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Interview with Frances Gonzales

Frances Gonzales

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Frances Gonzales
Interviewer: Heather Brewer
Date of Interview: October 31, 2008
Duration of Interview: 49:02

Heather Brewer 00:03

Okay. Hi, I'm Heather Brewer, and I'm taking an oral history class at CSUMB. And I'm going to be recording the oral history of Frances Gonzalez. Frances, I want to make sure that it's okay with you to record this interview.

Frances Gonzales 00:23

Yes, it is okay.

Heather Brewer 00:25

Okay, great. All right. Well, let's just start with some basic stuff about you. Your name is Frances Gonzales.

Frances Gonzales 00:32

Yes.

Heather Brewer 00:33

And about how old are you?

Frances Gonzales 00:36

I'm forty-three years old.

Heather Brewer 00:37

Okay.

Frances Gonzales 00:38

Yes.

Heather Brewer 00:39

And you currently stay—

Frances Gonzales 00:42

At the women's shelter—at the Women Alive shelter. They're on Soledad Street.

Heather Brewer 00:46

On Soledad Street? Okay. And where were you born?

Frances Gonzales 00:51

I was born here in Salinas.

Heather Brewer 00:53

Oh, you were—

Frances Gonzales 00:53

At the Community Hospital.

Heather Brewer 00:55

Okay. Great, and where were your parents born?

Frances Gonzales 00:58

My parents were born in Mexico, and I don't know how they got here. But, you know, my grandparents actually was born in Mexico, and I guess they all came to Salinas, California. And this is where my mom and dad met—

Heather Brewer 01:18

Okay.

Frances Gonzales 01:18

—in Salinas, I believe. We lived in Watsonville, California, for, like, I guess, from my memory, four years. Because that's when we—when my father passed away, it was in 1969. So we moved to Salinas. And I was, like, four years old then.

Heather Brewer 01:38

Okay. And so, you know that your mom and your dad were born in Mexico?

Frances Gonzales 01:46

No, I believe my mom was born—well, I know my mom was born in Phoenix, Arizona.

Heather Brewer 01:53

Oh, okay, so your grandparents were born in Mexico, and your mom was born here? Okay. So then, do you know when your mom came to Salinas, how old she was?

Frances Gonzales 02:04

I believe she was, like, a young child also. I don't remember.

Heather Brewer 02:10

Okay, but her and your dad met here in Salinas, or in Watsonville?

Frances Gonzales 02:15

Salinas.

Heather Brewer 02:16

In Salinas. Okay. Okay, great. And then you volunteer at Dorothy's Place?

Frances Gonzales 02:23

Yes, I do.

Heather Brewer 02:24

Okay, and what exactly is Dorothy's Place?

Frances Gonzales 02:26

Dorothy's Place is a soup kitchen for the homeless or for people that don't have food. And they can come and have a hot bowl of soup, you know, to warm themselves up and fill their tummies.

Heather Brewer 02:39

Okay. And what do you do at Dorothy's Place?

Frances Gonzales 02:42

What do I do? I volunteer there, and I'm a part-time staff when they need me. I work the day room, you know, hand out towels, shower stuff for people that need take a shower. You know, I bring the laundry that—people put their name on a list and, you know, they wash their clothes. Dorothy's is a place where, you know, like, people that don't have a place to send their mail to—they get their mail there. You know, and other resources they have [unclear] for the homeless.

Heather Brewer 03:14

So, they also do programs? You have meetings there?

Frances Gonzales 03:22

Yes.

Heather Brewer 03:22

What kind of meetings do you have there?

Frances Gonzales 03:23

We have NA meetings, so for anybody that needs to go to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting.

Heather Brewer 03:31

Okay. And so, it's a safe, drug-free place—

Frances Gonzales 03:37

Yes, it is.

Heather Brewer 03:37

—for people who don't have somewhere to go. And also food?

Frances Gonzales 03:42

Yes.

Heather Brewer 03:42

Okay, great. Okay, so you grew up in Salinas, from you said about the age of four?

Frances Gonzales 03:48

Mm-hmm.

Heather Brewer 03:49

And so, you used to come down here to what's been known as Chinatown on Soledad Street in Salinas. And can you tell me a little bit about that?

Frances Gonzales 04:00

Yeah. When I was a child—see, my mother and father were addicts themselves. And when my father passed away of an overdose [unclear]—when I, like, was seven years old, I remember coming down here with my grandma or my uncle to come look for my mom, because my mom would come down to Chinatown. And Chinatown, it's not like it was before, you know. Before it was, like, a little Reno, you know. There was lights and, you know, it was just really lit up this area right here. And I remember coming over here and getting off the car. Everybody would pick me to go get off the car to go get my mom and, you know, I was just scared because it was so many people and just, you know, different types of people. Anyways, I would get off the car and run into the Green Gold Inn. That's Dorothy's Kitchen now. And I'd go in there and look for my mom, you know, and tell her to come home because, you know, somebody wanted her or, you know, it was just time for her to come home, and sometimes we had to come [unclear]. But Dorothy's—Chinatown is nothing like what it used to be.

Heather Brewer 05:09

So can you describe some of the, like, maybe smells, like—I don't know if there was restaurants, maybe some of the— what did it look like? What kind of—was there a lot of different ethnicities of people?

Frances Gonzales 05:22

Yes.

Heather Brewer 05:22

A lot of different people? What—can you describe that?

Frances Gonzales 05:25

Yeah, there was a lot of Chinese people here. Restaurants, gambling places, bars. Fort Ord—when Fort Ord was here, when it was open here in Marina, all the Fort Ord guys would come down here because they would have, like, a—just, like, I would say, for them to come and get the checkups for the doctors and stuff. They had their own, like, unit here where, you know, they'd get their checkups. But they would figure out, hey, this is the place to come party. And they'd come, you know, afterwards or whatever, come down here on the weekends, and there would be different kinds of people, all kinds of different people—black, white, Chinese, Korean, you know. [unclear] people, lots of them.

Heather Brewer 06:17

Okay, can you think of—do you have any specific—a specific memory about coming down here, a specific time or what it was like inside the Green and Gold room where Dorothy's is now, back then?

Frances Gonzales 06:35

Well, when I went—when I walked in—the day I remember walking into my mom, the day room, what we call the day room now, was a bar, and people sitting at the bar stool at the bar—on the bar stools and smoke just, like, you know, people smoking cigarettes, playing cards. It was a trip, you know, so as a kid, you know, [unclear], you know, they're sitting in here, you know, but back then they didn't [unclear] in there. So what? You know. But it was a motel at the same time, upstairs. But yeah, I remember that. I remember, like—I do remember driving by Chinatown at nighttime and looking towards, you know, all the lights and stuff, because that, you know, attracted me, you know, to see the lights, you know. And bumper-to-bumper cars just coming through, plus prostitution, drugs, alcohol out here. You know, that hasn't really changed.

Heather Brewer 07:38

So it was a scary place for you or—but at the same time—

Frances Gonzales 07:42

Yeah—

Heather Brewer 07:42

[unclear]

Frances Gonzales 07:42

—because it—it was. You know, one time we were coming down by California Street, in the alley, and I see this man behind the dumpster throwing up. And I know my dad's brothers were part of it. They liked to drink and stuff. And I was, like, looking at the man throwing up, like, "Mom, look at that man." And when he bent, when he got up, it was my uncle, I was, like, "Oh my God," you know. "Keep on going. Keep on going." Because we didn't want him to come to the car or anything like that, you know. But yeah, it was scary.

Heather Brewer 08:14

So then when you would get your mom and go home, where did you guys live? And what was your house like when you were at home as a little girl?

Frances Gonzales 08:24

Well, I have five other sisters. I'm number five. We have six—altogether six, and one brother and he's the youngest. We'd go home—we lived on the west side of Salinas by Central Park. And it was a—we would always have to have hand-me-down clothes, you know, because we had a lot of sisters, and my mom didn't have a lot of money. So we all shared clothes. Sometimes we had like lights, PG&E, and sometimes we didn't, you know. It was, you know, it was that type of a lifestyle. You know, my mom was home sometimes, sometimes she wasn't.

Heather Brewer 08:31

And what did you guys—what did you guys eat when you were little, and what did you guys do, whether your mom was there or not? Like, would your family members play games or—

Frances Gonzales 09:11

Yeah, we would go play outside with, you know, with the neighborhood kids. We'd go to the park, because we were, like, three houses away from the park. What we would eat is food like rice and beans, tortillas, you know, something cheap. You know, meat sometimes, you know. That was, like, really cool, when we had meat to eat. So, yeah, tortillas, homemade sopes.

Heather Brewer 09:16

Okay. And then, so tell me a little bit about your life as you continue to grow older.

Frances Gonzales 09:47

Well—

Heather Brewer 09:49

What—I'm sorry to interrupt. What, like, elementary school, and then tell me, if you can, what school you went to, and just like about that as you grew older.

Frances Gonzales 09:59

Well, when I went to elementary school, I went to Roosevelt School here on Central Avenue. I went to school there from kindergarten all the way up to sixth grade, and that's as far as I went, you know. I had friends at school, certain friends. They were really nice, and they had better things than I did. You know, they had their own bedroom, and I really admired that, you know, a friend of mine. And people made fun of me because of my mole on my face, and they would always—you know, they would always make fun of me. Just, you know, kids could be mean, you know, but I was, like, taunted all my life, you know, with this on my face. And anyways, I grew to not let it bother me anymore, because, you know, it's part of me. You know, school was cool. I would worry about my mom a lot, so, you know, I really didn't pay attention too much to my school work. I was okay, I guess, you know. I tried to do my homework when I got home, but it was just really strange because, you know, my other sisters were a little bit older than I was, and they were, like, partiers or, you know, in that teenage life where, you know, boys would come over and just interrupt me and then just, you know, I'd be—I was the only one out of six sisters that would listen to my mom. If she said to do something, I did it, you know. The other sisters would not do it, and they would, you know, end up arguing with my mom, or, you know, just making everything so hard for themselves, you know, and I was just, like, do it. Just do the dishes, you know. But it's just, you know, everybody's not like me, you know. I just do it so we don't—I don't get in trouble. And it's just nothing really to me to sweep the floor or take the garbage out, you know. And there was plenty of us to do it. The house shouldn't be dirty or a mess.

Heather Brewer 11:59

So did your mom have a job? Or how did she support you guys?

Frances Gonzales 12:04

My mom had—she had got us Social Security when my father had passed away. I believe he would—you know, he worked, and he had his credits to get Social Security. So we got Social Security for all of us when my father passed away. And that's how we would live, off of our Social Security.

Heather Brewer 12:22

Okay. And then so as you got older, you went to high school?

Frances Gonzales 12:30

Yes.

Heather Brewer 12:30

And what was that like?

Frances Gonzales 12:31

High school was cool. You know, like I was telling you before, when I got to high school, it was just, like, I went to school, but I never went into school. You know, I did show up to my classes sometimes, you know, but I preferred to stay outside and smoke weed, drink, you know. I didn't realize how that was gonna screw up my life. You know, I didn't realize that—what it had done to me, you know. And it was just—it was hard for me, because when I really did want to go to school, they didn't want me — they didn't want me to come back. Then I hung out with the worstest people in Salinas, so it was, like, you know, when we—there was a certain part of the school we would hang out, and ninety-nine percent of the people that saw people that I hung out with, they were scared. So nobody messed with me, you know. That I liked, because all my life I was picked on, so when I finally got to high school and hung out with these people that didn't even go to that school, they'd come every—at lunchtime—and they would be, like, so scared of me. Like, oh my god, let's not be mean to her or anything like that. So I liked that kind of power. So it was just, like, [unclear]. So I thought—

Heather Brewer 13:41

So who were these people that you hung out with? Why were people afraid of them?

Frances Gonzales 13:50

Because they were gang members. They were gang members. And they were mean people, and they did things that weren't right. You know, at that time—of my time, of my age, I thought that was way cool.

Heather Brewer 14:05

And how old were you when you started hanging out with gang members?

Frances Gonzales 14:11

I was, like, the age of sixteen, maybe fifteen—but sixteen and up.

Heather Brewer 14:19

And up until then you had just—hung out with your family, or how was school like up until then? You said when you wanted to go, then they didn't want you back. Did you get kicked out or—

Frances Gonzales 14:31

Oh, well, when I'd start—when it was, like—before I had signed those papers for the Job Corps, I tried to get back into school, because, you know, my mom told me that if I didn't go back to school, that they were gonna cut me off of my Social Security, and she would—we would use that money to pay the rent and stuff. So I tried to get back into school and into Salinas High, and they didn't let me back in. The principal said no. [unclear] try some other school, and that was Mount Toro.

Heather Brewer 15:00

So you had only—you had quit. You had just quit going to school is what it was? And then, Mount Toro?

Frances Gonzales 15:07

Yes.

Heather Brewer 15:07

Did you go there?

Frances Gonzales 15:08

I applied—I registered, but I never went.

Heather Brewer 15:14

And then you went to Job Corps? Tell me about that and about where you went and why.

Frances Gonzales 15:20

I signed up for Job Corps when I was, like, sixteen years old. A friend of mine asked me if I wanted to do a buddy system with her, because she wasn't going to school. But, you know, she told me we can go anywhere in California in Job Corps, you know, and let's go to San Diego. And I said, well, I gotta get my mom's permission to go. So I had asked my mom if I can go, and I had to go to, like, a orientation to see what was—what it was all about. And so I went, and after the orientation, my mom had signed papers for me to go because you had to be of age to go. And the ages were from sixteen to twenty-five years old. So anyway, she signed the papers, and we would go, and, like, it took, like, maybe four months, six months for them to let me know what, you know, when to go, you know, what time and what date we had the Greyhound. Anyways, so I had got the time and date, and they told me when it was time, so I left, you know. I just grabbed my stuff and left. And it was cool. I liked it. I liked it a lot. I'm a certified chef. I graduated with my class to be a chef. I tried to get my GED there, but it was just, like, really hard for me for some reason. But it was cool. I stayed in school for, like, nine months. It took me nine months for me to graduate. And then from there, I got a job in downtown San Diego on Sixth Street, in a vegetarian place, you know, making salads and cookies. You know, cookies that look like cookies but didn't taste like cookies. [laughs]. But it was cool, because the people that hired me were from Watsonville. And they were, like, just so amazed—wow, you're from Salinas, wow, you know. So they gave me a chance, and they gave me a job. So I was working there for a minute until I

was with this guy, and, you know, it was all about party time, and we lived, like, five minutes away from Tijuana, Mexico. So, you know, that was, like—I just, like, messed that up and didn't go back to work and just started partying, you know. Another, you know, that's just—you know, it was like, something that just happened, you know. I just started drinking, and so I didn't go back to work. So I lost that job. And from there I moved to Tijuana with my boyfriend. And it was, like—that was different. It was really different. But, and I don't know Spanish, so it was, like, really hard for me to talk to these people, and they were, like, looking at me, like, you're Mexican, you know. But I wasn't born and raised to be talking Spanish or anything like that. My family did, but I didn't. So, yeah, I stayed up in San Diego for, like, three years, and then I came back down after my mom [unclear].

Heather Brewer 18:09

So where was your mom during the time that you were there?

Frances Gonzales 18:12

Prison. She was in prison.

Heather Brewer 18:14

Okay. And then you—and then she got out and you both came back here together?

Frances Gonzales 18:20

Yeah, the reason why I went to—I went to San Diego because I knew my mom was going to prison. So she signed the papers, and when I went to San Diego, she was already sentenced to go to the CIW up in LA. And when she went, she got two years and a half, so I figured, well, I'll stay up in San Diego because it was closer for me to go visit her. And I just didn't want to be here without my mom. So, and I felt closer to her when I was in San Diego. So that's what I did, was I stayed up in San Diego for, like, three years until my mom got home. And then I came back home.

Heather Brewer 18:53

And then did you move back in with your mom and the rest of your family?

Frances Gonzales 18:57

I moved back in with my mom and one of my sisters.

Heather Brewer 19:00

Okay. And so you didn't speak Spanish? You never spoke Spanish growing up?

Frances Gonzales 19:05

Yeah, broken Spanish. I mean, I can understand people talking, but don't expect me to have a whole conversation in Spanish, because I can't.

Heather Brewer 19:17

But your mom did speak Spanish?

Frances Gonzales 19:18

Yeah.

Heather Brewer 19:19

Do you know why—did your siblings speak Spanish?

Frances Gonzales 19:23

Yeah. I just have this feeling—I just have this—I don't know. I just feel like, you know, I'm not from Mexico, so why should I—you know, I had a really bad attitude back then, and I'm, like, I'm not, you know, totally Mexican, and I'm not going to speak Spanish, and I made sure I didn't, you know.

Heather Brewer 19:42

Did you feel like you—did you feel like Mexican people were discriminated—did you experience any discrimination because of being Mexican?

Frances Gonzales 19:50

I had experienced a lot of bad stuff towards—with Mexicans, Mexican men, and I just, like, hated them ever since then. But I know all people are not the same. You know, [unclear] Mexicans [unclear] way. You know, I had [unclear] other people. But that was wrong of me to not like none of them. But now [unclear].

Heather Brewer 20:15

So then you moved down and did—during your teenage years or during that time after you got back from Job Corps, were you ever down here in the Chinatown area during that time of your life?

Frances Gonzales 20:30

No, I wasn't. But when I did come down here was back in 1998. I thought I had been through everything. I had been through eviction notices I got. You know, I've, you know, really made some mistakes in my life by not paying my bills and stuff like that. So, you know, I ended up getting kicked out of places and stuff. But I'm, like, man, I had been through all this before. You know, I've been through so many bad things. You know, what else could happen? Well, one day, I was living on Market Street up here, and the city came knocking at my door telling me you've got twenty-four hours to move—all of us, the whole complex people. So anyways, we're, like, all in shock, everyone's freaking out. Anyways, motels are really expensive, you know. So we ran out of money, like, in three days. And so, where else were we gonna go, you know, so we came to Chinatown, to Dorothy's Kitchen. And it was really strange. My kids were really small, and I would tell them to hold onto my pant loop on each side, you know, "Don't let go." Because, you know, back then it was, like, everybody did drugs everywhere. They didn't care. They didn't care—at the front door, the back door, the side, everywhere. You know, it's not like that right now. You know, things are changing. Things are for the better. For the good. You know, people don't smoke crack right in front of the door anymore, on the property, inside the building. But, yeah.

Heather Brewer 22:00

So tell me a little bit about your young adult life at having—you obviously—tell me about—you had children, and just a little bit about that time in your life and what it was like.

Frances Gonzales 22:12

I have two boys and one girl. My oldest is twenty. His name is Daniel Garza. My daughter's the middle child. Her name is Margarita Amanda Aradonda, she's a teen. And I have my youngest, Raul Ramirez. They are all from three different fathers. And he's sixteen, and he's a good boy. All my kids are just, like—I love my kids. You know, I put them through a lot. I put them through a lot of stuff that they shouldn't have never had to go through. But, you know, like I said, I've done a lot of things in my life that I regret, but all I can do now is just make things better, you know, for myself, and for them, you know. I can't just live in the past, because I used to do that. I used to dwell on the past, think about what I've done. That would just waste my day, you know. I'd be just, like, not really trying to fix things, but just sitting and isolated, because of what, you know—I put my kids through homelessness. You know, they didn't need to be down there. But there was nowhere for us to go. People, you know, I've given people money for—to stay in their place or in their rooms and stuff, and they would just take my money, kick me out the next day [unclear] the same day. You know, just hateful people wanting to see other people, you know, going through hell, you know, and we went through that, you know. But we stood in abandoned houses right around the corner from here. You know, it's just awful, awful. My kids will never forget that, you know. My kids will never let me forget that. You know, my kids are in foster care now. You know, it's really strange because my kids are in foster care but, you know, we're still close still, you know. We're, you know, we're a tight family no matter what, you know. My son Daniel has been in the system for, like, almost all his childhood, you know, because he didn't want to listen to me. He wanted to run the streets at seven years old? What's a seven-year-old going to be doing on the streets, you know? He just wanted to do whatever he wanted, and I had to go find some help to help me get him—to stop him, you know, from leaving, because, you know—what seven-year-old goes out at ten o'clock at night and goes the opposite direction to go do something? To do what, you know? At ten o'clock you should be home. You know, and I used to drag my other two to go looking—to go look for him, because [unclear], you know. So anyways, I ended up going to CPS to look for—to get some help. So I went and asked for help, because I couldn't help—I couldn't control him. So anyways, it all went bad. It all went bad after that. You know, not bad, but, you know, I would try to help my kids, you know, and help my son. My other two were really cool, you know. Really cool and did everything I told them to do. But Daniel was just really the one that gave it, you know—all he could get to do whatever he wanted to do, you know, with anger. He had anger issues and stuff like that. And I believe he had all that anger issues and the way he was, because I used drugs when he was in my stomach. And I regret that, you know, because, you know, they say, "Oh, my baby came out so healthy even though I used all through my pregnancy." But in all reality, you know, when they start growing and stuff, you could tell, you can see, you know, between a healthy baby and a drug baby.

Heather Brewer 25:43

And what drug did you use?

Frances Gonzales 25:50

I used cocaine for quite a bit, and a so-called friend of mine introduced me to methamphetamines. And so I was using—I used that for a good seven years.

Heather Brewer 26:05

Where did you—so you said that you guys lived in some abandoned houses over here, and then can you just tell me a little bit more about where you were and what you were doing as your kids were growing up?

Frances Gonzales 26:18

We were—okay, so when we came to Dorothy's for help and stuff, you know, we found places to sleep at night. And then, Dorothy's Kitchen donated a Mercedes Benz to me and my boyfriend and my kids, you know, because, you know, they didn't want to see us walking, or, you know, we didn't have nowhere, we didn't have nothing. So they gave it to us, you know. And anyways, at that time, we were, like, traveling across town and back and forth in the car. And then the carnival came to town, and my boyfriend decided he was going to work there so he can get some money. So he decided to get—he decided to take the car and leave me and my kids behind. And at that time, we got a trailer and—like a trailer house. So he left us in the trailer and took the car, and left us here in Salinas, and he followed the carnival, which was the best thing that could ever happen, because it was, like, really bad. You know, I didn't—I was unhappy with him, and my kids were unhappy to see me with him, because they knew that he was giving me, you know, drugs and stuff. So it was, like, they were so happy that he was gone. But the trailer that we had, we lived in there for, like, almost a good six, seven months, in a spot, and I took them to school from that spot. You know, they went to school every day, even though they didn't want to, but they went to school. You know, I always made sure they were in school when we were homeless, but it was really hard to keep them from, you know, getting—keeping them clean and stuff. So, you know, I did all I could do to make sure of that, you know. There's a van that comes here on Fridays, and it's called the [unclear] van, and they bring blankets, clothes, bus tickets, all this stuff, right, for all the homeless. And I told my kids—they were, like, about maybe eleven or twelve at that time, and I'd say, "Go to the bus and go get some tickets." Anyways, they went to the bus and the lady said no, that they couldn't have any, it was only for the homeless. And they told her, you know, we are homeless. And she's like, you guys don't look homeless—no, we're not giving you no tickets. So my kids came and told me what happened. So I went over there, and I had told her we were homeless. She goes, well—she gave me props on how my kids look, because they didn't look homeless, and I said thank you. Because, you know, just because we're homeless, we don't have to look it. You know, we don't have to be dirty. You know, and I felt good, because it was a compliment to me. And she gave us tickets afterwards. But it's, you know—I tried my best to keep my kids looking good and clean, you know, at school. You know, but, yeah, we lived in trailers. We lived in trailers for, like, three years until one time I had went to jail—I went to jail, and they took my kids away, because there was no one—my family didn't want to take care of my kids, so they took my kids to CPS, Children Protective Services. And then from there on, I had to go to a drug program, which I completed, and I got my kids back and it was just all [unclear]. And so, you know, I kind of came again and I was parenting out of guilt wanting to give my kids everything they wanted, because, you know, that's what they deserve. And, but the more I gave them, the more they expected from me, you know, of me being clean, and I was just, like, doing everything to make them happy. But it turned out that—it just drove me crazy. Went back to using again because they just ignored [unclear] the money to be buying these shoes from the mall or these Game Boys and stuff like that. It was just, you know, it was overwhelming for me. So I went back to [unclear].

Heather Brewer 27:07

So you—were you working? So, during that time when you got out of jail, tell me a little bit about that—where you were living, and what—how that all ended up happening.

Frances Gonzales 30:09

Okay, when I went back—when I got out of jail—the first time they took my kids, everything was handed to me. They set me up with a house. My boyfriend that I had at that time gave me a 1979 Camaro. It was, like, so cool. We had—we got an apartment, a car, you know, the kids were getting—and it was summertime, so we were, like, we got to get closer together since there was no school, but when school came, there was going to be a problem, because the kids didn't want to go to school. You know, they—"Okay, well, I can't go to school without this shirt. You know, or, "I can't go to school without these shoes." And I'd be trying to do what I can to get the shoes and stuff. And anyways, it's just, like, it turned out to be all bad, you know. I ended up telling on myself, telling people that I used again. And so they said, "Well, we're going to take your kids back, and you go back to the program, and we'll do it again." You know, and the foster parents that were taking care of my kids, the first time they signed a paper saying if anything happened between me and my kids that they would take my kids back, no problem. Anyways, my kids ended up telling me that the foster parents were having my little boy, which was, like, twelve at the time—pretty big kid—anyways, having him discipline there other foster children, and it ended up saying—my son coming and telling me this, and he was really nervous about putting the little girl under water and stuff, and I'm, like, "No, you don't do that. That's their job. You don't touch that little girl. That little girl's not to be—" You know, "No, that's not—that's wrong anyways. We're going to tell somebody that way somebody can help them." Anyways, that time when they told me that I had to go back to program, my kids told me, "No, we're not going back, mom. No, we're not going back to those people or anything like that." And they took off from me. They ran from me. They ran away anyways, and so I gathered up all I could from the apartment and took off to Salinas, you know, and then when I got a spot for my stuff, I went looking for my kids. And I couldn't find my kids for a good month. I didn't report them, you know, missing or anything, because they were already looking. The cops were already looking for them, and for me, because I only had one more month to get them back in my custody. But you know, we messed that up. But anyways, one day when I did get my kids back, we went to a restaurant to go eat, and in the newspaper was—for some reason the newspaper—we read the newspaper, and there in the front page was that little baby, that little girl or little boy, that they were having my son trying to discipline. Well, that little baby was—they passed—the baby passed away for having internal injuries from the foster parents, from hurting it. And it was really sad. And I understood why my kids didn't want to go back, and I understood why they wanted to run. So, I helped them. I hid my kids for a year from the law. And we came back here, you know, to Dorothy's Kitchen, because this is where we can get meat and stuff, and I made sure that—I'd go in and get the stuff and bring it back wherever we were staying at. And I tried to hide them as much as I could, until one day they, you know, my son took off with a friend, and he—the friend came back saying the cops got him. Oh my god, I was just so shocked that they got my kid. And then the month later, in August, they came—me and my daughter came to Dorothy's, and I said, "We'll clean today." You know, help them—we'll volunteer and wipe the tables down and stuff. And sure enough, the police showed up, and they took my daughter, and then I ended up—after that, I ended up staying out here on the streets for five months in a car. The shelter was open already, but I was [unclear]. I didn't want to go in there. And so I stayed in my car for, like, five months. And then the cops picked me up, because I had a warrant for, like, a seven-year-old warrant. So they picked me up and I did, like, six months in jail. Did my whole

time. You know, got off of felony probation and everything, then came back out here to Dorothy's Kitchen, and did—I stayed out here for, like, five months and went back to a program so I could get my kids back, because that's the whole goal for me was to get my kids back, you know. Anyways, I went to a program. A week before I graduated the program, they told me I wasn't gonna get my kids back at all, indefinitely. And I was just so upset. And my counselor said, "Well, I thought you were doing this for yourself, to get clean." And I said, "I want to get my kids back." And she goes, "Well, you can't because you got to get clean for you, you know. You got to get yourself together." Anyway, I understood her. I just was just angry because, you know, that's my whole goal was to get my kids back, but I didn't, you know, I didn't get them back. So anyways, I graduated. But the month before I graduated, they were trying to help me get a job, because I got to that point where, you know, it's time for you to go out and look for a job, so when you graduate you have a job, have a place to live, and this and that. Well, nobody wants to hire a felon. Nobody wants to hire somebody that has battery, like, fighting and stuff like that, gang stuff. That's all I have in my record. Anyways, that just, like, screwed me up, you know. My past is really here to haunt me, because now I can't get a job. Walmart is not going to hire me. Target is not going to hire me. The only reason why I say that is because I went to apply. I did try it, and it was just so hard because nobody wants somebody—you know, I'm not like that today. But, you know, my past is what screwed me up—not paying my rent, not paying my bills. I had bills in the credit bureau. Nobody wants to, you know, do warrant checks or do checks in the housing, you know, to see if your record is clean or if your [unclear]. You know, nope, sorry, we can't help you, you know, because you didn't pay your rent, or you can't pay [unclear]. So that really messed me up. But anyways, I finally—I came back here to Dorothy's, and Dorothy's hired me for on call. Just in case somebody does not want to come to work, I'll cover them, because I know Dorothy's Place, like, you know, like, it's my home. It's my home. And anyways, I was so happy, you know, that they just—they wanted me to work, you know, and I always wanted to work for Dorothy's Kitchen. So now, I'm, like, on call, and I got hired for another job here at the Green Corps from the community center right here on Soledad Street, and CSUMB students work with—or are running it. So that's pretty cool. They're going to help me, and I'm going to take advantage of everything I can, because it's like on-the-job training. So I'm going to do the best I could—can.

Heather Brewer 37:24

Okay, so just to get the timeframe—when did you complete your last program to get clean? When was that?

Frances Gonzales 37:37

January 14th.

Heather Brewer 37:40

Of this year? Of 2008? And then you came back to—you came back to Dorothy's then? Then they hired you?

Frances Gonzales 37:47

Yeah, I came back—no, I came back here, because there was nowhere for me to go. When I graduated the drug program, I went to a shelter in Marina called the Hamilton House. And I decided one day I was going to stay with my kids one weekend, and they said, "You're not here—you haven't been here for

thirty days, and you can't do that until you stay there for thirty days. Well, I took it upon myself to stay at my sister's for the weekend, and they told me I had to leave. So when I left they—I came to stay with my sister and I decided, well, I don't want it—I don't have the money to pay her rent or electricity or nothing. So I came to Dorothy's, which is—I'm, you know, I'm more comfortable because, you know, I just didn't want to give my sister another burden, you know, another worry. So I came here and ever since I've been here, I've been working. I have side jobs cleaning offices, and I had another offer this morning to help this man clean his motorhome out for once a week. So yeah, I'm trying to do what I can. And Peter, my new boss, is gonna help me learn some stuff about, you know, the Green Corps, because I don't know too much about it.

Heather Brewer 39:01

Can you explain a little bit about it? About—so this is through CSUMB. You got hired there? So explain to me a little bit about that.

Frances Gonzales 39:10

Tim Carson is going to be—well, is—they hired three people for this—I guess, for the winter, I guess. And we're gonna learn—we're gonna be beautifying Soledad Street. We're going to be going to these lots and cleaning them up, planting trees and putting plants, doing electricity, learning how to connect electricity together, solar panels, I guess. That's what Peter was saying. Going to recreational parks like Central Park, Foster Park, and going around beautifying those places and learning about landscaping. [unclear] and we'll be going to school too here at the community center and learning other stuff with the CSUMB students. So, and I'm excited about that. And I told Peter I'm scared, because it's been so long since I've been at school. You know, I don't have my GED, but I plan on going to Hartnell in January.

Heather Brewer 40:08

Great. Okay, so, is the community center that you're talking about, is that—that's through CSUMB?

Frances Gonzales 40:17

Yes. I'll show you when we leave. [unclear].

Heather Brewer 40:22

Okay, and then do you know if any of this has to do with the Asian American Cultural Encounter that is working on the Chinatown Rejuvenation Project right now?

Frances Gonzales 40:33

I'm pretty sure they all are, you know. I'm pretty sure they all are, because at the Buddhist temple there, they always have meetings there, you know, committee meetings, everybody gets together and talks. I haven't been to one of them, so I can't really tell you that much about it. But I do know that everybody wants to beautify this place and make it something, you know, because, you know, it's been really, like, really bad and drug-infested, but it's gotten really good, gotten calmer. A lot of people are not being so open about selling their drugs or anything like here. It's alright. It's a lot better than before. You know, before it was—I had to have my kids hang on me and stay next to me and don't—you know, if they all needed to use the restroom, you know, we'd all go together, and it's not like that today.

Heather Brewer 41:24

So, the Asian American Cultural Encounter, they are working on this project to rejuvenate the Chinatown area. And they're hoping to—this is—our interview is part of that. The oral histories that we're taking, my classmates, from Asian Americans that grew up here, and then I'm interviewing you, because you grew up here. And then you're also part of this community now. The goal of the rejuvenation is to bring back Chinatown to—even back before you were born, it was a bustling place with a lot of Asian American culture. And now it's more—there's more homelessness here. There are drugs here, even though it's getting better and better. And so they want to bring it back and have it be a better place. And I'm wondering, where you—how you feel about that, and where you see places like Dorothy's Place that's obviously vital to the community here. And the current homeless community that is here, where do you see you guys fit into that? And how do you feel about that?

Frances Gonzales 42:41

I feel like there's—there's people that are homeless that want to be homeless, you know. There's some people, some homeless people, that are homeless and want to make something better of themselves. And Dorothy's Place and all the Asian meetings and stuff are to help us get off of our feet and do something with ourselves, you know. I feel like it's getting better. I feel like, okay, for me, I want to be—I want to do something different in my life. I want to make something of my life. I'm forty-three years old. It's never too late to do something good, you know, and I want to be a part of this, because I never was a part of anything really but having kids when I was young and taking care of my sisters, and my sisters taking care of me. You know, it's just—the Asian thing here is just—it's gonna be good, and that's all I know. It's getting good, and it's gonna get better. You know, everybody's involved. Everybody's involved, you know, the community, the, you know, City Hall, stuff like that. We're all in it together, that want to be in it together. Like, I talked to this man, Frank. He has the building next door to [unclear]. And when you walk into his place, you should see the pictures he's got on his walls, you know. Those pictures are what you want to look at. I mean, these pictures are from here, you know, from Chinatown. You should see—I was, like, looking at them the other day going, "Wow." You know, it's really neat, because that's—all the Asians up on the wall, all these, you know, in depth—it's really neat. It's really neat. So, I believe he's going to get interviewed Sunday, so I think there'll be—we'll have some pictures of all that.

Heather Brewer 44:32

So, what are your hopes for Dorothy's Place and for this area in the future of the rejuvenation? What do you want to see happen?

Frances Gonzales 44:45

Back in May we had—I believe in May, we had the mayor come to Dorothy's and to see about getting a different—a brand new building to help with the homeless, a drug program. We should be having a cafe. Dorothy's Cafe is going to be like a culinary arts school, learning how to cook and serving the homeless at the same time. It's really—I'm looking forward to that, because I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of that, and I believe—I know it's gonna happen, because these people that are working for Dorothy's and with Dorothy's, and—it's gonna happen. It's gonna happen. I just know it. And it's going to be good.

Heather Brewer 45:31

Great. And this place that we're in right now is actually a new affiliation of Dorothy's, and it's the at-risk gallery. And Audrey that works at Dorothy's was telling me that this art is from local artists, that's on the walls. They can come and display things here. And then also, they have people who are artists and who let—open the doors and let kids come in here and show kids how to do art.

Frances Gonzales 46:04

Yeah, Margarita is the woman involved that started this, I believe. And I just got to say this: she had—she even has prison art. She writes to some of the prisoners, and she let us know if we knew anybody that was locked up and had drawings that they wanted to put up in the art gallery for prison art, and my son's been in prison, [unclear], so she sent—him and Margarita are friends now, and he sent pictures down here. So he got to get his pictures displayed on the wall here. And I think it's exciting, because he's involved—he's not here, but he's involved, you know, and I think, you know, people that are locked up, are, you know, they're not forgotten. They're not forgotten, you know, and it's just really cool that they're a part of, you know, and I think this is good for the kids. There's a spray painting outside on the wall out here around the corner, and these kids can do some really good work with a spray can, you know. It's really neat. I like it. And there's kids that come here after school and draw and do a lot of other things. And I think that's cool for kids that don't have anywhere to go or, you know, instead of going into the hood, come here and paint or write, or do their homework.

Heather Brewer 47:17

Yeah, so this is a great piece of the future.

Frances Gonzales 47:19

Which we've never had before, so that's—

Heather Brewer 47:22

Exactly. Great. Well, I want to thank you for doing this interview with me, Frances. And I just want to ask you one more thing, and this is, like, on a separate side note, but I was wondering, if you think that this rejuvenation—is it going to bring attention to this community? Because I know that it seems like in some ways, this community, I've been told, has been kind of shut off from the rest of Salinas. And are you—

Frances Gonzales 47:56

I hope. I hope there's going to be more people out in their community to come to Dorothy's, you know. A lot of people are afraid to come down here still because of what goes on out there on the streets and stuff, but I hope so. I really—you know, there's a lot of people that do come still, you know, that are starting to come, especially to the art gallery, to Dorothy's, you know, the garden across the street that we never had before. You know, it beautifies the place. It looks a lot better, you know. I hope so, and I pray on it because, you know, this is a part of Salinas. This is Salinas, you know. This, you know—I hope they don't treat it like a ghost town anymore, because it used to be like really, completely a ghost town before, you know, after they closed everything down and stuff.

Heather Brewer 48:49

Cool. Well, hopefully we'll get some attention to that.

Frances Gonzales 48:53

That's cool. I hope so too.

Heather Brewer 48:55

Yeah. Okay. Well, thank you, Frances.

Frances Gonzales 48:57

Thank you.

Heather Brewer 48:58

And we'll go check out Dorothy's.