

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH STAVAN CORBETT**

An Oral History Conducted by Nathalie Martinez

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

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



Stavan Corbett’s ancestral legacy is a criss-cross of Mexican roots through his mother’s side with Russian and Polish Jew on his father’s side. He was named *Steven* at birth, and later altered the spelling to *Stavan* as a recognition of the blending of his cultural backgrounds.

Though he has a tanned Latino look, he did not learn Spanish until electing to study it in high school. His mother and his grandparents saw assimilation as a better path for their future and that of the next generations. Being inquisitive, his cultural exploration would also reveal that his parents’ courtship was not without overt discrimination—a white girl and a Latina was not always embraced.

While growing up, he was also intrigued with family stories, especially one that told of a great grandfather who fought at the Battle of the Alamo.

As he explores in this oral history, his curious nature has spawned a career resume in Las Vegas that it relentlessly focused on education and youth. He has served on local, state, and national policy initiatives and organizations as an education official and strategist. His career includes work with College of Southern Nevada, Trustee on Clark County School Board, and President of Nevada State Board of Education, among others.

Stavan is a Las Vegas native, a graduate of the College of Southern Nevada and Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy.

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November 5, 2018  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Nathalie Martinez

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Signature of Narrator

Date

Nathalie S Martinez 11-5-18

Signature of Interviewer

Date



**Good morning. Today is November fifth, 2018. We are in the Oral History Research Center here at UNLV in the Lied Library. My name is Nathalie Martinez and we are here with...**

***Rodrigo Vazquez.***

***Barbara Tabach.***

Stavan Corbett.

**Can you spell your name for me, please?**

Stavan is S-T-A-V-A-N. Corbett, C-O-R-B, as in boy, E-T-T.

**Thank you. Stavan, how do you identify yourself?**

As Latino.

**Why do you identify as a Latino?**

I think a lot of it had to do with growing up here, starting school in the early eighties in kindergarten and first grade, getting questions like, *what are you? Are you mixed?* A lot of just external inquiries about what my race is. It's not something we really discussed in the household.

As I got older and began to see more people that look like me here in Southern Nevada, it became something that I began to self-identify or began to form an identity about where I came from, what was my history, what was my family's history, what was culture. Even as a professional in the community working predominately with Latino families and really feeling empowered about the richness and the diversity and the culture.

**Where are you parents from?**

My mother is from San Antonio, Texas. She moved here in the 1960s, early sixties. My father is actually from Brooklyn, New York. He also moved here in the sixties.

**Where do their Latino heritages come from?**



On my mother's side, both my grandparents are from Aguascalientes in Mexico. Matter of fact, my grandfather talks about his grandfather, so it would have been my great-grandfather who would have fought in the Battle of the Alamo. That's where their family had originated and settled, in San Antonio.

My father's side, interestingly, is Eastern European. They were actually Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants who came here during the World War to leave Eastern Europe.

**Have you ever been to Aguascalientes?**

I've never been there. I've been to the state of Sonora, but nowhere else.

**What did you see in Sonora? What was your time there like?**

It was a vacation, so it was very focused. What I saw there, of course—so I stayed in—oh, I can't think of the Spanish translation right now, but it's Rocky Point. I went there for a vacation as a family. Mostly it was on the beach, some in the urban area of the town, but predominately vacation activities.

**Let's go back to your parents. What was your childhood like here in Las Vegas?**

Childhood was very interesting. From memory, going back to preschool, elementary, I lived off East Tropicana and Mountain Vista and I went to Harley Harmon Elementary at that time. It's kind of where I got the questions about, *hey, what are you? Are you mixed?* Recognizing to this day I can't remember anybody else that looked like me in that school—my kindergarten year, my first-grade year—I mean, that was coming from teachers asking, *hey, what are you? Are you mixed? Do you speak another language? Where are your parents from?* I got a lot of curious questions about my look. I was darker than other kids. I had darker hair than other kids. Instead of sandwiches I had burritos that I would bring to school, and so kids were fascinated that I didn't have square lunch; that my lunch looked different theirs. Interestingly enough, even the way I

dressed was a little different than the way they had dressed.

Growing up there at that time—it probably wasn't until we got to third grade and we moved more to the center of the city where I began to see more Latino students, but even then it was very small. When I share those stories with people, they kind of get taken back. I say, well, look at the 1980 Census; we were five percent of the population. It's very interesting when I talk about not seeing a lot of Latinos or being in environments where there were high Latino populations the way it is now, recognizing just the growth that's transpired over the last twenty-five years.

**You talked about bringing burritos to school. What other foods did you have at home?**

**What was life like at home?**

It was chicken and rice. It was beans all the time. It was just really the food that we could afford. Sometimes you wonder, was it a matter of economics or a matter of culture or both based on the food that we ate? I remember going to friends' houses and their homes smelled different than my home smelled, and vice versa. They would come over and say, "Oh, it smells different in here." Even just all those other nuisances that existed just by having friends and going to their homes and them coming to my home. Even just the candy was very different. We didn't eat Snickers and Musketeer bars. It was more of the Mazapans and the other candies that were more Mexican I guess you would say. Being able to be in a position to even expand the knowledge base of my friends based on just the different foods and candies that I ate.

**Growing up did your parents speak Spanish to you in the house?**

They didn't. My great-grandparents, all they spoke was Spanish. My grandparents were bilingual, but they were very specific on not—for my mother's side, of course, is what I'm speaking about. My mother's side, my grandparents intentionally didn't speak to Spanish to them

in the sense that they didn't want them to have accents and wanted them to be accepted and didn't want them to be ostracized because of actually being bilingual or having accents and not being able to compete in the spaces they needed to compete in because that would be seen as a deficit. So I didn't grow up in a household where Spanish was spoken.

**How do you feel about that? Do you regret not having had that?**

Oh, yes, indeed, especially in today's environment, which is a very different environment than it was when my mother was growing up in the fifties and sixties and seventies. Yes, it was always a yearning. I currently speak Spanish, but it was because I took it in high school and took it in college and surrounded myself with individuals who also spoke Spanish, and so I kind of immersed myself in that environment.

My children are bilingual; that was something that I wanted to make sure was inspired. I tried to correct the balance in life, so to speak. They're bilingual, which I see as an asset. I don't know that that experience would have modified any approach that I took with my children in terms of making sure they spoke Spanish, but it was definitely something that I was cognizant of.

**You spoke about elementary school and what that was like. What about moving on through middle school?**

Even going on to middle school when the Latino population, you had a lot more of immigrant populations coming to Southern Nevada. I notice a difference even in first generation Latinos and second generation Latinos in that there were even cultural differences between those who were second generation and those who were first generation. It was almost like the experience that as an elementary student that I was—the experience I was providing in terms of diversity to my friends who are non-Latino, I was actually experiencing that with those who had just come from Mexico. It definitely had a support or an enhancement in my own identity formation

because my Latino experience was already Americanized, so to speak, where there had been already a history of assimilation and adaptation and amalgamation where these students were coming to America for the first time and they were now my peers in middle school in recognizing that they were even different than I and that their Latino sense—they didn't even call themselves Latino—but their Latino-ness, so to speak, was very different from what I had identified it as or had experienced.

**Around what time was this in middle school?**

This would have been in the late eighties. This would have been like '87, '88.

**How did they identify themselves if they didn't identify as Latino?**

I would say second generation Latinos had a little more confidence, again, with that sense of amalgamation, integration; had already developed in their navigational and social skills in terms of adapting. Where what I saw in the first generation or immigrant populations, they struggled a little bit. You could see that there was a struggle of fitting in and recognizing, hey, I spent X number of years, at that point it would have been twelve, thirteen years, in another country, and now I'm coming here and it's very different. Again, the way the immigrant students would dress compared to how we would dress, it was almost a sense of jealousy where they were able to maintain their identity and brought it to them and they were bold in their identity. Those of us that were second generation were like, ugh, what side do we navigate in? Do we really want to be accepted and what does that look like? Even just going through that type of thought process. Their parents spoke Spanish and they were bilingual. Being somebody who looked just like they did, but didn't know Spanish, it was all those other levels of revelation that was like, oh, okay, so maybe this is where I come from and this is a part of my culture, my history, my identity. The possibilities, I think, from my perspective it was more seen as an asset.

**How did you change the way you acted with those people after seeing all of those things?**

That's a good question. I think it was more just trying to relate more. I think with any thirteen- or fourteen-year-old, middle school is just a tough time in general, right? You're already going through those same mental exercises about fitting in and forming your identity, but when you put that other cultural context on it, I think it just enhances it. I would say it's really no different. It definitely inspired a lot more questions specifically with my mom. Hey, I noticed this or I noticed that. She could relate, but it wasn't something that she ever extended.

She also had been—this is my words—she had also been programmed in a sense to protect me and try to make sure, just like her parents wanted her to do, which was assimilate and kind of blend in. I think that carried on just as being parented that way, she also parented that way. It made some really interesting conversations when I began to become more inquisitive about our culture, about our history. That's when my grandfather who still lived in San Antonio would come back. He gave me a perfect oral history of where his family was from and recognizing that my great-grandfather was in the Battle of the Alamo.

Being able to go to school with first generation immigrant Latinos really inspired probably me to seek more intensely where I came from, what the heritage was like, what was the language about, what was the history, and so it was a positive experience. I'd say the way it changed is it inspired more questions more than anything else and really inspired this self-discovery about origin.

**What stories did your grandfather tell you?**

He would talk about just, going back then, the Day of the Dead. It's very popular now. You can go to the Springs Preserve where back then it was something that was only in Mexico City or small towns in Mexico. It was prevalent in San Antonio. You have sixth, seventh generation

Latinos in San Antonio. Just the maturity of where he had come from was very different. The stories were more about, yes, we're a proud people and this is what we engage in. This is what the social construct looks like in San Antonio where you have a high population of Latinos. We don't try to fit in; we just are. It was a lot of those type of things.

But again, moving here in the late fifties, early sixties, he also did his best to assimilate. Las Vegas in particular doesn't have a great reputation on how they treated people of color going into the sixties, seventies. Recognizing that that was the environment here, I think he also had to make some sacrifices in denying who he was, coming from San Antonio where Latinos were celebrated, to a place like Southern Nevada where they weren't celebrated.

**Why do you think that difference existed? Why was there such a difference between the cultures?**

I couldn't even speak to it. Going into the eighties, just the level of curiosity of people showing me, even educators who are supposed to be sophisticated in their mind-set and diversity and understanding, just in the way that they would talk to me or make assumptions of me. That wasn't anything I recognized as a kid. I was like, oh, okay, because I didn't know better. As an adult looking back on it, I recognize, oh, that's what that was. I think again to the point Texas was Mexico, right? Recognizing that you had this long-term history of a people where they were embraced and celebrated and didn't have to navigate or minimize who they were.

Coming here where you don't have to look that far back in history about how African Americans were treated or how Latinos were treated when you go back into the sixties or seventies. I think it was just part of the culture that was here. It was a very western town.

My father talks about even him coming from Brooklyn, New York, and coming here in the sixties where he saw cowboy hats, boots and overalls. It was even just a cultural shock for

him to come here and recognize they were like a real—I always equate it to if you go through rural Nevada now, it is exactly what Las Vegas was like in the sixties and seventies.

**BARBARA:** *Your father was Jewish?*

He is, yes.

*Can you address that what while we're talking about parental backgrounds? That puts a couple of projects together.*

All right. Yes, indeed.

*Did you practice Judaism? Did you learn about that part of your life?*

Yes. My parents divorced very early on. Matter of fact, when I was in kindergarten, he went back to New York; we stayed here. When I would go back for summer break—actually it was Christmas break for me here, but it wasn't there. Yes, I did Hanukkah. I did all the Jewish practices when I was with him and then all the traditional Latino/Catholic things here. Yes, it screwed me all up.

*Mixed marriages at that time were tough.*

Indeed. I'm glad you bring that up. That was something actually they went through being here in the sixties. He looks Caucasian. My mother is dark-complected. They had a very tough time here when they were dating. He didn't see any—New York is a little different. New York has experienced diverse communities a lot longer time than here, and so even that created some interesting stories, indeed.

**What kind of stories? How was it with you?**

When they were dating and getting rocks thrown at them because they were dating. My father's car being vandalized because he was dating my mother. Different things like that. That was all here. That gives you another perspective of the cultural context that was here in Las Vegas in the

late sixties, early seventies.

**BARBARA:** *Is that because of the neighborhood that they were living in?*

Interestingly enough, they went to Clark High School. Clark, in the late sixties, seventies, was like a Palo Verde. I would say they were in a Summerlin-like environment back in the sixties and seventies. My grandfather was a shoe salesman at Wonder World. Wonder World, back in the sixties and seventies, was like the Wal-Mart of the day, actually more like a Sears. He had done very well for himself, and they had done very well for themselves. My father was out here living with his sister who is eighteen years older than him and moved out here to live. He was getting in trouble in New York, so his mom said, "Go live with your sister." They were also upper middle class. I would say in that upper middle-class environment is where they experienced a lot of conflict.

My mother talks about not really having those challenges growing up; that they really assimilated very well. They're darker complexion. They're not light-skinned Latinos. They're darker complexion Latinos. It was visible. But because of the economic environment they were in, they were accepted. My grandfather, being actually manager at Wonder World, he would sell shoes to Ron Lurie's kids, who was the mayor back in the day. They had been accepted, so to speak.

She said she would experience that type of racism when she started seeing my father. She got to understand even for herself where she was and what her own limitations were in terms of exercising her identity.

**Where did your mother work?**

To this day my mother is a cage cashier at the Mirage. She's been a cage cashier as long—it used to be the Holiday International, which is now Main Street Station. She worked at Circus Circus



for years, the Mirage. It's always been as a cage cashier.

**What's that like? How has that changed over the years? Has she told you stories that she's heard?**

My mother's side, being here and being this place where they came from, they really assimilated quite well. My mother only tells stories related to race when she dated my father. Other than that she hasn't really shared any significance of stories that are standing out right now.

I'll say something that's probably insensitive. I think sometimes you're seen as, well, if you're the only one, that's okay; there's not a concern until there is more of you. I think she's always been in an environment where she's been accepted because she's literally been the minority, so she's never been a threat. Even to this day when I think of her coworkers, they're predominately Anglo. It's not until you get to other sections of a casino where you see less diversity or more people of color in those environments. She hasn't shared anything that's standing out right now.

**What was her upbringing like here in Las Vegas?**

She talks about her grandmother visiting from Mexico and her grandmother only speaking Spanish and her parents only speaking English to her. Matter of fact, her parents not liking that my great-grandmother would speak Spanish, but they weren't going to tell her anything just out of that cultural respect.

They assimilated pretty well in the sixties and seventies. Even as I was going through my own identity formation, I saw that it was something that my mom and her brother—she has five brothers that were born and raised here. Even as I get older and look at their context of being Latino, I think they associate more with the American respect. I don't have any second thoughts about it other than that was just their assimilation and survival at the time that they grew up. I

think when we're together there is kind of, oh, okay; yes, this is that. My grandmother is still with us. She's in her eighties. She speaks Spanish, so she loves coming over and speaking Spanish to my kids because they're the only grandkids that do speak Spanish.

**You're not an only child, then.**

No, I'm not. I'm the oldest. I have two brothers; one lives in Pennsylvania and the other one lives in Montana. I'm the only one that lives here.

**And they don't speak Spanish?**

No.

**Do you know why they made that choice?**

No, not really. I think I was just probably more curious in terms of the culture. When I was married, my ex-wife was from Mexico. She was an immigrant, and so I think that also helped in terms of being married to somebody who spoke Spanish. She was probably ten years old when she moved to America, and so she had a lot of that identity formation already instilled in her, which I contribute tremendously to the fact that our children have that understanding about who they are.

Also, going to school here, again I was in the, I would say, extreme minority. My daughters and my son go to Desert Pines High School. I stayed on the east side of town where it's 90 percent Latino. Their school experience is very different than mine. When I graduated in the nineties, the Hispanic population was still less than 10 percent where now in the Clark County School District it's over 50 percent. Even just in that generation you're talking about a 40 percent increase in population representation that they have that I didn't have. That also contributes to, I think, how they see themselves and who they understand they are.

**Just to go back to your father, you said there was a great cultural difference, comparing**

**Brooklyn to Las Vegas. Can you tell us more about that?**

Some of the things he points out, it was more about the cowboy culture, western culture that was a shock to him. Coming from New York he had been in communities where there were Latinos. The Puerto Rican population is huge in New York, and so though the Mexican population isn't, Puerto Rican is. He associated the same; there are Latinos in New York and there's some Latinos here. It obviously didn't have any impact on him in terms of dating my mother at the time. He just talks about this being just a very western oriented town.

Being Jewish, he recognized some of the racist—those are my words—connotations and environments that existed. It wasn't very welcoming here either to some Jewish people, and so he had recognized that. I don't know how that played or didn't play out in terms of how he carried himself. He did talk about not only being Jewish, but in combination with dating my mother, getting rocks thrown at them or his car being vandalized, just other things that would happen to him because of bringing that with him and then engaging in a mixed-race relationship.

**How old was he when he came to Las Vegas?**

He would have been maybe sixteen or seventeen.

**You mentioned that when you went to New York you would interact more with Jewish events and here you have the Catholic/Latino events. What were those Catholic/Latino events like?**

It was interesting going to catechism and going to Christmas Eve mass and seeing a priest and then going to New York where my great-grandfather was actually a rabbi. My grandfather was very religious in the sense of celebrating and high appreciation the Jewish culture and celebrating everything and being out there and experiencing the Seder and all the things that were on the table and the things that my grandmother would prepare for that experience, to Hanukkah and

being in New York and seeing all the...candles for Hanukkah.

**The menorah?**

The menorahs, yes. You would see them in all the windows in Brooklyn. You have the stoops and then you have the windows and there were all the menorahs in the windows, which I didn't see a lot here. For lack of a better term, phenomenal; I love that I have had that experience to appreciate and really be enveloped in both cultures.

**Do you practice religion now?**

Probably more so on the Jewish side. Yes.

**BARBARA:** *That's interesting. You belong to a synagogue here?*

No.

***Do your children practice?***

I mean, I don't know if they practice. I share with them. It's open. I don't tell them, you must do this. I educate them and hope they make informed decisions going forward.

**RODRIGO:** *It's more of a cultural thing for you?*

I would say so.

***I do have a please questions regarding, one, the formation of your identity. Do you have a timeline of when you started to notice you were different than the other kids?***

Yes, I do. ... Of course, first grade when the teacher would ask me, "What are you?" That type of thing. I think that was the impetus of my identity formation. In third grade, moving always on the east side, but more central east side where there were higher populations of Latinos and actually seeing two or three other children that looked like me, which is something I never experienced up to third grade. That also had another level of inspiration.

Even as a young kid recognizing—and I'll share—even having crushes on girls with

blond hair and blue eyes and how they reacted to me versus how they reacted to other boys with blond hair and blue eyes. They were like, *huh?* That even in and of itself had an indicator.

Going into middle school was also different; I would see the population of Latinos increase, again first generation, for lack of a better term. It's not meaning to be disrespectful, but I saw a lot of the second generation Latinos were more gang involved especially being on the east side where the first generation were like, no way; I'm here to make sure my parents' sacrifice pans out. Even just seeing that. I'm deploying this looking back, but didn't realize it then. Just how coming from an environment where anybody is the same versus where you have to struggle and there are other racial implications and how just people deal with that and navigate that and how they gravitate towards different behaviors versus, hey, I didn't have to experience racism because everybody looked like me, and even how that had an impact in just cognition or behavior.

I would say interestingly, it was probably my sophomore year I did actually go live with my father for a full year. I lived with him back east for my whole sophomore year. Kind of duplicated, I was getting in trouble here, so my mom said, "Hey, go live with your dad." I lived with him for a year, and so that had an impact.

It wasn't until I came back. When I came back for my junior year, I moved in with my grandmother. My grandmother lived west, which was really the furthest on the west side of town, Jones and Charleston where Bonanza High School is. Back then in the early nineties Bonanza High School was like the Palo Verde, so very affluent community and I recognized that.

My birth name is Steven; I'm a junior. When I got to Bonanza High School, I recognized that there were like three Stevens in every single class I was in and I wasn't really happy about it. I didn't appreciate it. I thought, *I don't look like all these other Stevens in my class.* So I took out

the E's and put in the A's and began to pronounce my name Stavan, and so it stuck with me ever since. I think that was probably another pivotal point where I said, "Hey, I don't look like those Stevens. I really modified the spelling of my name to try to inspire some type of differentiation.

At least in my school years, those are probably the significant points of identity formation. Also, meeting my wife at the time and really being in that environment also helped form what that looked like. Also going through school really looking at taking ethnic studies classes, really learning about the indigenous cultures of Mexico from the Aztecs to the Toltecas, Aztecs, really just taking an initiative and an interest in that and recognizing the indigenous assets was huge. I think those were all significant points.

I'll go back to even in my professional career. About seven or eight years ago, I worked as an administrator in the Nevada State College in the College of Ed and got to help design—it's called the **Nepantla** program, which is a program for first generation Latino students and really looking at immersing the culture into the curriculum for that identity formation because we recognize a lot of first generation college students don't succeed in college because of the lack of identity formation or it can serve as a level of resiliency. I would say that's kind of somewhat of a timeline.

*Just to follow up on that, you said you started school in the eighties, nineties, which was a crucial time of growth for Las Vegas.*

Right.

*How did, I guess, a change in the formation of Las Vegas also kind of help that development—*

Oh, indeed.

*—as more communities started to come in?*

If I understand what you're saying, on the east side of town growing up, really throughout the whole 20th century, there was a Mariana's on the corner of Bonanza and Eastern and it was literally probably the size of this office, real small, boutique, where the Latino community would go to purchase foods that they could get in Mexico. Maybe in the later eighties Los Compadres opened up across the street down the way, which is on Sunrise and Eastern. That was really it. It wasn't until the 2000s where we had Cardenas, which is a huge L.A.-based Latino foods market. El Super, which is also from L.A., is here now. Los Compadres is still around. La Bonita, the family who I know is from Mexico, but their children are first generation, born here. Even just that in terms of economics and looking at now on the east side of town you have, I think, one Smith's, but they're all predominately Cardenas, Super, Los Compadres, La Bonitas.

The American grocery chains really struggled to survive in that east part of town. Now if you do go to the Smith's that are most prevalent on the east side of town, if you walk into a Smith's—it's really interesting—if you walk into a Smith's on the east side of town and you go up and down the aisles, they mimic very much the Latinos market that are on that side of town versus you go to a Smith's in Henderson or Summerlin. You wouldn't be able to tell they're the same grocery provider. That, in and of itself, is something again that my children experience that I wouldn't have experienced growing up. I don't know if that kind of gets into what you're talking about.

*It's perfect actually.*

**Just for the record, what middle school did you go to?**

Dell H. Robison.

**And Bonanza High School?**

I went to Eldorado. I moved back east. I moved in with my grandmother. I went to Bonanza. I

wasn't successful, so I went to Eldorado and graduated from Eldorado High School.

**How did the environment contrast between Eldorado and Bonanza?**

Oh, night and day. I have an uncle who, oddly enough, is six months younger than me. He went to Bonanza, stayed at Bonanza, as I went back to Eldorado High School. We would hang out. He would come hang out with me and my friends at house parties, and we had deejays and music, and everybody was having fun. Then I would go to his parties, and it was quiet, and everybody was calm and no dancing and you just hung out. Even just that, it was very interesting just in terms of east side dynamics of us really wanting to—we couldn't call it a party if there wasn't a deejay. On the Bonanza side of town, it was rock music on very low and everybody was just kicked back and sitting around talking. He was like, "Let's not go to my parties anymore. Let's just go to yours." Once he got to see what our social dynamic was, which was very different than the social dynamic that he was in even just at the high school level.

**What kind of music did they play?**

More like alternative. Back then it would have been Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Toad the Wet Sprocket; all those alternative, soft rock, kind of grunge. On the east side of town, we were listening to hip-hop and some Merengue.

**Any specific groups?**

On which side? Hip-hop was big. That was probably the largest thing. Cypress Hill. A lot of the West Coast rap, some East Coast, some Public Enemy, some Tribe Called Quest. What else? You could probably name any hip-hop artist and it was playing. You could name any soft rock, slash, alternative and it was playing over there. Or even new wave, like Depeche Mode, New Order, even that exposed me to the diversity. I'm like, *oh, this music is kind of cool*, because I had never heard it. I just didn't grow up in that environment. Going to Bonanza was also a very



different environment. And I learned.

**Did you see any difference in reference to education or the way teachers acted?**

Oh, a hundred percent. Something that's even prevalent today, yes, going there and even seeing the social dynamics at Bonanza High School of the way teachers spoke to students was very different than the way teachers spoke to students at Eldorado High School. It's something that even continues. Even with my own children, during the NCLB, which was a federal law for No Child Left Behind, if your school wasn't succeeding, you got to send your child to a school that was succeeding. My son, I intentionally sent him to Green Valley, so he went to Green Valley High School for one year. My daughters went to Greenspun in Henderson for one year. Now that my daughter is at Desert Pines and my son came back and graduated from Desert Pines, they talk about even just a difference in how teachers speak to them, the expectations, the different comments. It's literally night and day, not in a positive night-and-day way. Being a former educator and being a professional in a space that I've been a professional in, if I wasn't there to coach them and give them access to help navigate that, I don't know that they would be doing as well as they're doing.

**How would they address students exactly?**

My son would even say how teachers were respectful in Green Valley High School. He said they would speak to them as adults. Where here, he said the teachers want to too much be their friend and they feel sorry for the kids. So they don't really focus on education and academics, they focus more on being their friend. My daughters will say the teachers at Desert Pines would say, "Oh, it shouldn't be this tough. I don't know why I do this job." I'm like, *what?* My children shouldn't be exposed to that type of environment. Where at Greenspun, they say that the teachers are engaged and have different conversations; push them; want to make sure that they do well.

They say the teachers here are like, "Ah, if you don't do it, don't worry." Just even that. I would say that's continued. That was my experience twenty-five years ago and it is unfortunately still their experience.

**You mentioned that you saw second generation Latinos being more gang related. Can you tell us more about that?**

Yes, of course. Second generation Latinos I saw were more involved in the gangs especially in the eighties. If you go back into the eighties, it was really the height of gangster culture. Growing up especially on the east side, you had 28th Street and you had San Chucos and you had El Locos. Then you had, of course, the Crips and the Bloods, which was really prevalent back in the late eighties. You barely hear it today and if you do, my opinion, it's because of job security of people who make money off being able to say, "Hey, this still exists; we have to be involved," type of thing.

It was even night and day. You could see second generation Latino students were in one area; first generation immigrant Latino students were in another area. There was even segregation between them. There wasn't really a lot of where the immigrant population was like, that's not what we want to be a part of. There's reasons you can say that existed, again, dealing with racism, dealing with, again, the environment where teachers really didn't care, for lack of a better term, in just the way they taught those students versus the way they taught the students who were first generation immigrant students, just very different and you could see the difference. I would say you could probably go into Rancho or Desert Pines where there is a high immigrant population and you can see even first, second, third generation Latinos and I think you would be able to just to look across the lunchroom and see the difference even today.

**We talked about your high school experiences. What about moving on to higher education?**

Higher education, I went right into CSN because that's what you were supposed to do, community college. Actually, I'm the first to even graduate high school in my family. Even recognizing that neither one of my parents went to college, so in terms of social or navigational capital, they couldn't share that with me. As a first generation college student, I was just doing everything that I thought I should do and reading what I could read to be successful. I never heard of FAFSA or things of that nature, no college knowledge that we call now; I didn't have any of it. I really wasn't successful.

It wasn't until later on when I got reengaged and went to Nevada State College and actually took online programs with Georgetown University to get a credential. It's been a long path in terms of capturing that academic credential. It's something that, of course, I made sure my children have. I didn't know to go to accelerated courses or AP courses, so it's something that my daughters and son did participate in.

My first job out of high school, I was a dishwasher at Harrah's and was making six eighty-five an hour. After my six months' probation, I was going to make eight fifty an hour and I was like, *yes, I would have made it*. Back then, this was like '93, '94, I was like, *if I can make eight fifty an hour, I'd be set for life*. Little did I know, right?

It was interesting. When I was a dishwasher at Harrah's, there were other people who literally had been with Culinary their whole life and had said, "Listen, you don't belong here; you don't belong here; this is not for you; you don't want to end up like me; you don't want to wash dishes for thirty years; go back to school and go do something."

Eventually I took the advice. My professional career really started when I started working at the Lied Discovery Children's Museum. I actually went there on a date and was really impressed just by the experience and began to volunteer for about six, seven months, and I got

offered as a job and served as a youth coordinator for a year and a half.

From there I moved on to YMCA. I worked at the YMCA as a sports director. We used to have year-round schools here as a way to address the growth because they didn't have enough schools. They put everybody on year-round schedules, so some kids would be on and some kids would be off. We would have what they call track break camps. I did curriculum design and management for those camps. I did their sports leagues. I worked with the City of Las Vegas, Clark County.

I did some adjudicated youth work, served as a psycho-social support case manager for adjudicated youth. I worked for Nevada Partners at the time. Being in that environment also was, I say, a point of identity formation again because what I saw was, especially working with adjudicated youth, when I looked at the disproportionality and the high specifically male colored representation in the juvenile system and then recognizing that there was actually a higher proportionality, or disproportionality, however you want to look at it, of Latino males in the justice system than we have even in our post-secondary system. That also inspired me to begin to look at, what were the points and how much did identity formation played a role?

When I worked at Nevada Partners, I worked with a doctor, Dr. Alonzo Jones, in developing an evidence-based practice curriculum for identity formation, working with urban youth, and really understanding the significance that identity formation has in terms of resiliency and success in terms of just academic, social skills, et cetera. I would say even throughout my professional career there were those points of, oh, okay, I see the different elements and the impacts on a community that really inspires a trajectory of culture or a trajectory of behavior or decision-making processes that come along with just other elements in the community.

**When you first enrolled into CSN, what motivated you? What was your goal?**

Well, what motivated me was, one, being the first to even graduate from my family. My mother didn't finish. My father went into the army. Matter of fact, going real back, his family put him in the army to try to keep him from marrying my mother. He was probably eighteen-years old and they put him in the army so that he wouldn't marry my mother—of course, what is he going to do? He's going to marry my mom.

**BARBARA:** *That always backfires.*

He ended up having a good—back then in the seventies you didn't need, as you do now, the level of education or academic credentialing that you need. They both had okay lives even not having that.

The inspiration was I was the first to graduate in my family. *I'm going to be the first to go to college.* That was really, I would say, the dominant motivator. Even in the nineties at CSN, I didn't see a lot of Latino students even then. It was predominately Anglo students that I would see, which is not something you would say now. The Latino population is at its highest participant at the community college level today here at Southern Nevada. That was also another tremendous shift from twenty-five years ago to now.

I would say that was the main motivator. It was also being able to see the trends of wages and academic credentialing and recognizing, as I began to get more and more into the job market, everything was degree required, degree required, degree required. That in and of itself I recognized I wanted to have a quality of life and that was going to be one of the ways to be able to capture that.

**What was it like working at Harrah's, in the casino industry?**

It was interesting. We had several kitchens and you worked in different kitchens. The buffet was the busiest restaurant, and so there were six or seven of us in that kitchen. You had a cup station,

silverware station. You were the dish feeder or you were the dish catcher or the runner. You didn't want to be the catcher because you had all this steam coming off of the machine. We wore paper hats and like an hour into your day you were sweating and the hat would rip because of the sweat and it would fall on you, but you had to wear it because you would get in trouble for not wearing it. Nobody wanted to be the catcher. Cups was easy because you're just stacking cups. We never fought for the feeder position because the gentleman who was about to retire and doing it for thirty years, he was probably in his late fifties, early sixties, an older African-American man, out of respect we let him always be the feeder, and so we never really jockeyed for that position. But all the other positions were up for grabs. You knew if you were there on time and you were early, you wouldn't have to be the catcher. If you were late you were going to be stuck at the end of the machine and that was just going to be your day. That was an experience in and of itself. It was again predominately African-American, Latino people, very few Caucasians in the back of the house, so to speak.

Interesting, when I worked at Nevada Partners, Nevada Partners is also associated with the Culinary Training Academy. A lot of our services through Nevada Partners was through WIA at that time, Workforce Innovation Act, and so it's really geared towards people who are unemployed or underemployed, upscaling their job sets. Recognizing going into that and also that being a point where I saw many more minorities, I was like, *oh, wow, we're everywhere here in the back of the house*, was also a new environment and recognition.

Being at Nevada Partners where we still do that training, there's actually a documentary on the Westside Las Vegas and they talk about how African Americans during the sixties were only allowed in the back of the house. This would have been ten years ago, so 2008, 2006. I was like, *wow, we're still doing the same thing; we're training communities of color to work in the*

*back of the house forty years later, and recognizing that not much had changed from the sixties to even today and that's one continuum that is even prevalent today.*

But, yes, being there, I would say that was a dominant experience of what it was like. It was also recognizing that the people on the casino floor were predominately Caucasian and those of us of color were all in the back, and this would have been in the nineties.

**What documentary was that?**

They always air it on PBS.

**BARBARA:** *It's the African-American Experience. It's based upon our oral histories.*

That's exactly right.

*I worked on that project. I'm glad you watched it.*

Oh, yes, indeed.

**Moving on from CSN to Nevada State, what was the change in the demographic?**

Nevada State is only about twelve or thirteen years old, and so the demographic is a little more blended. Bart over there, who is the president, is very clear about, hey, we're a first generation, working adult campus. I think you see a lot more diversity in that campus. Even in the staff it's a little more mixed.

I remember getting into the profession in the late nineties and working for YMCA, even at the professional level not very many of us of color were at that professional level. I remember going to my first Latin Chamber of Commerce luncheon and being like, wow, *we exist; we're professionals and we dress up and drive nice cars; there is a population of Latinos out there that is successful at least in that sense.* I saw some of that at Nevada State College as well where there was a more diverse blend of diversity in terms of race and economics.

**Going back to Harrah's real quick, were you involved with the Culinary Union?**

I was. I was, yes, involved as in a member. They weren't who they are today back then. Today they're very inbred into the community, very grassroots activists, politically inclined. Back in the nineties I wouldn't say that was the case. That's probably over the last ten, fifteen years. Even at my level of modification of Culinary having the presence that it has today, they are a force today in terms of the political dynamic.

**As a member what would you do?**

Remember, I'm like eighteen, and so for me what they did for me is make sure I was going to make eight fifty an hour and I had insurance. I didn't really have that future orientation yet. I was an eighteen-year-old. It was really surface level, kind of selfish-type stuff.

**How did you balance work life with school at the time?**

Oh, it was tough. It was tough, again, because nobody else around me, my friends, weren't going to school. I couldn't compare notes or compare experiences. I would get off work and everybody was going to have fun and I had night classes that I had to go to. I was in English 101 until nine o'clock at night after I already had worked a full day. It was very difficult. I couldn't go to my parents and say, "Hey, what did you do? What was the advice?" It's not that they didn't wanted to; they just didn't have the experience to be able to share. I know they wanted me to succeed; they just couldn't tell me how to other than just work hard, like all parents tell you. But in terms of just the details of success and the strategies, they couldn't share. It was difficult. Yes, it was very difficult. I think that's why it took so long, going in and out of it. The only frame of reference I had was just my own self-leadership or self-guidance.

**What about with your siblings at the time?**

No. My brother under me is three years younger than me. He just went right into the workforce. He didn't even enroll in school. My youngest brother, the same thing; he tried to go to Culinary



for a little bit, but didn't do that. I am to this day the only one that went to college out of the siblings, out of myself and my brothers.

**What did you study at Nevada State?**

At Nevada State I studied criminal justice.

**What was the goal there?**

The goal was, first, to get a degree. At that time, I already had been working with adjudicated youth and learning the juvenile justice system. I had sat on different boards or panels for the disproportionality contact, DMC, Disproportion Minority Contact. Here, the African-American male makes up six or seven percent in high school, but they represent 42 percent in juvenile justice; very similar with Hispanic male population. It was really a way to get the credential to try to help inform already the work experience that I had developed.

**Do you continue to work in that field at all today?**

No. In terms of the professional space, I got into politics. I ran and I was elected to the State Board of Education in 2010. I served on the Clark County School Board. In the last, I would say, almost ten years I've mostly been in administration in my role. I still have some level of impact.

And I would say yes, because now I currently work for United Way and I do strategy and government affairs, so through policy I still try to have an influence in that space. It's actually what really made me want to run for office is, as an educator and as a caseworker and working in the boots on the ground, so to speak, I would spend the majority of my time navigating policies to be effective with the community where I recognize policies were not really developed to support the community; they actually created more barriers. Through my current role I still try to influence policy that's more related to day-to-day life. I can see tremendous gaps in terms of policy and what actually people go through on a day-to-day basis. So somewhat, yes.

**You mentioned serving on the school board and I know at the time you were the only Latino on the board. What was that like?**

Yes. So it was fun, and I mean that. It was fun. Even then I would really have to talk to my peers on the board about advocating for issues of students of color or minorities, especially English language learners. Everybody always looked to me as the token; I was supposed to speak about Latino issues because I was Latino. I would say, "Ah, you can care about it just as much as me; you don't have to look like that just to care about it." I had a couple of really good allies. Not everybody believed that or I wasn't able to convince everybody of that, but I did have a couple of other school board members who took it on. I said, "Listen, if you really care about this issue, they have to hear it from you because I look self-serving. I look like I'm just advocating for my own people and I'm just trying to help my own folks. Where you, you don't look like me. They'll actually listen to you more than they listen to me because you don't look like the population you're advocating for." And so that was a constant dynamic especially, again, with a school district that is 70 percent of color. There were those pieces.

It was also really—I don't know what the right word is—but it meant a lot to me to look like a community. That also sounds opposite of what I just said, but to look like a community that you serve where people from the community would come up and speak to me because I look like them. There were important issues to them that would have gone unaddressed. And who knows what evolution of what would have happened? But they would come to me because they felt a level of confidence. Same thing, I would say, "Hey, I have colleagues you can go talk to as well. You can trust them. Just because I look like you is the portal, but to be able to complete it can be holistic in talking to other folks because they have the mind-set and they have the compassion." And that's actually more prevalent. I'd always say, "Hey, there's people that look

like us that probably don't do us any favors." And so it's not just about people who look like us, but it's about the mind-set as well. That was a constant conversation. I would navigate really between the community who only wanted to come to me because how I looked like and board members who wanted me to speak on things because of how I looked like. Trying to navigate that was really interesting and really trying to evolve that ecosystem, so to speak.

**When you were running for this position, what was your agenda essentially?**

My agenda was really broad and I think the demographics allowed it to be broad because of the—it's not the right term—because of the minority-majority school district that we are, recognizing that if you were to focus on these elements, the school district would excel. It just happens that those elements are made up by 70 percent of the population. I was able to talk in a broad sense.

One of the things that was coming about that time was a common core standards and people really trying to push back on those and saying: all it is, is we're evolving math and English so that we can compete globally. No matter what community you are from that's going to appeal to you. We as a society need to be able to compete globally and have an education system that inspires success to compete at the global level.

It was really a generalist approach.

Also, in my last election when I lost it also helped in terms of even today. When we did the analysis of the post-election number, the precincts that were predominately Latino or urban, I won every precinct, but when you got into the more affluent districts, I lost. Where I didn't look like the community is who didn't vote for me. It's where I looked like the community, they did vote for me. That was just four years ago, so that's an indication of still the context that exists today in society.

**Who was your opponent at the time?**

His name is Kevin Child.

**While you were on the board, what were some of the accomplishments you were able to do?**

Interestingly enough, ELL is a huge piece. About 70 thousand of our students are English language learner, first generation English speakers. There's also academic language. Those communities that come from poverty, specifically in the African-American community, there is a lot of opportunities in terms of academic language and they're the same. Through a group of us, we were able for the first time to bring African-American and Latino communities together to come to a school board meeting and actually help inspire resolutions....It was the first time the school board adopted a resolution around academic and ELL language and saying, *Okay, this is something we care about.* This is not one community speaking over the other, but it's both communities coming together and saying: *Hey, we care about this. So let's not make this issue of race, but let's make this an issue of success and what we know exists in the academic realm of how we make sure our students are capable of being successful, and what are the supports that they need so that they are successful?* I would say that was one of the things that I got to be a part of. I won't say I accomplished it, but got to be a part of.

Other things, again, there were just issues within the district that weren't being addressed. In our school system you get the least experienced teachers that work at the highest risk schools. That's just the way it's framed. That similar context follows with principals. Through working with school administrators, we were able to get experienced principals at high-risk schools. I'm happy to say you can see the success of those schools. The trajectory of those particularly high schools and middle schools were the most difficult. If we were to look at where we were able to work together and get those effective leaders and principals in those schools, if you were to look

at where they were performing five or six years ago compared to where they're performing now, it's actually an increase. Those are some of the things that I was happy to be a part of. It is really that systems level approach and not just these individual successes, but how do we inspire the system and get systems level approaches and opportunities in place?

**How do you think your background as a Latino and seeing how you had that growth and identity, how did that influence your decision-making process on the board?**

Oh, a tremendous amount. I mean, it inspired it a tremendous amount. I would say what it made me much more sensitive to was injustices and really looking at the ecosystems that were in place. People always say the system is working exactly the way it is designed. All I did was look at the outputs and the outcomes and say, "Okay, there's a system that is designed to provide these deficits or these injustices that are in place, and so let's be really thoughtful about how we design a system that creates different outcomes."

I think had I amalgamated the way some of my other family—I'm just being honest—I think if I had amalgamated the way some of my other family members did, I don't know that that would have meant as much to me. But because I had that identity formation and the understanding and really to this day live in the community that I was born and raised in, I think gave me a level of inspired identity formation and sustainability because it's not only forming the identity, but it's also sustaining it and having it constantly evolve. I think that all played a significant role in terms of how I engaged those opportunities.

**Tell us more about your position now working with United Way.**

I've been at United Way for about four or five months now. I serve as their chief strategist and government relations officer. A lot of my role is about strategic partnerships even to this day. I just got back from San Antonio, which my mom loved. Last week I was in San Antonio. We

have a new president at Nevada State College. He's the first Latino president here, Dr. Federico Zaragoza. He is a rock star in San Antonio and really built from ground up a collaboration with Community College of Alamo, Workforce Connections, United Way, and through policy has really robust career technical academies placed throughout the community. So really geared towards identifying the underrepresented communities.

What are the human capital development points and systems that we can import into those communities so that there can be economic success? Really came back from looking at what he did there and now beginning to work on a project of, what does that look like in terms of developing it here? My role has a lot to do with, again, some of those system level partnerships, working around the policies for pre-K. That's a significant piece of my role is advocating for pre-K funding and best practice policies around early childhood development. A host of other things that you would look at. Really looking at, what does economic success look like? What does human capital development look like? What are the best practices that could be deployed? And then how does policy either inspire or sustain a lot of those best practices so that best practices can continue to evolve so that the nonprofits in Southern Nevada don't continue on the same scope generation after generation, but that their scopes evolve to help propel success so that there's an evolution in the works and in the inputs that they provide?

**How did you move with the school board on to United Way?**

My term ended in February of 2015, so almost four years ago. From there I worked for the Rogers Foundation. Jim Rogers, who has passed on since then, but he was a very well-known philanthropist here in the community. He owned Channel 3 for years. When he passed away, his wife, Beverly, and Rory Reid, who I got to work for, created the Rogers Foundation. They do scholarships. They actually have a charter school. They do a lot of philanthropic. They give a lot

of money.

**RODRIGO:** *The same person who donated to Wiener-Rogers Literature and Law Building.*

That's exactly right. A real philanthropic family. When he passed on, they liquidated a lot of stuff and gave it to UNLV; gave it to Nevada State College. I got to work for them right after I finished my term.

From there I went to go work for the Public Education Foundation, which has been around for almost thirty years here in Southern Nevada. Judith Steele is the founder and to this day executive director. I served as senior vice president for that foundation for the last three years up until about four or five months ago—my title at Public Education Foundation was Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships—when United Way about six months ago floated another strategic position.

In the social enterprise nonprofit space, strategy is an emerging role if you look at business. They have strategists for political campaigns; strategists for everywhere. When I saw another strategic position in a nonprofit space, I was like, *wow, a unicorn*. I kind of gravitated towards that. I've been with them for about four or five months now.

**Earlier you mentioned going to a Latin Chamber of Commerce luncheon. What is your involvement with them?**

That was like '98, maybe, when I first went to my first luncheon and it was really an epiphany, for lack of a better term, to see professional Latinos, accomplished, educated Latinos, business owners, executives. From there I was very involved. I've been involved consistently—that was twenty years ago—for the past twenty years. I have been involved at every level from their Latino Youth Leadership Conference [LYLC], which they have here on campus. Did you participate in that?

**Yes.**

Oh, cool.

**I was a facilitator for two years.**

Oh, interesting. Tom Rodriguez, who started it, is a very good friend. I'm actually having lunch with him. Tom probably gave you my name.

**Yes.**

It all makes sense.

**It all becomes full circle.**

Yes, I was very involved in the Latino Youth Leadership Conference. I actually spoke probably every other year or every year up until last year. No, I did last year as well. As I got busier, I had to pull back on my involvement, but I did a lot of facilitation for them throughout the years.

I served on the Latin Chamber of Commerce Foundation Board for about four years. To this day I still do a lot of work with them. Peter Guzman, who is their current president, and then Dan Tafoya, who is their chair, I still do different projects with them to this day.

**Any other Latino organizations that you're involved in now or in the past?**

With Tom, Larry Mason, Dan Tafoya, Jose Melendrez, we all sit on the board of the Nevada Association of Latino Educational Justice [NALEJ]. We serve on that board together and do some work through them. We predominantly provide support or scholarships to undocumented students who don't qualify for financial aid or other forms of money. We provide money for books or registration fees. We are really trying to fill the gap predominately for undocumented students who need resources, so raise money and provide resources for students in that space. We sponsor the Latino Youth Leadership Conference as well through that organization. I am very involved with the Latin Chamber. Off and on there's other little pockets that have come up.



I see Al Martinez in one of your pictures. Al is a significant mentor. I worked for him when I worked at the county. He was part of, I think, it's Latino Education Alliance through Professor Lasos who is involved in that space. I haven't really worked with them in the last couple of years, but I know they have some efforts that are still going on.

You may have heard through these interviews—I see Fernando [Romero]—I served on Hispanics in Politics Board in the past. Those pictures are inspiring thoughts. Dr. [Edyth] Fernandez, I worked with Dr. Fernandez.

I would say we don't have a lot of organizations here. A lot of our work happens through networking and, hey, this came up; we're friends; we have resources; let's provide support. So it's kind of an informal network that we try to work together and provide resources for a community. But you have El Mudad, which is relatively new here. We never had those organizations. We had that NALA in the past, which was around forever, which really no longer exists. That was something that was unfortunate. I would say there are things like that that were really prevalent in the eighties, nineties, even a decade ago, but has dissipated since then. We still struggle with infrastructure in those types of organizations. Those are some of the things that are coming to mind. Chicanos por la Causa, they're relatively new. They might have been here only five or six years. They do some good work.

**You mentioned earlier *Día de Muertos* in San Antonio. Did you go to any of the cultural events here in Las Vegas?**

Yes. Winchester Community Center, which is on the east side of town, did the very first public Day of the Dead. The first year they did it, I would say would have been 2002, 2003, maybe. That was like the first time they publicly celebrated it. It was literally the altars, but there were fifteen of us there. It was very, very—compared to you go now and there's thousands of people.

They just did another one. You now have three sites; I know there's Winchester, Springs Preserve, and there's a new one this year, another site that just opened up. You can go to either one and it's just packed. You can barely move, it's so well attended. Even going back fourteen years ago, it was not part of the community fabric. When they did advertise it, literally it was like fifteen people walking around and you could walk through it in ten minutes versus today and what it looks like today. Even just in that decade, decade and a half time lapse, you've seen the robustness of it. I stick to Winchester. I did go to Springs Preserve a couple of years ago, but I really like Winchester. That's just me.

**I was there last Friday.**

Okay, cool. Just a phenomenal experience. Again, you couldn't even fifteen years ago say that a culture like that would have been celebrated at the level that it's celebrated today.

**Any other festivals?**

Being on the east side there's a lot of little things. The east side community center does a lot of different things, which is really interesting. Leadership has a significant role. When Elias Zamorano was the director for the East Las Vegas Community Center, he started at the Rafael Community Center, which is really like the cultural context where a lot of these events would happen. Then when he took on the East Las Vegas Community Center, there was a real representation of the Latino culture. He hasn't been there probably in about seven years. There's a significant difference in the programming and the presence that these community centers have today than they did when he was there. Some would say that's almost a regression of culture based on the leadership that's there now and not as open to the community that they actually serve in or thrive in. That's not answering your question, but it inspired that response. That's all I can think of right now.

Broadacres is huge. As a kid I would go to Broadacres and, again, it was predominately Anglo. It was predominately Anglo, cowboy, mechanic parts, nothing at all what it looks like today. There was very little Latino representation at Broadacres in the eighties or nineties. It wasn't until maybe the late nineties, early 2000s where you saw much more significant Latino representation over the past five years where they do concerts now on the weekends and Fridays. I mean, that's been a real evolutionary microcosm of Hispanic presence, Latino presence.

**What were these Christmas masses? You want to share around that?**

In Catholicism you go to Christmas Eve mass. They tell you when you get back you can open a present, so it helps you want to go. Yes, I remember being there ten, eleven o'clock at night, standing in the pews and having to stand up, kneel down, stand up, kneel down. I'm just being honest about my experience.

**Which church?**

It would have been St. Christopher's, which is on the east side in North Las Vegas right by Rancho High School and J.D. Smith. St. Christopher's, St. Anne's sometimes, those are the two.

**Did you ever attend any traditional Mexican parties, like *quinceañeras*?**

Not growing up. Not until my adulthood because it just wasn't prevalent here. Again, people look at me like I have three heads when I say that, but we're just a very different community now than we were then. There wasn't a high representation of cultural activity growing up as a kid here. It wasn't probably in high school until I even heard the word *quinceañera* and understood what it was, and at that time in the nineties is when we saw the growth of Latino families moving here. No. I mean, as an adult I attended a lot, but not as a kid, not at all, no.

**What are your political views today? What are your views on the current political climate?**

I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful. The views are that there's tremendous need that exists, and the need

that exists and whoever can best speak to that need is who is going to be given the opportunity to lead and provide support to that need. I think if you overlook that need, you can have all the right messaging, you can have the right strategy and you can even have the best intention, but if you're not willing to be open to the need of a community, you're not going to be given the opportunity to influence that need or provide support to that need.

My views today, from my perspective, I think what's out in the open now is not new. I think people are just more bold about sharing those ideas because they feel like there's a level of comfort now to be able to share those ideas. The past election for me was just a reflection of what I've always known to be true. And it's not new information, it's not new context, it's not a new way of how people think. I think people just got more comfortable in sharing that and feeling like they have the right to believe that way and look at people that way. Some of that is one side's fault for not addressing that. In a nutshell, I think that's what it really is. But I'm hopeful. I am hopeful.

**You mentioned a need. As an educator, what do you think is the need now in education?**

I have these conversations a lot and I say, "If you really want to help evolve our pre-K/twelve system in particular, make sure you have educators in the buildings that are most experienced and not the opposite." I don't know of any other industry where you put the least qualified people in the highest need areas. I just don't know of any business model where you would do that. Until we either do that or at least begin to provide substantive—not training, but development to people who are going into the education workforce...I have these conversations with Dean [Kim} Metcalf over at the UNLV College of Ed on a frequent basis and say, "Hey, when I went to school here, your College of Ed and the programs or classes you offer don't look much different. They have to look different. We're a different community now." I don't even know that it's

different in a sense—I'm not saying that it couldn't look that way twenty, thirty years ago because it's all about human capital support. I think as long as you have adults who are educators and schools that are uncomfortable with the populations that they're supposed to inspire to a greater life, you're going to have a continuation of what we see. Until we can have professionals in place that want to be in the schools that they work in and understand and have a compassion for the community, but not a compassion as in the poor baby, low expectations, but a compassion in terms of, "you can do what anybody else does and succeed the way anybody else does" type of support, I think until that happens we're going to continue to see what we're seeing.

There are principals who have been given the autonomy to hire their staff and be like you would in any other business model, hire the people that you think are best for the job. You see successes of those. In the school performance framework, you have what is called shining stars, which are schools that are performing very well. There are twenty schools where 75 percent FRL rate and high first generation, high poverty communities, and they're outperforming some of the schools in affluent communities. That's because you have adults in that environment who have the right mind set about how to inspire those successes. So we see it can be done. There's twenty schools across the valley that we can point to them and say, "Hey, as adults when you lead, this is the outcome that can happen." I think we need to scale that and provide infrastructure so that it's sustained and developed.

**BARBARA:** *This has been a really great interview. You've done a great job.*

*Any other parts of your life that we've neglected that we should include in this oral history?*

No. I'm very comprehensive.

*Yes, you did a good job.*

Yes, very good job.

**Thank you. Maybe just one more question. Can you share more on the stories your grandfather told you about the Battle of Alamo?**

I was thinking about this. When he shared that with me, it was like, "Oh, your great-grandfather fought in the Battle of Alamo." He talks about how he had his own horse. I can't remember the name of the horse. But he said, yes, he had a horse that he would always talk about. I mean, he wouldn't really go into detail. I think it was still that cultural—and I don't even know that it's cultural. I think it's just grandparent-child where you sometimes don't want to share too much because you think you're protecting them. Where I was like, "I just want to know everything." But from his context I think he didn't want to share too much.

I believe this. I don't know that it's true. I don't have any evidence. But I believe also there was a sense of guilt on even my grandparents' side. As I began to question more about who we were as a people and began to really engage it, it wasn't anything their own children, speaking about my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, ever really.

By me asking them, I think they understood, *well, if we would have done this, he probably wouldn't have to ask*. But I think there was also an understanding that they did the best they could and made right decisions at the time being in the city that they were in, in the sixties, where folks were not friendly to brown people or black people, quite frankly. So I could see there was a lot of struggle when I would ask questions. They didn't know how much...My only regret is that they didn't allow us to engage in the level of conversation or go as deep as I wanted because I think there was always that—I don't know that it's guilt, but just that context or that environment of, hey, I really tried to shelter my family from this because I wanted them to assimilate and integrate and be successful. I could kind of feel always in those conversations that

it was filtered. I could see the emotion increase, but then get drawn back real quick as those conversations would happen. I would experience that on the Jewish side of the family as well when my grandmother would talk about coming over and hearing the bombs and having to hide in closets and things like that. It was something I recognized on both sides, just different experiences.

***Continuing that part of the story, your family, what country were they from?***

Russia and Poland.

***They came leading up to World War II, before the Holocaust had started?***

Right. Their parents had seen the writing on the walls and began to come over. When it would rain and thunder, my grandmother would be in her seventies at the time and hide in the closet when it would rain because it gave her memories of bombs going off when she was immigrating. That's just a whole other experience.

***With your own children—I'm just going to follow up, and if you don't want to talk about this—with your own children, how do you share this family history?***

All of it. Yes, all of it. I'm as open and as communicative as possible because I don't want to duplicate the, hey, you don't know. I try to provide them information as a way that it inspires the inquiries of openness. But they know.

My father lived in New York up until 2001. I moved out here in 2001. My own children got to experience directly the Jewish things and the foods and the culture. A lot of it I didn't have to do because they got to live it being able to grow up with him in that space. If that helps a little.

***That does, yes. That's very good. How old are your children now?***

My oldest is twenty-one and then seventeen and sixteen.

***You have two still in high school.***

I do. Two girls in high school.

*The older one is in college or done?*

Yes, he's in college and works. He's at CSN.

*Excellent, excellent.*

But now he has the support and I can guide him.

*That's wonderful.*

**What are his career goals?**

He doesn't know. He doesn't know.

*He's twenty-one.*

That's right.

*Not everybody is like you, Nathalie.*

Oh. My girls know exactly what they want to do. My girls are on it.

*It is a girl thing. It is a gender thing.*

It is. It is.

*Except Rodrigo. You're okay.*

No, no, it is.

**RODRIGO: I have one question. Are you planning on running for office?**

No, no.

*Ever? Any position?*

I said that before and somebody who I really respected said, "Don't ever say never," and got mad at me. So out of respect of that conversation, I won't say never.

*But it's not in your plans currently?*

It's not in my plans currently, no. I really enjoy the work that I do. I love the impact that I had as



an elected official, but behind the scenes there's equal impact. I actually have, I think, more freedom behind the scenes than I did when I was on the board, a lot less to navigate because behind the scenes I can be a little more intentional. I'm thinking it's designed that way. When you're an elected individual, you represent everybody, not just one section. Even if I disagree with you, I still represented you and have to come to some type of support or understanding.

**For your kids, you started elaborating on the Latino experience. Did they participate in any Latino things at school, SOL or LYLC?**

Not LYLC yet. My older son, I gave him the opportunity, but he didn't. Again, I gave him freedom. I didn't force him. But my daughters, yes, they look forward to it. Actually, my daughter who is a junior will apply to this upcoming session. Even my son listens to Norteños, which I didn't grow up on, but he listens to. My daughters, we didn't do a *quinceañera*, but they asked about it. Because of just the community we live in, they probably go to a *quinceañera* every weekend. Again, their experiences are night and day compared to me. Where my identity formation was all inquiry based for the most part, theirs are experiential.

**Thank you.**

Yes, of course. Thank you. I appreciate it.

**[End of recorded interview]**