

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDITH FERNANDEZ

An Oral History Conducted by Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

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PREFACE



Dr. Edith Fernandez is a native Las Vegas, a Chicana American. In the 1950s, her parents emigrated from Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico and joined family already residing in Las Vegas area since the 1920s. The Fernandez family of three children grew up in Charleston Heights as one of a very few Latinx families in the predominantly white community.

Her parents believed in hard work. Her father worked as a waiter at the Sands Hotel, and her mother was a bank teller. From a young age she heard their stories, among which were her father's memory of serving Elvis Presley and of being a Culinary Union member and participating in the 1984 Union strike.

At an early point in her elementary school education, a teacher tried tracking Edith into the special education program. Maria Fernandez would have no part of this for her child and

perhaps, this triggered for Edith the value placed on education within her family. With the mentorship of her sister and encouragement of her family, Edith went on to graduate with two bachelor's degrees from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR); two master's degrees, one from University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and Harvard; and later her PhD in Higher Education from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Fernandez's career crosses over two decades, serving the Las Vegas community and increasing access to higher education for students of color in the Las Vegas Valley. She helped open the Cambridge Center, has served as a recruiter to increase diversity for UNR, supported the Latino Youth Leadership Conference, and been the District Director for US Representative Steven Horsford. She now serves as the Associate Vice President at Nevada State College where she specifically focuses on supporting diverse student populations.

She serves on two national boards: Council for the Alliance of Hispanic Serving Institute Educators and Association of Hispanics in Higher Education.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Marcela Rodríguez-Campo

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To start, go ahead and say your name. And could you spell it for us as well?

Sure. My name is Edith Fernandez; that's E-D-I-T-H, F-E-R-N-A-N-D-E-Z. There's a story behind why I say it as Edith (pronouncing *eh-deet*), but I'm sure we'll get into that.

My name is Marcela Rodriguez-Campo. We are at Nevada State College and I am with Claytee White and Edith Fernandez, interviewing her today [September 27, 2018] for her oral history.

To start, could we begin with your early life; where were you born, what was your childhood like?

I was born in Las Vegas Women's Hospital, which no longer exists in terms of a physical structure. I was born to Maria Antonieta (Cabello Fernandez) and Alvaro (Fernandez Rodriguez), who emigrated from Mexico in the late fifties to Las Vegas. My father had followed his brother who had come here in the late fifties; his name is Jorge, and Jorge had followed his sister Lillia. So there were quite a few Fernandezes here already. We were also related to a family that had been here in Las Vegas since the 1920s, and that was my Aunt Celia Rivera Ramirez [family photo below]. I know that UNLV has a lot of pictures of the late 1920s documenting my aunt's family and her growing up. If you can see how, word of mouth, one family member comes and ten, twenty, thirty years later everyone kind of trickles in, so my dad was part of that.



I grew up in the Charleston Heights area, which is Charleston and Torrey Pines; that area there. I went to Rose Warren Elementary School. I remember, whether this was true or not, it felt like Rainbow was the edge of the town. I just remember desert all the way up to Red Rock. In fact, Red Rock seemed far away. We would get in the car and take a trip to Red Rock and it felt like it was far away, like we were leaving town. Now it doesn't feel like that given all the housing that has been built in between now Rainbow all the way up to Red Rock. I have distinct memories of feeling like we lived on the edge of town. In fact, we have some pictures where it shows our house and then just desert. I distinctly remember my principal Theron Goynes. He left a huge impression on me.

I grew up in a predominately white neighborhood. As far as Latinos go, it seemed like there was just a handful of us, and two of them I was related to. I lived on the corner. I lived on 6348 Brandywine Way on one corner, and then on the other corner, 6200, lived my Aunt Lillia, the one that had preceded my uncle and my father. Then there was a sprinkle of other Latino families. We really stood out.

I remember the black kids were bussed into Rose Warren and I remember asking about why was that. I probably didn't know these words, but it was about mixing the neighborhoods and making sure that they were mixing with others, et cetera. I just have these memories of the kids on the bus coming out.

My mom worked in the school cafeteria, and so I think that's why I knew the principal very well, because I would go to work with my mom very early. In fact, my mom was a volunteer; she wasn't a paid worker. All my friends were from North Town that were bussed in, and it just happened to be that way I think because just the friendship, we would eat breakfast together, and also we were different from all the other kids. I didn't necessarily have a racial

identity, but I definitely had a cultural one, of being Mexican, for sure. I had the burrito in my lunch box. All my friends were black, but the majority of the school was white, and I knew that my friends didn't live in my neighborhood. So I have memories of that.

Then Mr. Goynes being black, I don't know if he just liked me or liked my mom, but I just have real distinct memories of him. He was tough, but friendly, so it was a really interesting balance of that. I never wanted to break the rules because I wanted to make sure that I impressed Principal Goynes or was a good kid. It stood out to me that we're in a white neighborhood with white kids, the black kids get bussed in, and we have a black principal. I never forgot that. That stood out to me.

I had a great childhood. I remember playing on the streets. The call to come home was when the streetlights turned on. I certainly don't let my kids play outside now. I live in the same neighborhood. I live around the corner. I bought a home in the nineties and I've never left. I still live in the same neighborhood and it's drastically different, drastically different. I had an older brother, Alejandro, an older sister, Elissa, and we had good experiences.

I remember being teased because the kids would refer to me as Edith Bunker. If you're familiar, she's a character on the TV show *All in the Family*. She's Archie Bunker's wife. They would call me Edith Bunker. My only reference was...It felt like I was being teased because she's a white old woman. I thought she was an old lady, white, and it was clear that I was being made fun of. I remember crying to my mom, "Why did you name me Edith (*E-dith*)? I hate that name." She said, "I didn't name you Edith. I named you Edith (*eh-deet*)." For me that just changed. I tried to assert the pronunciation of my name, Edith (*eh-deet*), whenever I could, but I would say the majority of my school years people called me Edith (*eh-deet*). Once I got to college, I just asserted, "No, it's Edith; it's Edith." It's hard to this day to make sure people call me Edith (*eh-*

deet). Folks butcher it and that's okay as long as they try. Every day it's just a reminder of being different, but also the pride of having Mexican parents. I'm a first-generation American and I can be Edith (*eh-deet*).

Tell me how drastically different the neighborhood became. Describe that.

I would say for starters I remember maybe the early eighties when other housing tracts started to be built around Garside, on the other side of Rainbow, so on the more western side of Rainbow. I remember my mom telling my dad, "We should move." My dad is like, "We're not going to move. We're fine here." Then noticing all my friends started moving. I distinctly remember that and it just seemed like in the blink of an eye we were no longer on the edge. It felt like the center of town, especially by the time the nineties hit.

And then you just saw more and more families that were two adults working in the home, usually they had some kind of casino job, or single parents. Again, I didn't necessarily know how to articulate this, but obviously the income of your average person in my neighborhood dropped, and then the more expensive houses were bigger, the ones surrounding us. I remember that.

I remember growing up there was this program. Folks would put a paper in their window. I think it was called Block House. It indicated this is a safe house. If you need something or you're lost, it's a safe house to go to. You would put this little sign in the window of the front door of your home. I remember that. You had parents that weren't home. I got home and my parents weren't home. They were working. My dad worked swing shift at the Sands Hotel, and my mom at that time was a teller at a bank.

I remember we had one of those signs and we were one of the homes that if a kid needed something, come to the house. I know there's kids that knocked on the door. I know there were kids. Usually my sister would deal with something like that. Yes, I was home alone with the

kids, but we were out and about.

It was a white flight, so all the white families left, and then I saw more brown people like me and more black people. I don't know the exact demographics, but just visually it seems the majority are Latino. There's a lot more black families. I don't remember having any black families growing up, but now there are, so that's what my kids are exposed to. Increasing crime. I saw Rose Warren go downhill, physically, structurally. Garside was a happy place where we'd go swimming in the summers, and then you just hear the reputation of it being a horrible school and fights. It's sad to see. Also a disinvestment in the neighborhood, too. That's what I've seen, big changes, really big changes.

I'm kind of curious. How was your family able to get into that neighborhood during the time when it was a predominately white neighborhood?

I don't know enough except to know that we followed my aunt. I was very much aware that the majority of Latinos were in east North Las Vegas. It also seemed really far away.

I remember that I had a teacher who insisted that I take special education classes. My mother was insistent I didn't need special ed. The more she pushed, they had suggested that I go to school on the east side. My mom is like, "No way." I could literally cross the street and I was at school. I lived on the corner of Brandywine, literally across the street from Rose Warren. My mom insisted. It turned out that they ended up giving me speech classes. I guess maybe that was a compromise versus special ed. It's because I would say things like *shicken* and *shair* and *shocolate*. I needed to learn how to pronounce *chair* and *chocolate*. Sometimes I still do it to this day. I grew up in a home where Spanish was the dominant language at home and I learned English at school.

My mom was always at the table with us doing homework. I remember her recalling,

she's like, "I think that's how I learned English, helping you guys with your homework and watching TV." Then my dad let her go to a language class. I say "let" because back then it was a big deal that my father let my mother leave the home and go to this school, which I can't fathom that right now. Things have changed generationally as well. That's how my mom learned English.

My dad was born in Mexico, but he went to high school in the United States for a period of time. He comes from a family of educators, and my mom does, too. Although my mother didn't graduate in high school in Mexico, her parents were educated, and so I think that was really important for the insistence in us doing well in school in the United States; that was at the root. But we were just following what his sisters had done and I don't know all the reasons why.

Do you know what part of Mexico they came from?

My dad comes from Ensenada, so Baja, California. My mom was born in Calvillo, but her teen-age years she lived in Ensenada.

What was the reason for them coming?

It kind of traces back to my Tía Celia. Celia, I think that her mom married a man that somehow was related to the casinos here in Nevada, so this is my grandmother's sister came. There were a lot of them. It was about just opportunity. Las Vegas was like a little speck, but there was opportunity and just word of mouth, "Come," keeping the family together, too. Then my Aunt Lillia came in her teen-age years and then she found someone here and they got married. I think it was just about having a career, for economic improvement.

Did they ever tell you what that immigration journey was like?

I heard stories about my dad jumping in a car and driving all the way to Ensenada; they'd say every weekend. He didn't really want to live in the United States, but he could make money here.

He was constantly going back to Ensenada. They would say that he would fly [travel quickly]. That meant my dad was crossing the border in a car, back and forth.

On one of those trips, him going back to Ensenada, is when he met my mom. He saw her at his sister's house. Apparently when he saw my mom, he said, "That's the woman I'm going to marry." And then he chased her. Then he told her, "Come to Las Vegas and I'm going to take care of you and there's opportunity here. We're going to get a house." And all kinds of stuff.

My mom blindly came to Las Vegas without ever seeing anything. It turns out that they ended up living in an apartment with an aunt. My mom is like, "Where is this house you said?" Eventually they got a house. But my mom was like, "This isn't what you had promised." But quickly they built that.

CLAYTEE: What kind of work did he do at the Sands?

He first was a busboy and then he became a waiter in the Copa Room, the showroom. I have fond memories of my dad. He did the swing shift. It felt like as I was coming home, he was getting ready to leave for work, so I think he'd get into work around five or six. He would shine his shoes every single day. He looked impeccable and he smelled so good. I just remember thinking my father was so handsome.

He wouldn't necessarily tell us stories, the kids, but I would hear him talking whether to my aunts or my mom about meeting Elvis and the Rat Pack and then someone named Peter Lawford. I remember a story about Elvis. My dad, he's a waiter in the showroom. Elvis was sitting in a booth and he asked my dad to come sit with him. My dad just sat with him. Then my dad said that he was the most beautiful man he had ever met and then something about how he could tell that Elvis was lonely and that it was actually sad. We all kind of speculated that maybe Elvis just wanted someone with him. That story has always stayed with me.

I remember on New Year's—my dad worked all the holidays, of course, the weekends—after midnight he would come home with all the party favors that the guests had left on the floor or, sometimes, they would give to him. We would redo New Year's with all the party favors that he was able to get from the celebration in the Sands.

I also remember that he'd come home, and he'd take all the tips out of his pockets. He would just put them in a pile in front of my mom for my mom to count. He didn't even know how many tips he made; that was my mom's job. I distinctly remember handfuls of silver dollars when people would just tip with silver dollars. I loved seeing the silver dollars and stacking them up. They were heavy. They were pretty. Just that image of stuff coming out of his pocket. He had a certain drawer in his room, it was like a peanut can, and he would put change in there. Sometimes I'd go in there and just count his change and I'd see all the silver dollars.

I remember my dad smelled and he smelled like cigarettes and alcohol. I'll never forget that smell. Before he went to work, ah, probably one of the colognes—was probably Old Spice, which I probably wouldn't buy now. But I just remember thinking he always smelled clean, like a shower clean and cologne, clean-shaven. He was a very handsome man. Then the contrast coming home, he was stinky. I remember that.

Washing his uniforms, my mom did the majority of that, but then I got to a certain age where then I started doing the laundry, too. The black pants, the white shirt, the bow tie, I remember all of those things.

The Sands seemed to be like a really important place. I didn't quite know why, but after a while you understood it was the hot spot. They had the top entertainers and that's when my dad was there.

I remember my father did not like eating out. He didn't even allow us to buy canned food.

Everything had to be made fresh. I think that comes from Mexico where you go to the grocery store every day and you cook. Everything is very accessible. There's a little market on the corner. Part of that was just tradition, but we did not eat out at all. I think maybe one part was economics, but also my dad wanted good food at home. There were some exceptions; one was this Italian restaurant; I think it was called the Venetian on Sahara near Valley View. I'm pretty sure it's called the Venetian. Then the Hilltop Supper House way out maybe on Craig. That seemed like it was way out in the boonies. I actually thought, *where are we going?* It was dark. There were parts of it that were dark. We'd come up on this...To me it just seemed like a shack and it was dark. It was kind of like a steakhouse-type place with really good food. Those were my dad's exceptions of going out to eat.

What kind of food did you eat at home?

All Mexican food; that was the majority. My dad was a great cook and he would learn things from the kitchen at the Sands. He would cook things, like beef stroganoff. I remember that one distinctly. He actually was a better cook than my mom. My mom will say, "Your father was a better cook than me." But she did the majority of the cooking. We always had tortillas. We always had *chile* at the table.

We made fresh lemonade because in Mexico they're called *aguas*; it's like flavored water. Ours was always lemon-lime. Every day we'd make a fresh pitcher of lemonade. I remember that.

CLAYTEE: That's a black tradition as well, a southern black tradition.

I remember we'd go to east North Las Vegas to get tortillas or to go to a butcher over there. Sometimes I'm like, *how did my dad know these things?* He had a whole other life that we didn't know. Or he'd disappear and he'd go to the barbershops in the east North Side and he'd come

back with his shoes extra shined. He had another life. He knew where to go. He knew all the back roads; Oakey was one. He would never take the freeway. He'd just zigzag everywhere. Everywhere we went he knew somebody; he was that kind of guy. He was well liked, very funny, the center of attention, and handsome. I have those memories. I feel like I'm going off on tangents.

This is wonderful. I kind of wanted to know a little bit more about the neighborhood that you grew up in. What about your neighbors? How did your neighbors respond when your family moved there, if you remember any of that?

I remember we had moved into a house that was relatively new and we were the second owners. The neighbors across the street from us—Mr. Kelly, I remember his name—he was a really tall white man. He did things with his hands, so I don't know if he was a plumber. I think maybe he was a plumber because I remember overalls. I remember them kind of being in my head what I thought white people were like, like in books. They were good neighbors. They were the kind of neighbors that...I remember my mom would say, "Go ask the Kelly's for eggs," or literally like a cup of sugar. That really did happen; I'd go ask for a cup of sugar. "Here you go; here's a cup of sugar."

The house that we moved into, I remember the story. The reason why those people left is their little daughter got run over by a car and died. We assumed the house. I think maybe the death of that young girl impacted the neighbors, too, in this way of "let's look out for each other." So I remember having really good neighbors.

My brother, more so, had a best friend that lived three blocks down. We all played outside. I never felt unsafe or uncomfortable. I never felt racial stuff not until I reflect back and I remember someone saying something did I realize that was racism. But I definitely felt it more in

college. I went to Bonanza High School. It was relatively one of the newer schools. It was, quote-unquote, one of the better schools. I think Bonanza was built in '76, I think. I remember my friends, again still predominately white, talking about gardeners, "This Mexican gardener." I just remember saying, "Well, I'm Mexican." They're like, "Well, yes, you're Mexican, but you're not Mexican-Mexican." I'm like, "No, I'm Mexican." Just knowing there was a difference.

I remember in high school I had a white friend, and her grandfather came to visit. I wasn't allowed to come over because—and I heard them on the phone—he didn't want "any fucking Mexicans" in his house. I'm thinking, *whoa, this is supposed to be my best friend*. I remember thinking, *I don't want to go over there*. I know she was mortified. She never said anything. Clearly we both heard. This is back in the day you actually had a phone with buttons. You know when you're with your girlfriend and you're making a phone call and you're together and you're like, "Oh, what are your parents going to say?" So we were listening, both of us. That's when I kind of...the awareness. I'm sure my dad dealt with stuff that we didn't know about.

I remember my father was in the Culinary Union. Without realizing it, my identity around being a culinary kid was something that I didn't realize until I got older. My mom would say, "The Culinary." I just remember it was a constant word that came up; that we should be thankful that we have Culinary. "We're going to be okay because we have Culinary," and, "The Culinary is going to help," and, "My dad is going to a culinary meeting." Again, now as an adult I reflect that that was a big part of our life.

I remember when my father went on strike. It was a strike that seemed like it went for quite a long time. It was pretty serious. It got serious to the point where I remember one day my dad came home with a big block of cheese, maybe eight inches long, a huge block, and it said *USDA*. We were like, "Oh my God, we got a lot of cheese." It was so awesome to see so much

cheese at once. Except it was yellow cheese, so American cheese. For a while there, we were eating eggs and hot dogs, so *huevos con weenies*, and tortillas. We started eating white Wonder Bread, which isn't something that...And then I found out that we were getting food—and I don't know if this is accurate; it's just my memory—that I guess the Culinary Union supplied because the workers were on strike. That was a short period of time. I remember my uncles helping my dad with money. But I remember, but the Culinary saved us.

CLAYTEE: That was in the eighties?

I'm pretty sure it was in the eighties.

CLAYTEE: Yes, so the 1984 strike.

I was going to say 1984. I was just going to say that.

MARCELA: What were they on strike for?

I don't remember, but I'm sure it was for a higher minimum wage. My dad would picket and my dad was staunch union. He would not cross the picket line. If you crossed that picket line, he just wrote you off. It was the union or die. It was together and it was about working families and Culinary. My dad at one point in his life got good tips and then the Sands changed. But it was because of health insurance that we were able to have this working-class standard of living, which is good schools, calm neighborhood, access to healthcare, and belonging to a union. My dad did not aspire for more because that's all we needed, and we were thankful. I never felt like I went without. I had no perspective of being poor or poorer or lower class. I didn't realize that because I never needed anything. I had a loving family and we had Culinary. I got braces because of Culinary. That was a big part of our identity and my dad's identity, the whole family, was Culinary. I'm a culinary kid. It's hard for me to see the erosion of unions because I know how important a role they play maintaining a middle class, a working class.

CLAYTEE: Did you think about college at that time?

No. I don't think I even knew what it was. My sister, I always remember thinking she was smart because she was always reading books. I remember staring at her reading a book, I'm not kidding you, because we shared a room. I'd watch her read a book and think, *why does she read so much?* I remember I would tell my mom, "I'm bored." "Well, read a book." That was her response.

My sister was smart. I remember she was in speech and debate and I remember her practicing. Just always knowing my sister was smart. My sister went to Harvard for undergrad. She's a little bit older than me. My recollection is that when I was in my senior year—we went to the same school at Bonanza—I told her that I showed my counselor, Mr. Hannah, my test scores and that he said I should go to the community college. He also said that I didn't need to go to the college talks. I told my sister this, who is at Harvard, and it just seems like next thing you know she's at my school. It's just how I piece together the story. Next thing you know, she's like, "My sister needs a different counselor." Pretty much, "I'm not leaving here until you change counselors." Then they changed me to Mr. Coffin, I remember that. Who knows what my sister said, but she said something and insisted. Mr. Coffin became my counselor. I ended up going to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno] on a scholarship because I wanted to be an education major.

In that whole process is when I learned more about Chicanismo is and being really proud. That helped me in identifying as Chicana. It helped me feel more empowered. It helped me realize I had to assert myself; that I had a place; that I was smart. We had been here a long time whether it was because of my aunt that we followed or my dad followed, all the way from that to just even this understanding of "once upon a time this was Mexico." Just all of that was just right in that high school-college awareness. That really changed things for me. An awareness of

education is a game changer.

I don't know if my parents said this in exact words of, "You don't want to be a waiter," but I do know that they would talk about being a professional. I interpreted it as I don't want to be carrying fifty-, hundred-pound trays of food in the middle of the night, coming home smelling like smoke. I knew that that wasn't for me and my parents didn't want me to end up like that.

CLAYTEE: Were there a lot of Chicano students at UNR?

No. UNR, again, is where I experienced more in-my-face racism. I have this distinct memory: My boyfriend was African American and we're holding hands walking down Virginia, and just the racial slurs that came out of this car of these white boys, I felt scared. Again, just being at UNR, I knew majority white. I was aware of it, but that was the first time I felt not safe. They called him a nigger. They called me a *spick*. Really ugly stuff. I felt like, *that car can turn around and get us. ...*

MARCELA: Could you tell me a little bit more about what that transition was like from leaving home to going to Reno to go to school?

I think what helped me was I had a sister that went to college. I remember it was Thanksgiving. Again, I don't know if everything is accurate; I'm just telling you my recollection because I don't know if my sister would say, "That's not how it happened." I could just hear her saying it. We couldn't afford for her to fly back on Thanksgiving and there was this program at Harvard that, A, would help them get a winter coat, and then, B, place them with a family for Thanksgiving so they didn't feel totally alone. I think that she ended up going with one of her roommates or something like that. But I interpreted: That's sacrifice. You're going to go to school. You're going to make it and you're going to figure it out. That's what I learned from it. And then talking to my sister on the phone. "You're going to be sad. You're going to be away. But you've got to grow

up." I don't know if that was just my way of dealing with a sister that left, but it was kind of like, *don't complain and this is what we have to do*. Just kind of like, *that's it*. Those were the lessons.

I went up to UNR blindly. I hadn't been up there. My parents were able to rent a van and we drove up there. Then we ended up going to San Francisco. It felt like an extravagant vacation. I think my parents probably saved up a lot of money. We did touristy things in San Francisco and then we crossed over and did stuff in Tahoe. They made it feel really special. I do remember that. It was back in the day where when you registered for classes, you'd have to walk up to one table and say, "I want English 101." You'd walk up to another table and say, "I want chemistry."

CLAYTEE: And they gave you a little card.

They gave you a card and it's like madness. You're just like, *I don't know what I'm doing*. I had to act like I know what I'm doing.

CLAYTEE: Which year did you go to UNR?

1990. I remember being able to come home more frequently because you would just hitch a ride with someone. "Anyone going to Las Vegas?" You would just hitch a ride with them. That was a bonus to being in state.

My parents were...I never felt pressure from them, but I did feel constant support. "*Mija*, you've got to do what you've got to do. Don't worry about us." I do remember my parents always saying, "Don't worry about us; don't worry about us." I always knew they were hiding things. I don't know if it was they were struggling or whatever it was, but it was like, *you do you*. I remember that being different from others around me where they were like, "You can't leave home," or, "We can't afford it," or, "Why do you want to go to college?" They were just always like, "This is for you and your future." I always felt supported by my parents for sure.

There at UNR I met a woman named Emma Sepulveda, which if you're going to

interview Latinos up north, she'd be amazing.

CLAYTEE: Unfortunately, not. Does she come to Las Vegas for any reasons?

I don't know lately, but I can find out. She was Chilean. I learned about the reasons why she came here; it was to escape an oppressive regime.

Then she introduced me to one of her colleagues. He was Chilean, too. He really helped me discover my Chicano identity through education. Mind you, he was not Mexican. He did not identify as Chicano. But he was a professor in Chile, and he was so well read. He knew everything about the Chicano Movement. I did an independent study with him. I remember learning about the zoot suiters and then the L.A. high school walkouts. That's when I started reading it. I had known about Cesar Chavez because of my sister, but then I read about Cesar Chavez, and so it was different. That's because of independent study. There was no Chicano class. People didn't call themselves Chicano. In fact, I think everyone probably looked at me weird because I called myself Chicano.

MARCELA: What did it mean for you to identify as a Chicana?

It felt like it was a political statement, for sure; like, I'm going to break your stereotypes and let me school you; let me tell you a thing or two you don't know because you're only given one version of history. We've been here a long time. I have family that's been in Vegas since the twenties. Then back to, let alone, this was Aztlan and this was Aztec and this was Mexico. Hello, why do you think it's called Las Vegas and Nevada? Those are Spanish words, people, hello. All of that. It was about political empowerment, the power that education gave you, and just feeling like, *I know a thing or two; let me tell you; you can learn from me.* That was empowering.

CLAYTEE: The Chicano Movement was really popular back in the mid-sixties, early seventies. Why didn't it reach UNR?

That's a good question. I would think because just geographically, the location. They're north. They're northern California. They're north. The Chicano Movement was strong in pockets. Southern California and then parts of Texas were the strongest holds. I would say another pocket was San Jose, California, because of the farm workers. But I don't know enough to understand why. Can you imagine how small Reno was during the Chicano Movement? I think for those reasons. Geographically you have the mountains up there that create a barrier, a physical barrier.

MARCELA: Do you remember the first college class that you ever walked into? What was that like?

I remember taking an education class because I had gone there wanting to be an education major and meeting what became one of my best friends in college and sitting next to her, again, very much aware I was the only non-white person, which that wasn't anything new. But I wanted to make friends. Finding just how important it was to connect with people one on one, and if I could do that at UNR, I would be fine. I remember thinking of a strategy of, you don't need to know everybody; just know one or two people and it will come. Her name was Laura James.

Despite all that I had a really good experience. I got involved. I was an RA [Residence Assistant]. I always felt like I was hustling. I never asked my parents for money. I don't think I ever asked for them money. In fact, I think what motivated me was also thinking, *I need to help my parents; I need to help them*. I figured out the whole financial aid thing, which was really difficult to navigate, but my sister helped me. I remember my sister telling me, "If you take out a loan, you've got to pay it back. This is an investment in yourself." I translated that into, if I don't get an A, then this loan ain't worth it. That's how I think academically why I also excelled because I was like, this is borrowed money; I'm buying this; that awareness. I was an RA, so a Resident Assistant. I worked at Waller Ticket Center. I worked at Sears in the mall. I always feel

like I was hustling. I'd come home for Christmas and I'd work at JCPenney. It's because that was what my parents did, always working. I was a full-time student. I graduated in four years with two bachelors, not a major and a minor, two bachelors. I know it's the work ethic of my parents.

CLAYTEE: Did your mom ever work outside the home?

Yes, she was a bank teller. I would say when I was maybe in fifth grade, I think that she did get paid to be something at the school, but I'm sure it was minimal because she started off as a volunteer. But by sixth grade my mom was working full-time. She was a bank teller and ended up being a customer service operator with Nevada Energy. I remember that.

After I graduated from UNR I came back home, and I was a Kelly girl; those are the temps. You sign up at a temp agency and they place you somewhere. I remember everywhere I was placed, people would tell me how smart I was. They would try to offer me a job. One of them was at those loan places that really rip you off, Payday Loan places. It was during the OJ Simpson trials. I remember being really conscious of I'm temping here. I figured everything out quickly that they were charging people exorbitant interest rates that were taking advantage of people that were desperate. I was good at it, but I knew that it was wrong. I'm like, *how am I going to get out of this?* And feeling the pressure of, *well, I've got a degree, but I don't have a job yet.*

I came back to UNR for homecoming and I met a woman on a plane. Her name was Gerdy Washington. She was from Chicago. She had moved to Las Vegas to work for Cooperative Extension and be a community organizer. We just sat on the plane and she's like, "I want you to apply to this job." It was to open a community center. It's now called the Cambridge Center on Maryland. It first started off as the Lowden Center two blocks behind its current location. I opened up a community center with Cooperative Extension. I remember learning from

Gerdy Washington. You kind of look like Gerdy Washington.

CLAYTEE: A beautiful woman, huh?

The gray hair, short, gorgeous, always dressed to the tee, thin, short, powerhouse, like, *boom*. She was tiny, but explosive and powerful and smart and right. She was always right. She'd call you out, but she also did it with love. I learned from her what it meant to be an organizer because she grew up in Chicago. I learned a lot from her and she invested a lot in me, obviously.

Then there was this man Andre Thorn who was a recruiter for UNR, but stationed in Las Vegas. I ran into him in the mall. We just started talking. I told him about what I was doing at the Lowden Center, which is now Cambridge Center. He was like, "Well, I'm getting ready to go..." I think it was grad school. He was like, "I want you to do my job." I applied and I got his job, and so I worked for University of Nevada, Reno, Admissions Office, but in Las Vegas.

I'm really lucky, very lucky. Someone pushed me on that. They said, "Stop saying you're lucky." I'm like, "But I feel lucky." I think that's the humble immigrant, first generation. Thank you for everything. So appreciative and humble. But also you have to be careful it doesn't cross the line to be like, well, people can walk all over you and take advantage of you. I think that's what Andre was telling me. He's like, "Luck is when preparation and opportunity collide." He made me realize that you've prepared yourself; you're doing everything that you have to do and you're exposing yourself to opportunity, and when those two collide that's your luck, but you wouldn't be lucky if you didn't prepare yourself. I really like that. I still hold on to that.

I became a recruiter for UNR. One of the first offices was on Campbell and Charleston. Now they have a really big building in Henderson; I think it's on Warm Springs. It's a big beautiful building. I think there's now five recruiters. They have all this stuff and I'm like, *I was one little office*. I feel like I kind of helped build that office. Once Andre passed the torch to me, I

felt like I needed to do a good job because Andre believed in me. I remember him telling me that I needed to outreach to the Latino community and him talking about the importance of and the similarities of the black and the Latino community. Then it helped me realize I've always been somehow attached through friendship or peers to the African-American community, but I never verbalized that I saw, yes, we're in the same boat. Andre helped me to see that and the importance of reaching out to black and brown communities and encouraging them to go to college. Then it really hit me, oh, this position at UNR was to diversify University of Nevada, Reno, because they weren't going to get diversity just recruiting up north. They had to come down south and recruit and I was a part of that. I was proud to be a part of that.

Andre started this program called Nevada Bound. We would take kids on a plane, and we would pay for it, to visit UNR. I would purposefully go to the high schools that nobody wanted to go to because they were the black and brown high schools. Eldorado comes to mind. I wanted those kids to be a part of this trip that was free. I was looking for the kids, and thinking about my experience; they weren't the ones that were going to show up to the college talk; they were the ones that somehow someone along the lines told them, "College isn't for you." But those are the kids I wanted, and I did a really good job.

Oh, another very formative experience was when I came back to Nevada, I got involved with Hispanics In Politics. I don't know if you guys know Fernando Romero. The reason I got involved is because I did a speech in Southern Nevada about my experiences going to school at UNR. I think, again, this was probably part of the bigger campaign of diversifying UNR. I remember Fernando Romero came up to me and he gave me his card. Basically, he was kind of like, "Get involved; when you move back to Las Vegas, get involved." I got involved with Hispanics In Politics.

From that I met this guy named Jose Melendrez and Magdalena Martinez. I volunteered for the Latino Youth Leadership Conference and that was in 1994. I believe it was probably the second year of the program. Tom Rodriguez and Maria Chairez created the Latino Youth Leadership Conference. They modeled it after a conference in California.

Magda, Jose and I instantly became friends. Part of what bonded us so quickly was the intensity of this program where I remember we were calling parents trying to convince them to let their kids stay with us—and I believe the conference was three days back then—and talking to them in Spanish. "We're going to take care of them. This is who I am. This is going to be good for her or him." Desperately trying to get kids to sign up for the Latino Youth Leadership Conference. Then organizing this thing: How do we run this? We had a model, but we had to actually do the work. How do we separate the students? How do we create a bond that is going to make an impact on them? We insisted on there being a session—this is obviously from Maria and Tom—that there be a session on your history. Because I wasn't getting this in high school. I wasn't getting it in college. I guarantee these kids weren't getting it either. For the first time they're hearing what the Chicano Movement is. Then again, a sense of pride. *Oh, we can accomplish things. We're professionals, too. Oh, we go to college, too. Oh, we were here before everybody else.* Just all of that.

The addiction was I am seeing in front of my eyes these kids go through what I did, but I'm trying to get to them much younger. The Latino Youth Leadership Conference has been a major influence in my life because it just reinforced the importance of higher ed, which became my career, and just giving. That's where I met...Magdalena Martinez and Jose are my best friends to this day, and it was in service to the community that our friendship is held so tightly.

Now I look back. Olivia Diaz was in the Latino Youth Leadership Conference; Nelson

Araujo; Ruben Kihuen; Jocelyn Cortez; Erica Bodegas; Jennifer Lopez. All the movers and shakers were from the Latino Youth Leadership Conference, and you just realize what a powerful community tool.

Everything is volunteer. Every year we feel like, oh my God, are we going to pull it off? Oh my God, are we going to have enough money? Every year.

CLAYTEE: How many years now?

Twenty-five, I think.

At least, yes.

Twenty-five. Here is a program, last year. Yes, twenty-five years, every year. Now it's a week long. Now our target is a hundred kids. This is the year I started, 1994, and these are all booklets.

Can you describe what the conference does over that week, please? Just generally.

In general, it's focused on leadership skills. But to get to that leadership, it's about having cultural pride and empowering them with the message of, "You can do this." We like to encourage kids to go to college and/or be a professional. If you're going to be a plumber, get your credentials and be the best plumber you can be. Be a professional. Get educated whether it's community college, four-year, whatever it is. But the "being a professional" is very important and the method is the education. We don't want to shun those that said, "Oh, community college is for me," but we do want them to aspire. Well, you might do community college and then think about transferring. A lot of our Latinos are pushed into community colleges, but, unfortunately, we drop out of community college. A student has a better chance of graduating if they start at a four-year institution; that's just what research shows. It's just about creating community and just drilling in that leadership is about giving back to your community. And it doesn't matter if you're a plumber or you're a lawyer, you give back to the Latino community to help others. Kind of like

that message, too: If you help the Latino community, you're helping the city as a whole because the educational advancement of Latinos as a demographic, it helps the entire state, and so you have to be a part of that to help others, is really important.

Then along the way it's just identity and the intersection of identity; it's evolved because then you have kids that are like, "Well, I'm not Mexican; I'm from Guatemala." The majority of immigrants in Nevada are Mexicans. That's okay. This is about Latino identity. "Well, I'm mixed; I'm half-black." That's okay. It's about awareness, embracing your biracial identity. "Well, I'm gay and I don't fit in." That's okay. There's a root in being Latino; we're not all the same, and I think that's really important. In fact, just Latinos unto themselves, we're a mix; we're a mix of everything: Black, white, native. By definition, by a philosopher named Carlos Fuentes, he says we're *la raza cosmica*. We're the cosmic race. We're just made up of everything. You just get exposed that we have multiple identities. Being a woman and Latina or Chicana or however you want to identify—explore it, own it, define it for yourself. But giving back to your community is important and being educated is important, and in all the different ways you identify yourself, we need that in our community.

They get exposed to community leaders, to history. One that I really liked was about etiquette. When you get a job interview, what fork do I use? You're in a job interview. How do I dress? Even preparing them. They may not have been exposed to all the forms of social capital just because of maybe where they're at socioeconomically. But one is to arm them with all the social capital they need through all our networks. If you've never had a parent that went to college, I will introduce you to someone who went to college. If there is any gap through this beautiful network, we will connect you; that's one thing.

Also for them to realize that they themselves have the community cultural capital. This is

a term from Tara Yosso, Y-O-S-S-O. You know her, right? Of just you being bilingual; that's talent; that's a skill; you know another language that someone doesn't. Navigational capital, like I remember interpreting for my parents or telling my parents what financial aid was; that's a skill; I am helping someone else navigate a system, a social system. Since you know Tara Yosso, all the different forms of capital that may not be validated in a white society, a male-dominant society; that doesn't mean you're less; you just have something different. I feel like that's what this conference is about, having pride in that, tapping into that.

MARCELA: How are students selected for it?

I'm a bit more removed now from the process, but just the fact that there is this process that's online and you apply just shows you from 1994, when we're on the phone begging people to come, how it's grown. But it is an intricate system where there are peer facilitators, so students that went through the program the year before, they train for a whole year. They meet and they train each other on how to be a peer facilitator, what does it mean to be a peer facilitator. They volunteer to go to the high schools, usually it's their home school, to recruit, and so they do presentations. Now that it has been on many years, we do rely on networks of counselors that are already familiar with our program, or principals; that's really important. We ignite the network. But it's still people physically going into a high school and saying, "Sign up for this," searching for those kids, not the four-point-ohs. Maybe you're a two-point-nine or a three-point-two kid, you can come to this conference, too. There's an interview now. Now we have more applicants. It's evolved.

Everyone has done this volunteer. Irene Cepeda, she's been the most recent organizer, and I want to say she's done it a good three, five years. I think her greatest contribution is really building up this network of facilitators. They train. They go camping together. They do

community service together. Again, volunteer, volunteer. It's beautiful. They look for diversity, again, not just your four-point-oh student. We like to look for diversity in terms of the different high schools, diversity in racial and ethnic identity of students; that's important.

I will say we struggle to get males to sign up. There's always double the female applicants, but that unfortunately is a trend nationwide. Here at Nevada State, we're 76 percent female. I don't know if people know that. Seventy-six percent female.

CLAYTEE: I had no idea.

It's amazing, amazing, amazing that this youth conference...My volunteer work, I'm always giving of this. Every year it feels like we're not going to make it; we don't have money; we're begging people. All volunteer. Sponsorships that we're trying to get. The people that do the workshops, it's always like, "Will you do me a favor? Will you come here?"

This might be a good one for you to have that shows a little bit about Tom and past conference organizers or directors. But this is my copy. I can probably get you an online version.

MARCELA: I think I saw Rosemary Flores in here.

Yes, Rosemary is in there. She led it for a while. But that's really influenced me for sure.

I left to go get my master's and then I came back and then I left.

CLAYTEE: Where did you go to get your master's?

I went to Harvard to get my master's and came back.

I thought you had that there because of your sister, but, no. Did your sister talk you into going to Harvard?

She did not. Magdalena Martinez talked me into it. She went to observe the Latino Youth Leadership Conference in California and she met the powerhouse of Latinos over there and they were talking about this program at Harvard to get your master's degree. She was in the mix,

absorbing all that she can. I remember clear as day her coming back and she said, "We're going to Harvard." I was like, "What?" That positive peer pressure and the influence. It was hard. We had to write our statements of purposes and think about what we were giving up because we were professionals. She worked for the City of Las Vegas. I worked for University of Nevada, Reno. We're like, "We're going to give this all up?" And we were like, "Yes, because we're going to Harvard." I remember that. We both got in, which was great.

What did your sister say about that?

My sister became one of the people that I showed my statement of purpose, my draft. She's so tough. I just remember her always being in my corner. That's when she ignited her network and she tried to find me alumni from the School of Ed. She just kicks into "I'm big sister; I'm going to help her." I don't think it was a question for her that I would get in or not. I doubted myself from the minute Magda said, "We're going to Harvard," to all the different drafts that my sister would give me that were all in red, thinking, *how am I going to get to Harvard? I can't even write*. Yes, she was always pushing me. I never felt pressure from my sister. I always felt inspired by her. But once I said I'm going to do something, then the pressure was, "Finish it and finish it well." That's when I would feel the pressure of my sister, but not to be like her. Or if I didn't achieve the same way she did, I wasn't going to be liked any less or looked down upon. I never felt that from my sister. But I always felt inspired by her, for sure.

MARCELA: What does she do?

She is a U.S. Attorney for the Department of Justice in California.

That's incredible.

I know. She's a tough lady. You don't want to see her in court. My brother is a physical therapist and he lives in Seattle and he got his degrees from UNLV and Tacoma, Washington. Very

blessed. Loving brother and sister, professionals themselves.

Are you the youngest?

I'm the youngest, yes. When I came back and I was working for Gerdy, I remember she said—I had started a master's at UNLV and then I left. Gerdy is the one that told me to get my master's. I remember that. Then I left to do the master's at UNLV (sic) and came back. And Gerdy is like, "Aren't you going to finish that master's at UNLV?" I was like, "But I have one from Harvard." She's like, "And...?" *You started something*; that kind of thing. So I finished my master's at UNLV.

CLAYTEE: You have two bachelors and two masters.

Yes. I'm a nerd. I'm a nerd. I love it. I remember—and I will not use names—but I worked for the College of Southern Nevada and I was at this conference table. It was all men and they were discussing something that I felt was wrong and borderline unethical. I just knew it wasn't the time for me to say anything; it wasn't going to have an impact. But I knew I needed to get out; I didn't want to be a part of it. I realized that the only way I could do that is if I was at the head of that table, and so that would be the way that I would speak out. It would have done me no good to have done it then.

Then a professor at Harvard had told me that I had what it took to get a doctorate. Again, I didn't believe her. But when I was in that conference room, it's just like the world collided. Her name is Stacy Blake, an African-American woman. Now I'm just seeing this theme of educators, mentors from the black community, wow. That collided with being at this table with these men. They were older than me. Not all of them had doctorates. Something was like, *I need to get my doctorate. I want to be at the head of this table.* The doctorate was the solution because I'm in the field of higher ed. You have to have a doctorate, right?

Then Magdalena and I started applying for graduate schools. We had a lot of similar schools that we were applying for. We both applied to graduate school. I got into the University of Michigan. She got into Michigan State. But we were really close. Again, I was director of admissions at CSN. I made money. It was like you would say, "Okay, she's set." I left all that and I went to grad school for six years.

What year was that?

2000 to 2006. I along the way got married, had a kid, got pregnant with my second child, and eventually I found my way back to Nevada. And it's Magda's fault. No, I'm kidding. My then husband, who is now my ex-husband, he wanted to come back to Nevada. He had followed me around to Harvard, to Michigan, and I kind of felt like, *okay, I'll follow you now; it's your turn*. Then we got divorced six months later. But he was like, "I've got a job." He is a faculty member at CSN. I remember calling up Magda and saying, "I'm coming back home. I need a job." Then I worked for her.

CLAYTEE: At?

At the Nevada System of Higher Education. She hired me to oversee a Go To College grant. Again, this theme of college, education; all of that. It was called Go To College Nevada and it was a grant. She had just gotten the grant and she needed someone to run it and who better qualified? I remember there was resistance because there was that, *well, she's just your friend*. You're like, okay, we acknowledge that, but she's a Harvard educated doctorate from the University of Michigan with all these years of experience; she's qualified. In fact, she's more than qualified.

I felt like it was maybe a step down, but I knew it was a job and I'm a hustler. I can never not work. I was trying to support my husband. I took that job at NSHE and loved it, enjoyed it,

just hit it out of the park.

Then I went back to CSN and then to Nevada State. I worked for Congressman Steven Horsford. I was his district director.

MARCELA: What does that mean, district director?

You run the Nevada office, the Las Vegas office. Kind of like you are the congressman when the congressman is not home to make sure that you're meeting with the right people, you've got his schedule. You're aware of all the legislative issues; that you have a pulse on all your constituents. If the veterans have an issue or your farmers have an issue or your inner city people have an issue, whatever it is, I had to constantly have a pulse on what's happening, who do we talk to, to inform the congressman and to help him make decisions. You have your office in D.C. that does the policy that thinks about, yes, Nevada, but the nation as a whole. Your district director in the office here kind of helps ground everyone. Okay, is this policy, is this law going to really work in Nevada? How is Nevada different? I always saw it as it helped ground everything that we did.

I never worked so hard in my life. I don't know if you know Steven Horsford. Can you imagine working for Steven Horsford?

CLAYTEE: No.

He is an amazing person. I think about, why did I say yes to him? Because he really cares. He's real. He's so smart, so smart. It just blows me away. I just saw a real authentic person who cares and is from the community. I asked him, "Why me? I'm in education. I know nothing about politics." I didn't even know what a district director was. And he said—and so I guess flattery, too—he said, "There's just something about you; there's just something about you." He never gave it a name. Then he's like, "I need you to help me build relationships." Then he's like, "And you know you're smart. You'll figure it out." That was his attitude: You're smart; you're going to

figure it out; I need your ability to build relationships. I have never worked so hard in my life. He is right; it was my ability to connect with the veterans; it was my ability to connect to all the different constituent groups so that he would be able to have just a well-rounded understanding of his entire district, which is the size of Alabama, mind you.

Steven and I had gone to school at UNR. We weren't close, but, again, he is black and I dated a black man. It's a small world. There's a handful of us. I remember really liking him. He was smart. We were RAs together. He was a student leader. I just always remember liking him and respecting him, but we weren't close friends. He saw me at some event. I can't remember all the details. But opportunity and preparation because I happened to have been somewhere where he was at. I had come back from living in Texas. I guess I said something. I don't know. I made some public comment. And he was like, *zing; that's Fernandez; I know who she is; and look at her causing trouble again and look at her vocal...* I don't know exactly what Steven thought. Obviously, when he won, he's like, "I need a district director," and somehow I made the list of people that he was wanting to interview.

CLAYTEE: Were you there for the entire two years?

No, I left him before. I remember crying when I told him I was leaving him, and he was so gracious. First of all, he's like, "I already knew." Because he knows everything and I knew he already knew. But I needed to tell him myself. He was like, "Higher ed is where you need to be." Isn't he a lovely person?

In fact, he was just here in the summer. He was a keynote speaker. I run a program called the Men of Color Collegiate Retreat. It's for black and Latino and any man that identifies as an ally. He was one of our guest speakers. He reiterated; he is like, "This is where you need to be." I'm good with Steven.

I hope he wins (election to US Congress) this time, too.

Oh, I just...We need him. We need him. We need that kind of leadership in Steven.

Yes, we do. Then when you left him, you came here?

Yes, I came to Nevada State College. I love being here because where else in the United States can you build a college? You guys came out here. Is this your first time out here?

Oh, no.

We have five hundred and nine acres. This is just the beginning. You're going to say, "I remember I went to Nevada State..."

I remember when it was just that building over there; that thing.

MARCELA: That was a vitamin factory, right?

Yes, yes. So I get to build a college? I'm part of the Nevada State College executive team and lead other offices to imagine, what kind of school do we need here? How can we be different? Instead of always expecting students to fit into our mold, we need to fit into what they need and react to that and create a state college that reflects the new student, the current student, not the one from...UNR is 1800s; UNLV is 1950s maybe.

CLAYTEE: 1957, yes.

Fifty-seven. Not how they were built. That's a different era, a different kind of student. Where else in the country could I do that but here?

What are the needs of the student today?

I would say everything from how we structure the course schedule. These models of Monday/Tuesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday; this set amount of time. Faculty choosing when they want to teach. We have to flip the script on that. Our students and the ones here and their working lifestyle demands a different offering. You have to borrow from the corporate world

when you can and when it's appropriate and adjust to your clients. We have to be much more nimble.

I think another thing is us understanding that we're not just educating a student to get a degree but addressing them holistically as they are leaders; they are heads of family. Just like your K through twelve schools, they come in with an array of different social needs. We need to figure out which of those social needs we're going to meet; should we meet; and if not, how to then make sure that they're connected with the right resources in the community. We have a responsibility to be a part of that network of taking care of students, like mental health. There's lots of transportation issues. There are a lot of needs here that we need to adjust and figure out, what do you feel we're obligated, responsible, and should address? And then in other ways, how do we make sure we're connected with the community, so our students are taken care of by the entire community? So that's one way.

What's different, too, is we need to think about those majors—you know how they always say there's going to be careers for the future that we don't even know what they are? So, what do we arm our students with? One major we're thinking about is data informatics. How does having a major in data informatics maybe carve a pathway into healthcare, into gaming, into banking? Any career now has a data office. They're collecting data on clients. How do you read that data? Data driven decision making. Should we have a major here that helps students, no matter what field it is, know how to consume, interpret, report numbers? Because that's what we're all about. You think about Facebook and all the analytics. We always want to know who the customer is and what are they doing. That's all about numbers and data and stats. Should we have a degree like that? Our provost has said, "Yes, we're moving in that direction." Just being nimble and responsive to those kinds of academic, thinking about, again, having a student who

we're preparing them for a career that may not be here. So, what do we arm them with? Hard sciences? Soft sciences? Is it a mix? Does it look like a liberal arts degree or not? Do we change what a liberal arts degree is? All that kind of stuff.

I'll take you to our library downstairs and you'll see that one thing that's missing from our library are books. We're all online.

MARCELA: Everything?

Yes, everything is online. Our library has librarians that are equipped to help students navigate the web and how to find all this information online. They can give you the stats, but I believe our students have more access to more online articles, books, all of that than UNLV, and they're at a university; that kind of thing.

CLAYTEE: I think it's a community. I think everybody has some of the same resources.

We have some of the same even with some of the schools in California.

Yes. How do you tap into that network? Even our faculty...How do you teach a class that the students are demanding just because they're this new generation that's used to watching videos or having interactive elements or doing things themselves, like video recording, PowerPoints, graphics, animation? Because they don't teach you this in grad school, right? How do you become a teacher that—there is one term that's called Gamify Your Curriculum. How do you incorporate technology to teach online or in person? Our librarians are heading all of that. That's really cool, so they're cool people.

Our spaces...We have study rooms that have your smart board, so your screen, all the cable hookups, because we can build something that fits the current technology needs. It's interesting to see that when the library is at its busiest, everyone is sitting down in front of their own computer in the library. It's kind of trippy. And there's no books. They have a few books,

but...

CLAYTEE: Right. I noticed in UNLV's library when I started in 2003, where I used to walk in through the back door, there were stacks and now you don't get to any stacks until the third floor.

The third floor?

Yes, that's where the books start. Computers take over everything else. What about service learning? You have classes geared to service learning already?

If memory serves me correctly that was part of initially when Nevada State started their curriculum was trying to incorporate service learning. Then we entered this era where they were going to close down the campus, and that is something that kind of went by the wayside a bit. I think that you'll find a lot of faculty who just incorporate that into their curriculum without it being mandated. I think we're attracting faculty that are very social justice oriented and with that comes experience with and appreciation of something like service learning whether it's criminal justice, biology, education, yes.

MARCELA: I know that Nevada State really prides itself on being a Hispanic-serving institution. When we walked in we saw a butterfly. Could you tell us about the culture here, a little bit about that?

Did it say Dreamers, NSC Dreamers?

Yes, it was on the first floor.

Yes, I'm really proud about the work that we've been able to do with undocumented students, or "DACA-mented" students in particular, which nationally their symbol is the Monarch butterfly because it's associated with the Dreamers Movement. Being an HSI and then also being a place that's very welcoming and open to undocumented students, and given the majority of

undocumented students are Latino, not all, but the majority, it kind of comes hand in hand. I always like to remind folks that in the undocumented community you have folks from different African nations, from different parts of Asian, even Eastern Europe that, man, they tend to be in the closet even more. It's really interesting to be in that world and learn more and more. But because of the numbers, it being heavy Latino oriented, this kind of embracing the DACA Movement, the Dreamer Movement has been one of our strong suits. My office leads those initiatives and I have to thank Astrid Silva who is an alum from our institution that helped me raise my awareness of like, Edith, you're in a position of power to do something. I was always fearful of, well, I don't know all the ins and outs; I don't want to misinform someone. This is a very delicate issue. Then I realized again that you don't have to know everything. There are experts out there; you can call upon them. We have to educate ourselves. It's got to start somewhere.

Man, we started putting trainings together. We called in folks from Arizona. I know Anita Tijerina from UNLV has been very complimentary of the leadership of Nevada State College, myself, my team. In a small system you see a sister institution do something and it's a great opportunity for then another sister institution to say, "Well, if Nevada State is doing it, we should do it." It's building on that momentum to help them identify each campus, folks like Anita, myself, to then collectively bring attention to: This is an unserved population; the fact that we don't know how to answer their questions is not the students' fault; it's our responsibility.

One of my missions was...You would hear these stories about front line staff intentionally or unintentionally giving misinformation or not even understanding themselves what was the correct information. If we didn't train them, how do we expect them to know? From front line staff to directors of offices, we started off with some of the basics of: If you're a student that

graduates from a Nevada high school, you can go to a state school; you can go to an entry school, no questions asked; you don't have to prove citizenship. You pay in-state tuition. Just some of those basics.

It has mushroomed into, okay, well, how do we support these students so they themselves feel empowered? Then we went through some rough times with Trump ending DACA. Man, a lot of folks were on this roller coaster of, *what's current? What's the right information? Can I even leave my home? Should I drop out of school?* All of that stuff that we had to be on top of. I would say the UNLV Immigration Clinic connecting with folks like that, just this community came together. We realized in the Las Vegas community itself there were people already doing this work, we just weren't connected with each other. So tapping into everyone's strengths, it's just been amazing.

Recently we honored the UNLV Immigration Clinic at an NSHE board meeting because, man, talk about being at the front lines of this and so giving, their staff, and committed to helping people in crisis. We're proud to be a part of that network. We all are good at something.

I connected with this foundation called TheDreamUS.org and it's through Astrid's [Astrid Silva] own advocacy at a national level that they—the gentleman's name is Don Graham and his family owned The Washington Post at one point in time and I think he was the CEO. He has this foundation that reached out to Astrid and said, "You're a national figure. Who are you? Where do you come from? This is amazing." In Astrid telling her story, she talks about Nevada State College and how important it was for her, and she finally was able to graduate from college because of the support here, and all of that. Astrid soon found out that there was this program that gave scholarships to undocumented students. She made the connection with the foundation. We had the courting, right? "We're interested. Can we be one of the schools where you give

scholarships?" We had to prove what services we had in place to help undocumented students because they don't want to just give money. They even interviewed President [Bart] Patterson. "Is your president committed to serving undocumented students?" I always joke with him that he was interviewed and he had to pass the test. The first year we had thirteen full-ride scholarships and this year we have twenty-nine.

That's incredible.

We're the only institution in the state of Nevada that has this relationship with this foundation. Part of their requirements are things along the lines of affordability and, again, proving that you have a network, a system of support for students. Our Dreamers Club happens to be the largest club on campus. One of my team members, Amey Evaluna, she is the adviser and she is like the anchor in this community that she meets these students one on one, she creates community for them, and if they have an issue, she ignites who are the key people in different offices. That was part of it is that you can't always expect everyone in one office to know everything, but if you have one go-to; that was key, having a go-to person in admissions and recruitment. Then they become the Amey Evaluna and they become educated and they can tell their front line staff. We know things are always in transition. But if there is an anchor in each of these offices that then we know how to interact with that was what's important.

I remember Astrid Silva saying that she attempted to go to one of the universities here and was told, "You can't because you're undocumented," and her feeling like her life was over. It was just misinformation.

CLAYTEE: Someone told her that at UNLV?

Yes. She lost her Millennium Scholarship because of it. Who knows who it was? Again, just misinformation. When I would hear stories like that instead of directing your anger to, *ooh, what*

was that person who told them that? You have to take responsibility of, did I train my staff so they had the right answer? I think that's what made the difference.

Also, to have the president's support. It doesn't matter what your politics are. You set your politics aside and you serve the student. If we're saying these students can be here because they're Nevada high school graduates, then you give them the information, just like you would with an LGBT student. I don't care what your personal opinions are or beliefs. You're in a role of serving students. Do your job. But as administrators we have to do our job. Are we training our staff? And we weren't, we weren't training our staff.

CLAYTEE: The last question that I have, sincerely the last question—we want to copy something else that you've done here. You have an HIS [Hispanic-Serving Institutions] grant, a huge one.

I know.

Yes, the only one I believe in the system.

Yes, in the whole state.

Right. Tell me what we do to do this at UNLV because Jose is onboard.

Good. I'll share with you my strategy. I created an HSI task force. I needed to better understand: What is an HSI? What does it mean? How did other schools get a grant? I started becoming involved in associations, so one of them is the Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institute Educators, which currently I'm on their board. That's an evolution, right? I didn't even know who they were a few years ago. Also, tapping into a network called the Association of Hispanics in Higher Ed, which is an offshoot of a more popular association called HACU, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; that's the more well-known one.

Understanding that part of an HSI task force had a messaging marketing component,

what is an HSI? Dispel myths. And let folks know what are the benefits. The benefit, the biggest one, the one everyone talks about is, you can compete for grants, but the operative word is *compete*.

Because I involve myself in these networks, it became pretty clear that I had to make sure our faculty were equipped with the tools they needed to apply for a grant. You're competing nationwide. How do we expect our faculty to just know how to write these grants, these multi-million-dollar grants?

With an awesome task force, we would call up schools that had the grant and ask them, "How did you do it? How did you train faculty to apply for a grant? What resources do you have?" Just that over the course of years. Then the enrollment push that we had with recruitment. The reality is we're just reflecting the population, right? All that preparation. We're preparing a group of folks that, A, know what kind of grant they would want; and then, B, know how to write it. When it came for call for proposals, we utilized the network and we paid for someone who was experienced in getting these grants to consult. Your president has to support it with money; our president did that. Combined with we had an amazing faculty member who stood up to the plate and who wrote this grant with this consultant and just gave a hundred and ten of herself to this grant. But we also supplemented it with a professional person with a track record. If you're going to play the big leagues...Kind of that combination. Then also it fit into our mission, so we focused on education and preparing teachers; all of that. Also, timing; again because we're preparing people to take advantage.

We have a 2.7-million-dollar Department of Ed grant that is led by Dr. Laura Amon and it's focused on teacher preparation.

I think part of it is you need the campus community support. Have real conversations

about, who is the sponsor of this? I was one person that was like, okay, Edith is leading all these HSI efforts, and I also was someone at the table that could speak to the president and say, "If we really want this, it's going to cost us. Let's talk about, isn't this worth investing in?" As an executive team we decided yes. You have your sponsor and then you have your project leader. You have to have someone that's connected to the executive team, which equals money, right? That's always important. While simultaneously you are supporting, you are grooming faculty that can write these grants; that have the support. Dr. Amon was newly tenured, I believe, if that's correct, but she still needed support. She needed support of, yes, take the time to do this; yes, we believe in you. The institution also has to support whatever faculty step up to the plate.

It's wonderful. Congratulations for that. That's a wonderful accomplishment.

I was just going to say we have an opportunity to then go for what's called the Collaborative Grant. Let's say we were to be in collaboration with CSN or even UNLV, because you can't have more than one HSI grant at the same time. But we have a potential to do a collaborative grant. Again, what are ways that you can outshine or draw attention? There are more HSIs out there than there were just two years ago. To be competitive you have to show that you are as a system invested. I really believe that the next HSI grant has to be a collaborative grant because if you look at what California is doing—again, this is because I'm part of the network—that's what they're doing; they're going for these grants as a consortium. The community college, state college, university, they're applying as one to get these grants. It's no longer just one institution.

We want UNLV to be part of the collaborative grant. So whatever that means...

Yes, what that could look like, or with the community college.

All of us, it would be great.

Guess what? There's enough kids that need our help.

Yes, just think about that population here in Southern Nevada.

Yes, yes. We've really adopted the philosophy of, if a student is going to thrive at UNLV, then we need to encourage them to go to UNLV; but if we know they're going to thrive here at Nevada State, here we are. There are enough kids to go around.

For everybody to serve, yes. How many students do you have now?

We're at 4,800. We're a baby.

UNLV is near 30,000. Just think of all these kids right here. We're just starting.

We're just starting, yes. It looks like I could talk to you guys all day.

MARCELA: I want you to think back to when you were a little kid. Imagine you as a kid and where you are now. What would you say to five-year-old you? To high school you?

What would you say to them now? Growing up and hearing counselors say, "You're not going to go to college," what would you tell five-year-old you?

Gosh, I hate to sound cliché, but *Si se puede—If I can do it, you can do it*. And to inspire them to relate to them of like, here is a path, and share within the reality of, yes, you're going to have to work twice as hard and sometimes three times as hard, but it's worth it.

[Taking pictures]

MARCELA: Thank you.

CLAYTEE: I appreciate this so much. This is wonderful.

I appreciate you, too. This was fun.

And you took so much of your time. I love this.

Thank you for doing this. We've been here a long time and we want everyone to know.

Yes. You were here in 1905 when Las Vegas started. There's lots of history that we haven't uncovered yet.

MARCELA: For me, it has been a pleasure. Thank you.

Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]