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### **Acknowledgement**

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Joe Caldwell  
Adjunct Research Assistant Professor  
Department of Disability and Human Development (MC 626)  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
[Jcaldw3@uic.edu](mailto:Jcaldw3@uic.edu)  
[selfadvocacyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:selfadvocacyhistory@gmail.com)

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**Roy Rocha**

**9/7/2007**

**1:00PM – 3:30 PM**

**Sacramento, CA**

Caldwell: The first thing is to really talk about our life story, really starting with childhood, where you were born, and how you got involved in the self-advocacy movement. First of all, do you mind sharing how old you are?

Rocha: I am 47.

Caldwell: Where were you born and where did you grow up.

Rocha: I was born in Bakersfield, California. I was born in 1960. I was born at a hospital. I had seven brothers and two sisters, and I was different from all of them. I was born too big for my mom to have me and they stuck those jaws in there, in the womb of my mom, to pull me out. It damaged my head, and I was born with a broken arm. When they were going to release me from the hospital the doctor wanted to talk to my mom and my dad. They talked to my mom and my dad, you know, and they said, "Do you have a name for your son?" They said, "Yeah, we are going to call him Roy." That is Rojero in Spanish. My dad told the doctor why. He said, "The son she had is going to be special. He is going to be different from the other kids you have at home." He goes, "What do you mean he is going to be something special or different from the other ones?" "Well, when he was born, he was hard to come out of your wife's womb. We had to stick something in there to pull him. He was too big, and we damaged his shoulder, and when we stuck those things in there we damaged his head. They had some problems with his brain." "Is he going to be not speaking?" my mom told the doctor. He said, "No he will speak, but he is going to be slow." My dad kept asking the doctor, "What do you mean he is going to be kind of slow?" The doctor said, "Well, Roy is going to be mentally retarded. We damaged his head, you know. We don't know what is going to happen to him in his future."

Well, my dad did not believe that, you know. When I can home, it took five months to make me walk. My mom was there to exercise my legs. I used to drag myself around the house. This is the story my mom told me. She says, "You dragged around the house so much, you know, in the living room. One day I was doing exercise on your legs to make sure you start walking." So one day she said she just gave up on me and said, "He is not going to ever walk. What the doctor said was true: something is wrong with him. He is going to stay dragging himself around the house." She just threw herself on the couch. And when she said that to me my mind just popped out and I got up and started walking. And my mom said, "It is a miracle! He is walking." Well, my dad came home and he was happy to find out that I started walking.

Well, my dad believed to put me in school. When they put me in school he told the principal, "You know my son is special. He is going to be mentally retarded. Is there any classes for him like that?" They go, "Yes, here will be some special classes we teach the disabled. We will put him

in a special class.” That was when I was in special ed all my life. Well, when summer came around the corner he believed to have me out in the fields to work with him, with my sisters and my brothers. My dad was a farm worker. He used to work out in the fields. He used to take us out into the field at two o’clock in the morning clipping onions. One time I approach my dad and told him, “Dad, why are you taking us out there at two o’clock in the morning?” He said, “Son, the sun is out already.” The sun was still down, you know, but my dad believed to work out in the fields. My dad worked so hard to support us. The only time I liked to work in the fields with my dad was when it was payday. They would pay us out in the fields. We used to form a line, the brothers and sisters, because he would pay us. And he would say, “Don’t spend your money because the fair is coming.” He would pass out the money. Five dollars at that time was a lot of money. My brothers and sisters used to run to their rooms and hide their money because they used to save it for the fair. When he used to give me my money I used to run out the front door and go to the store and buy candy and stuff.

When the fair came around the corner, my sisters would get together with their friends and my brothers would get together with their friends and they would go to the fair. For me, I would just sit there on the couch and look at TV because I didn’t have no money to spend to go to the fair. My dad would come up to my mom and say, “Well, let’s go to the fair.” She said, “We can’t. We need a babysitter.” He said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well, Roy is on the couch.” He goes, “He is not going to the fair?” My mom says, “Well, he spent all his money. He didn’t save any penny of it to go to the fair.” My dad will come and tap me on the back and say, “Son, I told you to save your money. I said, “Well, I am sorry dad. I spent all my money.” He said, “Well get ready. I will take you with me.” We will go to the fair. We will run into my sisters and my brothers. We will come home at the same time and we had a great time at the fair.

In 1973 my dad started getting sick on us. He used to take us out to the field and drop us off. My dad was a construction business person. When Sears first came to Bakersfield for the first time, my dad was a contractor to go help them build it. He used to also be out in the field and do that back and forth. After Sears was built he continued working in the fields. One time in the fields in 1973, my dad started having strokes, you know, heart attacks. He had one heart attack in the field. We got all scared. We ran out. We told the farm worker boss and he told us he was going to call the ambulance to pick him up. We took him to our family doctor. He told him, “Raymond, you have to take it easy. You are a hard working man and you have to take it easy.” My dad was real stubborn and he continued doing that. He would put his number in again at the contract company to see if they would call him to build another building or something else. He continued doing that all the time and he started

getting sicker again. He had a heart attack at home. They rushed him to the hospital again. Again they told him, "You have to take it easy."

In 1974, two weeks before Christmas, my dad passed away. It was hard for me. I thought my dad was going to stay living with us and grow old with my mom and my dad. Well, when he died he was 51 years old. It was hard, you know. My mom was still working and supporting us. She was getting his benefits, but not that much. I graduated from junior high in 1975. Then after I graduated from junior high I had four more years of high school. And I graduated from high school and I was just home. All my brothers and sisters had jobs. They had good jobs and all that. Well, before my dad passed away he got us all together in the room at the hospital. He went around the bedside and asking all my bothers, "Be someone when you grow up. Help your mother, you know, because I am not going to make it coming out of here." We are all in tears; and when he got towards me, he skipped me. He went to the next person. I said, "Well, how come he didn't talk to me?" After that, I told my mom, "Why he didn't want to talk to me?" She goes, "I don't know." I went up to him, "Dad. You got something to tell me?" He goes, "No. You are special." I go, "I know I am special. The doctor told me I was going to be special." My dad was also a person to save chickens. Chickens and cows would be in the back yard. He goes, "Don't forget to feed the chickens." That was the last words he told me, "Don't forget to feed the chickens. That is your job, Roy."

Well, we are all in tears and we walk out of the room. Two weeks come around and he called my mom. He goes, "Connie, come pick me up. The doctor released me already. I am doing fine." She was happy. She went to the hospital and he was sitting on the bedside. He goes, "Give me my dressy clothes. I want to put them on. I want to go home and see my kids." She goes, "Raymond. You have to take it easy." He said, "No, I want to take my kids on a long trip." So, he was putting on his shoes and he just froze. My mother looked at him and said, "Raymond. What's wrong?" His face turned red on him and it seemed like someone picked him up and threw him on the bed. She ran out of the room and she called the doctor. They took machines into the room. The doctor came back out and said, "Connie he is not going home. He just had another heart attack right now. She said, "What caused that?" He said, "Excitement." She came home and she told us about it and then two weeks before Christmas he passed away. I was down at his mom's house across the street. She went over there and knocked on the door. I opened the door and she said, "Your dad just passed away, Roy." For me at the age of twelve, I just fell to my knees and started banging on the ground, "Why? Why?" He is gone now. Well, the next day I went to the house. My sisters were crying. My brothers were crying. My oldest brother came from Korea. He was in the service, in the Marines. He came home to get the things set up

for the wake. I was just saying, you know, "What is going to happen to me now?"

I told my mom, "Do you want me to still work out in the fields with you, mom?" She goes, "No. Just continue going to school and I will support you guys." My mom was getting his benefits, but not that much. I was going to school. In 1979 when I graduated from high school, I was upstairs just sitting there. I was just cleaning the house for my mom and she was giving me like five bucks. When my brother got out of the service he opened this business working at Burger King as a manager. Soon they moved him up and they told him this is your restaurant now. His wife said, "We can't make it on the money you are making. I want to start working." He said, "Well, we have two kids. Let's go tell my mom to have Roy come live with us." He goes down to the house and he says, "Mom, I know you are suffering with Roy not working. We are going to take him off of your hands and he is going to come live with us." She packed all my clothes and my brother came and picked me up. See there is two little towns that we live apart. I live in Bakersfield now, but there is another little town called Lamont. My brother was living in Bakersfield and he came and took me to his house.

I spent like three years with them. They were paying me like \$35 to take care of my nephew and my niece. One day, it was a weekend and my sister said, "Do you want me to go take you to see your mom and spend time with her?" So I went down there and my mom said, "You are not working?" I said, "No." I saw a van go by and I saw the initials on the van. I looked at the initials and I said, "Man I would like to see where that van goes to." We knew the family too. My mom went to go talk to the family and said, "I heard your son is going on this van all the time." She goes, "Yeah. He goes to a program called Bakersfield VRC." My mom said, "What kind of a program is it?" She said, "It is for disabled clients. They show them how to work and they make money." My mom told me about it then the following week my brother came to pick me up. I went back home with him. One day my sister and I were talking and I said, "I need to have a dream. I don't want to get old age and die. I need to do something with my life." I told my sister and she was flipping the newspaper and said, "Hey, this program is nice for you to go to." I looked at the ad and I said, "I saw those initials on the van one day." She said, "Do you want to go visit that program?" I said, "Yeah."

I went to go visit the program and they had clients working, they had a contract taking phones apart –Pacific Bell. I saw clients taking phones apart. I said, "Do clients get paid for doing that?" They said, "Yeah. The wages depend on how fast they do it." I said, "I would like to do that." They said, "Yeah, but are you a client of the regional center?" I said, "What is the regional center?" They said, "You have to go there first to get

a case worker to open your case.” We made an appointment and the case worker that I had it was in a little town because they had a branch office there. The regional center we have, we have like ten branches in the Bakersfield area. For me, because I lived in Lamont, my case worker was in Lamont. I went to go see him and he said, “Yeah, I can put you at Park so you can work there, but you have to take a physical first, Roy, at Kern Regional Center.” They gave me directions to get there. My sister-in-law made an appointment. I got to the building and I looked up and said, “Man, I would like to work here.” My sister-in-law says, “This is not a program, Roy. This is where you are going to get your case worker at.” I go, “Okay.” They gave me the physical and all this stuff. My dream was to work there at the regional center.

They put me at the program and they said “Let’s see how fast you can take phones apart.” They showed me how to start taking phones apart and they said, “Man, you do it pretty quick.” And I said, “I am not going to miss no days and I can’t wait to see what my first paycheck is.” Two weeks came and they were passing out payroll at the program. When I got my paycheck I started opening it and they said, “You can’t open it here because the other clients are going to get pissed off to see how much you make.” I go, “So. It is my check and I earned it.” So I opened it and I said, “Fifteen dollars!” I took it to the supervisor and I go, “I didn’t miss no days. How come my check is only fifteen dollars?” They go, “Because it is not fair for you to make more than this other client because he cannot work that fast. We had to budget.” I turned around and told her, “Well, I used to work for a school.” They go, “Well what did you used to do?” I go, “I used to do janitorial.” They said, “Well, we are looking for client to teach other clients how to do bathrooms here.” I said, “Okay.” I asked if I would get a raise ad they said, “Yeah. You will make more.” Because the clients had a habit of not emptying out the jugs completely empty before they throw it away. Just teach them how to pour a little bit in the commode, in the sink, and all that stuff. That was what was my job.

So, I started doing that and then I says to myself, “It is time for me to leave again.” I said that to myself. Two weeks went by and one of the workers was leaving. He was going to open his own business putting cow bins together. He was going to be the boss but he was going to hire some other people to do that. They were going to have bathrooms there for people to use and they needed someone to clean the bathrooms. He took it to my boss and said, “You know I am leaving. I am going to open my own business but I need someone to clean my bathrooms.” They go, “Well, we got the right person for that, to help you clean your bathrooms. That is Roy.” He goes, “Okay. Will you bring him into my office? I would like to talk to him.” And he hired me. He said, “Roy, I would like for you to come work for me.” I said, “Will I get the same amount as I am getting here?” He said, “No. You will be making like \$300 or \$400 every two

weeks.” I said, “Okay. I will go for it.” I left the program and went with this little company. One week I got real sick. I came down with pneumonia. And they let me go. I said, “Didn’t you guys believe me? I called in sick.” They said, “We are going to have to let you go.” I didn’t want to go back to the program to start from the bottom up again. One of the workers at the program, her name was Josie, she called me and said, “Roy how is your work coming along at that steel company?” I said, “Oh, it is fine.” I didn’t want to let her know that I was gone and they let me go. She goes, “Roy, we heard that they let you go. We want you back at Park.”

That is when my life started to change a lot. When I went back the clients looked up to me. They were happy to see me. The director of the program called me into his office and he said, “Roy, the Kern Regional Center is looking for a client to be on the board of directors. Do you want to serve on that board?” I go, “Sure.” He said, “Okay, I am going to take it back to the board and I am going to talk to the director at the regional center.” My dream was still to work for the regional center. He took it to the director and he asked him, “I found a client to serve on your board. His name is Roy. He has a good head on his shoulders. Do you want him on your board?” They go, “Yeah. It will be on Saturday. Can you bring him down on Saturday?” He called me up and said, “Roy, there is going to be a meeting on Saturday, a special meeting. The director wants to meet you. His name is Mike Clark.” I go, “Man, I am going to meet a doctor.” He took me over there to meet him and he said, “I heard you have good head on your shoulders.” I go, “Yeah.” He goes, “We elected you to be on our board.” I was happy, but my dream was to work for the regional center.

Days went by and then it was time for me to leave the program again because they opened up supported employment to work out in the community. I was the second one to leave but I was still on the board of the regional center. When I left the program I went to supported employment to work at a grocery store as a stocker, stocking stuff on shelves and cleaning the bathrooms. She called me and she says, “Roy, I got a letter from the governor. He is looking for a client who came so far in his life. Can I put you down and tell him about your history and where you come from?” I go, “Sure.” Then days and months went by. I was still working at the store. My dream was still –I want to work for the regional center. I was still going to the board meetings. One day my director called and told my case worker to call me again, “They are looking for a client to serve on the state board in Sacramento.” She sent an application. My old program helped me fill it out. After that, they sent it back to the state here. Then they called me and asked me, “We got your application here and we want to interview you.” I said to myself, “How can I get to Sacramento? I don’t drive.” And they go, “No. We will fly you to Sacramento. We will send you an airline ticket plus spending money for

your food and all that.” So they sent it to me and I told my people at the store that I had to go to Sacramento for an interview. The guy that hired me to work at the store was real nice. There were over twenty clients to get interviews but they had their worker or their family there. I was sitting there by myself then they called my name and I said, “I am here.” They looked behind me and said, “Okay, who came with you?” I said, “I came by myself. I am the one to be interviewed to be on the state.” They interviewed me and the next day I went back to work.

Then my director called and he goes, “Hey, tonight is the board meeting. Are you going to come to the board meeting?” I said, “Sure.” My director used to pick me up back and forth to the board meetings because I wasn’t driving. He picked me up at the store and I called my mom to let her know. My director goes, “Hey Roy, congratulations!” You are going to get an award from the governor.” It was a nice brass award shaped like a lightning bolt. I said, “I am going to get that?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “Well, I got this letter from something else.” He said, “You are going to get another award.” I said, “From where?” He said, “From the state.” I received two awards in two months. I still continued working for the store. I was happy I got these two awards.

Caldwell: What were the awards for?

Rocha: For outstanding speaking for your rights. The one shaped like a lightning bolt, it was for how far I came in my life. After I got those two awards I was so happy. I took them to work and showed everybody. Then my director asked me, “On Saturday I will pick you up, but I will not go in the room with you. I want you to speak to these people about your life.” It was so shocking when I walked into the room. I thought it was going to be husbands and wives but it was tons of women. I was the only man that was in there. I was afraid to get up and speak.

Caldwell: Who were these people?

Rocha: They were big shots in the Bakersfield area. They wanted to find out how a client came so far in their life. I got up and spoke.

Caldwell: His was your first time speaking?

Rocha: First time speaking, but I pictured them with no clothes on. After that they asked me some questions. They said, “You are a client?” I go, “Yeah.” They said, “Well I bet your mom and dad is proud of you.” I said, “Well, my dad is looking down on me.” They said, “How about your mom?” I go, “She is proud of me too.” I still have in mind to work at the regional center. One day at the board meeting the director goes, “The Department of DDS here in Sacramento is looking for one client to work for them and I want you to come work for me.” That is what Dr. Hart told me. I looked at him

and said, "Where is this at?" He said, "At regional center." There it was. My dream came true.

They didn't interview me. They just hired me right there on the spot. I asked him, "What is going to be my role here?" He said, "Because you came so far speaking about yourself and speaking up for other clients about their rights, I want you to go to the schools and make appointments. Your boss will take you to those appointments." My case worker was there and she goes up to me because I was getting social security. She called the state and says, "Roy is going to be working for regional center. He is going to be making lots of money. We want you to cut him off from social security. He doesn't need these benefits anymore." They go, "Okay. Okay." My caseworker was telling me, "Roy, bring your checks in. We are going to save them because once they send us a letter we are going to send them all those checks back." It took like three years. I had so much money in my account at regional center my case worker helped me pay off my bills from when I went into debt. She paid them off.

I still had so much money in my account she took it to the chief supervisor and she said, "Roy, you should learn how to drive." I never got my license from high school. I was in an accident, a real bad accident. It almost took my life away. That is why my head is all scared up. She helped me get my license. I get my license, but they can't pull me over for walking too fast, you know. She goes, "We go so much money in your account. Do you want a car now?" I go, "Yeah. I need a car to drive." She goes, "Okay. Let's look around." She found a nice little Chevy truck. One of her friends took me to look at it. I thought, "Oh my God. There goes all my money. I am going to have to fix up this truck." But there was no dents or nothing—a nice white little truck, low rider, drop, and all that kind of stuff. They go, "How much can Roy put down?" She turned to me and said, "How much money do you have in your account Roy?" I go, "Over a thousand dollars." They said, "Oh, we can work with you." I put my thousand dollars down. The next day my case worker came in and helped me fill out my papers for the insurance. They said, "Okay, here are your keys." I walked out and turned on the car and took it back to the regional center. They came out and they was happy that I was driving. I lasted three years with that truck, then I traded it in and got a little Nissan car. That last me like a year and a half. I traded that in for a newer truck. I traded that in and now I am driving a 2004 Nissan Frontier. I drive to my appointment and to my meetings to do my public speaking to schools. I make my own appointments. I do have a supervisor at the regional center. I just tell him I am going to be at the school, what time I am going to be gone, what time I am going to be back.

After that I was just doing my job. I didn't know nothing about People First here. I learned about it by one girl who used to live in Central Valley. Her

term was up or she didn't want to do it no more and she passed it down to me. She asked me, "Hey, do you want to be on People First?" I said, "What is People First?" She explained it to me over the phone. They sent me the application and had me fill it out. I sent it back in. They called me and I went down for the interview. That is how I got involved in People First. And like I said, I do public speaking about where I came from. I also tell other clients, "If I can do it, you guys can do it too." I still have friends at the day program that I used to work at, you know. They come and see me and say, "Oh, here comes the big cheese, now that he works at Regional Center." I go, "I am not the big cheese. I just succeeded in my life."

I met this girl. We lasted like eight year and then we broke off. She is another client. Her name is Petra. We still see each other at conferences. One time we went to a national conference, her and some other clients. I begged her to go back with me and she didn't want to go back with me. I said, "Okay. I lost her." Then July of that year, after the conference was over, she called me. I was living with my mom. She goes, "Roy, I need to talk to you about something." I said, "Well, I am busy right now. I am cleaning my room." She said, "Well, how long is it going to take you?" I said, "About an hour." She said, "Okay. I will call you back." About an hour and thirty minutes went by. She called back and she was crying on the phone. She says, "Roy. I need to talk to you really, really bad." I am in my dirty shorts and dirty tennis shoes and I took off. I showed up before she did because she was in another town. She showed up and she was crying. I said, "What's wrong?" She said, "I broke up with my boyfriend." She told me what happened. I said, "Okay." She goes, "Do you want to get back?" And I says, "Sure. We can get back together." Most all the Kern County clients know Roy and Petra. They ask Petra, "I heard you and Roy got back together. When are you guys going to get married?" She said, "When Roy gets me a ring. Then at the conference it was rigged up that I was going to propose to her."

Caldwell: At a People First conference?

Rocha: Yeah. They called us up on the stage and everybody clapped. There was two bowls. One was in red and one was in gold. The lady that was doing the raffle put the bowl down. Petra looked at the bowl and said, "How come they put that bowl down?" I said I didn't know, but I already knew what was going to happen that day. She picked up the bowl and pulled a piece of paper out and looked at it and it said, "Will you marry me?" She looked at it and started crying. The worker that was helping me that day said what does it say Petra? It says, "Will you marry me?" She says, "Well?" Petra says, "Yes, I will." This month will be one year.

Caldwell: Did you meet her when you were still at the day center?

Rocha: No she was going to another program.

Caldwell: How did you meet then?

Rocha: We met. I used to be the chairperson for People First of our area but we used to call it the client advisory. We didn't have a People First in Kern County yet, until I started coming here and they asked me to do a People First in Bakersfield. They asked, "Hey, do you have someone to take to the dance tonight?" I said, "I met this girl. Her name is Petra." It was like a big dinner for clients to come to. They contacted her program and said, "Hey are you going to bring any of your clients to the program; and one of your client's name is Petra. Are you going to ask her to come?" They go, "Yeah." When she got involved in our client advisory she was one of the clients I interviewed. I fell in love with her then, but she had a boyfriend already and she was ready to break up. When we had the big dinner, she asked me, "Hey Roy, I am not with that guy anymore." I said, "Would you like to go around with me?" She said, "I will have to think about it." I took my class ring off and I gave it to her. She goes, "Roy, I can't wear this class ring. It is too big for me. I might lose it. But I still have to think about it." I wrote by name on a matchbook and I said, "Well call me tonight." She said, "Okay." I got home. I had my own phone in my room. My phone rang and she said, "Okay. I would like to go around with you." We lasted eight year together and we broke it off because she was getting in to my affairs at the regional Center. After that she got back with another guy she used to be with. Then she broke up with him and we got back together and got married. Robin came to my wedding. We took a honeymoon and all that kind of stuff. My director from the regional center was my best man.

I do travel to Washington DC with Robin and Joe. I don't do no public speaking but I go up there to listen to what is going on to bring back and share with People First of Sacramento and the people I work with in Bakersfield. Last year I told my director, "It is that time again. I have to go to Washington DC." He goes, "Okay." I showed him the paper and how much it is going to cost. Mike, his name is Mike. It showed how much it cost and he doubled that. I go, "Why you add it twice Mike? I am just going by myself." He goes, "No, I want you to take Petra. I know you guys didn't take a honeymoon. I want you to take her with you. That is my gift to you for your honeymoon." He paid for her trip to go to Washington DC. We went to Washington DC and we had a great time. It was business, you know, going up to work, but sometimes there was free time for both of us. When we got married, we didn't have a big wedding. We were going to have a big wedding but then something happened in her family and we had to cut it short. We got married. We live on our own. We are two clients. In the system they have services for people to come in and help you budget your money and help you cook. We don't have

that. We budget our own money. We pay our bills, our rent. She drives. I drive. She has a nice little car. We go our separate ways when we go to work. She goes this way and I go this way. Sometimes she works late. Her job is sometimes working late. We budget our money. We buy our groceries. We pay our bills. We don't need no services from nobody. There are a lot of clients now that need services. They don't know how to budget their money or they go to the store and people force them to get credit cards. They have people helping them not to get credit cards because credit cards are dangerous to have. If you were a client, I could go up to you and say, "Hey, you want a credit card?" And you say, "What is a credit card?" And then they will just brainwash you. They won't tell you the penalties and all that stuff. There are a lot of clients like that, you know. My job is to tell them, "It is good to have a credit card. It is good not to have a credit card." I will speak up for them or tell them, "You need to speak up."

My role at the regional center is when the IPP comes along I will tell them, "This is what you to tell your casework on the IPP." Because before on the IPP, the caseworker would fill it out like, "This I what you are going to do for the next six months." I know because they used to do it to me. But now that the new IPP law passed the client speaks up about what they want on the IPP. I just refresh their memory. I will sit there in the room. I will not speak for them. They need to speak up. Because I just refresh their memory to tell their caseworker what they want in their lives –what they want, what services they want. They will speak up. Some clients will not speak up. If a client has a problem with their case worker they will come to my office. I have four walls and one door. I tell them, "Is this going to be confidential, what you are going to tell me?" They go, "Yeah." Then I go, "You have to sign this paper that it is going to be confidential. If it is not confidential than I need to release it to our caseworker." Or sometimes a client will come in and say, "Will you tell my caseworker to come in and I want you to sit here and I want to tell my caseworker what I want?" I say, "Yeah. That is what I am here for." There is a lot of clients that will not speak up because they think the IPP is still the same way as a long time ago, but it is not. It is our turn to speak up; it is not theirs. They are just there to do the paperwork for us.

Caldwell: Why are you able to speak up? Were you ever afraid to speak?

Rocha: I was afraid to speak up, but I learned it from seeing other people speak up, you know. I said, "I need to start speaking up. I don't want no one to run on my back." Like when I didn't have my license to drive, I had to depend on my sister to take me to the mall. She said, "Roy we are doing to drop you in front of the mall. You have to be at this certain spot when we come back to pick you up." I didn't have no transportation to get back home. I have to speak up, "Wait a minute. I am a human being too. I

want to take my time shopping.” My brother, one time he come over to my house. You remember that program, *Hawaii Five O*? He said, “Roy. We want to take you to Hawaii. You are overweight. If you lose weight, we will take you next fall.” When August came around and he said, “Roy, we can’t take you to Hawaii.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “We cannot go.” When I went to the program I heard someone speaking about Hawaii. That is when I spoke up and said, “You know what. I want to go to Hawaii.” He said, “You want to go? Go.” They told me how much it cost. I started saving my money. I made a down payment, down payment until I finished paying it off. I went and took money to spend. I called my brother and I told him I went to Hawaii. He said, “You went to Hawaii?” I go, “Yeah.” People need to speak up. If they ignore you then there is not going to be anything accomplished. When I do my public speaking, I tell them, “You need to speak up. You need to speak up with your caseworker. You need to speak up with your parents.” Parents are afraid to let go of their son or daughter because they are getting that benefits or they are afraid that something is going to happen to them.

There are some clients who need help and there are some clients who don’t need help. Like me and my wife, we don’t get services from nobody. We don’t need someone to come in and say, “Oh, this is how you should make your bed. Oh, this is how much you should spend on your groceries.” Things like that. When I get paid, my check goes straight to the bank. My wife pays her bills. We budget our money together. We don’t need no one to come in and help us. If she needs money, I give her money. If I need money, she gives me money. But some parents say “no” because the money is there for the parents too. They are getting money from the son or daughter. If they say, “Go and move on your own,” they will lose that benefits from their son and daughter. They go, “We are not getting that anymore. Our son is out in the world.” Look, my dad passed away in 1974 and he was worried about what is going to happen to me in my life, but now he is looking down and he know what I am doing. I told my mom that I plan to get married. My mom is not on her own because my sister lives with her now. When my mom is gone I will at least have someone under my roof now. I am living on my own. Because if I was still living with my mom and my mom passed away, my mom go say, “Oh, Roy is going to end up living with his brother or sister and they are going to do his washing or do this or do that.” But now after she is gone, she knows where I am at now. I will still visit my brother and sisters. I am not going to abandon them, but my mom is going to be happy because I am married now. She will go, “Well, my son is happy now. He has a wife now.” My mom loves my wife dearly. I have come a long ways in my life. I want to see more clients do what I am doing now.

Caldwell: What do you think were the things that helped you “come a long way,” or what were the biggest things that helped you along the way?

Rocha: Going to the first program. I see other clients how they were working. I also do a camp thing every year. We have a camp where clients go to. I am a counselor there. The clients look at me like a brother. I am like a step-brother to a girl. They are my brothers and sisters. If a clients passes on it hurts me. If a client gets hurt it hurts me.

Caldwell: Why do you say what? What do you mean by that?

Rocha: Well, you see, some clients get treated real bad. I see them. I have to put my foot down. They have feelings too you know. People go, "Why you have feelings?" I go, "Because I am one of them."

Caldwell: You feel a real connection with other people with disabilities?

Rocha: Yeah. Because I am a disability too you know. You could see me out on the street and think, "Oh, he is a normal person." But if I come up to you and say, "I am bound and disabled." You will say, "You are bound and disabled?" I say it to you. People look at me and they think I am not disabled, but I am. I don't know how to read that well. I don't know how to write that well. Sometimes it clicks into my head and then I start reading it. I speak from the bottom of my heart with other clients because, like I said, some other clients look up to me. I don't want to see another client, another boy or girl, get hurt, you know, because they are normal people too like us. They are slow, but I think a bound and disabled person can do a better job than a normal person I think.

Caldwell: Say that again?

Rocha: A normal person and a bound and disabled person. Like me, I can do a better job as a normal person. Because there are a lot of people who say, "Oh, he can do that. I cannot do that."

Caldwell: Do you think being a person with a disability, does that influence who you are as a person?

Rocha: Yeah.

Caldwell: How so?

Rocha: Like my brother. He thought I would never get a license to drive. He used to take me out in the field with my dad's truck. He said, "Okay, get behind the wheel." He would put me behind the wheel. Then I would kind of jerk it sometimes and he would say, "Don't jerk it. You need to learn how to drive. Look at me I know how to drive." I go, "Well, no you know how to read and write and all this kind of stuff. I don't." But I took my time and learned. He was shocked when I got my license. He was shocked when I got my first vehicle. He goes, "Well, who helped you with all your paperwork to get your vehicle? Who helped you to get your license?"

First thing, my caseworker, told me, "Do you want to get your license, Roy?" I said, "Sure. That is my goal." I explained the background. My brother used to take me to the mall, but you go to the mall you like to take your time looking around, or you want to go shopping, or you want to go eat. You know, you want to take your time. Now I can go to the mall. I called my brother, and I said, "Victor, I got my license to drive." I said that is the first step. I went to the dealer to trade my truck in. They started telling me some stuff and I said, "Slow down. Take it step by step. I want to buy a vehicle to get me back and forth. I don't want a car that is going to fall apart on me." They had me sign the contract. He was shocked I did all the stuff by myself. If you want to do something in your life, don't let your brothers, or sisters, or caseworkers tell you what to do because you are going to depend on then the rest of your life.

Caldwell: Do you think the self-advocacy movement helps people to do that?

Rocha: Yeah. They do that.

Caldwell: Does it help people with their self-esteem and who they are as a person you think?

Rocha: Some understand what the self-advocacy thing is and some don't, but there is a majority not. A lot of clients are speaking up. We have had grassroots days here in Sacramento to talk to the Senate about bills and stuff like that. The first thing I ask them is, "Why do you penalize the bound and disabled first? It is not their fault. You guys screwed up on the system. Why do you want to pin it on us first?" They want to cut this. They want to cut this. They want to cut this. I say, "You are not hurting yourself. You are hurting them. The ones you guys should cut is your benefits. They are struggling to be strong in their lives, but you are going to cut things you shouldn't be cutting." When I came up here the first time, my wife and I and two other couples... My director says, "I want you to make appointments at the senate up in Sacramento. You guys go up there and talk to them about who you guys are and what you are there for." I always get dressed up in a suit, decked out and all that. My buddy was all dressed up in a suit. My wife was dressed in a nice outfit and the other girl too. We called and we made an appointment. We walked in. They asked us, "Who you guys are? What you guys are there for." We tell them. And they go, "Okay, we will get back to you." I go, "Well, we are not finished yet." We start telling them what we are there for and right away they go, "Who are you guys?" We go, "We are clients." They go, "You guys are clients? We thought you were big wigs from another business here in Sacramento." I go, "No. We are clients. We are here to speak for ourselves and for other clients." They go, "Oh, okay." And they will listen to us. They say, "Okay, we will do something about it." Our mayor in Bakersfield, he is real support for the bound and disabled

because we always have him at our conference in Bakersfield. He always gives out an award to the person who has come so far. I got it last year. I go in. I make my own appointments to see these big wigs in Bakersfield. I tell them who I am. They say, "You got a good head on your shoulder. Keep up the good work."

Caldwell: Now, right now you are vice president of People First of California?

Rocha: Yeah. I am vice president here for the state and I am the president of People First of Bakersfield.

Caldwell: And those are positions you were elected to? You have to run in an election?

Rocha: Yeah. I put my two cents in. They vote me in here. In Bakersfield, see there was a problem. I couldn't be on People First because I was working for regional center. Soon the director said, "I need you to come back to being the president." I said, "Well, you told me I couldn't be the president no more." He said "No, I want you to step in to help the clients." I get kind of little snotty with the people down where I work. Now that I am the president I do a lot more for them. When I was support staff we used to haul all this stuff. We used to have fundraisers and car washes. We have our conference. The regional center pays most of it, but the money we make goes give a wards out to other clients that will speak up. That is how I got involved to do People First here.

Caldwell: How long have you been vice president of People First of California?

Rocha: This is going to be my second year. My term is coming up already but I can put my bid in to be president of People First of California when Michael leaves.

Caldwell: How long have you been at the regional center?

Rocha: I have been there thirteen years. When I started there my transportation was a bus to get home.

Caldwell: Why was that your dream job?

Rocha: Because I just wanted to work there. When my director hired me, it was kind of funny, because when they pulled me into his office, the director's office was only four doors down, the secretary put a dictaphone on the desk and she said, "Roy, that is how you are going to do your paperwork, by talking to that thing." I looked at her and said, "You guys think I am stupid to talk to that thing." I was getting up and taking it back to her to tell her that I am not going to talk to that thing, when I turned around and here comes my director on it. He had one in his hand, talking to it. I am like,

Oh my God, he must be stupid to talk to this thing.” That is how I do my paperwork.

Caldwell: Is there a certain reason why you really wanted to work there?

Rocha: Well, when I asked my director, Dr. Clark, “What is going to be my role here?” He said, “To go and speak for clients. Attend their IPP meetings. Go to do public speaking still. They then what regional services are out there when I do my speaking at the schools in special ed. I didn’t have no one to come talk to me. No one talked to us to say, “Okay, you are going to graduate this year. There is a program called regional center for the state. Go there and they will find you a job or put you in some of these programs they have now.” We didn’t have that. That was my goal when I started working at regional center. I didn’t have no one come talk to me in special ed classes. I took it to my director. I took it to my boss. We had a meeting, the three of us. Her name was Sharron. I said, “Sharron, my goal here at regional center, I want to go talk to the special ed classes to tell them what services regional center does for the bound and disabled.” She goes, “Well, that is a good goal.” Dr. Clark goes, “Okay, Sharron will take you to your appointments, but when you get a car can you do that on your own?” I said, “Sure.” That was my goal too, to get a car, to learn how to drive and go back and forth.

I would call the schools and ask to speak to the teacher or the counselor of the school. I tell them who I am, who I work for, and that I want to make an appointment with the special ed teacher to tell them what services there are at regional center is there for when students graduate from high school. They go, “Sure.” I take my business card. I hand them out. I tell them, “This is my school. This is the school I graduated from. I am here to speak to you guys about what services are out there for you guys.” I give them my business card. The student will put it in their pocket. They will take it home. The parent will stick their hand in their pocket and they will find it. They will call me. They go, “Hey, I found your business card. Do you work at regional center? What kind of services do you give out?” I go, “Can you guys come in?” They go, “Yeah.” And I will hand out brochures, “These are the programs we serve in Bakersfield. For your son to go to these programs he has to come here to get evaluated –the physical and psych ed and all that stuff. We will enroll them. If they deny them you got 30 days to appeal them. If they deny you again a judge will come down from Sacramento to hear your statement.” Right there they will sign. That is my role to tell them what services are out there for them. They will come in. I have my own office. We will just talk.

Caldwell: What would you say self-advocacy means to you.

Rocha: Speaking up for yourself, your rights. Just speaking up for yourself, your rights, what you believe in.

Caldwell: When do you think you first became aware of discrimination against people with disabilities?

Rocha: The first times I learned it was at the day program. I was doing something and they started saying, "You are this and this. You are stupid." And you know, "He is not stupid. He is just a slow person. You could do it quicker than he could, but he needs to learn it step by step. He is bound and disabled. He needs to learn it step by step. You are discriminating against him." Now they have clients working out in the community, you know. Some clients still get discriminated, "Where you came from? Why don't you stay at your program?" All this kind of stuff. The clients will turn around and say, "You know what? I like to earn money like you do. There is a world out there for us too you know. It is not for us to keep in close shelter in the day program for the rest of our lives. It is time for us to explore what else is out there for us too you know." They might say, "But you are getting social security and all this stuff?" There are a lot of clients that don't want benefits no more. What I tell the clients is, "What is better? Getting social security or working at a place where you are making more money?" Some clients say, "I just want to stay home." I have a buddy of mine. He stays home. He doesn't want to work. He could work. I always say, "Look the day is going to come when Social Security closes the doors and says no more social security for the bound and disabled. What is going to happen?" That is what I tell my buddy of mine. Because he had a job at a day program too, but he did some stupid things at the day program and he just decided not to go back. He decided to get his benefits. He has his right to do that but I tell him that is going to run out one day and you are married now and you have a wife to support. She gets social security too, but from her ex-husband who passed away. There is world out there. I was getting social security too, you know, but I lost it because I am making too much money now. I got good benefits when I retire.

Caldwell: Who would you say in your life has supported you the most?

Rocha: My sister-in-law, because if she never found out about this day program, I would probably still be with them –living with them or doing nothing in my life.

Caldwell: Were your other brothers and sisters supportive of you?

Rocha: Not really because they depending on their families, their lives. That is why I keep thinking about my dad, you know, he said, "What s going to happen to Roy? What is going to happen to him after I am gone?" And my mom said, "Well, I am going to keep him at home." He goes, "Well, you are going to get old and die one day. What is going to happen to him then?" She said, "Well, maybe one of his sisters will take him in or one of his brother will take him in." But I said to myself, "I don't want that." It is

getting kind of weird because I have a friend who used to live across the street. His mother and father got separated. His mom was raising him. After his mom was gone they sold the house and they divide the money, but they didn't give him any. They only gave him a burial. I said to myself, "Okay, if my mom dies and I was living with my brother and sister, do you think they going to tell me the same thing?" "Let's give Roy some money." "No, he don't need no money." The House is mine after my mom is gone, but I told my mom I don't want it. Give it to my sister, the one living there now. We are drawing the papers now. We don't want the governor or someone to take it away from us because my dad bought it for us and we remodeled it. When I got my social security the first time, they gave me a big chunk and I put it into the house. We don't want no one else to take it away from us. The family will meet there on Christmas, on Thanksgiving. I don't want the house. I have a wife now to support. We will meet like brothers and sisters. But the one who supported me the most was my sister because she found the program for me.

Caldwell: Anybody else would you say helped support you to get where you are at?

Rocha: People First. This one here is Sacramento because I learn a lot about what is going on in the state and I take it back to where I live at to share with them. There are a lot of people in People First in the state of California. We are one of the chapters in Bakersfield. It is not that big, you know. To tell the other clients, "Look, this is what People First is doing in Sacramento. We should be doing that here too."

Caldwell: You had mentioned Dr. Clark or Mike?

Rocha: He is the director for the regional center in Bakersfield. There are 21 regional centers in California. He supports me a lot. When I talk to him, he knows where I am coming from.

Caldwell: Is he the person that came to you about the job?

Rocha: What happened was he came to one of his DDA meetings up here in Sacramento. All the directors meet up here and they were told they need to hire one client at all the regional centers. He came back and he said, "Roy, I would like you to come work for me at Kern Regional Center. I will support you and we will sit down and talk about what your role is going to be there at the regional center." I lasted four years at the store and on April 18, 1997, I left the store and went to work for regional center. I was afraid. I thought I would never go to work behind a desk. I received many awards from different places. Half my wall is awards I got in the past. From the state, the governor, from the mayor in Bakersfield –I got awards left and right.

Caldwell: Were those important to you? Did they help your leadership?

Rocha: Yeah. I look at the awards sometimes on my walls. I look back and I go, "Did I deserve these awards?" I sent a tape to the President of the United States. He sent me a picture back and a letter that said, "Keep up the good work, Roy." I have it framed in my office. I sit back and say, "What did I do to deserve these awards? What did I accomplish?" One time I took it to my director and I go, "Mike, look at these awards I got. Did I accomplish some of these things?" He goes, "Yeah, you came a long way Roy. You speak up and you mean it. I want you to continue doing your job. When I retire from here, there is no one who is going to let you go. The next director who takes over I am going to put my foot down and say do not let him go until he retires from here." I am going to retire from the regional center.

Caldwell: I think you talked a little bit about this, but the first time you became aware of People First or the self-advocacy movement. Could you talk more about the first time you became aware of that or involved in that?

Rocha: The first time I got involved in that was that person leaving. She was getting tired of being on the board of People First. We have a People First magazine and that person kept calling her all the time, called her at ten o' clock at night time. She asked me, "Roy, I am leaving People First. Do you want to serve on the board?" My caseworker helped me fill out the application. They called me up for an interview. It was kind of scary because it was a big step. I didn't know nothing about People First, but now I know what is going on, where we get money from. We get grants. We do conferences. The one here in Sacramento comes every June. We plan it. Clients come from different locations. I take it back to the clients in Bakersfield. I show it to my director and he hands it to me and goes, "It is up to you Roy. How many do you want to send to this?" I said, "Probably twenty, ten, or fifteen." He goes, "Okay, work on it." We have People First of Bakersfield and each program has two people coming to our meeting. I tell them there is a conference coming up and I need a list of people coming to the conference. We draw names out and they come to the conference. My director is real supportive of that. It is like a five hour drive coming up here. I say, "I got here who wants to go to the conference." He will say, "Okay call me back in a couple hours I will have a check cut out for you. I want you to cash and give some money to the clients. It is a five hour drive. I don't want them to starve."

Caldwell: I had some questions about the self-advocacy movement and the future of the movement.

Rocha: I want the movement to get stronger. We don't want to go down, because if it goes down it will shine on our faces real bad. If it continues going stronger, it is going to get stronger. I hope one year, all the big wigs here in Sacramento, in the capitol here, will be clients running it. We do a

hearing every year. Last year we did one and this year we did one too. We have clients come to the hearings to listen to the issues and they will respond back to the issues. We have people from the floor come in, you know the big wigs. They will listen to us talk and who we are.

Caldwell: What sort of things do you think the movement needs to get stronger? Are there supports needed?

Rocha: We need to run it ourselves –the clients do, not someone else who knows what is going on already from the Department. We need to run it how we want to run it. If we ask you, “Joe, what do you think we should do?” Then we are letting you to do it for us. There should be only clients do it. They should be there just to support us and say, “Okay, this is how you want to do it. This is how we are going to write it down.” We are the ones that have to speak up, not the big wigs. Because the big wigs will say, “okay, we will do it,” but then it might get done or might not get done. They will say, “Forget it. They want this done. We can’t do that.” We want them to hear us. We want to be present there when they express it. When they were saying, “let’s cut benefits for the clients,” I wanted to be there to say, “Why? Give us a reason. We didn’t make a mistake. You guys made a mistake.” Me, Robin and Tony were going to try to put me on the floor in Washington DC. I have been going to Washington DC, hearing these big wigs talk about bills and all this stuff. Last year I asked Robin, “Why don’t they have a consumer up here on the panel?” She said, “You have a good point Roy. Go talk to them.” I went up to them, “I have been coming to this conference for two years. You need to hear from the point of view from the client. How he feels or how she feels.” They said, “You got a point there. Are you a client?” I said, “Yeah. I am going to put my bid in.” It is kind of weird because you don’t know how I feel because I don’t live in your body and I don’t know how you feel because you don’t live in my body. They need to hear it from someone who is struggling and someone who is not struggling.

Caldwell: Let me ask you about the money or funding for People First or the self-advocacy movement. Can you talk about that? Do you think the movement needs money to support it?

Rocha: Well, we do need the money to support us because if we don’t have the money how are we going to support ourselves? We get grants from the state. They give us a grant and we use that money to do conferences. We use that money to send people like me to Washington DC or anybody to other conferences to learn what is going on in other states –because there is People First all over the place, even in China. See how they are doing. How in their countries how they are getting treated. What their government is doing for the bound and disabled. Here in California we know so far how it is going, but somewhere else they are doing something

different. And to buy supplies too. Because if we don't get no support from nobody, how are we going to?

Caldwell: What about advisors? People like Robin, who help the movement?

Rocha: Robin is there to help put things in the right way. She says, "It is your guys meeting, you do it how you guys want it. It is how you guys want to run it. I am just there to support you guys." Her and Mike, they are there to help us. Sometimes we will say, "Leave us alone, you know."

Caldwell: Let me ask you some questions about leadership. First of all, would you consider yourself a leader?

Rocha: Right now, yes, what I am doing right now to help more people speak up. I am a leader in my local to tell the client, the boy or girl, to speak up –to be a leader just like I am, to tell your caseworker what you want in your life, or where you live at, or where you want to go. Because before they used to just put you in the day program and that is it. You are there for however long you have to stay there, you are dead, or you don't want to be there anymore. I think I am a strong leader to tell them, "You tell them what you want to do. You don't want to go to this program. You don't want to get the services you don't want. You can do it. You have to be a strong leader to speak up for yourself."

Caldwell: Would you say leaders are born or made? Do you understand that?

Rocha: You mean like Robin. Yeah, she started out with a good head on her shoulders. She knew about us, but we cast the line to learn how to do it ourselves. We know what to do now.

Caldwell: Who would you call a great leader?

Rocha: The President of the United States. Well kind of, because now we are having problems that he is sending to much people to fight this war. All those people need to come home. It is a battle where all those people are just dying you know. It is sad you know.

Caldwell: Who would you say is your role model? Do you have a role model?

Rocha: Right now, no.

Caldwell: When you were coming up, when you were younger did you have someone that you looked up to?

Rocha: I looked up to my mom only. That is it. My brothers and sisters were just doing their role model themselves, you know, what they wanted to do in their lives, and all this stuff. They could go anytime they wanted, get in their car and take off. I would just stare and sit there. My role model said,

“You can do something in your life,” and I am doing something in my life. I am a role model now. I can do anything I want.

Caldwell: Do you think people look up to you as a role model?

Rocha: Yeah, the clients and the staff. I don't snipe back to my staff where I work at. If I have respect for them, they have respect for me where I work. If they say, “Roy, we need you to do this for us,” I will not turn to them and say, “That is not my job.” I will just do it, because they give me an evaluation every year at regional center to see how I do there. So far I have been doing so good. I don't smack back to them and they don't smack back to me. Why should I? I am just there to do my job eight hours a day. I go home and I go back. The next day is another day.

Caldwell: With the next generation of self advocates ,or the younger generation of self-advocates, do you think there is anything different?

Rocha: I know what you are getting at now. The ones to come in the self-advocacy movement, I hope they will still continue to follow the steps that we have been doing. Don't let no one tell them what to do. If we came this far, it only takes one committee to fall back and then everything will fall through the cracks. We want to continue to make it stronger and stronger and stronger.

Caldwell: Do you see many young people coming up in the movement?

Rocha: I see some and some don't.

Caldwell: Is that something you are concerned about?

Rocha: Yeah, like I said if we have come this far we don't want them to fall through the cracks.

Caldwell: What do you think they need so they don't fall through the cracks?

Rocha: Someone to teach them. Like myself, or the president, or anyone o say, “Look, we came this far. This is how is it going on.” Like I tell the clients, when I retire from regional center someone else is going to take my spot. I will explain to them about People First. I will sit them down and explain what we do. We come up here to the capitol and scream our lungs out. It is working now. People are listening to us now. Before they didn't listen; now they listen to who we are and what we are doing.

Caldwell: Do you think there are any differences with the younger generation versus your generation?

Rocha: Right now it is equal. It is the same. The younger ones are learning what we are doing and they will turn around and say, “I would like to learn to do what they are doing but we cannot do it now because we are still young.”

I speak up for someone else in my life too. Her name is Michelle. She is my niece. She is in a wheelchair. She gets benefits like wheelchairs and help but she cannot speak up for herself. She knows what I am doing. She is proud of what I do. The young ones I hope they will follow what we are talking about. They will continue going up the steps.

Caldwell: What kind of skills you think you need to have to be a good leader?

Rocha: That is a tough one. Just to speak up.

Caldwell: What are your goals for the future?

Rocha: My goals are to continue what I am doing. I hope one day that this hits me in the head and I will learn how to read and write. I will plan to write a book myself. I would like to work in the capitol in Sacramento as a client. If anyone from People First will bring me the issue, I will address it to the senate floor. That is my goal. Because I started a program to continue climbing, climbing and I want to continue climbing until I reach the last step and can't climb no more. That is my goal: to speak up for the bound and disabled and tell them what is out there for us.

Caldwell: Is there any advice you would give to young people?

Rocha: Well, when I talk to young people I will tell them about my life and my history. I will tell them, "If I can do it." If they are still living with their parents, "Look what happened to my dad. Start now to do a goal, to do something in your life because after they are done at least you have succeeded in that goal and can continue doing that goal. There is a lot of things you can do out there in the world. If you don't succeed in a goal you are going to end up in one of these care homes or these shelters where they keep a lot of people, state hospital or something like that, or you break the law and they put you behind bars or something. But do something in your life before your mom and dad pass away."

Caldwell: What beliefs do you think guide your life? Certain lessons you think might guide your life?

Rocha: Just continue doing what I am doing now, you know. I tell everybody what I do in my life and they believe in what I do.

Caldwell: It seems like you have always kind of spoken up for yourself, was there ever a time when you were kind of afraid to speak up?

Rocha: Like I said, the first time I started speak I said, "What do they want me to talk about in my life?" I just started speaking, where I started from; where I am at now. I was kind of afraid the first time to speak up because you don't know how they are going to react back to you. Or they might say, "Oh, we don't want to hear him. He is boring." But when I started

speaking, people understood where I was coming from. They said, “Yeah, I wish my son or daughter would do that.” I said, “Let them have a chance and they will. Tell them don’t be afraid. Tell them to give a little speech of what they did in school.” I was afraid the first time, very afraid. I said, “Oh my God. I have to talk to all these people. I don’t know what to talk about.” I talked to those women. I talked to the United Way. I tell them who I am. There were people asking me questions before I was done talking.

Caldwell: Do you see a lot of other people with disabilities that are afraid to speak up?

Rocha: Yeah.

Caldwell: Why do you think that?

Rocha: Well, because they are shy. They don’t know what to say. I tell them, “Don’t be shy. Just tell them who you are. Speak up.” But some are still closed in. They have the door closed to them.

Caldwell: Is there anything else that you want to add about how you became a leader or self advocate?

Rocha: Well I became a leader because I came up here to learn more about People First. The leader part is just to continue doing what I am doing now, be a strong leader for clients and all that kind of stuff.

Caldwell: Do you think, being in People First, do you think it has changed you?

Rocha: The first time when I started, I didn’t know what they were talking about, but when I started coming to the meetings, I learned what was going on. I picked up the space quick. This is my second term already. I was just a person to bring reports from our region to over here then they did elections and the elected me to be vice president and I learned more. Then I told my director I was going to run for president of People First of California and he said, “Go for it. I think you will be a strong leader. People will listen to you.” Then when I leave I want someone else to follow in my footsteps. That is what I want to do.

Caldwell: I wanted to ask you about, you are Mexican. Do you see different issues for people with disabilities who speak Spanish or are Latino that you see?

Rocha: Used to drive to Mexico a lot. I had a cousin. He was fragile. They were not getting the services like we get here. It was hard for them. I see a lot of that back there. There are a lot of people suffering. I guess because the president of their country or state doesn’t want to deal with people like that. That hurts me a lot too. They are just like us. They should be getting the services like we are getting. He is totally on bed rest. He

doesn't move. His legs are crooked. He is suffering. His mom will tell me, "We don't get the services you get over there." She and her husband got tired and they moved to Chicago. Right away when they got to Chicago they went to the Social Security office and started getting benefits left and right. There are a lot of Latino and Mexican people who don't get the services that they should get.

Caldwell: Is that something you have been helping to outreach in California?

Rocha: I haven't started doing that, but I would like to. All services should be the same. They are struggling too you know.

Caldwell: Is there anything else that we didn't get to talk about?

Rocha: Nope. I think we covered most of it.

Caldwell: I think so too. You have a fascinating history. You have come a long ways.

Rocha: Continue doing what I am doing. Someday I would like to write a book about my history. I have people crying. I say, "What are you crying for." They say, "Your story touched my life." I am proud of what I am doing. I go home every night and I am with my wife and she is asleep and I look up at the ceiling and I go, "Another day." I call my mom every day from work to see how she is doing. I have friends and when we go out of town I tell them to call their mom. They say, "What for? She knows where I am at. But I always call my mom every day. We are Catholics. She calls me up and she says, "Roy, I need you to come to Lamont and take me to the Catholic church." She goes, "Can you just take it for me?" She gives me this envelope to give to the father. I will take her to church. Me and my wife will go over there to go to church. I don't miss any days calling her. I know one day they are going to call me and it is going to be a big shock. She is not that young anymore. She is 78 years old.

Caldwell: You are taking care of her?

Rocha: Yeah. I have other brothers and sisters. There is a brother across the street. We are all spread out, but I call her every day. When I leave here, half way, I will call her on my cell phone.

Caldwell: What do you think you get from her, your mom?

Rocha: Her love, and my dad too. He was just like, "What is going to happen to him?" I thank People First and I thank my director. He loves my mom a lot. My mom says, "Don't ever talk back to your director. He is a good man. He took you under his wings to do work with him."

Caldwell: I bet your mom is proud of where you are at?

Rocha: Yeah. She thought when I grew up I was going to work in the fields in the hot sun. I don't like working in the fields, but that is my culture growing up, you know. One day I turned around and said, "What is going to happen to me? Do you want me to work in the fields?" She said, "No. Your field work is over already." My dad used to take us after school to work, after school, clipping onions. We would see our friends out in the street playing baseball. My dad used to say, "Go put on your clothes you wear on the weekends and let's go out there and clip onions." We would go out in the hot sun. We used to go to school the next day smelling like onions on our hands. Our friends didn't want to hang around us because of the smell on our hands. We would take showers but still have the smell on our hands. I know he is resting now, but I looked in the coffin and said, "Dad. You had us out there working too much."

Caldwell: But it seems like you that also sort of maybe built this hard working instinct in you to keep going and maybe speak up?

Rocha: Yeah. Well, he is looking down right now and saying, "I am glad he is not working out there in the hot sun. He is behind the desk now. I am happy for him." If he survived right now he would be paralyzed from the waist down. Now we have a ramp because my mom can't walk well. She uses a walker. I go to the cemetery all the time and take him flowers, me and my mom or me and my wife, we just go over there and tell him what I am doing now.