

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARACELY RASCON

CLAYTEE D. WHITE

OCTOBER 2, 2018

REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

**This is Claytee White. It is October second, 2018. I am here in Las Vegas on—what is the name of your firm?**

Simpson Coulter Studio.

**I am interviewing...Please pronounce and spell your name correctly.**

My name is Aracely Rascon. It's A-R-A-C-E-L-Y. And my last name is R-A-S-C-O-N.

**I've got to learn to do that. Thank you so much. Today, as you probably know, we're going to talk a little about the event that happened a year ago today. First, though, tell me a little about your early life; where you grew up, what the family was like.**

I'm originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. I was there until about nine years old, nine and a half, and then when I was ten—my dad had been living between the U.S. and Mexico—when I was ten, he decided to have his family come and live in Vegas. I've been here for twenty-five years now.

**What was your father doing for a living here in Las Vegas?**

He is—he was, now he's retired—but he's been a laborer. He worked in construction all of his life.

**Did your mom work outside the home?**

No, she is a stay-at-home mom, and I am so appreciative that she was. She was always there.

**Wonderful. How many brothers and sisters?**

I have four older brothers and I'm the youngest.

**You're the only girl?**

Absolutely.

**Oh my goodness. That's wonderful. Your mom as a stay-at-home mom. Tell me about the food that your family ate.**

The best. I only tried to replicate it, but I can never do it. My mom's food was always the best. She was always looking for fresh ingredients. She hated when we wanted to buy McDonalds, or junk food she called it. She's like, "I stay home so that you can have a healthy meal every day." Her and my dad are always adamant about having a family meal at least once a day every day.

**Describe some of the things. Tell me about Chihuahua's food.**

When we came to the U.S., we actually brought our—well, like any other person that comes from a different country or a different ethnic background, it doesn't matter, even though you're in a different country, you still keep your food, your culture. You try to embrace it as much as you can. So the same foods that we ate over here, my mom tried to cook over here.

**Tell me what some of them are.**

What we call chile Colorado, which is basically New Mexico peppers with pork and potatoes. Yes, it was delicious. That's my favorite dish. Enchiladas, chilaquiles, chile rellenos, all these were staple foods that I grew up with.

**Do you cook them now?**

I try to, but, like I said, I can't do it nearly half as good as my mom. My mom is the best cook ever.

**That's great. At ten years of age you came here. Where did you go to school?**

I started at Fay Herron Elementary School and then moved over to Von Tobel Middle School. Then after that I applied for A Tech, magnet school. Then from there I went to UNLV, CSN, and just back and forth.

**Fantastic. Where did the family live when you first moved here? Do you remember?**

Oh, yes, I remember every single step.

**Tell me where the family lived.**

My parents, our very first house here in Vegas was an apartment in an apartment complex above Pecos and Las Vegas Boulevard. That's where I grew up and I thought it was huge. Now, of course, when I drive by it, I'm like, *oh, it was not big*. But to me it was phenomenal. It was just the quality of living here in the U.S. versus Mexico. To me it was the best place in town.

**Where did you move after that?**

As a child, we moved almost every two or three years. We were moving to different places until my parents decided to finally buy their house and we were able to stay there.

**What area of the city did you buy a home, your parents?**

My parents bought a home on—central, central to Las Vegas.

**Towards old downtown?**

Close to Cashman Center? Yes.

**UNLV and CSN. What was your major at UNLV?**

It originally started as architecture. But then, it's funny, after two years I decided to try interior design. I completely switched majors and I fell in love with it and I didn't look back and here I am.

**My goodness. I don't know anything about interior design. Do you do houses? Do you do commercial?**

Right now at Simpson Coulter Studio we do mostly commercial, a lot of public works, so we work a lot with the school district, the library district, a lot of public works. It's a great way to—projects that we get to work on.

**It sounds like you love it.**

I absolutely love it. I absolutely love it. I'm very passionate about it. I think when you're able to have a job that you don't feel like, *I have to go to work today*, but you absolutely love what you

do, it's so easy to get up in the morning, even if it's five in the morning. My dad always told me, "Whenever you decide what you want to do, make sure you don't pick a job because you're going to make a lot of money. Just make sure that you pick a job that you will always love the rest of your life. It doesn't matter how much money you're making."

**Great advice. A year ago today we had the shooting. Where were you on that Sunday evening?**

I was in my house with my husband and my two kids. Usually, because I wake up early, I go to bed early as well. So I didn't really find out about the shooting until I went to drop off the kids with my parents before I came to work.

**What did your parents tell you?**

My dad is always on top of the news and he knows what's going on. So I rely on a lot of information from him because he's always up to date with it. He told me, "Did you hear what happened?" And I said, "No, I just woke up, got ready, and I'm on my way to work." He's like, "Okay, sit down. This is what's happening."

When I found out about it, the first thing that came to my mind was the 9/11 attacks and how I was prepping to go to college that day and we were watching on TV the first plane and then the second. That came to mind. You always think it's happening somewhere else, but it never crosses your mind that it's going to happen in your city.

**What did it mean to your children? How old were your children at that time?**

They were eight and ten.

**What did that mean when they went to school that day?**

They were scared to go to school. That day they didn't grasp it, but then, of course, as soon as they go to school, all the other kids are talking and they're telling them, "Did you hear

about this?"

I'm a huge country music fan. I was actually going to plan to go, but because of work I just didn't want to go. I didn't want to go to bed late.

When my kids went to school and all their classmates are telling them what happened, it almost heightened their fears. When I came home that day from work, although it was a short day, I picked them up from school. I felt like I needed to pick up my kids from school and have them with me. I tried to explain to them, but, of course, they were frightened because, I mean, throughout the years we have seen how many shootings have been happening in churches and schools and random places, and they have a fear, *what if this happen?* So now the conversation starts to be: This is what you have to do if this ever happens; it doesn't matter where you are, these are the steps that you should take to be safe.

**What are some of the steps that you've taught them?**

I told them, if you're in school and there is an active shooter, please listen to your teacher. If she or he tells you to hide, do not cry. Do not make any loud noise. Try to be quiet and hide until the police comes and tells you that everything is safe. "If you're in a classroom"—I told my older son—"Don't try and look for your brother. Please stay hidden until somebody tells you it is okay to come out."

**You never thought you would have to have that conversation.**

Absolutely not. As a parent you think of all these conversations that you're going to have with your kids as they're maturing, but that was never a conversation that I thought I would have to have with my kids.

**Exactly. When you came to work that day, did you start talking about how you as a company, you as a person should respond?**

We all get in at different times. I got in at seven, and then, of course, I start talking to Helen. She's our counselor in the office; we always talk to her. But we waited for everybody to come in. I still remember. We always meet right outside ton the big lounge every Monday for project meetings to discuss projects. But that Monday, October first—I don't recall what day it was.

**October second.**

Yes, October second. I remember when we came in Sean and Wade asked us to meet in the lounge. They discussed that this is what's happening in our city. We talked about it for an hour as a group, and then they told us, "If you feel that you need to be home with your family, with a friend that's probably has a relative that was a victim, just leave. We want you to feel that you're okay to go home. We want you to be mentally at peace. Just try to relax and just take the time that you need." So we were able to take most of the day off to be with our family.

**What a great employer to work for.**

Yes.

**You just used someone's name. Sean?**

Sean Coulter, he is one of the principles, and Wade Simpson.

**When you left that day, you went to get your kids. They got out of school early?**

Yes.

**Did you know already that school was going to be ending early?**

No, I was not aware. I was not aware that school was going to be ending early. I remember as soon as I left, I was actually on the freeway. We're very close to Mandalay Bay, so as I'm driving I'm seeing the building. There was not a lot of traffic on the freeway; it was very light. Normally I always encounter traffic when I'm going home. But as I'm looking at the building, I wasn't on the event, but just the thought of what people had to go through came rushing to my mind, just

trying to imagine the horrible experience that all these people had to encounter.

**How did you decide to help put together that resiliency center?**

Well, I did not decide on it. This is how it came to be. On Tuesday, October 17th, I usually come in seven. That day, for some reason, I came in later. Something was happening with my kids, so I came in around seven thirty. Gary, one of our coworkers, is just anxiously waiting on my desk, and his face is pale, worried because I wasn't here quickly. I'm like, "Are you okay, Gary?"

He says, "Here is a sticky note. His name, Chief John Steinbeck. Here is the phone number. He contacted me because now that the Red Cross has taken off, Clark County was essentially responsible for putting together a permanent temporary resiliency center for the families, and they need help with coordinating everything and making it happen." Initially it was just carpet. He just needed carpet and he wanted somebody to help him find carpet. So Gary is like, "Please give him a call and he'll give you all the details."

**Give me his name again, the captain.**

It is Chief John Steinbeck. I contacted him and I told him, "I'm going to get on it right away and this afternoon I should have some samples over so that we can select from and we'll meet at the resiliency center."

The great part of that all was that after I hung up—usually in our profession when we're looking for samples, they tend to arrive three to five days after you order them. But I reached out to every single rep; some of them are local and most of them are out of town. As soon as I mentioned why I needed these samples as soon as possible, they were mobilizing quickly trying to find a way of how to help. If they didn't have the carpet, they would tell me, "Look, I don't have this carpet, but this other manufacturer might be able to help." It was just so selfless of them. They just wanted to help. I was able to find a person that—Clark County—is on their list,



their manufacturers' list. The rep brought over the binders. I met with the chief.

When I go there, there's a lot of people in the resiliency center. Some are trying to remove old furniture, just trying to clean everything up and getting it ready, prepping everything for all the finishes and paint and furniture that's going to come.

Well, I get there and I talk to the chief and I started to explain the carpets and which one would be a better fit. He says, "Okay, whatever you say, it's fine. Let's go with the one that you think is more appropriate."

Then in comes Misty Richardson and Adleen—I don't know how to pronounce her last name properly—Stidhum. Misty Richardson is with the Clark County Emergency Response. She's the management coordinator. Adleen is the purchasing manager at Clark County. At that point I had no idea those two people were going to be key elements to making all this thing happen, until that day I was there. It was an overall team effort. Misty told me, "We need to find furniture." She said, "Can you help us?"

I came back to the office and I talked to Sean and Wade. I told them, "Look, this is what's happening. They need paint. They need furniture. We need to go out shopping with them."

Sean and Wade unanimously said, "You drop everything." They told me to drop everything, all the projects that I was working on. They said, "Drop everything and just go help them in any way, shape, or form that you can. Don't bother about coming and asking us about if you can do this or that. Just go and help. All the hours that you can, just don't worry about work for this week." That whole week I started a whole journey with Misty and Adleen.

**Can you recount how it went, what you had to do? Just walk me through your week.**

Sure. That was Tuesday. Then Wednesday I come in the office and I'm looking at my list of manufacturers. I'm thinking, *okay, we need furniture and we need it now*. The resiliency center

had to be open Monday. The following Monday it was going to be open for business for all the victims to come and get help. *Where am I going to find all this furniture?*

I started making lists of places where we could go. I didn't want to waste their time, so what I went and did first, I went and walked the World Market to see what was available. I walked several stores to see what was available. Then after that I told them that I would meet with them around noon on Wednesday, and so I did. I told them, "I made up a plan of the things that we needed to do and where we needed to go." Of course, it was a plan, quotation mark, because it was life. Everything was changing and we needed to adapt to whatever was happening. So they agreed.

That day actually I came back with paint colors. Even though I had the plan to go shopping, we came back and I told them where to put the different colors and why we would be selecting those colors for the space. I remember it was a blue and a green. I just explained to them, "Blue and green, we need colors that are peaceful and soothing for the people that are going to be using this space."

After we talked about the locations, they said, "Okay, so what about furniture?" I told them what I had done, and so we agreed that on Thursday we would go and hit all the stores that I had on my list until we were able to find all the furniture pieces that we needed.

In the meantime, on Wednesday, they had already contacted other vendors because the resiliency center consisted of fifteen rooms: Ten of them were offices and then the other five were what we call the family rooms; and of those five, one was a larger one, which was targeted for families, and the other ones were for one or two people. They went ahead and contacted local vendors to see if they would be able to help them put together this whole project, so essentially office furniture for those ten offices. That's what they did on Wednesday.

**What would happen when you called a person on your list? You would call them and say, "I need furniture for this resiliency center." What kind of response did you get?**

Well, that was Thursday. After I put my plan together, I didn't know the response until we went over there on Thursday. It was just amazing. We would go there, and I remember our first stop was the World Market Center. We're walking around and I told Adleen, "This place has a lot of chairs and we need a lot of chairs." So we went in there and we checked it out. Of course, we were making a pile of all the things that we wanted.

The manager—I don't remember the name of the showroom—but the manager there, she came to us and Adleen was talking to her and she mentioned why we were looking for the furniture and why we needed it so quickly. We needed to take pieces from the showroom, and it's hard sometimes for them to sell pieces that are straight out of the showroom. She told her—I still remember—she said, "This is for the resiliency center and this is to help all these people. Just take all the chairs that you need and we will not charge you—we will charge you only for one thing." Out of the entire pile that we had, we only paid for one item and everything else was donated.

That wasn't the only showroom that was like that. There were a couple of other showrooms that we walked around, and it was a rug and other pieces of art. They said, "This is what we're going to do for you."

Everyone was just willing to help. It seemed like everybody was just on-call, waiting to see what they could do. In these types of scenario, normally you think, doctors, nurses, EMTs, because they're saving lives. People were not directly related to those fields were just thinking, *what can we do? How can we help?* It's almost as if we were on standby. *If there's anything you need, we're here. We just want to know how we can use our skills to help.* That was the reaction

unanimously with all the vendors and manufacturers. They were all willing to help. They just had the greatest of attitude. They were giving us the help, not only like I mentioned before, to give us their product, but they said, "Hey, by the way, check this other place out; you might be able to find things here or there." It was throughout the city. We went all the way from the World Market Center to Tivoli. It was a wonderful attitude that people had, which was amazing, and I think that's one of the key factors that contributed to the success of this being open in less than a week.

**What did you learn about your city that day?**

I always loved Vegas because I always thought it's a small city and we're a very close community. But that day I learned how selfless the people that surround us are; they just want to help. They just want to help. Sometimes we see people in crisis and sometimes we think that nobody is there to help us or help them, but there's people who are always willing to help. That's one of the greatest things that I was able to just verify again. It's just wonderful that when people are suffering there is people always there and that have that attitude to just help without regard.

**You're a country music fan.**

Oh, yes.

**Immediately we began to hear about people at the concert helping each other. Did you relate that at all to the character of country music people? Did you think about that?**

**Combine the two things?**

Well, yes, but not only about country music. One of the things that I was discussing with a coworker earlier is that coming from a different background—I'm Mexican—learning how in Mexico emergency situations get handled versus in the U.S., it was a different perspective, per se. One of the greatest things about being in Vegas for twenty-five years, you've seen the city

evolve, but diversity has evolved along with it. In times of crisis when people are helping each other during the crisis, there's no raise, there is no backgrounds, ethnicities. Those are all just pushed aside and people are just genuinely helping you for yourself, for who you are. I think that was one of the greatest lessons. We should do that more often, where it doesn't matter your race, you're a human being and you need help.

**What are some of the things that you learned about yourself from this?**

One of the things that I learned about myself was—I knew I always wanted to be an interior designer after I went through the architectural program, and I always know that I wanted to make a difference in people's spaces. But I never knew that I could—I guess in a way I didn't know that what I do could be used to help improve a space for people that are in pain, for people that are hurting. Sometimes when you go through these crisis, the colors, the carpet, the finishes, that's the last thing anybody thinks of. I was just so fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to be involved in this, to be able to help.

What I learned is that pulling this together in less a week, it taught me how to be a leader, in a way, how to help people and keep them always—the end result would be for those people to do better, for those people to heal. And how can you be a great leader and, at the same time, produce results that are there to help people?

**Thank you so much. That was beautiful. I want you to go back now. You have all of these goods coming in. How do you transport them?**

Adleen had arranged already where the goods were going to be stored and when they were going to be delivered. So Adleen and Misty were key components, like I mentioned; they were coordinating all of that. We would go to the places, purchase the furniture, and then Adleen had coordinated all of the moving people that would come in.

I have to say this. We had done all our purchasing, and so Sunday was when we had to install everything. At that point I sent an email to the office and I say, "Hey, we're at this point where we need volunteers. If you're willing and you have some time on Sunday to come and help us, we are going to be receiving all the furniture, all the art and accessories, and we need manpower." I even asked my husband to come help, so he did. From the office we ended up having five or six people that came in to help, and, of course, Misty brought her daughter and her dad and Adleen and Chief Steinbeck was there. We all worked all Sunday to get everything completed. It was an amazing opportunity to see how people are just willing to help—that's the bottom line—willing to help and push their personal life aside so that they can give priority to those people that really need it.

**Fantastic. You always liked this city. How did your attitude change about Las Vegas?**

I think I love it even more because fortunately we hadn't seen the city going through this crisis, but after you see a city that goes through this crisis pull together from all the professions...All you have to do is pick up the phone and say, "Hey, do you know somebody that can do for us? Do you know somebody that can help us with this?" The fact, going back again, that people were willing to help; that was the biggest thing. What is there not to love about Vegas when you have such a strong community?

**That's right. If you right now had to give advice to another city where this has happened and they're trying to set up a resiliency center, what kind of advice would you give the people putting together the center?**

I would say to have unity. If you have unity and if you stand together, you're going to be able to accomplish any goal within any specific set of time. Why unity? Because if you stand together strong, you're going to be able to solve issues faster, quicker and better.

**Some people came out of this saying, "Okay, I'm going to change my profession; I'm going to do that. This has shown me that I want to do something different with my life." How did you feel about that?**

I want to do my profession even better, even better. Because, like I mentioned, it doesn't matter what profession you are, you can still contribute, you can still help in ways that you might not even see it possible. Like in our case, how can an architecture firm contribute? But, yet, we were able to hopefully improve the environment for the people that were going to be using it. So, yes, I would absolutely...Now, as I'm going through projects, it has changed my perspective. Even though I would think about the end user before, now I'm thinking, *how are they really going to benefit from the way I'm designing? How is this space going to contribute to their improvement whether it's in their personal life or in their professional life?*

**I think that's great. Did this experience change your attitude, pro or con, any way, about guns?**

I don't think about the experience changing my attitude about guns. I think, again, it goes back to a community that stands strong, a community that stands united. Even if we're not in times of crisis, we should always be strong; we should always be united; we should always have a strong bond as a community. This way we're able to tackle anything.

**What about your girls?**

My boys.

**Your boys. What about your boys? How do you see them growing out of this or maturing?**

**How did this help in any way with them?**

I always tell my boys, I always tell them this: From any negative problem, any negative thing that happens in our lives, you should always look to the positive because there's always a

positive side to everything, even the darkest. I tell them that there is a perspective. I want a wider perspective that we should have on people and how we should not judge people because of their appearance, because of where they come from. Just teaching them to have a wider perspective and respect people without regards to where they come from or where they are. And to always stand strong as brothers.

**I love that. Do you think it matters that we will probably never know why pad dock did what we did?**

I think what matters in this scenario is how the city has come together, how the city has responded, how we are all there to help those who need us. I think that's what matters that we're there to help people who are in need.

**Tell me what happens the first time you walked into the resiliency center after that Sunday.**

It's always surreal when you go into a space that you've designed and you see it all come together. It's just wonderful to have had that opportunity and to see the colors, the furniture, everything that we were running across town trying to find and it's finally here. It's very peaceful to stand there and try to imagine how people are going to benefit from that and how we all collaborated to make this happen. It wasn't just me. Like I said, I was just a small piece of the puzzle because there were a lot of people that were there to help.

**Wonderful. Anything else you want to add?**

No. I just want to thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

**I thank you so much. I look so forward to seeing you on Friday afternoon.**

Thank you. I do too.

**[End of recorded interview]**