

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELOIZA B. MARTINEZ

An Oral History Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2018

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) Grant. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

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



Eloiza Martinez (1942 -) grew up on a family ranch in Derry, New Mexico. She and her nine siblings picked cotton and fed their farm animals. Her parents, who immigrated from Mexico, taught her that with hard work and dedication she could attain her goals.

At the age of fifteen, Martinez asked her Los Angeles, California high school principal for a work permit. With her good grades and her record of involvement in extracurricular activities, Martinez convinced the principal to grant her the work permit. She acquired her first job at the Million Dollar Theater as an usherette. While working there, Martinez also worked for Commercial Credit Corporation.

Martinez had the opportunity to take finance courses offered by Commerce Credit Corporation. With the knowledge she acquired and her experience in the workplace, she became the first Latina manager of a Commercial Credit office. Her managers allowed her to transfer to an open management position in Las Vegas, Nevada.

She also worked for Wells Fargo, where she served as Vice President until 2011. During her time there, she worked to make banks accessible to the North Las Vegas Latinx community. She supervised the opening of banks within super markets, such as Cardenas. She sought to teach the community how to set up and maintain checking and savings accounts.

Martinez also served in Nevada HAND's administrative board. This organization is dedicated to assisting seniors obtain affordable quality housing. Martinez helped to diversify the board. She wanted Latinx seniors to have Latinx representatives.

Throughout her interview, Martinez shares family stories. She describes the ways in which she prepares her son's favorite tamales. Martinez enjoys teaching her grandchildren how to make flour tortillas. She vividly describes the day her father told her that she had to save money to pay for her car insurance. To raise money, she began to iron clothes for her neighbors. She states that the experience taught her character.

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October 10, 2018
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

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Today is October 10th, 2018. I am in the Reading Room in Special Collections at the UNLV Lied Library. I am Maribel Estrada Calderón, and I am going to interview Ms. Eloiza Martinez.

Ms. Martinez, can you please spell your last name?

My first and last name?

Yes, please.

Eloiza, E-L-O-I-Z-A. Middle initial B, is my maiden name. And Martinez, M-A-R-T-I-N-E-Z.

I'm going to ask you how you identify yourself: As Latina; Mexican American; Chicana; Guatemalan?

They have had a lot of changes, but I'm going to stick with the original. My parents were from Mexico, so I'm Mexican American.

Now let's begin with your childhood. Tell me about where you come from and your growing up experience.

It's amazing that you ask me that. I had one of the best childhoods ever. My mom and dad were married for sixty-nine years. She was orphan. They had ten kids; five boys, five girls. We grew up in the ranch and all we did was farm work; pick cotton, hoe cotton, feed the animals. But it was just a tender love among—we had nobody else to play with, so we were very attached, very attached. You will never hear me say anything about my brothers or anything. Sure, when we were growing up, we had a little bit of...But I see families today that they don't even talk and it just bothers me. Anyway, that's my story and I'm sticking with it.

Can you tell me where this was?

Derry, New Mexico. I was born in Derry, New Mexico. As a matter of fact, all of us were born in the state of New Mexico except for one of my brothers was born in Anthony, which is on the borderline of New Mexico and Texas. Other than that we were all from there. I think we're only about a year apart from one another. I was born on a very famous Mexican day, Cinco de Mayo, so I celebrate that continuously.

Can you tell me more about your family?

When we were growing up, I remember my dad used to tell my mother, "Today the kids can't go to school." She said, "Well, why not?" He said, "Because I've got a big crop to pick up and I need them." But my oldest brother told my mom, he said, "Momma, I need to go to school. I've got to make something of myself." My mother would fiddle with my dad to let him go to school.

From there he became a bilingual lawyer in the state of New Mexico. I lost two brothers in Vietnam. One of them retired as a sergeant and then he worked at the penitentiary for almost thirty years. He's retired and he's so tight he has the first nickel he ever made, but he has a home, an RV, a boat. He doesn't even know how to drive a boat, but he has all those toys. But it's okay. He earned it. He deserves it. When he comes to visit us, he always takes us to the market and he says, "I'm paying for everything." Well, he should. He's got plenty of money. But that's the kind of childhood that we had.

My sister became a telephone operator. At that time it was Bell Telephone. She was there for forty years. She was the international operator, so that was it.

I became a banker. I first retired from Commercial Credit Corporation after twenty years. I was a financial planner. Then from there I retired. I forgot the time I retired, but then I went to work for Wells Fargo, and I retired from there after twenty-seven years. I did work for the president, which was Kirk Clawson and Doris Charles. I was very instrumental because I always felt strong for the Latino market. I always did.

My area was to work the North Las Vegas area, so I did. I started serving the whole area and I started noticing that these people with their babies would have to get on to the bus. And I would ask them, "Where are you going?" "Well, we have to go to the bank." So I said to myself, "Fine, I'm talking to the president."

We had a powwow meeting with the president and all these circle of people that can make the power happen. I told him, I said, "Kirk, this is terrible. We need to put banks in markets like Super Mercado, Cardenas; all those." He said, "Well, why?" I said, "I already did the research. These people are walking. They're not going to go anywhere. They're going to be faithful to you. Put a bank in their place and I'll teach them how to do checking, savings. I'll teach them the right way. Give them an opportunity."

Six months later they opened all those banks. It made me feel good, believe me. To this day they know me. I go down the street down on North Las Vegas, on the east side of North Las Vegas, "*Señora Martinez, ¿se acuerda?*" ["Ms. Martinez, do you remember?"] Some of them are already gone. To me that was something so important. So, yes, I'm a Latino pro, a Mexican pro.

I'm going to ask you about how your family decided to live in New Mexico. When did they arrive in the U.S.?

My dad came as a wetback back in the day. He came by himself and he worked at Hoover Dam. He took—was it a bus or train in those days? I don't know. He worked on that dam. Then after that he went back to New Mexico and I think he met my mother, but my mother didn't like him, according to him. But anyway, they got together. Because my mother was orphan, she was tired of the place she was living. My mother married at barely eighteen years of age. They made a home together. They had kids, ten of us. That was so fruitful.

Another story about that. My mother had no parents, no kin, no nothing. She didn't know where she was born or anything like that. What she did one time—we were already grown up. My sister and I used to see her go down, take the bus, dressed up, as soon as she put my dad to work. I told my sister, I said, "God, I hope God doesn't punish me, but why do you think Mother is going out so dressed up?" We never asked questions. "Well, I don't know." She said, "Well, what do you think?" "Oh, I hate to think the worst, but..." See, I thought she was fooling around.

Well, this happened for eight months. All of a sudden on the eighth month I remember that she threw a big party. I told myself, "Oh, I hope she doesn't tell my dad she's going to divorce him." I mean, your way of thinking. She had all these people in the house. Everybody is coming, the whole thing.

You know what it was? She had just become a U.S. citizen. She showed us a big plaque, a certificate. She was so happy. Then she was going to vote, her first vote at that particular time.

I told my sister, "See, when you think bad." She says, "You were the one that was thinking bad."

BARBARA: How old were you at that time?

I would say I must have been about seventeen.

Were you aware at that time that your mom was not a citizen of the United States? Never thought about it?

We didn't think about it. Because all my brothers went to college, they went to school and everything, we never thought anything of it. We didn't give it a second thought. She was a homemaker; that was her job was to be sure we had food on the table. She taught us. I remember being six years of age trying to reach on a little pedestal to make tortillas. You know what? I passed that culture down to my grandkids. They know how to make flour tortillas. They know how to make Spanish rice. Gosh, if I'm going to the store, the first thing they say, "*Abuelita* [grandma], if you're going to the store, don't you dare bring us those canned beans." So I have to cook them. They do.

We've heard that before.

Can you believe that? Oh my God. So I spoiled them. My daughter says, "Mother, you emphasize too much on these kids." I said, "That's the only thing I have." I only have three grandkids. What can I do? You've got to cater to them regardless. Anyway, that's that on the cooking. They leave me notes in the refrigerator. "Today we want to have this, *Abuelita*." They write it all out. Guess what? *Abuelita* makes it for them.

MARIBEL: Can you tell me more about your education?

My education, it's is amazing. When I was with Commercial Credit, they started giving you courses at that time, and I took them because I didn't have to pay for them. If you did good,

Commercial Credit would pay for it. Commercial Credit was a financial institute and it was headquartered up in Baltimore, Maryland. They had a lot of good benefits. I was the first Latina manager in the whole United—

BARBARA: That's here in Las Vegas?

In the United States.

But I mean you were working here with them?

No, I started in Los Angeles and then they transferred me. But I was the first Latina manager. That was a high thing at that time. I said, "Wow, I'm a manager?" I had all these employees and I was so excited. I considered myself young at that time. I took a lot of courses.

When I applied at Wells Fargo, it was funny. I made an application. I said, "I've got to change careers, so maybe I'll go to the bank." There was an ad, an opening. I filled out the application. Then I went and I told my staff, "I'm going to be gone an hour and a half." No more than an hour and a half because I was very strict because I wanted them to understand what strictness was. I went and had my interview. Mr. Korinke, Mr. Herr. I had all these Caucasian men. I don't want to be specific, but... You know.

Be specific.

They're listening to me to tell me this and that. They asked me so many questions. "Well, we have a decision for you." Mr. Korinke says, "Okay, Eloiza, why don't you do this? Why don't you call me tonight at six o'clock and then I'll give you the answer at that time?" I said, "I can't call you at six o'clock. The Lakers are playing." I walked out. "Okay, goodbye." I got to my car, I said, "Man, I blew that one."

That's great.

I called him the next day and then he says, "So I hear the Lakers won." I said, "Did you watch it?" He said, "Well, they're not my team, but I thought about you. I said, 'I've got to watch them; she said about the Lakers.'" Then he says, "Okay, I think we're ready to make you an offer." I said, "Okay, everything that I wrote on paper?" He said, "Well, the income, it's a little high." I said, "I'm worth it. If I'm going to do your bilingual skills, if I'm going to be the outreach for the community, if I'm going to be doing this, I think I ought to be paid for it." He says, "Okay."

Did you have somebody mentor you to ask for more money or that was just you?

That was me. I felt that I could do so many things. That's my feeling. Maybe people say, "Oh, yes."

Women in general are shy about doing that even to this day.

Not me.

Bravo.

Never. Anyway, he told me. He adjusted it. He says, "Now, what am I going to give you to do?" He sent me out to an office on Pecos. At that time it was First Western Savings and then it converted to different names and finally became Wells Fargo Bank.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I went into this big office. It had drapes and my office was all covered in, all these drapes. I go in there and I said, "This is a dungeon." I open all the drapes. I went outside and greeted to all these people. Boy, they looked at me. Nobody had ever done that before. They figured because you're in a management position that you're going to have this big office. What for? You're supposed to be meeting the people. That's the way I look at things. When they give you a position like that you're supposed to forte the people, see what they need, see what they want. That's a way of me reading people.

But anyway, I enjoyed that. I took a lot of courses with them. I guess you know Mayor Oscar Mayer, I call Goodman.

Oscar Goodman, yes.

Something like that. I love his wife, too. She's fantastic, Carolyn. Anyway, I don't know if you knew Mr. Aner Iglesias? He used to own all the King Markets here back in the day, all the King Markets. Then it was the mayor and then it was—of course, you know Ruben Kihuen. He was my godson in a way. They had this big old meeting and then my boss, Kirk Clausen came to me. He said, "There's an opportunity for you." He said, "I don't mind dishing out fifteen hundred dollars, but you're going to have to take a course online." I said, "I do?" He says, "Yes, I think it's good, Eloiza. You'll pass it. I trust you." "Well, what is it all about?" He brought in somebody, Dr. Anaya. He's a doctor from Nicaragua. We had this powwow meeting. I did this course online and it was for a doctor's degree in community. My boss says, "You deserve that."

He, Oscar Goodman, we all got it, but they had to do the work. They made a big old party and it was at City Hall when they gave it to us and then we had a party at Cafe Florida.

LAURENTS: Yes. Over on Las Vegas Boulevard?

Yes. They had a big old party there.

BARBARA: Each of those people were getting the same certification?

Yes.

MARIBEL: And you did it.

I did.

Oh, okay. I thought you said that they had to do work and you didn't have to do.

No. They worked, too. *Señor* Iglesias and I knew it in Spanish. I think Mayor Goodman had to have somebody to help him, which he did, he had Susie Sepulveda. He had very knowledgeable people. But he got it. He threw us a big old party. It was good.

When did you move to Los Angeles?

I moved to Los Angeles when I was thirteen and I hated it. You come from a farm. You see all these people, the school. I was good in school. I must say I was very good in school. I was the captain of the softball team. I never stood behind, never. I was always up front.

I remember when I was fifteen I went to the principal. I wanted to have a conversation with him. He says, "Yes?" At those times you had to have a piece of paper. Anyway, I went and talked to him. He said, "What's up, Eloiza?" I said, "I want you to look at my record, at my grades, what I'm doing. I do extracurricular, but I need to work. I need to buy some tennis shoes. Look at these shoes, they're awful, and I can't afford anything. Can you give me a permit because I know I have a job lined up being an usherette at the Million Dollar Theater?" He looks at me and he says, "I've never been asked that before." I don't think he wanted to see my tennis.

He gave me a permit. I took that permit. I took the bus. I went home and I told my mother, "Ah, Mama, they gave me a permit. I'm going to start working." She says, "What time?" We got everything settled. What she would do is I got to work on the weekends, like Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I didn't care. What she would do, because there are so many of us, she had the boys meet me at the bus station with the dog because she wouldn't let me come up by myself. She was very particular about her girls.

I worked there until I was about eighteen, nineteen. I was still working at Commercial Credit when I decided to give it up. The one thing I liked about working at the Million Dollar Theater, not only do you see good-looking boys, but there was an opportunity for you to model their clothes and they would give you twelve dollars. Oh, sometimes I modeled three things. That was a lot of money. I always had mine. It was so much fun.

I wish some of these young girls would experience that. If they aren't tied up on the phone, they don't do anything, really. But anyway, that's what happened to me.

That's where you started working with—

Commercial Credit. And then from there I went to First Western and then it converted into different names. Yes, that's the gentleman, he wanted me to call him at six and I said, "Nope, the Lakers game is going." I got to my car and said, "Man, I blew that." But you know what? I didn't blow it. I was there twenty-seven years.

How did you end up in Vegas?

I was transferred from Commercial Credit Corporation in Los Angeles to Las Vegas to head an office here, to continue that office because the manager was leaving, and so they gave me the opportunity. That was fun.

What did you think about Las Vegas when you barely got here?

I didn't see any Mexicans. That's what troubled me. I said, "Where are all these people?" I used to go to North Las Vegas. But a lot of people were afraid to come out because in those times if you didn't have papers—they were very limited. You have to have some kind of involvement with them, make an event, invite them, so they can get to know you. When I made my events, I remember one time making an event at the Silver Nugget down here on Lake Mead Boulevard to invite all the Latinos because that's a place they used to go. I got Commercial Credit and even Wells Fargo, "We've got to do this for them." They were very open to ideas, a different culture.

Then I used to hang around with—I still hang around with Hannah Brown, my black friend.

BARBARA: Hannah is wonderful.

I know. Vita Lynn? She's Asian. Jeri Merit? She's the CRA big coordinator for Bank of Nevada. And myself. The four of us, we hang around, and then we hang around with Phyllis James. Do you know Phyllis James? She's the legal counsel for the MGM Mirage. She takes us out to lunch every quarter. We have a meeting the thirtieth of this month. We go to the Aria, one of those big hotels, and she loves that because she's single. She just dedicates herself to community. But she gets a charge out of us. Those are my kind of friends.

We also opened a bank at the Westside; we have a Wells Fargo there, and then we have one in the Asian community.

Did you know Hannah and these other ladies before you opened up these branches, or how did you meet them?

Oh, Hannah and I have been together—together—I've known Hannah for about twenty years. She knew my grandkids when they were babies, and Vita Lynn, too. They've gone to the house. I cook for them. Phyllis James, she's single, so she doesn't cook, and so she takes us out to dinner. We don't mind. We don't really care. Good.

Were there other women of minority in Wells Fargo when you were working there at first, or were you the very first of any minority?

When I started to work at Wells Fargo Bank, we used to have a supply department downstairs. Me, I wanted to know everything. I went down to the supply department and I started looking around and looking around. I didn't see nothing. One guy that was doing all the hauling of trash back there, he was Latino; the rest of them were not. It started to bother me. I said, "No. Why do we do this? Why do we do this?"

Doris Charles, who was the branch manager, she's from Saint Lucia and she has this gorgeous accent. She's dark. We became friends. I told her, I said, "You're in management position down in the retail side. How come you don't bring in any Latinos? I don't even see any African Americans. You want to hawk it all in or what?" She laughed. She thought that was funny. Well, look at where it's at today. She made a big change.

LAURENTS: How did the men in those positions act towards you, one, as a woman, and then, two, as a Latina woman? Did you sense that they respected you?

We had a lot of fun with them. No, they did respect me. But you know what? I'm not too quiet. I don't want to get rude with people, but I let them know where it's coming from. If there's a difference of opinion and if you don't put it out on the table, they're not going to hold respect for you. Do you see what I'm saying? I honestly believe in being up front. You can be nice. You can say certain things in a nice way and get away with it. No, I did very good, very good.

It's funny that...Doris, she retired now. She retired last year. But anyway, she was so close to me. She would say, "Eloiza, I need this. What do you think?" She had a high position and she'd be asking my opinion. I said, "You want me to do it for you?" She said, "Well, maybe you should teach somebody else so somebody can be like you in case—" "In case what? Am I being fired?" "No, no, because you could be in a position so you are not going to be able to do that. You've just got to move people in." I said, "Okay."

To this date I was able to interview a lot of people. I interviewed the Latinos because they didn't know how to speak the language. How do you know they weren't phonying it up? So I talked to them in Spanish. I interviewed them in Spanish and they would answer. They're still working at the bank. Can you believe that?

BARBARA: That's good.

I had a good run. I can't complain. I cannot complain at all. I had a good run. I had a good upbringing. I believe the upbringing—my mother taught us good values and that's very important because nobody can take anything away from you unless you don't have those settings at the beginning. And respect. In those days we never talked back to our parents, never. We had a difference of opinion. "Well, what do you think?" I'm begging to see if they'll listen to me. But nowadays I see TV and these young groups, how sad. It saddens me. But what can you do?

MARIBEL: What were your parents' names?

Lorenza Gonzalez Bastidos My maiden name is Bastidos. My dad is Francisco Flores Bastidos.

What are some of the most valuable lessons that they've thought you that you've carried through and applied in the workplace?

To tell the truth and never back down on something; that's one thing. Do not lie about it, but don't be afraid to speak up, and my mother taught us that. She said, "No, that's the reason I take you to church, because you don't lie. You don't lie because it's going to haunt you." I think that was a valuable lesson, not only to me, to all of us. My sister and I could whisper about this and that, but she will never know because it was her and I.

Then I confessed to my mother. When she got her U.S. citizenship, I told her how I felt. She looks at me and she says, "What?" "Well, I thought you were floozying around." "Floozying around?" She says, "What's floozying?" "Well, you know, Ma." "No, no." But see, I had to confess because I would carry that guilt for the rest of my life and it would hurt me. That's it.

I've had a good run. Here I am seventy-six years of age. I don't care. Tomorrow I'm leaving early in the morning. My brother is not doing well. I told my daughter, "I'm leaving early in the morning." I said, "I'm going to pack tonight." She said, "Well, do you want me to make my *nino* [godfather/padrino] some soup you can take?" "No, he's on a very bland diet. If I need to make him something, I'll go to the store and hand make it for him." I'm sure he can't have meats or anything like that, so I'll do turkey or something like that.

Can you tell me about your work with Habitat for Humanity?

Well, it wasn't work. Habitat, I went from—oh, and I forgot to put the Latin Chamber of Commerce. I'm still involved with them. I've been with them since 1982, thirty-five years ago.

The Latin Chamber of Commerce, they had a board of directors and it was twenty-seven members. It was a handful. In those days you had Arturo Cambiero. You had Manny Cortez, who Catherine Mastos is his daughter. Luhan. All these people, they were powerful people, twenty-seven people. I became president. Well, believe me, I said, "How am I going to tackle this one?" I took each board of director and I talked to them personally about what my vision was. "Do I count on your support?" I can't do it in front of them because that's not culture. Anyway, I did that and I was their president for two years.

BARBARA: Had a woman been president of the Latin Chamber of Commerce before?

Yes. She's a lawyer now. Her husband died about seven years ago. Eva Garcia. Her husband died.

I had forgotten that. All right.

She had a law firm at that time, so she kept busy. Of course, at the bank, they get CRA credit, Community Reinvestment Act credit. Therefore, my boss says, "No, you spend as much time as you need." I said, "It's going to cost you fifty thousand." He said, "Okay." That's what I used to give the Latin Chamber. Why not? It's a win-win situation. But I had a lot of accounts. I would refer them to all my store managers. They made money, the bank made money, and then you have a good name out there. I was there with the Latin Chamber and the bank allowed me that.

Then I became president for Habitat for Humanity. That was something else. I was doing two things at the same time. I don't know if you know Todd Nigro.

Just by name.

He's a businessman, gorgeous man, too. He has a family with kids. Down to earth. He came to me and he said, "Eloiza, are you struggling being president for two big entities?" I said, "God, Todd, I am." I said, "The Latin Chamber, I've got to be with them because my earning, the whole thing." He says, "Why?" He says, "You want me to step in for you?" I said, "Would you please?" He said, "Yes. But you be on the board of directors and you're going to be hand in hand by me."

He took over for me, but I was still going to the meetings. That's a big responsibility to be a president of an organization. Then if you get some people that are so verbal, like me... [Laughing] It was a trial. It was good and good things came out of it. I'm still in good hands with them.

Nevada HAND does family, senior housing and assisted living. Mike and I started that company—well, he was the founder, but I was with him hand by hand. I don't know if you know Debra March. She's the mayor for City of Henderson.

Oh, sure. I've met her, yes.

She and Duane Soderberg. He was the executive director for Salvation Army. And there was two other known powerful people at that time. Mike was the founder and he had all these ideas. He has beautiful ideas.

One time we had a meeting with him. And not to talk bad about Mike. I mean, look where he got us through. Anyway, he says, "I am so mad. What do you think? I'm going to go to the council and tell them this and that." Debra and I said, "Whoa, you don't do that." He said, "Yes, but they're not looking at what I'm trying to do." "You don't do that. You don't fight the hand that's going to feed you. Never do that." "Oh." "As a matter of fact, you should go to a class to take some kind of a class." Because he gets so eager. But he meant well.

We calmed him down. Debra and I and Duane, we all sat around and said, "Yes, he can't do that to city council. They'll cut our tails off." He listened to us and then he sort of tapered down, the whole thing. Look where that company is today. Beautiful company. They love him.

Then another thing I had to fight between Habitat and Nevada HAND. I sat around the board one day with Habitat and I tell—there was Larry somebody. I said, "What's the problem here?" He says, "What problem?" I said, "Do you see anybody that looks like me?" And he says, "Well, no." I said, "Well, that's the problem. You're working with people that look like me and you don't have a representative aside from myself. You don't have a black one. You don't have an Asian. What is the problem here? We don't play that way." Look at it today. Same thing with Habitat for Humanity.

Expand on that. Tell me more about how it's converted. What is the representation today?

The homes that we built are for low-income people, and most of the low-income people, not to frighten anybody, are people that have lower incomes and are minorities. If we're serving that population, why can't we put representation around the board to get it? And I told Mike the other day.

He says, "Eloiza, I've got a surprise for you." I said, "Is it a surprise, or has it been haunting you?" He said, "No, it's a surprise." He said, "You know how I have certain people?" I said, "Yes, and you're missing a black one and you're missing a Mexican." "I just want to let you know we're going to get a high, powerful Mexican person to be on the legion." I said, "Good, it's about time." "Well, I just wanted to share with you," he said. He is so funny. He said, "I just wanted to let you know." I said, "Good, I'm happy."

That's as of today we're still looking to have more representation.

In the leadership. The board is all settled. I got that covered. But the leadership is his staff.

Got you.

We make all these things. Not only minority, handicap, age, gender; I look at all those things. That's where I stand.

MARIBEL: Are there any other boards that you have helped to diversify?

Dress for Success is run by Amie Jo Greer. Do you know her? She's a singer. She's a black singer. She looks white-blackish, but she has a gorgeous voice. She runs this organization. I think it's called Dress for Success. She has about ten girls that she tutors on a Saturday. She said, "What month do you want so you can come and teach them how to cook and how to play bingo in Spanish?" So I do that. I love it. They all help me to take my stuff down to the car. I like it. Why not? Those are young kids.

Are there any other programs where you have worked with younger generations?

I'm sure in my time. Sometimes you get so involved with the boards that you can't even handle your own job or your own family.

There's one thing that I do. I'm leaving to Mexico the ninth of November. I'm going to Colima, Mexico. I'm going to stay there ten days. From there, I'm taking a flight going to Aguascalientes. I love that place. As a matter of fact, I feel like moving down there.

But anyway, to make the long story short, what I do, I go to TJ Maxx maybe before the end of the month and I buy all these clothes that are on clearance and I take them to the poor people in Mexico. Why not? I mean, you get them here for the price of...A dollar means a lot, a lot over there. I pay more for luggage and then I don't even bring the luggage back, but it's okay.

At the time when I was with Wells Fargo, I loved that; I traveled so much. I was so fortunate that every time I was turning around, they gave me an award for something, so that included a trip. My husband used to love that. He says, "Oh God, we're going to go where now?" Disney World; San Diego; Atlanta, Georgia: We went to so many places, so many places, and it was all because of the winnings of Wells Fargo; they gave me an award. Why? I don't know, but I took it. It was fun.

BARBARA: What was your husband's name?

Sebastian.

MARIBEL: How did you guys meet?

On a blind date. I kept telling him, before he passed, I said, "Honey, we've been married for so many years and we're still blind." He says, "I know."

BARBARA: What kind of work was he in?

He was a professional soccer player in Brazil. He's Brazilian. He played the last game with Pelé and then he had to go to college. He went to college for four years. He became a CPA and a stockbroker for Banco de Janeiro. They had five openings and there were three thousand five hundred applications that came in; he was number three, very smart man, a very smart man. Numbers? He knew them up here. Oh, if I've got to add two and two, I take out the calculator.

LAURENTS: You said he played on the Brazilian national team?

Yes, he was a Brazilian soccer player.

And so he played with Pelé?

The last game.

The last-last game?

No, my husband's last game. Pelé was younger than my husband. My husband is going to college. He went to college for your years and became a CPA or stockbroker at the Banco de Janeiro.

That's interesting.

BARBARA: What part of Brazil was he from?

Belo Horizonte. They call it Belo Horizonte, yes. He came from a large family, too. We used to share that. I said, "How many were you in your family?" I said, "We were ten." He said, "I think I've got you beat by one. We were eleven."

His dad was a mechanic. He was an excellent mechanic because he used to work in his dad's shop after school. He says, "I remember taking the motors out of the Volkswagen and replacing them." I mean, God. I said, "God, that's interesting work." He said, "Well, we had to do what we had to do." Yes, but he was a true Brazilian. A good lover.

LAURENTS: How did he end up in the States?

He got a permit to work at the embassy because of his grades. From college he worked at the bank, and then from the bank he went to the service. He was in the service for two years. Then he said, "Nah, I don't know if I'm going to go back to the bank or what. Maybe I should go for the embassy." They would talk about it. He got a permit. He worked for the embassy. He says, "There's nothing but politicians." I said, "Are you telling me something different?"

Then he came and he had a company, export and import, here in San Pedro, California. That was interesting.

MARIBEL: You met in California or in Las Vegas?

California.

Then you moved your family here to Las Vegas when you were transferred?

Yes. Well, I only had one little girl, my Veronica, because my boy was born here. Could you believe I had him at forty and my husband was fifty?

BARBARA: No comment.

I know. That's what my daughter says. "How did you...? What?" She was just telling me this morning, she says, "Oh my God, Mother, I'm forty-one." I said, "Yes, well, I had your brother at forty." "Oh my God, that's..."

Talk about raising your kids, well, in multiple ways. You're raising them in Las Vegas. Then you've got a multicultural household speaking, I assume, some Portuguese as well as some Spanish.

Then my daughter is married to an African American, but his dad is Mexican.

Oh, wonderful. Talk about the blending of cultures.

I think it's beautiful as far as I'm concerned. I think it's the best thing that could have ever happened because not only do you not know the culture in speaking, in acknowledging, in cooking, respect and teaching. The best thing out of everything is to teach. My thing with my grandkids is teach them how to do Latino food, period, so I put the two girls to make tortillas. Well, they have about three tortillas with butter before and then they're too full because, "Oh,

Abuelita, do we have to finish them?" I said, "Did I tell you to eat all of them? I let you do what you wanted to do and now you're going to finish them."

I wish we had gestures on the audiotape. That's cute.

But that's true, though. And teaching and respect; that to me is...One of the things, being with my daughter since my husband passed away, having dinner, cook dinner, they come to the table and their phone sits over there in a box. Huh-uh. This is my time with you. See, sometimes we let little things like that go because this thing is more important than a life to like. I have a problem with that. But they listen. They listen.

My daughter has a master's and she's very bright. She's like her dad, very smart. She's a director for donations for Safe Nest. She loves that nonprofit. She says, "I wonder where I got it from, Momma." I said, "I don't know. Do you know the lady?" But that's good, though. That's good for her to get involved in that. She's stern, very stern. She doesn't talk to many people like me. I'm a talker. Oh my God, I go to the street and I talk to everybody. Oh my God, she gets so mad. "One of these days they're going to set you up, Momma." For what?

Nevada HAND had a meeting last week and they sent a Lyft for me to pick me up. On the way back I got another driver. I forgot his name. But he says, "Ma'am?" I said, "Yes?" He said, "What do you do?" I said, "Well, I'm retired. I sit on boards and this and that." He says, "Do you ever snow dance?" Now, the man is seventy-eight. I'm seventy-six. I said, "No. Where is that at?" He said, "At Mount Charleston. Look it up in your Google. It's called snow-dance-dot-com. And you're going to see me there. I'm not going for the next two weeks because I'm having my knee replaced." I said, "Okay." He said, "Maybe I get to see you up there, or maybe if you want to call me, I'll pick you up." I said, "It's okay, thank you." I thought that was a nice compliment.

It is. It is. It's just dancing.

Snow dancing. That is so funny. I thought that was funny.

That is cute. I like that.

But he couldn't do for two weeks because he's having his knee replaced. I said, "Okay."

MARIBEL: Since we're talking about dancing, tell me about family traditions or festivities and any other celebrations that you partake in.

First of all, Cinco de Mayo is my big day. I could celebrate for three days as far as that is concerned. Because we were all born American, we follow the American, but we don't forget the Latino. *Navidad*; that's a day to make tamales. Ooh, two days, man, we're in there making those tamales.

My son is a fisherman in Alaska and he's coming Monday, I think. Yes, he's going to be here Monday. He tells me before that he wanted me to go. He says, "Momma, why don't you come

here? I'll send you for the ticket and you can come here. But don't bring any clothes." I said, "It's a hundred degrees under Fahrenheit. What do you mean no clothes?" "Well, the only thing you've got to bring is *ojas* and *chile* and all the things so you can make my tamales." He could care less if I froze, right?

But he says, "I'm coming. Do you think you can make tamales before?" I said, "I will. You know I will." I'm going to make him some tamales and I'm going to freeze them. If I freeze them and put them in a certain little cooler, he could probably take it back because it doesn't take one day to get there, so that will be fine.

He loves those tamales. He likes the cheese tamales with *rajas de chile verde*. You know the green? That's the kind that he likes. He likes the chicken. He says, "I'm not that crazy about the sweet ones." But the kids like the sweet ones. Then I make *chile rojo con carne y puerco*. I make all four and it's a process.

My daughter says, "Well, why can't you get those little machines?" I said, "You're losing the culture." She learned how to make them. She saw me so many times. She said, "Mom, I'm going to surprise you," last year. She said, "I don't want you to here. You go do everything because by the time you come back, you're going to have something. I'm going to surprise you." So she did. I had made the *harina* and I had put it in the refrigerator and she probably thought, *oh, I don't have to do that, but I know how to make it*. She did the chicken. Oh, she did a good job. She soaked the leaves. It was good. That means that they picked up on things because I'm not going to be around tomorrow. Well, I hope so, not tomorrow. I've got to wait until next week. My son is coming.

BARBARA: You've got things on your calendar. You've got to go to the snow dance.

That is funny. Oh, that was funny. He was quite a conversationalist, the gentleman. It was really neat. Veronica says, "There you go, Mother, talking again." I said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" I can't be like that. She says, "Oh, when I take a Lyft and I don't talk to anybody. I don't even look at them." But that's her. It doesn't mean that she's not a good person, but that's her.

It seems to have suited you well. You met a lot of people. One of the folks that mentioned you for this project to be interviewed was Tom Rodriguez. Talk about your friendship with him. How did you get to know him?

At the Latin Chamber. He was really close to the executive director. Then I knew Larry Mason.

We've interviewed him as well.

Oh, I just love him. He is so funny. I love him. Then there was another one that died, Orlando Sandoval. Remember? He died about eight years ago.

What was his role in the community?

He used to work at UNLV. He worked at UNLV and then he also was at the Latin Chamber. He was a prior past president for the Latin Chamber. Then Otto Merida, he's moved on. He's retired now. Peter Guzman is the new CEO.

You know what? It's funny that you said that. I went to a conference for the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce back when I became president. I came back. Of course, you sit there and you hear everybody. All of a sudden I heard a conversation that somebody was talking and was saying, "Well, you people got to beef it up or stuff like this." He says, "This is all executive directors. Move them up to president. What's the big deal?" I came back and I did that for Otto Merida and Victoria. I made her a senior executive vice president, big hike, and I upped their pay scale. I made friends forever.

But it's true, though. It is true. You give them a little title and they don't think about you that way. You know that? You've got to grow within the means. That's the way I see things.

MARIBEL: You mentioned that you celebrate your birthday on Cinco de Mayo because that is your birthday. How do you celebrate it?

First of all—and I'm going to go back to the bank. It was so funny. They knew when my birthday was. I would put out a memo: Group A, Group B, and Group C; I'd celebrate three days. Group A had special people, Group B were certain people, and Group C. They waited for their date and their time. My sister said, "I wouldn't even talk to you for doing that." I said, "But why? We can't all go together. They have departments they have to work. So I divided them A, B and C." They were all there; nobody ever failed. Sometimes I would say this: "Okay, we're going to celebrate Cinco de Mayo. But instead of going out, you know what I'm going to make? I'm going to make Spanish food and I'm going to bring it in." I said, "Sharon, you bring the plates, the cups, the things." Then I gave somebody a desert. I would bring in rice. You know what? We had a heck of a good time. I always used to have a Mexican flag and the American flag right next to each other.

The other thing that I celebrate is the 15th of September. You know what? It's funny. Going back to Cinco de Mayo, do you know they celebrate Cinco de Mayo here more than in Mexico? I was in Puebla when it was my birthday, and Puebla was where it originated. Now, they had a good old party. They had a lot of drinks, a lot of food. They have the best *mole* in Puebla. Did you know it's known for their *mole*? Oh my God, it's to kill for. Now, Cinco de Mayo here, they celebrate it more except for Puebla. Now, *El Quince de Septiembre*, here we celebrate it like they do in Mexico, but it's got a different connotation to it. But life goes on.

Of course, I celebrate my Fourth of July with potato salad. Of course, your Mother's Day; that's American and our mothers are always—well, no, in Mexico, Mother's Day is on the tenth of May; it never changes. It never changes. The tenth of May you always celebrate Mother's Day regardless. It's a beautiful day, too. It's a beautiful day.

Did you ever celebrate any Brazilian holidays?

You know what? No. I think my husband celebrated more the Latino ones, because of me, I guess. I don't know. He went all out for my birthday. I like his birthday, June 12th, because that's a saint's day. He just sort of mentioned that. June 12th is the saint's day. He died June 15th, right after his birthday last year. Oh, well, life goes on.

I'm going to go back to when you moved to Vegas. What was one of the hardest things that you experienced when you barely moved here?

Like I said, and I think I quoted this before, I didn't see people that looked like me. I said, "Where are all these people?" I knew that there were Latinos here. I didn't see them. I even went looking for them. *Where are these people?* I don't know if they were afraid to come out. I don't know what the status. Do you know?

LAURENTS: From talking to the other folks, it's kind of—everyone was in their pocket.

In a pocket. But they're afraid to come out or do anything.

Depending on the time period that you're talking about, ICE was more active and so people were being more careful. It depends. I'm not familiar, when did you arrive to Las Vegas?

April 28th, 1978.

I think that lines up a little bit more with what Javier was telling us where ICE was more active.

Javier Trujillo?

Javier Barajas.

How is he?

He's great.

Oh, I just love him.

Oh, he's fantastic. He was telling us when he got here—I think he came around the same time period.

Right, right. Big difference.

He said ICE was really active in that time period and he would try and pass, not appear Latino, because ICE was so active in the city, which I wasn't aware of.

Well, you weren't even born then.

Right.

I mean, I can pick up on that. You're so cute. Thank you for putting up with me.

But it is amazing. That was one of the experiences that I noticed and Commercial Credit was the same thing; they didn't have Latino people working there. When I came in I hired people. Wells Fargo, it took me forever, but I finally got it down and now look at it. I think there's a lot of work that still needs to be done.

I sort of feel sorry in a way for the handicap. Just because you're handicap doesn't mean that you don't have a brain. People that are handicapped are very smart. Maybe they've got a handicap because of something that happened in their life, but it doesn't take away their brain power. That's what I say. That's one thing; handicap, I don't care if you're a hundred years old, if you can still let up, go for it. I think people, once they get old, they sort of want to push them to the side, and you've got to have guts to come out of that shell.

MARIBEL: Tell me about the places where you've lived in Vegas and the neighborhoods.

The first neighborhood I lived in when we first came was on Belmont Avenue in North Las Vegas, Belmont and...Lake Mead?

LAURENTS: I'm not familiar with Belmont.

Oh, you weren't born then. Lake Mead and Belmont, we rented there for a while. Then my husband and I bought a home on Airshire, which was a newer neighborhood and we enjoyed that. Veronica was still a baby.

Then we moved to Pinto Lane. That's where my boy was born. He was born in Valley Hospital. He grew up there. We had a swimming pool. Sebastian and I always had the kids' friends come over because I thought it would be easier for me to watch the kids instead of letting my kids go over there because you don't know. We would cook for them. We'd barbeque. I'd do any kind of a sandwich. When they're little they're not big trouble, really. They don't eat that much when they're little. Fruit punch and a sandwich or some little potato chips, that's fine.

Other than that, they came out okay. My kids came out okay. I can't complain. I love them to death. Of course, I think I like my grandkids better. My daughter told me that the other day. She said, "I think you have a tendency to like the other ones instead of us." I said, "No. You guys are grown up now."

MARIBEL: Are they living here in Vegas?

Yes. My granddaughter goes to Centennial High.

LAURENTS: What was your son's experience, like schooling here? Did anything ever stand out to you?

He graduated. He started to go to college and then he says, "Mother, I don't think Las Vegas is good for me." I said, "Or you're not good to Las Vegas. Which one is it?" He says, "No, I guess I'm getting older now."

His dad always used to take him fishing when he was a little baby. He loved fishing and so did my husband. I gave a trip to my husband to go to Alaska to go fishing. He caught a halibut. My husband weighed a hundred and sixty-five pounds and the halibut was a hundred and sixty-seven. How do you like those apples? He's hanging this fish.

My son never got away from that. He's been fishing in Alaska now for the longest time. He fishes in the big boats. It's so dangerous sometimes. I think about it and I just have him in my prayers with my Rosary. I say, "Bring him back to me."

No, he did okay. He says, "Mother, really for me, college, I'm not going to go to college like my sister because that's not in me." I said, "Well, you have to do what you have to do, *Hijo*." I'm not going to force him down. You can't. If they're of age, they can do whatever they want.

But he loves Alaska. He loves Alaska. I don't know how anybody could take that cold. Ugh. Especially when he tells me not to take anything but take *mi ojias*. He wants me to make him tamales. The heck with the clothes.

MARIBEL: Tell me more about your work. What did you do in those positions in the banks?

Both jobs were very terrific to me. I had an opportunity to grow with Wells Fargo. I had to prove myself first. You've got to give them ideas for them to really think about it. When you work for the president of the bank...I used to tell him, "Kirk." I'd call him. "Do you have a moment?" He says, "Yes, I'll make it a moment." "Okay, I've got some ideas that I've got to run by you." "Okay, my door is open." So I go in and I had a big old pad. "Okay, this is the situation that I'm dealing with—that we are dealing. And, now, this is the solution." "Oh, so you got the problem and the solution." "Yes, but I need your buy-in." "Oh, I like that." I said, "Yes, you're not doing anything, right?" He laughs. He says, "Oh my God, Eloiza, you're too much." So I give him the situation, what we need, and the solutions. And he said, "That's a good comparison. That's very good."

But, yes, did I like it. When I had the opportunity, like I told you when we interviewed, I told Doris, "We need to interview bilingual. I'll help you. I'll do the translation. I want to be sure that we're getting what we're paying for." That was true because how would they know? They couldn't communicate with them. So I took it upon me, very casual. Doris would tell me, "Okay, Eloiza, ask her in Spanish." And I would. You could pick up right away when they know their skills. We hired quite a few of them, too.

What was your job title?

I went from loan officer to community loan officer to assistant VP. When I was an assistant vice president, I ran a local branch, tellers and everything. Then I got robbed. Doris sent me to get help because it was trauma for me. Then she took me out of there, and Kirk says, "No, she's working for me, so let's give her community." That's when all the banks were open inside those little malls because I told him. It gave me more time to spend and really concentrate on what I wanted to do, what I wanted for the community to know about. But I had a good run.

It's funny you mention that because to this date—we got a new president; his name is Brian Formisano. Last year December the 13th—I'll never forget that day. I'm good with numbers. His secretary Cheryl called me, "Eloiza?" I said, "Yes. What's happening, Cheryl?" "Well," she says, "Brian wants to know if you can make it a point to come and visit him." I said, "Well, I'm not looking for a job." "Well, I think he wants to talk to you." I said, "Oh, okay." I remember that I opened my calendar. She say, "He has the date of December the 13th open. Do you think you can meet with him?" I said, "Well, I don't know if that date is open for me." She says, "Okay. Well, check your calendar." I said, "It's open."

I got a bag. I put a bottle of wine. I took it up to him. I got all dressed up and stuff like that.

Brian Formisano used to be a business banker many years back and then he went out of state. He went to Washington and he became an area manager, more like a district manager. When the opening came that Doris and Kirk retired, he put in for it and he got it.

So I went to visit him. He was picking my brain, this and that. We talked. He says, "Eloiza, I'm new to the community." *This and that*. He says, "I need you to help me. How am I going to do it?" I said, "First of all, let me tell you one thing. You're going to do this. You're going to talk to Hannah Brown. You're going to talk to Vita Lynn, Jeri Merit, myself. Take us to lunch. You pay the bill. Then we go from there." He says, "That's a deal." He did, he took us to Bahama Breeze. We sat there and we talked.

But before then, I checked with the Latin Chamber. I said, "Listen. When is your next luncheon?" He said, "August the 17th." He said, "How much is it going to cost?" Two thousand and fifty dollars or something like that for a table of ten. I said, "But it comes with a booth and we can display your product there. Those people, you have to sit them at a table." He says, "Okay. I'll have Cheryl check into it. Would you want to join us for lunch?" "Well, yes."

I did, I joined them for lunch and gave them kudos. That's the way we've got to get them out. Nobody is going to know him being behind a desk.

He thought it was a great idea. First he took us to Bahama's and then we went to that luncheon and now we're going to work something with the Urban Chamber and then with the Asian Chamber.

BARBARA: You keep active in a passive way. That's great.

Yes. If they need something they call me. I think it's nice because you don't lose touch of anything. You keep on going and you keep on teaching. That's a whole method of teaching. I just told you what Nevada HAND said. "They're going to hire a Latino." I said, "Duh. I know, Mike. Thank you." He is a nice person.

Have you ever met Mike Mullin? He has twins, Tom and Tim Mullin, and Mathew.

I know the name.

He used to be a real estate agent many, many years back and then he founded this Nevada HAND. He has done wonders. He has a strong board of directors, too.

That's important. That's good organization for sure.

Yes, good organization. Hey, we're here to do what we have to do.

MARIBEL: Did you ever encounter discriminatory practices in the workplace?

I think a lot of it, we make it our own, personally. It's not just because you're Latino, huh-uh. I don't believe in that. Now, if there was somebody else and I get, "Ooh, look at your hair. Is that what you do?" That I would find discriminatory. But, no, I really never have. I don't know why. All my friends are from different nationalities. Do you remember Barbara Mahallon? She used to work for Citibank.

BARBARA: I know that name, yes.

She passed away three years ago. Oh, we were so tight. I loved her. Thalia Dondero?

Sure, I knew Thalia.

See, those are—you learn from people. I thought Barbara was so magnificent. What did she die of? I can't even remember now. It was gone like that. That's too bad. Those are the people I miss—Orlando Sandoval—people that have died. That's a road we all have to take.

We don't get choices on that one.

No, we don't. We do not get choices at all.

I really don't feel the discrimination and maybe because I am surrounded with so many different ethnic groups that you don't think about it.

How about when you were growing up?

It's funny you ask me that. We used to live twenty-five miles, from the ranch that we lived in, from school. A bus would come—listen, I remember—a bus would come. I think when he came this way, he picked up a group of kids. They were Caucasian kids. They sat in the front. The

second group was us, the Latinos, my brothers and sisters. We sat in the seats. The third group were African American and they sat at the back. But we talked. I never took it like, *what happened?*

Now my sister says, "I remember." I say, "And what are you going to do?" She says, "No, I just remember the front, the middle and the back."

But we all used to talk. I guess we didn't have malice in us. I don't know. But that happened. But it didn't bother me. I got to talk regardless of whether I sat in the front or the back.

How about in L.A.?

No. Maybe because I don't want to believe in it. That's one of my things. Because if I start making an issue about it, then I should stop going to church and being a hypocrite.

Where do you go to church here?

I'm going to a new one, St. Anthony of Padua, Filipino church on Centennial and Fort Apache. As a matter of fact, I signed up that I want to be a Eucharistic minister, but I want to teach the little kids and now I've got to be fingerprinted because of a big scandal that happened.

I used to be a Eucharistic minister for St. Michael (sic) de Sales. I used to go to the convalescent home on Jones Boulevard. That would be my territory. I would give the Holy Ghost to all the little patients or people. Sometimes I would go in there. I remember she had red hair and she was sitting in a corner. I said, "What's wrong? Why are you sitting in the corner? Today is a beautiful day. She looked at me says, "Well, nobody comes and visits me." I said, "I'm here and I'm going to give you the Holy Ghost. Let's talk a bit. Tell me, who is this beautiful baby you have over here?" "That's my granddaughter and I miss her." I said, "I bet you do. She looks just like you. She's probably a pickle like you, huh?" She would laugh. She said, "That's the most conversation I've had..."

I made a point to talk to her a lot. She enjoyed it. She would even wait for me. Sometimes I would take a book and say, "I'll read you a passage." "Okay, okay."

See, this is what I'm saying. You don't take it back. You pay it forward. She was the happiest lady after that. I could see that she could hardly wait for me to come because she wanted to talk. Then she says, "Well, let me tell you one thing. One of the ladies went to the store and I saw you not too long ago that you were wearing a blouse and I described to her what I wanted." I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me? I would have gone and got it for you." "No," she says. It wasn't exactly like mine, but it was similar. She wanted a new blouse. She showed me her blouses and stuff like that.

That's what I'm saying. You have to get them out of that mode. Then she spoke. She was real good.

MARIBEL: What do you like most about living in Vegas?

I think I've spent a lot of time here. To tell you the truth, believe it or not, Las Vegas is really small. It's not a big town. I got to know most of my community. I know so many people that you wouldn't believe.

Did you know that they made—when was it?—July 11th. You know the Women's Chamber of Commerce? What's her name? June Beland. They made Ten Most Powerful Women in Nevada. Carolyn Goodman was there. It was James, myself, Rose McKinney. That was such an honor.

BARBARA: So you were on that list.

Yes.

I'm sorry I didn't know that.

Yes, I was on that list. They have magazines. They got the magazine. Yes. That's beautiful to me. People still remember people. But if you screw up, they're going to remember you worse.

When did you officially retire?

July 29, 2011.

MARIBEL: What was your last job?

Community development officer, a vice president, for Wells Fargo, and I worked for Kirk Clawson—he was the CEO—and Doris Charles. I had to work with both because she ran the retail and then I did the community base. I had to go out there and come back to Kirk and tell him, "Kirk, you need to do this." "Okay, okay, okay."

He is such a nice man. Did you ever meet him? Wonderful man, wonderful. I have always been surrounded with wonderful people. I don't know why.

BARBARA: I think you bring out the best in people, is what I'm going to guess.

No, but so beautiful. At least they listen to you.

Yes. That's respect.

With respect and whatever. I don't know. This new Brian, the new president, he is another one. He is so sweet. But I guess people that are like that have that inner feeling. They must like people, right? They have to like people.

MARIBEL: Tell me about your role models. Who did you look up to when you were growing up?

Anne Bancroft, a movie star. I thought she was so beautiful. And the way she talked. Did you notice that? I mean, she stood out and she was only a little person. She wasn't a tall person. Wasn't she gorgeous?

BARBARA: Oh, yes. Yes.

She spoke her mind. There was no two ways about it. And I looked at her and said, "Oh my God, one of these days I wish I could be like her." Yes, Anne Bancroft.

I enjoy all those old actors and actresses. They were so beautiful. I saw the other day that Barbra Streisand is still around. Is she still singing?

I think she appears every once in a while.

Yes. She had a beautiful voice, beautiful voice. The other one I like, and I watch it on soap opera on TV, Reba McEntire. She is too funny, red-head.

I remember one time Habitat for Humanity hired her to be on a display that we were going to dedicate a brand-new home. They put her up to bring her down in those tractors or whatever. She's got this belt on her. She has a toothbrush, a hairbrush. She has lipstick. Nothing to do with tools. That was so funny. Oh my God, that was so funny. I thought she was so funny. She looks good for her age, though, doesn't she?

Yes, she is a beautiful woman.

She is, red-head. I wonder if that's her natural hair.

I have no idea.

I've always known her as a red-head.

Yes. She looks like a natural red-head.

I thought that was so funny when she comes down and she had all this... We thought she had tools. Oh, no. She had lipstick. She had her tools. I thought that was funny.

MARIBEL: Tell me about entertainment. What do you do for entertainment here to entertain yourself for pleasure, for leisure, here in Vegas?

One of the things I do do, and I'm not ashamed to say it, I like to go to Mesquite and play my five-cent nickel machine, poker, five cents, because I get comp rooms. Let me tell you what I do. There is a secret to everything. I happen to know all of those people, slot players, hostesses and the people at the rewards, at the club. You get to know them. I figured out, *how am I going to get this if I'm not working anymore?* I invite my friend. It's going to cost seventeen dollars apiece. What I did, I went over to Starry. I said, "Starry." She said, "Hello? Yes?" I said, "I'm Eloiza from Las Vegas." She says, "I've seen you." I said, "Well, listen. I'm going to take your business

card if it's okay and I'm going to call you maybe within a month because maybe I would want to go to the brunch buffet." "Do you want me to get you some tickets?" "Well, you don't give them to me now because I have to get you something before you give me that." She says, "Okay."

Every time I go I take her a gift. Then I take the manager for the buffet—she always likes to wear jewelry and earrings. I said, "You know what? I've got my stuff in storage. I'm not going to wear those things." I took them out and had them cleaned and put them in a beautiful box. Oh, you would have thought I gave her heaven. So that's what I do.

Then to the hostess, I take little gifts. Her name is Maria and she is real thin. Her mother died the beginning of the year. She said, "Will you be my mom?" Of course, she's younger. I bring her a blouse and I wrap it up. Then Tammy and Donna, they're partners and they have a dog. I used to give them gifts and now I bring the gift to the dog. But they know you.

Starry says, "Eloiza, do you want to stay over? I can get you a comp room." I say, "No, I think I'm just going home. I'm just here to see everybody."

My husband and I used to love to go there. We would go out and have brunch. It was our day. It's not too far away, anyway. We'd spend our day there.

I said, "No, I'm not going to stay over." I don't like staying over by myself. I said, "You know what? I'm going to go. I'm going to leave here no later than three o'clock. That way I get there early and I fight the traffic." "Okay."

But that's what I do. So I plan to go maybe the first of November because I'll be going to Mexico and probably won't be back until the end of December.

BARBARA: You go to Mexico every year?

Sometimes twice a year. I like to see the bull fights.

Really?

I love the bull fights if it is at La Feria de San Marcos.

MARIBEL: Tell me more about it.

I told that to my son. He says, "Momma? Momma? Momma?" I said, "What?" He said, "What do you do in Mexico when you go there?" I said, "I go see the bull fights." "I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it." "Well, you asked me." He says, "Mother, don't you think that's a little bit too..." "No, it's an art. Stop and think about it. It's an art. How many bullfighters can go around and do that thing with this big old bull?" "Oh, okay." It shuts him up real quick.

BARBARA: I was curious. You mentioned earlier that you've even considered moving there. Was that serious?

No, I do. I'm going to go check it out. You know what? I'm not even going to buy a house. I'll tell you what happened. If I go to Mexico in Aguascalientes where it's very peaceful, I can rent myself a home for three hundred dollars American money and be living like a queen and have a maid. What's the results? I don't want to live with somebody. You still need your privacy. You know what I'm saying? I want to be able to get up and go and do whatever. No, those are my plans. You never know. You know what? The way I think I might make it come true.

MARIBEL: What do you think about the gaming industry? Were you ever tempted to work in the gaming industry?

No. My husband was a dealer at one time, but then he had a heart attack, so he dropped all.

Phyllis James, legal counsel for the MGM/Mirage, she's a tough cookie there. She is one of the Most Powerful Women Magazine. You'll see her.

It never interested me. Personally the gaming, as far as I'm concerned, they do something for the casinos. They don't do a lot for the community. I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong. I think there is a different focus.

BARBARA: I know recently, especially for this project, for the Latinx Voices project, MGM is a big—

A partner?

—partner, yes. It was a matching grant.

Who did you deal with, Laura?

I don't know. Our development department does that. They matched half of the match that we needed.

Good.

It was substantial and we are very pleased with that. That support is important.

I'll be sure and blow UNLV's number when I have lunch with them.

We are very pleased with the community support for this project, and they are right up there, number one.

Recently the gaming industry just started doing it. They didn't think about that in those days. They didn't. I know. I've been around.

MARIBEL: What made you be interested in helping your community? Is it something that your parents engrained in you as you were growing up, or is it something that you picked up yourself?

I think I picked it up. I think a lot of it has to do with when you grow up in a family of ten and you don't have enough sources or resources, you have to, more or less—like me trying to get a job, I got a job at fifteen with a special permit. That was a big thing for me. My mother cried. She said, "You're too young, *Mijita*, to go to work." "No, Momma, I need shoes." It drives you forward. I enjoyed doing that. As old as I am, I still haven't forgotten the community. I will never forget because the community really built me up a lot, too. Of course, I was in everybody's ear, but they still don't forget you. It's like a bypass. *Oh, I know her; I know her.* We keep names like that.

Going back to your original question, I guess when you are really poor—not poor of food because we had everything. We had corn, eggs, chicken. We had that. But clothing, it was far and few in between that we could go shopping.

My dad, when we moved to California when we were young, he took a contact up in Napa, California. He got a contract for three months during the summertime and we picked prunes and onions and everything. Then we came back and bought clothes for school. That gives you integrity. I was not a lazy bum. I don't think so. None of us were lazy at all, none of us.

I remember when I was working at the Million Dollar Theater, I would get my paycheck and give half the money to my mother and a little bit I would keep for myself. I did that for a long time. I even forgot about it. Then I started working at Commercial Credit. I did the same thing. You don't forget the good habits. So I gave her that. Of course, my paycheck was a little bigger then. Then I started investing and buying my own clothes. I used to have to take the bus and save for the bus fare.

Anyway, to make a long story short, after all that money I had given my mother, one day I remember my mom telling my dad, "Francisco?" "*Qué pasó?*" That's the way he used to talk. He says, "I think it's time for Eloiza to have a car. You need to take her shopping for a car." "Well, how much money is it going to cost me?" My mother used to tell my dad, "You still have the first nickel you made." He was a tightwad. He had a wad full of money all the time. He never spent it. He was very good with his family. He bought a home. Mom took care of us. "Well, I think it's time. Take her down." Then my dad said, "Okay, tell her to get ready next Saturday. I'll take her down." Oh, I was up at the crack of dawn. I took a shower. I got dressed and put my makeup on. My daddy got up. My mother told my dad, "Take a shower tonight because she's going to use the bathroom all day and it takes her forever." So he took a shower.

He takes me, Downtown Auto Sales. We go in. I fell in love with this 1959 Thunderbird. My dad is just sitting there and I'm looking around and looking around. I go over to him. "Papa, I like this car. What do you think?" He turns around and looks at me and says, "You don't buy anybody's headaches. If you're going to walk out of here with a car, it is going to have to be a brand-new one." My eyes flew open.

I got to buy a brand-new Bel Air Chevy, chartreuse color, stick shift because I knew how to drive stick shift. I drove it down, up the hill. Everybody is waiting I am sure. It was really fun. I got in and parked my car and I'm so excited. I said, "Tonight I'm going to go with my girlfriends." After everybody goes out, "What happened, Dad?" He said, "Well, I want the keys." I said, "But I was going to go out tonight." He says, "No. You have the down payment for the car. Now you need to save for the insurance. So you can't have it until that insurance is paid for."

He taught me values. Oh my God, I cried. I used to iron for all the neighborhood so I could raise that money. But you know what? It taught me character. Yes, to this day.

How have you taught those lessons to your kids? How have you passed them down?

Oh, Veronica is very up to date. One of the things that she has is her education, which is great. She took that from her dad. She wanted to do it. She wants to do it.

I think the community side, she learned a little bit from me because at the beginning she used to work for a for-profit company for an interior designer. Then when she went to college and got her degree, her master's, she said, "Now I'm going to the nonprofit world. It's so peaceful and there's so many things to learn to do."

Now and then she'll ask me a question. "Mom, what would you do about this?" Not all the time because I think she doesn't want me to think she doesn't know. But it's nice to be taken into consideration.

BARBARA: Do you have any other stories that you would like to share—let me finish that sentence—that you think we should include in this interview about your life in Las Vegas?

I'll tell you one thing. It has really grown and it has really opened a lot of eyes. When I came here Decatur was a closing point. A closing point, really. I said, "Oh, wow." And look where it's at today.

But there are still a lot of good people, Barbara, in Las Vegas. You may not think so, but there are.

Oh, I do. I do. Projects like this open our eyes to all the different paths and contributions that people have made through their work or just being a member of the community. Yes, I do see it. I really appreciate you sharing your story.

I had a good life. I still continue to keep on going because I'm going to Mexico to see those bullfights.

You've got more to contribute here, I can tell. We really do appreciate you coming in here today. This was great.

You're welcome. It was great. I've got to thank Tom Rodriguez again. I love him. He made a comment. We were at a luncheon, August 17th, when Wells Fargo sponsored a table. I got to see him there. He said, "Oh, Eloiza." Then I completely spaced it until Laurents called. He said, "I dropped your name." "Where?" I said. That's what he said, "I dropped your name." I said, "Where?" "There is somebody from UNLV that will be calling you." I said, "Okay." Well, I spaced it. It was August, September, October. Then Laurents called me last week and we chatted. He must have said, "Oh God, she's coo-coo." But we talked. We had a nice time. No, I'm done.

This was really great. The students, as you can tell, are leading this project. Sometimes we do the interviews in Spanish. They are all bilingual. We make sure that we are inclusive of all people who are comfortable no matter what their language is. Yes, this has been great.

I've enjoyed it.

MARIBEL: Thank you so much for sharing your story.

It brought me back from childhood to all this time. It was a pleasant visit.

[End of recorded interview]