GONZALEZ: Of course. Since I was ill, I have from him--you know, he sends me poetry and things that he writes, too. And he wrote me saying he was glad I was well--(laughs)--or getting well. 'Cause a friend sent, first of all, to a number of people on my email the fact that I was in bad shape. And then I said, well, I guess I've got to send things saying I'm--

VAN WILLIGEN: --yeah, I've been meaning to (inaudible) fairly recently.

GONZALEZ: Yeah, well, he probably would not have mentioned, you know. But yeah, some of the things when I was--that I was concerned about as president--but on the board, was the fact that just what I said today, that we were not being recognized as knowing anything about the right things. And, you know, I was living--now, when was it? It must have been when I was in Boston. Yes. Because I went to--what? It was--there was an organization within the government that hired anthropologists, but not applied anthropologists. And which one was it? Anyway, I went, and interviewed them as to why. And they said, "Oh, we can't possibly add anthropology to our list, because we already have so many applicants from so many different fields. We just can't add." I said, "Yeah, but these other fields are not necessarily the things that you really need." It was something about an Indian--maybe it was the Indian Service or something? Yeah, I've forgotten what it was. But I became very concerned with--well, and then they said, "And they don't know how to talk to us." And so we, for a while, were very concerned with, we've got to start talking to other people than ourselves, and that applied anthropologists weren't much better than others in this, often. And when we wrote reports, or when we wrote--and I remember that I started teaching differently. I would make people write term papers if it was undergraduates, but especially the graduate students. I'd say, "I want two versions."

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, that's very interesting. I've never thought of that, because I sometimes have people write the long anthropological version, but not do both of them.

GONZALEZ: No, I said, "I want you to write them both together, and I want one for, you know, for other anthropologists and I want one for everybody else." And--

VAN WILLIGEN: --really interesting.

GONZALEZ: Yeah. And I'm trying to think of the one guy that wrote me in poetry once. (laughs) That was out in New Mexico. That was before I--but I was concerned, from very early on, about why can't we write for the newspapers, and there were very

few that could. I'm trying to--Bee was one who did. William Bee. Remember him? Bee--

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, Robert Bee?

GONZALEZ: Yeah, Robert Bee.

VAN WILLIGEN: B-E-E?

GONZALEZ: B-E-E, exactly, yeah. And, we still don't write enough, you know? And now, like my humanist article, which just came out, is a totally different kind of thing. Actually, I was a little bit appalled, because they added some pictures. Why don't I--well, I'll get it for you later. They added pictures that had nothing to do with the point I was trying to make. (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: Goodness.

GONZALEZ: And of course, I didn't even know that this was going on. My son and Carolyn, who came from England to take care of me in part because we're good, close friends, they went through the editorial changes that they wanted and all, and I mean, I couldn't say a thing. I didn't even know. I was out of it. But, um, it turned out that they only did one thing that I really got angry about, but I didn't say anything after all.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

GONZALEZ: I had some information from the 2000 US census, because, after all, that's the last one that we had when I wrote it. We hadn't even anything from the 2010. And I had evidence from that as to households and families and their composition which was really what I was trying to talk about. And instead, they cut that out because it was from 2000, long ago, and put in some kind of a poll that the Pew Research people had done where they asked them things like, "Do you think that the American family is declining?"

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: "Do you think?" I said, why on earth do you look--that's not important. What we want to know is has it changed. And even the word "decline." You know. I said, families haven't declined; they've changed. And they

missed the point totally. But anyway. I felt, for a long time, that we needed to write for non-anthropological--

VAN WILLIGEN: --and that was an important thing, in your involvement on the board and as president?

GONZALEZ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And then the other thing is to study the elites. Long before Laura (laughs) did this, that's what I did in the Dominican Republic. I studied the elites, because I said, when you--and I can remember, um--what was his name? The man with the cranberry farms.

VAN WILLIGEN: Philleo Nash?

GONZALEZ: Right, yes, Philleo Nash. Also, the whole thing about ethics and, as an applied anthropologist, to whom do we owe loyalty? Because if we're being hired by somebody, do we go in and just screw them because we know (inaudible). You can't do that. And maybe what we need to do is to understand what it is they want, and to explain to them why maybe it's not a good idea or how could we, you know, change their mind. And Carolyn is my best student, uh, from that perspective. She worked for Rio Tinto, the mining company.

VAN WILLIGEN: What is her last name?

GONZALEZ: McCommon. M-C-C-O-M-M-O-N.

VAN WILLIGEN: Thank you.

GONZALEZ: And she has given presentations, I think--well, in Merida, she gave a presentation.

VAN WILLIGEN: Um-hm.

GONZALEZ: Yeah. She's retired now, too, you see. But she was actually hired by--did you know Glynn [Cochrane]? The Scottish guy.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, I've probably seen his books, but I can't remember his last name.

GONZALEZ: Well, he worked for Rio Tinto. And he's still alive. He's gone through three wives now--(laughs)--all of whom have died. She knows him, and he was the first anthropologist that they hired. And, he was a friend--you know Bill Stewart?

VAN WILLIGEN: No.

GONZALEZ: No. Bill Stewart is not an applied anthropologist, but he was a close friend of Glynn's, because Glynn was an actual applied anthropologist before he was anything else. He was in the Pacific. Uh, he was, um--I think before he was an anthropologist at all, he was--what do you call it, for British? He was--

VAN WILLIGEN: --a colonial--

GONZALEZ: --a colonial officer of some sort. And Bill Stewart did his research in Micronesia and knew this guy--(laughs)--you know. And then probably he influenced Glynn to take anthropology on his own at the time. He went and took anthropology; I think in Europe. But anyway. I knew him well and I recommended Carolyn, and she has worked for them for, what, fifteen years.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

GONZALEZ: And she's been all around the world, because they are the biggest mining company in the world. And they had had some problems you know, going in, and I think they even had a little revolution at one place, and rebellion. And she was able to talk to--I used to emphasize the importance of finding out who are the so-called stakeholders, you know. And that you must study where they're coming from, and not take on this aspect of they're all terrible and you're all wonderful. That you don't--you know. Otherwise, you go to work only for the community. You know. And if you can do that, that's fine, except in that if you do, you still have to help that community understand the others around them and why they're having problems. And that they must help--you must help them to understand the people out there. Because most anthropologists--many of them, you know--students, they go in with the idea that they're going to save all the poor people in the world. And, and that they're going to knock out all the--(laughs)--you know. And it's the same kind of thing when really it's a political thing that you're getting right now in the United States, about somebody that said we, we can't cut the taxes on the rich people, because then they'll all move away. (laughs) And wouldn't that be awful? That was

on, that was on TV the other day. That was someone on the street that they were interviewing. (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: While you were president the Society met in Amsterdam. And that meeting, partly because I'm--my grandparents on one side were Dutch--

GONZALEZ: --oh. Van Willigen. Well, guess what? (laughs)

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes. And so that was the first experience I had going to the Netherlands.

The SfAA Oral History Project

The Oral History Project was instigated by the Board to document applied anthropology and the history of the SfAA. This resulted in a collection of 120 recorded interviews located at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky, our partner. With this transcript there will be 26 published transcripts. These are accessible through the SfAA publication web pages. If you have any suggestions for people to interview contact John van Willigen at ant101@uky.edu.