

Oral History Interview with Rosa Anaya

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transcribed by César Frías

This oral interview was conducted with Rosa Anaya by Unknown Interviewer in El Salvador. Rosa Anaya was born in 1976 in El Salvador where her parents were student leaders. Refugee in Canada and briefly in the United States, Rosa and her family returned to El Salvador with a strong will to transcend peace and uproot violence through Cultures of Peace. In attempt to bridge generations together, Rosa got involved with the youth in El Salvador by working in penitentiary centers where the organization that she is a part of, *Segundas Oportunidades*, dedicates itself to eliminating barriers that disadvantaged and excluded youth involved in gangs and the criminal system face. This interview was conducted on the occasion of her receiving the [AWARD name]. In this interview she focuses greatly on the practice of Cultures of Peace that have transformed individuals, their families, and their community. As an agent of peace, Rosa describes her journey in El Salvador dismantling oppression, toxic masculinity, gang violence, the criminal system, and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Topics: peace-building, community activists, human rights, power (social sciences)

Countries/regions: El Salvador, Central America

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Okay, I'll be saying very little. I had a couple of questions that I wanted to record for security purposes so that [inaudible]. And you are willing to show your face in the video?

Rosa Anaya: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there any topics that you don't want to discuss?

Rosa: Yes, here the political topic is a bit complicated and the topic of gangs as such with moderation. [Rosa laughs].

Interviewer: Yes [Interviewer laughs]. And is there someone in office, person not in office, places, things like that that you don't want to be in the video either?

Rosa: No, in office --

Interviewer: Because sometimes something has changed, like office support, like the letter of the offices, things like that.

Rosa: No, because that is, let's say public, no? Yes, the entire world knows where we are. [Rosa laughs].

Interviewer: And the same, with people in office, are there any people that you don't want [inaudible]? I don't think I'll be rolling around in anything about office. If someone comes up or --

Rosa: If in case, we will ask them, but I don't think there are problems.

Third Person: No.

Interviewer: Perfect.

Rosa: Yes, the office area is a safe zone.

Interviewer: Perfect. Okay. Well, can you explain a little about your story? Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Like your background a bit.

Rosa: Well, I was born in the circumstances, sometimes sounds like a joke, but I am the product of love in the time of war. My parents are survivors of the 1975 massacre of the

march of students on July 30. My mom threw herself off the bridge. She broke her knee in four pieces.

[00:00:02] Both were student leaders at the time and that was in 1975. My father would return and tell my mom who had disappeared, who had been killed. But at the same time, with the tragedies of the day, he also brought his poetry, his stories, and suddenly I was born in 1976, of those circumstances. Let's say my whole family has had a history of fighting for the defense of human rights. Actually, my let's say will to survive, my will to be on this planet, for some reason to bear, I hadn't even been born because they had captured my mom when she was three months pregnant with me. She was captured and tortured for 24 hours with electric shocks. And I always blame my personality on that incident that in some way was obviously tragic at the beginning of my life, but also says a lot about the desire to continue fighting not only for my family but also personally. For my dad, he was the general coordinator of the non-governmental human rights commission and was captured in 1986 for the work he was doing in defense of human rights, tortured for 15 days, and then let's say his word in the testimony he said, "I became a number of the statistics that we take and denounce in the human rights commission." But now I can put a face to it.

[00:00:04] I have felt and lived what the Salvadorian people suffer in terms of the repression that happened in those years and let's say that his conclusion at the time he wrote and said, "the agony of not working for justice is stronger than the certain possibility of my death. This last bit is nothing more than an instant, the other constitutes the totality of my life." And those have been the words that for a long time have guided me in the work that I do, the work that my family does. Each and every one of us always has some work that has to do with the defense of human rights. And well, I survived, I survived the war. We were expelled from this country after the murder of my father in nineteen -- when he was released from jail in 1987, he took us to school. In October, October 26, 1987, and we were five brothers and sisters. He already knew that they were going to kill him because they had him, they had clearly told him that if he didn't stop reporting, they were going to kill him. But he said, "I can't leave, I can't leave my people" and he decided to stay and when he was released from jail, since for about six months was a political prisoner, he decided to stay and keep fighting and keep reporting and they were like the busiest days of his life because he felt and knew that his days were counted. On October 26 of the year 87 when he took my brothers and me to school. I was ten years old at the time, they killed him in the parking lot where I am currently living and who witnessed the murder was me. I don't have memory of the moment in which he was killed,

[00:00:06] but all the chaos, everything that happened, for us was obviously impacting, but I think that from the constant misfortunes that happen to us, we always find people who aren't

only fighters but also extremely supportive. We were expelled from the country because they persecuted my mother to kill her after they killed my father and gave us political asylum immediately in Canada. Then we were refugees for a while in the United States and even though our stay was short let's say -- questioned my pre-established ideas of who the United States was and I was able to see that side of solidarity, of completely giving my brothers and me to strangers. We were adopted for six months each in a different house while my mom continued the report about what was happening here in our country. And since then, since I was little, ten years old and all my brothers were in churches, in schools telling people what was happening in our country. When I returned to this country, I was a teenager too, but I was able to identify the gap that existed between what we should be doing at the time after the peace accords and the fatigue of the historic human rights fighters that were picking up the pieces of who we were, of the family, of a quote on quote normal life. We forgot that this generation existed, right, that it was my generation that was between the war and what we intended or thought should be, but we didn't have a concept of what that meant. And to point, I always say and make that relation because this country describes you, knows, has violence for breakfast, lunch, and dinner it describes it, knows how it smells, how it feels, but it's difficult to have a context of something different. That, I think, is something that really marked my work today. When I saw that lost generation I even said, "But why don't they pay attention to us?" And around '94, '98 at that time I started working in prisons and let's say those young people that I saw on the streets that I knew had no opportunities and tried to understand from my conception of romanticism that it was the understanding of defense of human rights why having signed the peace agreements this country failed to overcome the state of war, that state of violence. And that was how little by little I got involved in working with the youth being a little girl, too, because I was a teenager trying to understand what it meant to be in the middle of a war, having known that ironically positive tragedy, to have seen and have lived solidarity in living flesh, to see a town despite the greatest misfortunes that could happen this town gets up every morning and keeps walking no matter what they have to face. It's hard, obviously hard, but it's possible. So that is where I find, even contradictions, with that historic struggle of human rights defense because suddenly we learn to differentiate between those who deserve to have human rights, which are the good ones, the victims, and those who do not deserve it because at some point in their life they made a mistake. And something happened to me in a correctional center that marked me a lot, I was working with the youth there that were, let's say, deeply involved -- youth in conflict with the law, youth that began to see the theme that we now see as gangs, the M.S., the 18, but were children of the street, foolish children, children who wanted a future that nobody was giving them. And I remember that it was extremely easy for me to identify myself with that generation and say it is possible. We have to examine how we are going to overcome what we are facing. If our parents, our grandparents had to live in a complicated situation like war, this generation would have the

answer to overcome this phase. But no, it wasn't like that. We couldn't, we couldn't connect. There was a gap between this generation and the next, but I identified myself. I would say, "this is the group, this is what my parents showed me, they taught me that we should be on par with people who needed it the most, the people who had no voice." But I learned something more from my parents, too, because we all learn from the mistakes of previous generations. It was very important for me to keep the compromise not only personal. I can say I decide to put my life in risk, I decide to put up a fight, but we have family. Yes, I grew up without that father. Very heroic, very respected, impressive, but as a little girl I too, have rights and my parents taught me that. So, for me that has been a constant struggle to try and connect the practice, the theory of what the letter of defense of human rights says, and the practice of what we have to live everyday because that practice signifies a lot of sacrifice and if the family can't understand the sacrifice it's really difficult to connect them. Well in that moment, when I was working in the correction center as a volunteer, there was a group called Opera. In those times they were a group of deprived of freedom. The situation in the correction centers is indescribable, right. A really complicated situation. Coming out of war, chaos still. There was a black hole there, but there was a group called Opera and it was known for its optimism, peace, hope, renewal, and harmony. And they told us as members that somehow they wanted to contribute to society. They had that, they had the hope to be different people. And there was everything there, there were people who we now call civilians, people who were linked to gangs, to gangs. There was everything there, you were there in the prison and in that time there wasn't so much segregation. Well, a friend calls me who also worked with us and says, "look, we are going to meet one of the founders of Opera." Ah we're going to meet one of the founders of Opera! In my head I can hear those teens, those young people who I, too, was fighting for to have an opportunity even though they had made mistakes in their life. Turns out that when we arrived at the meeting, this founder of Opera was not the young man with whom I identified with. Rather he was one of the soldiers who was involved in one of the most heinous war crimes that this country had seen in the the early 80s. He was one of the individuals who participated in the the murder of of four nuns at the time. And of course it was inconceivable to me. I didn't how I said, they taught us one way to another to separate those who had rights, the victims, and those who were the monsters. Those who we could not forgive and who we had to bury in the deepest, darkest hole that we could find because that is what they tell us or what the general concept of justice is. Impunity has generated this feeling that revenge is the end goal of justice and it is not. It shouldn't be that way, but at the time I couldn't relate those two things. And I couldn't see this man. I couldn't even talk, I mean, we couldn't connect and I said, but -- I wondered -- "but why?" I left the meeting and the truth is that honestly to this day I have not seen him again. But he had a big impact on me because when I was heading out of the prison where the meeting took place he said to me, "remember that I was also a victim." Oh, that broke me. It's like, at what moment do we stop thinking of ourselves as

humans and categorize one as animal, the dehumanization of the other, of the enemy? And since then, at the time, I began to question. If one is going to be a defender or defender of human rights, that's what it is. You have to defend at the expense of even those you do not agree with because only then will we rid ourselves of the barriers that at any point generate conflicts. To me, that was my first hard lesson because, well, the family also has to accompany that process. And it is difficult to ask the victims to simply forgive and forget and turn the page. It's not something that is done overnight, it's not something that doesn't hurt, but it is something necessary. The process of reconciliation is something extremely necessary and part of the reason our job initiated was to rescue that historic memory. We can't keep repeating where we've already been knowing it doesn't work. So that is when I stated to look for alternatives of how to work with people that I consciously know have committed big mistakes, but how willing are we as a society to start reconciliation not only of past violence, not only of war violence, the current violence is as brutal as war itself and people are hurting. But we can't ask victims to be the ones to dictate the [regulations of public policy] with respect to violence. They must be a part of the healing and reconciliation process, but that is only one part of true justice. This town needs the truth, this town needs justice, and to be able to have justice we also have to auto-reflect how we are going to heal because healing means forgiveness. And to me that was the clearest moment of my life, when I decided to forgive the person who murdered my father, forgive the person who tortured him. Not for that person's sake, but for my own healing process and that has been my liberator. It has been my liberator because it has allowed me to do the work that I do without judging people. I think that one can't work in a space where there is so much pain without having felt and recognized that pain and at the same time be strong enough to continue to give hope to people that are considered good for nothing. To those who have been treated like that, like animals. There have been multiple instances where the people we work with throughout different projects state that their greatest change is, "it's because you all treat me like a human being" and that is not something one can lie about. It's not something that is taught in literature, it's something that you feel and that unites. Without that unity, real hope dies and the only thing that remains are the bases of lies and we aren't capable of advancing as a society [like that]. That is how I started working in this field. Finding the -- to me I am like a type of bridge that unites that generation that was here and lived through war and this generation that tried to say let's take a step forward with the process of peace, but realizes that violence is not changed overnight. It's a cultural theme that goes hand in hand with the fact that we are imperfect and that from that imperfection we must find, what works for you? What works for me? And how we are going to achieve a vision of the future that works for everyone. What does it look like? I don't know. We continue to construct it. That's our biggest challenge right now.

Interviewer: Can you feel that the people are ready? Or are they willing to start this process? I find it difficult a lot of the time talking to people that --

Rosa: We are never going to be ready. And that's why the work that we do is so important, because we also weren't ready during the war. It's something that even the people who have committed horrible crimes aren't ready to commit. There, too, is a trauma and that is the part that is difficult to comprehend. To be ready for reconciliation is something very personal so we need to keep that door open at all times for when someone is ready to start that process. Then, it is not something that has a start and a finish. It is a cycle. Just like how violence is a cycle, the construction of peace, too, is a cycle and has multiple sides, multiple routes from where to arrive, multiple routes from where to exit. And to us, from the project, justly is the basis of our philosophy, right. I don't expect people to change just because, right. Every person has their own process, the truth is healing, forgiving oneself, forgiving those who have caused damage and asking for forgiveness are three very different things and each of them has a distinct difficult process. Seeing that transformation is magical and we have had the privilege to see it from multiple angles. So much that we see it from those that have perpetrated violence and say, "stop" to those who have been victims of violence and say "stop." Finding that point between these two oceans creates a new vision of the future because it is no longer a part of resentment but rather of wanting to construct a future for our children which is what I think is more important. We are already on our way out [Rosa laughs].

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about the program that you are running inside of the prison?

Rosa: We have a program that is called *Segundas Oportunidades*. *Segundas Oportunidades* was born with the essential idea that each person has the power to make important changes to their life, in their family, and in their community. We have to -- have been working in two scopes. There are two models that we utilize, one of them is the program for constructing youth where we work in communities providing youth opportunities for them to find alternatives of what their context gives them and one can't change their context. What we can change are the alternatives for youth to find the personal tools that they can utilize to advance and surpass all the obstacles that their context presents to them. Years ago a young man said, and I'll never forget, he said, "my family, my community continues to be the same, but what changed was me. Now I feel capable of surpassing obstacles that I face in my community because I am an agent of transformation in my reality." And that to me is the essence of what this model signifies. In the work of our community, necessary when working with youth that is more vulnerable or that are exposed more to violence, because when there is more violence there exists more trauma, those that have committed crimes or

have family members who are surrounded by the theme of extreme violence we have to work in prisons. It's not a secret that what happens in our community in my country has a lot to do with what is said and thought in these prisons. That's not what I'm saying, right. It's there in the newspapers. The entire world talks about it. Well since we like to always find the positive things regardless of how dark they are, we have to see something positive in it. Why not use that vehicle and do it in a transformative way so that we empower people so that they are capable of transforming their own reality? And that was another lesson that I learned from my parents. I am not here to be the voice of anybody who has lost theirs, rather I am here to be able to give people their voice. It's not the same thing for me to tell you with my own experiences what it meant to be the daughter of a murdered father, go through a process of resentment, and reconcile than for a third party to come and tell you. It's not the same thing that I have had the experiences not only of living with the repercussions of a war in the past, but also with the repercussions of the current war. And even then being able to say that this is possible. I'm here, I was exiled from this country, I returned to this country just because I want to say, "Yes, it is possible. Transformation is possible as long as we are available to work with so many people it is possible with those willing to do it." And I got lost in the question, where were we?

Interviewer: No, you were good!

Rosa: Yes? [Rosa laughs]

Interviewer: Would you like to tell the people abroad, what it means to be a young person in a complicated community? What others mean coming from [inaudible]?

Rosa: A young person in this country, in a complicated community, has two options: die or survive and be an agent of change that this country needs. What we do is simply give the amount of support necessary so that every time that they make a decision they will always be between those two paths. Everyday for the rest of their lives they will be between the path that the entire world knows is complicated and highly probable that it will lead to jail or death or decide no, I am an agent of change in this country. And that, they do every morning when they get up. That is aside that very likely someone else decides for him or for her and they take their life away. That is what we face in this country at the moment and because of that it is more important to know that even in these conditions we have seen that it is possible rehabilitation is possible for whoever decides to do it. Easy? It's not, nor will it be in years, but definitely possible with the help and support necessary that these people require. Even when we are in those dungeons inside prisons, *Segundas Oportunidades* is just that. How to find oneself, how to transform that person from within, how that transformation expands to the people around them in the type of relationships that generate

with their family because you cannot change the world if you cannot change your own immediate reality first. And I believe that the most important thing is not to think we are here to change the inmates but the people in the system. *Segundas Oportunidades* is what you want to generate, in this country there are 28 penitentiary centers potentially in the future there are 28 schools of promoters of peace. Can you image 38,039 people that someday return to their community who know perfectly well where we don't want to go and we can create a different vision and promote that everyday of their lives for the rest of their lives? This country can change radically. And we are here to generate that. The inmates, who are deprived of their liberty, the custodians who have a lot to do with the culture that enables or disables rehabilitation, the technical teams that are the staff that are there to support those deprived of liberty with their rehabilitation program, in the end account for the system itself. We want to transform this system so that, even if no one believes us but I have seen that it is possible, that from being a school of crime, as they call them here, to being a space of hope for this country, of hope for the families of those people who are living through complicated processes, and for the community to which they have often damaged. As I said at the start, it is not easy, but it is a process that we have to do and it is necessary. Inside all of this is the role that the victims have, one cannot ask the victims, as I have said before, "Well, let us turn the page and here I forgive and forget and deleted my new account." It is a process that we decided as a country, how we are going to continue the way, and the victims are part of how we build this way. The victims are part of how we build this alternative way. And those of us who think we have nothing to do with the problem, we are mainly responsible for seeing that we really change the course of this country. Constantly with those deprived of liberty that come out of the processes they find the sad reality that very few people are going to give them a chance. This is *Segundas Oportunidades*, it is not only for those deprived of liberty but for society. I want to give the potential employer a second chance to rehabilitate himself and if he can work in this society in a positive way, that providing second opportunities is beyond a job issue. It transforms families, it transforms communities. For a family the problem of being incarcerated is not only suffered by the person in prison, but the whole family suffers because of it, and these are families who are extremely poor. And there is a great variety because one does not have a certain concept of who is in the penitentiary, but there is something more important. You and I, under the right circumstances could make a mistake. No one in this world can be exempt from ending up in such a place and one must ask "What do I want this society to do to me when I make a mistake?" And from there, we can see and generate a little empathy in which the one who is free from sin can throw the first stone. So this is, in general terms, what we do as a program: methodological transfer of curriculum I prepared and of a culture of peace, there are inmates and there are technical teams, and the transformation of the system in order to help make better use of the existing legal framework, because we are not

changing anything legal but working with what already exists, as we can use it in a better way.

Interviewer: For me, one of the interesting difficult things is that most people [inaudible] that they are going to come out and the community is not going to really have that many job options. And much more of the community is not ready to give someone recently out of jail a job.

Rosa: Actually, according to the latest data, in the next five to ten years, 12,000 people are going to leave the system because they served their time. It's not even because they gave them an early release or because they agreed to any—how do you say it?—prison benefit. It is simply because they served their time. 12,000 people. At the moment, the Department of Probation and Freedom, which is part of the Supreme Court, is responsible for monitoring people who are under substitute measures for the prison sentence and the number is approximately 16,000 people. Effectively, this society is not ready for that second opportunity and unfortunately many of the people who manage to get out, who have achieved some level of change, do not find that support, that network, that should be giving them a second chance, and they end up recidivating. Currently, there is a fact that I use with a little caution, and that's 20 percent of recidivism, but here there are different categories of recidivism, here, legally, it means that you commit the same crime again and you are convicted again for an equal crime. It does not take into account how many times a young person spends in prison, the career criminal or, that is to say, they commit a crime and then another crime. And I will give you an example about one of our boys who promoted peace and got out recently, about four months ago. I asked him "But how many years were you in there?" "Seven years. And I have already changed, yes, because I found that opportunity in you." I asked him "do you mean you have returned to prison before" [inaudible]. He responded "the first time I was in prison, I was 13 years old. And I've been in prison 14 times since I was 13 years old. And now that I've found Segundas Oportunidades, you have shown me that there is an alternative way. I was in prison until now, since I was 13 years old." It cannot continue like this. It is not possible for a whole system to condemn our young people to be like that, to be professional prisoners. To think that this is the only career that they have as an option. I asked him, "what changed?" and it broke my soul because what he told me was "what I received from you is a sincere ear that allowed me to believe in myself and believe that I could be something different." And I said, "and this is all?" Give me, I mean give me the formula I need to write this, to make an analysis. "No," he says, "that is all. If someone had sat down with me at the age of 13 years old and had listened to what I had to say, if they had asked 'what are my fears? What were my rages? What was it I didn't want to do? What was I dreaming of? I am sure that I would never have spent 20,000 hours imprisoned." And at this point, he told me the most important thing—he is 24 years old—

“at this point, what I do understand is that I am capable. I can do something different for my family and for this community and I am not going to stop because with this same determination I did the wrong thing, so with this same determination I can do the right thing.” Imagine how simply it was. Each one, as I say, has their moment, and has their process. Not everyone is the same, but being able to give people that opportunity when they are ready for it is vital for this country to change course.

Interviewer: I feel that a lot of the time people do not understand how young these boys and girls join [the gangs] or how they are forced to get together. And why do you think—I don’t know—what is the reason that these children are so willing or vulnerable to be part of or join [the gangs]?

Rosa: Note that here in El Salvador I constantly hear many people say that gangs are to blame for all ills. And I always ask society the question, “what are we doing so badly, as a good and honest society, that our young people decide to leave to be jumped or hit hard, to know that their choice of a career is death or a cemetery or jail and they still decide to be there? Because many of them decide to be there. The vast majority decide to be there because of their circumstances, because of the feeling of abandonment, because they want to feel safe, because of the idea of belonging. How is it possible that, as a society, we are not able to make our children, our young people, feel that there is a better option? That the love, that the care I can give them is much more valuable in the future than what other groups can offer? We have to question ourselves. And so that’s the mission, that’s what we push for. I am not going to allow a boy or girl to feel like they have more affection and a sense of belonging and a sense of family in a space where they are beaten and mistreated than in a space where society is supposed to honestly provide them with opportunities to develop as a human being, to be a professional who adds to their families and their communities. It can’t go on like this and I can’t follow by blaming others when we are partly responsible. We are responsible for action or omission of what these young people are going through right now and they are the best reflection, pitifully, of what we have created and if we have learned to resolve our conflicts with violence, then that is what our boys and girls are also doing. And if I have to go hug each one of those who are in the penitentiaries to convince them that there is an alternative, then literally that is what we are going to do as a team. We cannot allow heartbreak to continue to pass our young people through a pipe. There are so many young people who have impressive creativity, who have impressive visions, who have an impressive future even in the darkest moments. And creating as many paths as possible to make those dreams come true is part of what we are doing right now.

Interviewer: And speaking of this, do you feel there are many differences and specific challenges for women, girls—

Rosa: [sighs]: Ah.

Interviewer: How would it be to be a girl here of ten or eleven?

Rosa: [long pause]. If there is a culprit. It is *machismo* [Rosa laughs]. It is difficult to be young in this country, it is difficult to be a young man in this country, but there is nothing more difficult than being a young woman or girl. Because even those who suffer, those men, young people who suffer violence are already destined, according to them, in their heads to mistreat and overcome and keep women down because “that’s the way,” they say, “that’s how it works.” Having role models of young women who excel despite the circumstances is vital to remind our young women and girls that women in this country have carried ourselves for many years with this society and have overcome the most enormous obstacles. To change the idea of *machismo*, we are responsible for the education of our children and if we want new men, and if we want new youth, we must also change our own *machismo*. And to do this is revolutionary because just as we talked about the issue of peace, we don’t have the context. We need, as women, to rebuild and understand who we are from femininity and masculinity. To be new men and new women is to reinvent ourselves as human beings in a world where they constantly tell us what our limits are and how far we can go. If they are poor, if they are rich, if they are a woman, if they are a man, if they are young, if they are from a gang, if they are not from a gang, if you have or do not have tattoos, there is a preconception of what you are going to be and rebuilding ourselves means having a vision of who we could be with the opportunities that are provided.

Interviewer: I have noticed and spoken to people that many of the communities, when a girl is 12, 13 or 14, parents are already sending them to the United States. And there are a lot of children who are fleeing the country because parents are afraid, for several reasons—

Rosa: Of course.

Interviewer: Can you explain why they are running away so much [inaudible]? How is it for a person in the United States, who really does not understand what is happening in El Salvador? Why are so many children running away?

Rosa: As I was personally also in a refugee situation, I know what it means to flee from the night until morning. Nobody gets up in the morning saying, “My dream is that I want to leave my homeland, I want to leave my family, I want to leave my children, I want to leave my grandmother, I want to lose the link of what it means to have family and what, for us, means leaving the navel.” To migrate is a right, but the opportunity to stay and to build a

better future also is a right. As peoples, rather than as governments, as the people of solidarity that we are, we must think that opportunities and support and the generation of opportunities in our country is vital because at the same time that we can decide to migrate for a better future, to have that family bond, to have that bond with our land, to be able to develop our country, is our dream. It is important to understand that we do not leave because we want to, we leave because circumstances compel us to leave and that many others like me, although they forced us to leave this country twice, have returned twice. We return here because there is a future here, because there are opportunities here, but we need to build them and in many cases we have to open the gap where there is no path and the solidarity that we have received from many people has been vital to be able to build those opportunities here. And I am going to tell you one more thing, this is not a scientific survey that I can give you for support, but of the 100 percent of people deprived of liberty who I have spoken to about the projects and have asked them “What is your dream when leaving?” The first thing they answer is that this country will never accept me. The first thing I will do when I leave is that I am leaving completely. After doing the process of culture and peace, generating a life plan, searching for successful alternatives that are not easy, but having hope I can tell you 100 percent of those people say “If I have a chance, I stay, I don’t want to leave my family.” I know what it is to grow up without a father or mother and I am not going to do the same to my children and if that opportunity, although humbled, allows me to stay and raise my children, to grow my family, I’ll do it. I’m going to take it even if it’s the smallest opportunity I have. But that is part of what we propose. This society needs change, it needs to generate the opportunity, it needs to trust and for that it is also a whole process. Like forgiveness, trust is built and you are not going to forget your dead by decree or you nor are you going to force anyone by decree to provide opportunities. It is a personal process that is generated with practice and knowing and making multiple bridges between people because if I am able to see the murderer of my father as a human being who made a mistake, we are capable of giving ourselves the opportunity to make a different society. And it is not done on the basis of revenge, it is done on the basis of justice, but justice with the intention of reconciliation [long pause]. I’ve said it! [Rosa and Interviewer laugh].

Interviewer: Can you explain what [inaudible] is like a normal day for you?

Rosa: [smiles]

Interviewer: Is there a normal day? [smiles].

Rosa: On a normal day, I am a mother, I am a daughter, I am a wife, I am a coordinator of a program, I am an ear for those who need it, I get mad, I go to parties. That is a Friday. I am a human being who hears, gets angry, lives, makes many mistakes, many, many mistakes.

But every time I make a mistake, my intention is to learn. I have always said that even on the day I die I will have learned my last lesson of what it is to die because I will not have died before and it will be the last lesson I have. So a normal day is that. Being a student of life. I don't know what the future [inaudible 53:08] will bring me, I don't know what people will bring me, I don't know what the environment will bring me. Look how we are now suffering the burning of the Amazon. That hurts, but knowing how to continue, what are we going to do? What will our actions be? Part of a normal day of what we do is creatively face life with the good and the bad and the bad that may throw us. And there, as the saying goes, "if life gives you lemons, make lemonade," make a lemon pie, invent something because it's what we have—we do the best we can with what we have.

Interviewer: It is all very easy!

Rosa: [big smile]

Interviewer: It is easy! [smiles]

Rosa: The beautiful thing is going to be the celebration [continues to smile].

Interviewer: For you, what does it mean to receive this award?

Rosa: [sighs] For me, it means recognizing the work of a whole team and of many years of dreams, pains, and joys. I think it is very important to remember that right now, they are giving it to me, true, because, as we say, I am the face of it—but in reality, it is each person who generated an opportunity for their family, who made the decision to make a change in their life, who did something positive for someone, it does not matter what inspired it or the program or the actions we do. The team, Puchica, there are impressive people [emphasis]. Each one of the people who decides to work in this does so as a vocation. And it is that—to recognize their work, recognize the achievements of the promoters of peace, it is recognizing that it is possible, despite the dark days, you will always see a little light that allows us to move forward.

Interviewer: And it is work that is not easy...it is quite dangerous too. Do you feel that? Or no?

Rosa: [pause] This job generates a lot of satisfaction. Every time you listen to a chove who stops a riot in prison because he learned to manage his emotions, because he has the tools of a culture of peace to be able to negotiate, to be able to find the origin of the conflict and stop 1,500 people inflamed with a machete in hand, one must smile for this work. Is it difficult?

Yes. Is it dangerous? Yes. But I live in El Salvador. It is more dangerous to do nothing. It is more dangerous because I would lose my life every day I get up and decide just to do nothing. It is much more dangerous to think about the possibility of inaction than to think that there is little we can do to achieve it. And one would think that I am helping others, but it is the other way around. All these people help me to be a better human being every day.

Interviewer: And in the future, how would you like to grow your programs? Are there new programs you want to do?

Rosa: [oh!] I already told you, right now I am only working in new penitentiaries. I have 28 in this country. There are 39,000 people, and my team is made up of—[Rosa laughs]—of 15 with everyone [continues to laugh]. It is nothing, but the strength is that we are not alone, we are an area of peace and justice construction, we are an institution that works not only in this country but in multiple countries doing peace building. There are a lot of other organizations that are going through the same process. I think that something important I must say is that nobody has the magic formula, that if we are not able to learn from the experience of others, to share our own experiences, we will stay with our experiences and it's going to stay there and it's going to go down a tub. Sharing ideas, stealing ideas, thinking beyond what we thought was possible a year ago—I didn't think I was going to be talking to you about this award. That did not occur to me, but as we take a step forward, we become a little more aware of the ten steps we can climb. I think it's part of the magic, to keep learning. Do not think that what we have is the holy word, continue to learn from others and especially listen to the people who are beneficiaries—I do not like that word though, because they are actors. They are actors, they are agents of their own change. And I don't know [an aside], I do dream of having that. An institute of culture and peace in each of the penitentiary centers. So there is a long way to go. Surely my eyes will not see it, my father's eyes could not see what we have achieved, but if we are building it right now, it serves as a platform for the next generation.

Interviewer: And, I believe the last thing, is there a specific story within the prison of a person who changed radically— “seriously, how crazy I am like —I was never going to think that later...”—

Rosa: We have many stories. Well, one of the stories that I just want to tell you is...well, there are several. Many years ago there was a boy who was tattooed all over his face, everything—nobody gave a five for him anymore. He arrived at the prison as a minor. Initially, he committed a robbery and went in for robbery. He had no hope for life, to such an extent that he decided to commit another crime inside [the prison] because he could not find a reason to leave. He had no family, no friends, he had no one. Constantly—our idea of

generating this hope that I believe in, that I do not know what you are going to be in life, but I do believe that you are going to be something very positive and very important and that will benefit all of society—I don't know what it's going to be, but I really believe it. And this boy began to think what to do inside the prison. Those are the origins of the ideas of the concept that he is a promoter of peace. There was a riot, and you had approximately 800 gang members in a corner and the people who had gone through the culture of peace processes trying to convince them that there were bridges that had to be burned before taking action because they had a thousand people from the other gang telling them they were going to be killed. Go figure. These boys managed to stop and say, "If they don't go through that door, why are we going to react?" Only that managed to stop what had been planned at the time. But that specific boy, when they were going to be transferred—they were already taking them to another center—there was one thing that the entire penal center knew about. It had been like his lifeline. I gave him a quena [the traditional flute of the Andes], and a booklet where he learned to play quena and music allowed him to connect with his soul, to connect with his father because it was the only thing that remained of his family and there was this legend, this myth, that went unexplained in the penal center but that everyone knew, which was that you could touch anything of this boy's except that quena. And at that moment, at the time of the chaos, they took them and they took them naked only in their boxers, and [this boy], he had his quena hanging [around his neck], and the guard, at that moment, took the quena from him, threw it on the ground, and crushed it there with his boot, and everything in the world stopped breathing. They were getting on the bus, and the whole world held their breath [because he is going to explode]. Days later, he told the team that had been working with them on the culture of peace that "I only had to see your little faces" and Rosita would tell me "Don't worry, it's just a quena. Remember the consequences, this will happen and there will be more quenans where that one came from. And then I breathed and continued on my way." This act itself, his companions didn't even believe. They couldn't understand how we had managed a highly violent person to just breathe. That this whole legend around the quena was impossible. That act was a miracle and saved the lives of more than 800 people. That is a culture of peace. Chove in San Vicente was exactly the same. There was an internal conflict. There are 1,500 people in this prison. There, someone had told him that someone had given permission [for them] to come and kill another [person]. He was with everyone until they closed the doors of the cells and everything and then they came with machetes, they had their weapons, and they were screaming, and this boy says, "I remembered each of the classes. I was thinking of the violence meter. I was thinking about the physical language of the body and I could identify the anger, as it was seen in his eyes, as it was seen in his shoulders." And he was describing what he saw in others and what happened is that he started saying, in his conception, "God took possession of me. I used myself as an instrument. I repeated, repeated, and repeated the culture of peace classes" and other people who were promoting peace that were also in the

middle started listening and were able to identify common language. Ah, the consequences, ah, we are in a state of anger. Let's take a deep breath. What is happening—and he said to them— “let's find the origin of the conflict. What is happening? Why are we so angry? Remember your relatives. Think of the families of the people you want to harm.” And he says “I saw him and when I saw his shoulders began to drop, and the machetes were close to his legs, I knew that I had won the first battle.” And based on that, he could start asking: ok, what happened? Why is he mad? He realized that everything was the product of talking about others in their absence, right? And they managed not only to have that moment of crisis, but also to help the authorities themselves to control the situation and say, “Well, we have made a mistake. At this moment, we are going to hand over the weapons we have” and that generated a process, let's say, of respect for a leadership that not even he had believed he had. He said, “I am nobody, I am nobody, absolutely nobody, and why do people listen to me? That was the work of a miracle that happened because I had the correct language, the correct concepts, and the correct tools for other companions to hear that there are real consequences and that it is in our hands to decide whether or not to continue with the path of violence or see what we can do with peace [Rosa smiles and laughs].

Interviewer: Great. Did you want to add one more thing before finishing? Something we might not have talked about?

Rosa: I think it is important to remember that the things we do, although they seem extraordinary, are not. It is important to remember that we are all human beings. My team and I only make the decisions to do it and any of us are capable of doing it and the more we think about creative ways of transforming this society, the more likely it is that we can change the course of this country and hopefully this world. The Amazon must stop burning, we must build an alternative to this world that we have at the moment and it may be that we are only one, but one adds up and suddenly we will be thousands of people [Rosa laughs].