

AN INTERVIEW WITH MELI CALVO PULIDO

An Oral History Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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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



Meli Calvo Pulido was born in Mexico City and immigrated to the United States with her parents and eight siblings. In 1975, at 11:00 p.m. she woke up to the Silver Slipper on the Las Vegas Strip. She was raised on Las Vegas's 28th Street, where she helped her family and their neighbors by becoming the neighborhoods unofficial translator. The need to serve her community and the hardships faced by her family and the families around her translated into her work after she graduated from what is now Southeast Career Technical Academy.

She worked for the City of Las Vegas in 2011, after a twenty-five-year tenure in human resources. Throughout her life she has continued to give back to Las Vegas by serving in non-profit community service for decades. She attended the Premier National Hispana Leadership Institute (NHLI), where she trained in Washington D.C. and at Harvard University. Her non-

profit work has heavily focused on education success and hunger in lower income communities and in obtaining fair access to healthcare for all.

She was the executive director of Project-150, whose mission is to offer support to homeless high school students in Southern Nevada in order to ensure that they graduate. She has two daughters that have also been actively helping various causes in Southern Nevada.

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November 13, 2018
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

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Meli Calvo Pulido 11/13/18
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Laurenz Banuelos 11/13/18
Signature of Interviewer Date

This is Laurents Banuelos-Benitez. Today's date is November 13th, 2018. We are at Project 150 off of Rancho. I am joined by...

Barbara Tabach.

Today I am interviewing...

Meli Pulido.

Meli, can you spell and pronounce your name for me?

Sure. Meli, M-E-L-I. Pulido, P-U-L-I-D-O.

Thank you. I'd like to start at the beginning. Where were you born?

I was born in Mexico, the capital, *DF*.

Is there a particular neighborhood or a part of *DF* that you grew up in?

I'm not sure. I was two years old when my family left. There was five of us. I was the last of the siblings to be born in Mexico, in *DF*, so I'm not sure of the *colonia* or *el vecindario*.

Are you aware of why your family decided to leave Mexico City?

Both my parents, my father and my mother, had family in San Diego and Tijuana. In my dad's efforts to try to eventually make it back to the U.S. with the entire family, we took that route.

The family stopped in Tijuana first?

Tijuana, we lived there for seven years. When I was nine years old, my father moved us to Las Vegas.

How did you cross over; was it through visas?

My dad by then was already a U.S. citizen. My dad immigrated to the U.S. since he was sixteen years old and eventually received documentation, and was already a U.S. citizen by the time we crossed the border. My mother and my siblings and I had a passport. We knew because—my father moved to the U.S., to Las Vegas following a friend's recommendation to come work for

one of the hotels, the Fremont Hotel. He started working at the Fremont Hotel and, once he passed probation, at six months, he went back and picked us up. We all crowded in one car, and came driving to Las Vegas. We had a passport, so my mother had gone to immigration, Tijuana's border, and requested a two-week permit to be able to bring us to Disneyland; that's what we were told and it kept us quiet along the way. Because there were so many of us in one little car, it kept us quiet.

How many?

Let's see. There was eight of us, plus mom and dad, so there was ten of us in one little car. It was a little station wagon. I remember that my mom kept telling us, "We're going to Disneyland," but wouldn't tell the younger ones the real story of why we were going through our house and just selecting bags of things. Instead of taking everything that we had, it was just selected items, a few changes of clothes, and that's all we were allowed. The story of telling us that we were going to Disneyland was to keep us quiet and then so that we would all answer immigration questions the same way should we be asked. As kids we don't always keep to the story. We are just, "No, I'm not five; I'm seven."

I was one of the younger ones; I was nine years old. There were three younger than me in the car. When they said *Disneyland*, I'm like, *wow, we get to see the princesses and Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse*. I woke up at about eleven o'clock at night on the Las Vegas Strip and woke up to the Silver Slipper. I'm like, "We're at Disneyland, Cinderella's castle." My dad, "*Si, callense porfavor, callense. Mañana regresamos*." It took me another nine years before I actually made it to Disneyland as my high school senior trip.

I love it. That's great.

What year was that?

Nineteen seventy-five.

Is there anything from the journey that stood out to you, do you remember?

I remember lots of quiet conversations that my mom and my dad would have.

Our last house in Tijuana was a three-bedroom home, and where we used to live for the remainder of those seven years that we lived there was a one-bedroom apartment, and it had all of us there. The twins, who were the youngest ones in our journey to Las Vegas, were born in San Diego. My mom's sister lived in Chula Vista and she encouraged her, "Stay here your last month to deliver in the U.S." That was a strenuous plan.

I remember my father being afraid to move his entire family to Las Vegas. It wasn't San Diego. He was used to working in the United States on his own. He worked in Texas, Chicago, California. He worked the navy ships. He was a fieldworker. In many cases he would tell us that the move to Las Vegas was more of a steady employment, no more field working. When he was young and would work the fields, they would be piled up in a trailer, and if you didn't fit in the trailer as the workers' lodging, you had to sleep outside. In most cases they would go the whole month worth of work before they were given a check, and many times the morning of the thirtieth day completion they would all be threatened with immigration and then be asked to leave or stay working and shut up and then get paid wherever they would get paid. He would sleep outside under trees on cold rainy days with a cold and still get up at four in the morning and work the fields and hope that they would get paid.

When he started working San Diego in the naval ships, cleaning them, he thought, *well, this is getting a little bit more steady, so that I can't come back and be with my family across the border*. But then his friend asked him if he was interested in working in the hotels in Las Vegas,

it was indoors; it was more union formalized. He came, did his six months, went back and got us. He was scared, though. That was a big responsibility.

Our very first apartment was across the street from the Culinary Union, where they call Naked City now. The Stratosphere obviously wasn't there. It was a one-bedroom apartment. I used to write to my friends in Tijuana and tell them that we were in a gated community; that I couldn't wait to grow up and dress like the ladies who walked in our neighborhood and have a boyfriend that had a nice car with shiny rims and the lady's hat and belt and purse and shoes that all matched. "It's a small place, but we're in a gated community. How cool is that? My dad is doing really good for us."

Later I learned I was not in a gated community. It was gang-infested, drug-infested, prostitution-infested, so the landlord had barricaded us in a chain-link fence so that they wouldn't come into the apartment complex.

Shortly thereafter, my dad moved us to a five-bedroom house. So now I would write to my friends in Tijuana and my cousins and tell them that we weren't in a gated community anymore, but we were in a mansion and every house in the community was huge. We all shared a bike from a couple of blocks in, and then a couple blocks out we would share another bike. Everybody played. Everybody was having a good time. We had five bedrooms. We had never had a two-story five-bedroom house.

Then I quickly learned that I was not in a mansion community. I was in the projects on 28th Street and Bonanza, gang-infested, drug-infested. We were attending Roy Martin. I attended Roy Martin Middle School and Walker Bracken Elementary School. Not knowing that I was poor and not knowing the neighborhoods helped me adjust a lot more. It helped me want more and say, if my dad can make all these sacrifices and get us into this big house—I didn't understand project

homes and that it was a reduced amount. I didn't understand that until probably a couple of years later.

When I came to the U.S., because I didn't speak English, I had finished third grade in Tijuana and when I came here I was sent back to start third grade again because of the language barrier. There were no ESL classes. I remember the custodian offering vocabulary lessons in his utility room. So, if you wanted to learn English in elementary school at Walter Bracken, you knew to forego playing and go to meet with the custodian.

Do you remember his name?

No. I wish I did. I remember my teacher. Mr. Farrell was my teacher. He told me, "Hey, the janitor is going to teach five words today if you want to go."

And you're whispering because...

It's a secret. That's how he would tell me. He would tell me that because he knew my frustration in the classroom. That teacher would tell me, "Stop getting frustrated. It's okay." And I remember, "Stop. It's going to be okay." I remember the body motions because I didn't understand what he was saying. I know now.

Kids would call me The Mexican Girl. "No, we don't want the Mexican girl." For the reading groups. But when he had math problems on the chalkboard, I built this courage to raise my hand to try to solve it. I finished third grade in Mexico; that is probably sixth or seventh grade level math in the U.S. No, I couldn't speak English, but I wanted the classmates to know I wasn't dumb because I couldn't speak English. I offered to go solve a problem. They're laughing. I remember the kids just laughing. I think it was three numbers on the top, two numbers on the bottom, and the next challenge was three numbers on the top, three numbers on the bottom. I'm like, *ch, ch, ch, ch, ch*. And they're like, "Wow, the Mexican girl."

Mr. Farrell would look at me and he'd give me the thumbs up. When he whispered on the vocabulary part, that's why, so that I could learn.

The kids wanted me in their math group competitions. I had my own character and personality even back then because once they got me in their group, I didn't do the math. I just let our team fail, to teach them a lesson. You need to be nice to me at all times, not just when you need our math points.

Clever girl.

Good or bad, that's what I did, so confession. Then I slowly started going over; the janitor would take a box of toilet paper and write words and have us practice it and spell and practice, spell and practice, and that was my recess.

When you say "us," who else was in that group?

There were other kids.

So you weren't alone in that.

No. There were other kids trying to do the same thing I was trying to do, yes.

I remember the black trash bags. Nothing brought us home from playing faster than seeing someone coming to our house and dropping off clothing donations. I knew that could be a new outfit for me. That would get us home super quick because I wanted to beat everybody else to the clothes. There are three girls and seven boys in our family. I'm the youngest girl. If there were pretty dresses, for church or school, my oldest sister would wear it probably on Monday or Tuesday of the week, and then Thursday or Friday it was my dress. Then I would show up to school—I thought I looked cute—but it was pinned. It was made to fit me and still be able to be undone to fit my older sister. They would make fun of me. They would say, "The Mexican girl, *ha, ha, ha, ha.*" I didn't look the same as them, I definitely didn't dress the same, I didn't speak

the same, and probably didn't smell the same; a lot of what our students that we serve here in Project 150 go through. That was a challenge.

When I went to register at Roy Martin for sixth grade, I told them I don't belong—no, that was seventh grade. We went to sixth grade at Quannah McCall. It was a sixth-grade center. When I went to register for seventh grade at Roy Martin, my parents didn't speak English, so we were usually doing things on our own. I went to register.

Did you have a command of the language by seventh grade?

Yes. I was officially the family translator and officially offered to the neighborhood by my parents to translate. I can guarantee you I did not know what I was saying, especially for court hearings or parent conferences. My mother especially would send me. *Tu ve a ayudarles. El vecino necesita. The neighbor needs this; someone from church necesita algo.* I was always translating for our household business because my older siblings were embarrassed. They were older. They were teenagers when they got here, so their accent was strong. I was just, *I need to have them stop making fun me, so the sooner I learn, the better off I'm going to be.*

Did your older siblings not have a command of the language, or was it because they were embarrassed?

They were embarrassed. I think at that age they were probably more embarrassed than not. They used me as, *hey, she's doing really good, so let's go ahead and have her...*

I did all the parent conferences for the older and the younger kids. I did all the doctors' appointments. Anytime anything needed to be translated, I was the one, and then I was offered to the neighborhood to do that. I remember the knot in my throat having to translate on things court related. To this day I have a fear of going into courtrooms because I remember being this little kid, being responsible, and to me it was such a big authority building that I was more worried,

what if I don't translate correctly and this person goes to jail? I wasn't sure what I was doing other than you say something and I translate it or I attempt to. I was always that kid over the counter at the bank, "Well, my mom said this," or, "My dad wants this." Attending parent conferences for my younger siblings that weren't much different in their age than I was.

When I was standing in line to register for seventh grade at Roy Martin, I was in line and I thought, *I'm missing a year at my age because I had to start third grade when I got here. I don't want to be in seventh grade; I want to be in eighth grade.* I asked one of the deans that was walking around. I said, "I was set back when I arrived. I know I can do better and I can be in eighth grade. Is there any way that I can register for eighth grade instead of seventh?" He looked at me and he laughed. He goes, "Yeah, right." He goes, "If you can pass a test, sure, you can do that."

He must have thought I wasn't going to be able to pass the test. I went and I struggled. It seemed forever. I don't remember how long the test took, but it seemed forever. They graded it. He comes back and he goes, "You're in eighth grade." Just that simple. I know things are not as simple now. But I remember thinking, *wow.*

I came home and I told my mother I was going to eighth grade instead of seventh grade. She goes, *"Estas loca; Estas loca."* I'm like, "No, really." She didn't believe me. I went to eighth grade with her not believing that I was actually in eighth grade until I went to high school. She's like, "You're going to high school already?" *Ya vas a ir a la* high school? That was something that kind of set the tone for me on what my life was going to be like.

We were in a gang-infested neighborhood and in my mind, this is not the life I want to live. I never dated *cholos* or gang members. I never hung around with them. You tend to dress that way because that's the only clothes that you have or are accepted in the community. Having so

many brothers, I was always protected and they were my shield to protection. *That's the Calvo girl; that's so-and-so's sister.* That quickly gave me the idea of protection.

Your older siblings were able to avoid that as well?

No, no. My older sisters, yes. My two oldest are the two sisters and then I'm right in the middle and I'm the last and youngest girl. The girls were able to avoid it. It's a lot harder for males to survive a gang-infested neighborhood, and I feel sorry for them because that's not how we were raised; that's not how our parents wanted us to be. But the minute you walk the streets, your own neighbors are going to jump you to figure out your loyalty and...Not claiming a barrio, but who are you going to stick up for should Northtown come and jump your neighbor? Can they count on you to back them up? If you resist, you're still going to get beat up for resisting. No sooner than you get jumped by your own neighbors to see your alliance, then now you're in it because if somebody else from Northtown came over to 28th Street and jumped or hurt one of our neighborhood kids, they quickly talk to each other and they retaliate and before you know it you're in a gang. I remember how hard it was for my brothers to not be part of that. I don't think any of my brothers followed that by choice.

What was 28th Street and Bonanza like physically? What was there? If you drive over there now, they've put in a library now. Before that it was a set of projects.

Projects.

Was it the same projects, different projects?

No, same projects. The library actually sits where my house was. The tree where I lived is still there. They kept all the trees. When I went to the groundbreaking last year, it was very emotional. One of my brothers was the keynote speaker for that groundbreaking. Just remembering good childhood memories; they were good memories, but then also the tough life

that we had that we didn't know any better. We didn't know. We would walk from Bonanza and 28th Street all the way to Charleston because there was a McDonalds. If we had fifty cents, we wanted a fifty-cent sundae. Looking back or if I were living there at that time, I would have said, "No, you can't walk; children can't walk at night or can't do that." We would play hide-and-go-seek. We had one bike from Bonanza to Cedar that everybody borrowed and took turns, and then from Cedar to Stewart or Sunrise, halfway to Charleston, was another ten speed that other kids borrowed; everybody knew. Lily who you met grew up on 28th Street, too. Everybody knew everybody. Moms would bring each other's kids—*Este travieso estaba haciendo esto*—and snitch on us and tell us what we were doing wrong and bring us to one home and vice versa. That was just the way it went. But there were shootings. There were jumpings. There were teenage pregnancies galore. That was tough.

What was the environment at Roy Martin like? What were the teachers like?

I think they were good teachers for the most part, but there were a lot of teachers, in the seventies, early eighties, who had already given up on that neighborhood. They were teaching us because they had to. It was easy to be put away in a corner because we didn't understand. I don't think I had full command of the English language when I started eighth grade. There's so much reading requirements I didn't understand. I was failing classes because I didn't understand what I was reading. I couldn't write my assignments because of that. Even through elementary school, elementary school to middle school, I remember teachers putting me in the corner with a bad kid or the class clown because I was as equally disturbing and distracting to their classroom as the troubled kid or a class clown. I didn't understand, so I couldn't participate. I was just put to the side.

What was the surrounding neighborhood like? What were the shops around Eastern and Bonanza?

Eastern, there's a Mariana's now that takes up the whole shopping center on Bonanza and Eastern. That used to be a tiny, little unit, probably the size of my office, and it had a *tortilleria* as you walked in. There was a Taco Bell that I remember we used to go and have ten-cent tacos. We used to walk from 28th Street and Bonanza up to Eastern and make a right and there was a Taco Bell across from Al Phillips cleaners. Winchell's Donuts was there.

It's still there.

Yes. But that's not something we could have money for. If you could have a doughnut or a taco, you'd pick a taco. It was pretty much Mexico, pretty much North Las Vegas; you were either a minority or a person of color, African American, living in the projects.

Could your parents get by just speaking Spanish in that area?

Yes. The community, America was more open to that than they are today. I think kids were rude because we're kids and we have no filter. But I don't remember a whole lot of people verbally saying, "go back to your country" back then as much as I hear it today. I do remember people being prejudiced to my parents. I remember one of the translations that still stays in my brain and not in my throat is my mother was disciplined when she was a maid at the Holiday Inn that's now Main Street and she had a hearing with the Culinary Union. I was her translator. There were no attorneys on her side. They walked in with probably three union reps, attorneys, probably two, some paralegals or secretaries taking notes, hotel staff. There was a big conference room, at least fifteen, sixteen chairs. I remember how high-backed the chairs were and I sat down and you couldn't see me; there was like that much head at the chair. My mom's job depended on me making sure that I fought for her, to translate correctly and anticipate her thoughts. She would

tell me, "*Tu sabes lo que tienes que decir*". *You know what you need to say*. And I didn't. I just knew that my mom was wrongfully terminated based on what she shared at home. But I was a kid.

How old were you?

I want to say eleven. Eleven is what stays in my head.

What was the reaction from the other side, watching your mom come in with an eleven-year-old to translate?

Giggles, laughs. The union representing her, I think, was probably the most contained amusement. Even with the union reps representing my mother, I'm still a kid. I'm not even a teenager yet and I'm translating. They knew I struggled. Remember, I came in when I was nine. By two years later I can't possibly know the terminology, especially legal terminology that was needed.

But she got her job back. I'm sure I had not much to do, but I translated what needed to be translated and she did get her job back. That was a tough one. I felt like my entire family's well-being was on my shoulders.

Moving on a little to high school, where did you attend?

High school, my first semester was at Las Vegas High School, the old Las Vegas High School. Then I had applied to attend Vo-Tech, which is now SECTA, the vocational center up on Russell and Mountain Vista. I didn't get in on my first semester, but after spending one semester at Las Vegas High School, I kept calling and I kept asking my counselor at Vegas High School, "Can you please call." You find the person that's going to be your champion. I don't even think that lady was my counselor, but she just would, "*Y ahora que quieres?*" *What do you need now?* I would just tell her, "I can't be here. I'm so scared."

There were fights every period in every hallway. After school, there was someone's head being smashed on the sidewalk. It was just ugly. It was ugly. I didn't have the stomach for it. Roy Martin, I had two brothers and their friends that watched after me. At Vegas High School, it's a humongous campus. My brothers were doing their things, trying to keep an eye on me, their friends as well, or they were involved in a fight and they got kicked out. Something happened. I was more on my own at Las Vegas High School than at Roy Martin and it scared me.

I went to Vo-Tech. I started ditching at Las Vegas High School, which I was the little goodie two shoes, and then I started ditching just to avoid what I was seeing. I could see myself if I stayed there for my full high school years, I would have just nosedived. Everything that I had been fighting against up to that point would have been lost if I stayed one more semester because it was easier to shift to the other side for protection than to fight what could have happened.

What was the environment at Vo-Tech like?

Vo-Tech was, I don't know, I called it more preppy. I think that everyone who wanted that extra challenge was there. Even if I had students from our neighborhood, they were there for auto body or painting and construction. They, too, were struggling to break out of those cycles. There were still fights. There were still a lot of Latinos. But it was more of a contained environment, I think, that made me feel a little safer.

What did you specialize in while you were there?

Computer science. I wanted carpentry, but my mom wouldn't let me. She said, "*No, Eres mujer, tu no puedes hacer eso.*"

What drew you to carpentry?

What attracted me to that? Building things was something that I was attracted to and wanted to do. Here is the thing that in looking back, my mom said no, but I did everything else on my own.

I could have gone behind her back, but then I still feared my parents. The respect was unspoken. You just feared getting in trouble. I figured eventually she's going to know I'm not a secretary and I'm not working on computers and I'm not doing cosmetology; I'm doing carpentry, everything that she told me not to do. I just made a decision to follow her wishes.

I worked through high school. As soon as I could work, I was working. When I was probably twelve or thirteen years old, my friend was working at Sodi's on Maryland Parkway and Flamingo. It's now a T.J. Maxx, I think. It was a Toys R Us and a T.J. Maxx. She says, "I can tell my supervisor and see if she'll hire you." I changed my age on my birth certificate to be able to be hired. With being hired at Sodi's came now new responsibility, so now one of my younger siblings was my financial responsibility. Then as I worked in a summer job, on-the-job training, and I was placed at the Clark County social services building, I figured out how to get a bus from Vo-Tech over to Shadow Lane and Charleston. I made more money, so now I was in charge of two younger siblings and then soon it was three younger siblings. But I didn't see anything wrong with it.

Explain what that meant to be responsible.

Their expenses, their clothing. My younger brother had asthma, so that meant taking responsibility of the asthma medications. My parents helped a lot. Once you started earning an income, that's not your income; that's your family household income. Whatever they needed. If the kids wanted to play soccer, then they would just ask me, "Do you have money for my soccer equipment?" No one sat me down and said, "Hey, mom and dad are saying that now you're going to take charge of my expenses or my well-being." My parents didn't sit down and explain that. It just happened.

How long did that last?

Even after I was married I continued to help the family.

What about the older siblings, did they take responsibility as well?

Yes. We all had something to do.

How would you sum up your high school experience?

I don't remember having a childhood even up through high school. I went to prom. I had a high school sweetheart, the father of my kids who I ended up marrying, but that wasn't my independent thinking; that was what I was allowed to do. My mother felt that if I was going steady—he was a boy from my brother's soccer team. The families knew each other, so I was allowed to date, but take the whole crew, take all my younger siblings. We went steady for about six years and then got married, but that's something that with my mother's strict rules is, you've already been dating him for a year and that's who you're stuck with; that's who you'll marry. I'm like, okay.

What did you do right after your high school graduation?

I went to Arizona to live with my sister. It was a lot to get away from Las Vegas. But my brother-in-law owned a barbershop and he was a barber. My sister said I could go live with her. I went to barber school in Arizona. When I graduated I worked at my brother-in-law's barbershop in Arizona. You make a lot of money being a barber. I didn't want to come back, but then my mom said, "You can't burden your sister. You can't stay there."

I came back to Vegas. In Las Vegas I found that I couldn't make the same income that I was making in Arizona. Because my brother-in-law owned the barbershop, I kept 75 percent of my money and only gave him 25 percent. Here, they wanted to keep 60 percent and give me 40. I'm like, yeah, that's not going to work.

I remember working at Circus Circus for a very brief time, maybe not even a month. Then I went to meet with Otto Merida, who was the president of the Latin Chamber at the time. Victoria was there as well. I got an on-the-job training position helping them with the phones and mailings and all that until I was placed at the City of Las Vegas. Nevada Business Services was a service for youth at risk, kind of like JobConnect now. The Latin Chamber accepted me to be there to help them with the phones, office, get a little bit of experience. They sent me out to interviews so I could have a little bit of experience.

I remember going to the City of Las Vegas for an interview and the same day I interviewed for Citibank; they both called me at the same time. For City of Las Vegas, I didn't have a resume. I had an IBM typewriter and onion skin paper and did my resume really quick. I didn't need one for Citibank. I met with David Sanchez. He's since retired, but he's a professor as well. He looked at my resume. He goes, "Did you do this this morning?" I said, "Well, last night." He goes, "Okay." He gave me a chance, but it was on-the-job training, five dollars an hour, six-month position, again an at-risk project for kids like me. Citibank also called. it was going to be sixteen dollars an hour with benefits, graveyard shift differential, medical insurance.

I picked the five-dollar-an-hour job. I didn't talk to anybody about it at home. I was just evaluating my options at night and thinking, *what can potentially give me a better return in my career? Could I have a career?* I turned down Citibank at three times the amount hourly rate and I accepted the city and I worked my butt off. I tested before my six months were up and I got on permanently and I retired after twenty-five years of service with City of Las Vegas.

What was your position?

I started at on-the-job training and then went to office assistant one, very entry level. Then they moved me to the back in HR to help with personnel processing. Again, David Sanchez took a

liking to me and he gave me an opportunity. Being the director of HR, he can easily say, "Hey, pull her off the front and give her an opportunity to learn the back end of records," or, "Put her into benefits and see how she can help you."

He would offer me to the mayor's office to translate papers and letters. I was quickly translating for the mayor's office and for the city clerk's office. He would take me to community network events or HR events to translate. I would be at Roy Martin translating to my community in whatever HR presentation he was doing. He opened a lot of doors of opportunity for me.

What years would that have been?

I started with the city in 1986, April of 1986. From '86 almost to the end of '87. In '87, I went and worked for the fire department for three years and came back to human resources in 1990 and then retired from human resources.

That's not something that was easy for a Latina or an immigrant child that could actually do something like that. I remember talking to some of my neighborhood friends from 28th Street, and they wondered, how do I do that? How do I get in there? I would teach them all. There's so many from our community that are in there because I honestly believe that you brag about a sale at the store, why wouldn't you brag about, hey, this is really sweet? Now that I'm permanent I can have retirement and I get holidays off and I get weekends off. You can promote. You can do this. So, I would share it with everybody and get as many as I could educated enough to get in there.

What was the work environment like when you first came in for City of Las Vegas?

I think it was for the most part a great deal of opportunity. There will always be a side story of someone who thinks you are where you're at and as far as you will be and kind of put a thumb on your progress. But for the most part they were very good people. I was a hard worker. My dad

always taught us to work hard. Your work ethic is not your job assignment; your work ethic is what you do beyond that. My mom and my dad have third grade, fourth grade education, but my dad was the wisest man on earth. He passed away March of 2016. He taught himself how to read, how to write. He taught himself how to read music, how to play music.

He wrote a letter to President Jimmy Carter when we were living on 28th Street and immigration kept giving him a hard time on getting us legalized. He had followed all of the procedures and we were doing everything right to get legalized, but there was always some kind of hang-up. My dad wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter and Jimmy Carter answered. Through his letter we were able to have a meeting with immigration in Vegas again. Then I remember the immigration officer saying, "You guys are so lucky you had the president call on your behalf. There's no way we have time for this big of a family to get processed."

What was that process like as far as starting it? We know how it ended.

I don't remember. That was probably a lot that my dad did behind the scenes. We had a passport. We did overstay our two-week permit by a few years. But he still had the opportunity to—my mom had a passport. We crossed the border legally, just stayed here a little longer. We had the twins who were born in San Diego and my dad who was a U.S. citizen. Expensive because I remember my dad having to save for everybody's fingerprints and pictures. It was difficult. It was a difficult process for him.

What year was that when you became citizens?

Not citizen. I was fourteen, I believe, when I received my green card.

Your residency.

My residency. From what I understand going back in conversations with my parents, anyone under eighteen could have applied for U.S. citizenship, but we didn't know that. My mom didn't

clearly know that. My dad wasn't clear on that. It wasn't until later that we applied for our citizenship that we were able to be asked, "Why didn't you apply when you were fourteen? You had until the age of eighteen to do it and you would have automatically become a U.S. citizen, naturalized."

Anyone under eighteen with a residency could have applied for citizenship?

Yes.

What was that process for you to become a citizen?

For me, I didn't become a U.S. citizen until 2011. The reason why is that my husband wanted to—I started dating him when I was fifteen. Once we talked about getting married and all that he would always want to purchase property in Mexico. We were always told you have to be a Mexican citizen to be able to purchase; otherwise, it's a ninety-nine-year lease and it never really belongs to you. He would always encourage me. He was born in Las Vegas. "Don't become a U.S. citizen yet; just wait; just wait; just wait."

When I got divorced and started working and going to school, eventually that was my goal, to become a U.S. citizen. Then I wish I had been before.

Was it a quick process?

It was probably six to nine months by the time you apply and then you get the response. Yes, go ahead and take your fingerprints and go to your interview. Practice the hundred questions, then you get asked six.

What about the rest of your siblings, did they follow you?

Yes. I think all except two are U.S. citizens. By choice they haven't applied and done their thing.

I was wondering if we can go a little bit back and talk about your dad's time at the Fremont Hotel; what he did there?

My dad, gosh. His courage will always be his biggest legacy. He didn't speak English very well, but he had been in the States, so he spoke enough to get by. He was hired as a dishwasher in 1975 and then he retired in 1997 as the kitchen steward. A kitchen steward is a supervisor of multiple kitchens, so you're in charge of the dishwashers, the busboys, making sure that the sous chefs and the food preps, all of that line of work was supervised by my father with limited English. I remember when he was first given a pager. He told me, "*Mija, no me contestan. Yo les hablo y no me contestan.*" It was a pager. He would hear the page, "Calvo to the main kitchen." He would say, "Ten-four," or, "I'll be there in a minute. Do you need me now or can you wait ten minutes?" He goes, "*No me contestan.*" *They don't answer me. What button am I pressing wrong?* I said, "It's a pager, Dad. It's a pager, not two-way communication." "Oh, okay."

He was Employee of the Month a couple of times. Up to his passing in 2016, for his birthday he always wanted to go back to the Fremont Hotel buffet to eat breakfast or lunch. Everyone would come out from the kitchen, all the executives, everybody would come out and say hello. That was a big achievement for my dad, big, big achievement.

And he stayed there all those years.

He stayed and he worked so hard. He worked so hard.

That's wonderful.

Bob Agonia, we have a connection with him. How did that come up?

In 1999, I was at the City and the City was invited by the Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program, a nonprofit organization here in Las Vegas, to send a representative. In the nineties, there was a federal mandate that every employer had to have a representative in the Hispanic Employment Program, a law to insure diversity and rights. The City received a request

and then my HR director said, "I really want you to go represent us. I don't have time to be in those meetings and I don't think I can do them justice because I'm not Hispanic." I became their representative and that's where I met Bob Agonia and a lot of the community leaders that you mentioned. It's where I became more involved on a personal level, where I may have known them before, but that's where I met Bob Agonia. He and a couple of other people—Linda Rivera, John Medina, Alfred Montez—had started this from the early seventies and started a scholarship program with, "Hey, here's fifty; here's a hundred," and started doing that. By the time I joined them in 1999, SNHEP was a lot bigger and they had accepted private sector employers as well as contractors. The scholarship program was one of the things that they were strong with. I started as a member and then they asked me to be a board member. Then I ended up being president for seven years.

What did those meetings consist of, the ones where you had to be a representative? What was being discussed?

Employment rights, diversity, and a lot of training and development for the employers to know, what does diversity mean in your workplace? Does it mean that you give someone a job because they're a person of color and you're meeting your quotas? You still want to hire someone with the minimum qualifications for that position, but you can't pass them up because they're a person of color and a minority, so a lot of discussion about that; a lot of workshops being planned. Because we were nonprofit, there was fundraising and our key thing of higher education for better employment was our scholarships program, so I got heavily involved with that.

By then I was already divorced and my two little girls were with me at all times.

Volunteering and service to the community was always a part of our family. My mother could

look in a pantry and have five ingredients and still cook a full meal for us and the neighbor that just had surgery and someone from church. Service to others was always a big deal.

When I was married I was more limited to what I could do. My wings were clipped. When I was divorced it was like I was so...It's sad to say, but I felt so in my element. I felt like a total new person when I was divorced. It was something that was ugly, a very ugly transition in my life and for my kids, but it was something that gave me life and brought my wings back. My little girls were little, five and eight.

At SNHEP meetings or scholarship meetings I remember Bob or Linda writing on the chalkboard for disbursement of money that had come in in scholarship allocations. My youngest daughter, Senia, was next to me and she just kept busy writing, writing. Probably about five, seven years ago I found a notebook. She had kept all of her notes in her own little writing. When my daughters were involved, they ushered, they passed out programs, they shook hands with the mayor, they shook hands with everybody, whatever they were told they did, and they did it with a smile because service was part of our lives.

At the age of fourteen and seventeen, SNHEP suffered, like everybody else did, with the economy crash in 2007 and '08 and leading into 2009. Scholarships were being cut off our program. My daughters, on a Sunday afternoon during our dinner and family meeting—the three of us would have a Sunday meeting every Sunday; give me a high, give me a low from last week; what would you like different from this week? They said, "Mom, we really need to talk about SNHEP scholarships. It breaks my heart that we can't provide enough money. Sister and I were talking about we want to do a youth council and do our own fundraising for the community to make sure that SNHEP has money." They started a nonprofit organization to help raise funds,

a leadership youth program, in 2009. It ended up being under the umbrella of SNHEP because there was no need to be separate units. They fundraised a lot.

Since then they've awarded over three hundred and fifty thousand dollars in scholarships, over a hundred and sixty recipients. That program now is under Project 150 because when I started with Project 150, I was assisting with both and it just seemed like a good fit for them. When SNHEP dissolved, five different nonprofits were fighting for the girls to go over there and be with their nonprofit. It was a good fit to stay here, a good fit.

That's fantastic.

I was wondering if you can tell us about your second husband and how that...

Sure. I got divorced from my kids' father when I was thirty-three. When I met Ignacio, my second husband, I had just turned forty.

After my divorce, I dated a man that I thought was everything for me because he was the gentleman, he was very attentive, he was everything that I had been lacking in my marriage. That quickly turned into a very physically abusive relationship. It started with the verbal abuse, the intimidation, the seclusion from my family. He would tell me, "I'm sorry I lost my temper, but it's you. You still have your roots in Mexico and maybe this is why your first husband and you didn't make it. You make me lose my temper. You made me."

My mother and I were never really close. My father and I were super, super close. But I feared telling my dad some of these things that were going on with this boyfriend because I felt that he would tell my brothers and then my brothers could possibly hurt him and then it would make it bigger. I kept saying, "I got this; I got this."

Being in the community so much by then, I was embarrassed to share my story with someone. I was embarrassed to call 911 because I knew all the dispatchers. Everything that I had

done to help someone else, I wasn't doing it for myself. I became numb. I became silent—my voice was ripped from me—and embarrassed.

That relationship became verbally abusive and then physically abusive to the point that I had—it was a lifetime—I had to start putting my belongings in bags and then setting them outside for the soccer mom whose child played in my daughter's soccer team to start going out to the sidewalk and picking them up. I would tell her, "I set two bags outside; please grab them." Until I had an opportunity to escape that relationship.

That left me about seven months in a crying mode. Why me? What have I done wrong? Working on me.

Then I met Ignacio through one of our SNHEP partners from Metro. He introduced me to Ignacio as the new officer that would be taking over that area that the City of Las Vegas and Metro was going to collaborate on some of those efforts. I met him and he was everything that I did not want. In that seven months of healing from that abusive relationship I had made my profile list and I would pray to God that that would be the list of characteristics that the next person in my life would have. Being an officer was not one of them. Being younger than me was not one of them. Having young kids was definitely not one of them because I was closer to retirement. He ended up being that and so much more.

He died of cancer. Shortly after we became a couple, his cancer came back. He was in remission when I met him. His cancer came back rapidly a couple of times. We went probably a couple of months without the cancer and then, boom, it hit us.

He had two little kids. I had two daughters. People would call us the PSP, the Pulido six-pack. We were inseparable. Our kids were inseparable. It was never your kids, my kids; it was always our kids. I honestly believe that God's hand was all in that. The life that I had lived,

my marriage and my relationship after my relationship, Ignacio was a gift to me. He swears we were a gift to him.

But to be able to learn how a woman should be treated...All my life I was told "the Mexican girl." All my life I was told, "You need to focus on just being a stay-at-home mom. Why are you going to school? Why are you trying to better yourself? That's not in for us. That's for other women, not for our culture." To have someone who amplified everything that I worked so hard for and supported, he was the father figure to my children. At one point my kids had said, "If this is what life is like being married, I definitely never want to be married." But when he came into our lives, everything shifted.

Yes, we helped him as care givers and we helped him with the little ones. But there was so much learning for my daughters to know that they're never to be in a box. They're never to allow anybody...Sometimes even our own loved ones, our own family puts us in a profile box and those are the parameters of growth that we're given. Him being in my life amplified my efforts raising my children and amplified the need for higher education. That was very important for us.

He was the first one to get a college degree in his family. His similar story of immigration and things like that was like mine. I was going to college. The first thing I did when I got divorced is, I need to enroll in community college and obtain my bachelor's degree. He died before I graduated, but it was definitely something that was highly supported.

He was a detective for Metro. His career advancement helped a lot to shape my children and say, this is what I deserve in my life. And I always told my girls, you fight for your own voice, you work hard through education, and you find your own happiness. Someone else is supposed to be there to compliment meant you, not someone to bring you down. He always reiterated that for our children.

Thank you for sharing that. Your daughters are how old now?

My youngest is twenty-four. She's graduating from UNLV in December. Then my oldest is twenty-seven and she graduated from UNR in 2014. Senia, my youngest one, also went to UNR for her freshman year, but when her older sister graduated and came back, she's like, "I think I'm going to be homesick. Plus, I miss Project 150 and the youth council and everything." She's more boots on the ground and loves that, but she knows that a degree was necessary to continue her advocacy for higher education.

That's wonderful.

What was your degree in?

Business management.

Did you go back? I see your schedule on the wall. Is that yours?

No. That's my daughter's. She graduates in December, so that's her.

Is she working here?

She is. Actually, she is carrying on a couple of legacies that we had when we were young. I hope you don't mind me hopping back.

No. To tie this together, it would be great to know what is Project 150; that background. I will preface this by saying I may have to leave in a little while to go to a meeting about this project, but you'll be in good hands with Laurents.

Project 150 is a fabulous nonprofit organization that started in 2011 by two businessmen in the community, not two men that have ever experienced the type of services that we provide, but they were there to help a hundred and fifty homeless high school kids at Rancho as their company's charitable giving project and community project for 2011. That quickly evolved into helping one more high school and one more high school.

When I started volunteering for them was August of 2012. With my background and experience in nonprofit world, they asked me if I would be their executive director when they were helping six schools and they didn't have a building, they didn't have procedures, but they were over their heads because they had daytime jobs that paid the bills. I started with them in February of 2013 as their executive director.

We now serve fifty-nine schools and twenty in Reno. They have their own volunteer force in Reno. We've quickly evolved. I wish that there would have been a Project 150 when I was growing up, but I'm sure there were many community angels that served the role that Project 150 serves now.

We help homeless, displaced and disadvantaged high school students, over sixty-three hundred in fifty-nine schools here. We provide food, clothing, school supplies, cap and gowns, PE uniforms, bus passes, the scholarship program that my daughters continue, and Secret Santa program; that was something that my family has been doing for over thirty-five years and now they're carrying it on. In a nutshell that's what Project 150 is.

Your daughters, what legacy? You started telling us.

Secret Santa. Growing up we never really had Christmas. There was no such thing as mom and dad going out to shop for gifts. We may have had gift exchanges, but we wrapped a piece of candy or we made rag dolls or created something for each other to exchange. The only time we had Christmas gifts is if someone, a secret Santa, dropped off gifts at our front door and then we had. That's including Tijuana. My memory goes back to seeing boxes and boxes of things outside our window from a secret Santa. Twenty-eighth Street, it was a lady from our church; Sister Helen is what we called her. She lived in apartments across the street from us. She was our secret Santa, bags and bags, black bags, trash bags of gifts that she would leave at our front door.

She was the first one to ever take me to a new department store. My first new clothing experience was with Sister Helen from 28th Street. She took me to Montgomery Ward to start my eighth grade. I remember walking in to Montgomery Ward on 28th Street and Charleston and she said, "Go." She kept asking my mom could she take us shopping and my mom would say, "No, no, they have what they need; they have what they need." She just picked me and she said, "I want to take you." Maybe because I was the youngest girl. She says, "I want to take you shopping to start middle school." Junior high is what they called it. I remember my mom finally giving in. We walked into Montgomery Ward and she goes, "Go; go find your outfits."

I had no idea where my department was. I remember just making little turns in the store. I was just so amazed. I had never been in a new real store. She finds the little girls' section and she says, "Go find your size." I said, "I don't know my size." The shoe department, "Find your shoe size." "I don't know my size."

The same thing happens in 2018 when students come in and shop at Betty's Boutique, our store that Project 150 has for homeless, displaced and disadvantaged high school students. They don't know their size. They don't know what bra size they wear, pant size, dress size, shoe size. They've never had that opportunity to be able to shop for new stuff. Sister Helen gave me that opportunity in my eighth grade.

Now my kids do Secret Santa. My siblings and I carried on Secret Santa for our families. And now my daughter Senia, who works here as well, but even before she worked here, my kids carried on that legacy. "Mom, you just teach us how to do it. Sooner or later"—this is their words—"you're going to get too old to be doing this, so teach us how to do it." They've been carrying it on to provide Christmas for less fortunate kids.

You mentioned Sister Helen was from church.

She was from our church.

Which church did you attend?

LDS Church.

What role did religion play in your family?

A big role. My dad and my mom were Catholics before they got married. My dad converted to Mormon in the United States, in Texas. When he went back to marry my mom, he told her about his conversion and she agreed. They both were LDS through their marriage and when we were born we were born into that teaching.

When I got divorced I stopped, kind of pulled myself away. I was not as comfortable being the one to throw in the white towel to get divorced. I was the head of the president of the Sunday school. I had twenty-eight teachers I supervised since I was eighteen years old until thirty-three when I got divorced and over a hundred and seventy kids, ages eighteen months to seventeen. I just left that church and followed the Christian Church. I broke my dad's heart doing that, but I felt more comfortable.

What is the Latino presence in the Mormon Church?

High, very high. I think Catholics probably are, by a small margin, the highest population of membership and then LDS.

How did that affect the more traditional Mexican traditions that fall in with the Catholic Church? How did the Mormon Church...?

I think side by side family values are strong. Moral values were a high priority for us. My parents would always tell us, "Estamos pobres, no quiere decir que pueden hacer lo que les da la gana." *You may be poor, but that doesn't mean you can do whatever you want.* We were never hungry. Even if we had rice and beans and potatoes as our main meal every single meal, we were never

hungry. We were never dirty. My parents instilled high moral values in us. I think that was always something that I walked away with making sure that my children had, integrity. And service to others was a nonstop, not a mandate, not an order, not a discussion, it was something we learned watching our parents do that.

Sticking with traditions, what foods did you grow up eating?

Mexican food all the time.

Can you be a little bit more specific?

Coming home from school we could smell my mom's cooking and tortillas blocks away. My mother and my father are from Michoacán and their cooking is just off the hook. All of our friends were always at our house eating. Everything was homemade. Nothing was a can opening. Nothing was prepared, prepackaged. Everything was from scratch. That's one of the things I remember. The *mole*, *pozole*, enchiladas, the beans. I don't know what was so special about my mom and dad's beans, but it was just fabulous. My dad is eight years older than my mom, so he taught her how to cook and then the student surpassed the master.

My *abuelo* on my dad's side was a *panadero*; he made Mexican bread. My dad growing up, although he was an orphan because his mother passed away and my *abuelo*, his dad, kind of moved on in a different life, my dad still had that as something that came down the genes from his father.

Where did they get ingredients?

Here in Las Vegas? There was Las Panaderia's, like Mariana's. There were Spanish markets, yes. Flour, sugar, butter, and then tamales. Oh my gosh, I remember my mom slapping that lard into the masa to make tamales. Those traditions are just priceless, to be able to remember our parents.

On my dad's days off, it wasn't, let's all go the movies; it was going to Lady Luck downtown for the fifty-cent hot dog and a soda or a sundae or shrimp cocktail. If we went to the Lady Luck to get that we were super excited. That was like a big ta-da. We'd pile up in the station wagon and there we went.

Growing up in Las Vegas where would you like to hang out? Where were the Latino hubs, if there were any?

I worked most of my life, so after school I went straight to work. I don't think I went out a whole lot. I don't remember. We were either with family or there's lots of *quinceañeras*, lots of weddings, lots of that stuff. There was a Mexican theater on Rancho and Bonanza. I remember us going there for family night. I think the whole family went in for twenty dollars or something.

You said a Mexican theater, did they play—

El Rancho Theater.

Did they play Mexican movies from Mexico or were they translated?

Oh, yes. No, no, they were Mexican movies. Pedro Infante, Cantinflas, Yolanda—what was her name? Yes, it was all of the Spanish movie stars. It's all in Spanish. The whole family would go for twenty dollars. Rancho and Bonanza.

Does anything like that still exist?

No, no. I think we get subtitles, if anything. I don't even think there's movies with Spanish subtitles to accommodate Spanish speakers anymore.

Not that I'm aware of.

In growing up in my household there was never conversation about going to college, maybe because we were poor and my parents didn't want to open a can of worms and they didn't know the process of scholarships. But if we graduated that was their highest achievement wish for us.

They always instilled education, education, but we never talked about past high school. I know my oldest sister went to clerical school after high school. I went to barber school. When I went to barber school, my sisters both wanted to do cosmetology because they didn't want to move out of state to do barber school. They didn't have barber school here. So, they did that. Eventually everybody started doing their own career and their own family.

How have you seen the city change as you've grown up?

It's changed a lot. Obviously, the empty lots. When they started building Meadows, it was like, that's so far away. Boulder Station was a drive-in across the street from there and on Sahara and Lamb was another drive-in. Seeing those things that my children can never experience. Broad Acres was like the place to go and shop, the swap meet, and now it's busy as ever as well. I remember the Barajas family opening their first Lindo Michoacán. It was a tiny, tiny, little place. I think my brothers played soccer with the Barajas, with Tino and Javier. I think my dad and his parents were friends through the dish-washing community. *What hotel do you work?*

It was different. I think we played more. We talked more. I don't see a lot of that in today's day and age. We don't see a lot of neighbors talking and saying hello or children sharing a bike and playing. There's a lot more sensitivity to differences. My children discuss, "Mom, why are people so mean? Why do they hate us because we're Latinos? Why do they profile me? "So when did you come from Mexico?" my kids will be asked. When Sabrina was in school, they would say, "You can't speak Spanish. You can't talk that stuff." Or, "You can't speak Mexican. You can't talk that stuff here." She's only twenty-seven. Now I think there's more sensitivity to differences instead of acceptance of differences.

Yes. It's hard to explain. Did you teach them Spanish? Did they speak Spanish?

My oldest one, Sabrina, is pretty fluent. She works for Metro now and she's pretty fluent. Senia, she was more raised by her grandmother on her dad's side, her paternal grandmother, who was raised in Texas and told never to speak Spanish or you would be in trouble. Whenever she watched my kids, that's how she raised them. "No, they're going to get in trouble. No, they can't speak Spanish. They're going to get in trouble." Senia can speak it, understand it more, but not as fluent as my oldest.

I do have one burning question. When did you go to Disneyland finally?

My high school senior trip was at Disneyland and I finally got to see the real Cinderella castle. It was not that Silver Slipper on the Strip. It was definitely not.

I will forever be grateful for my parents' sacrifices. The stories my dad would share as an immigrant, a fieldworker, and the sacrifices he made to bring us here on a third-grade education, and the courage that my mother had. When we were in Tijuana, we sold *elotes*. My dad would carry the big pan of *elotes* and we'd hop on a public bus and a few of us would go help him. By the time he came back with those sold, my mom had set up for tostados or *pozole* outside of our home. That was our life.

We didn't know we were poor. Even coming here to the States, I didn't know I was poor. I knew I couldn't speak the language. But I had both my parents. I didn't know I was poor, and I think that's what allowed us to be more grateful and give more, be able to be a voice. There's no greater reward for me than to see my parents' teachings down three or four generations later, be carried on through our children. Senia may not be fluent in Spanish, but she's not doing anything different than my parents had me do or instilled in me to do.

I wanted to speak about Project 150 a little bit more. What is the demographic of the youth homeless population?

Who we serve here is predominately African American, Caucasian and Hispanic, probably in that order. I think a lot of our Latino population is either afraid to get services or we tend to think we're okay. Even if we're living with a family member; that's considered homeless. If you don't have your own address, it is considered homeless status. We take care of our own. But when we do make ourselves available to them, it's something that's refreshing and well needed in their household.

What are the causes of homelessness?

So many things. Las Vegas is such a transient city. We have a lot of human and sex trafficking. We have a lot of misconception that we have an abundance of jobs in construction and in the hotel industry and I think people move here and they realize it's not as easy to get hired or there isn't that many openings. A lot of illnesses. I'm sure there is drug, alcohol and gambling addictions as well, but a lot of the others probably prevail in the reason for them being homeless.

What kind of outreach? How do you make the population aware that you are here and providing services?

Schools. We try to communicate with the schools as much as possible. Some counselors and some administrators share our mission a lot more than others. Our volunteer advocacy is probably the strongest backbone that we have. We're usually on the media a lot sharing our services. The community knows we have Betty's Boutique. The community knows we're in high schools and to ask their counselors about us.

I saw Opportunity Village. How did that connection come about?

Opportunity Village has a job development program, levels one, two and three. That allows students who can no longer learn in the classroom the opportunity to be placed in work sites to get hands-on work experience so that they can secure a permanent job somewhere else. That part

of it is a plus for us because we have ten students Monday through Friday from seven a.m. to one p.m. that handle restocking Betty's Boutique and helping with holiday meals or helping with the weekend meal bags that we put together for our high school students, and then the deliveries that go out to the schools. Thursday and Friday are our weekly deliveries and they go out. They help with all of that, so it's extra labor force for us while they're learning a skill that they didn't have.

Is there a particular—I'm pretty sure you have many—but a particular success story that you'd like to share with us, someone who has come back and said, "Thank you so much. I wouldn't have been able to succeed without Project 150"?

There's so many. There's so many. So many of our students have moved on to serve the armed forces. There are some that are homeless and still took on higher education. We do our scholarship program and four of them last award ceremony were still homeless and were still persevering through their degree.

One that stands out in my mind is I was speaking at Clark High School. They invited me to share my story and talk about Project 150. I was sharing my story and telling them how hard it was to be that go-to child in the family that was responsible for all the resources and researching and translating for everybody. I was not a child. I never had that childhood playing. It was just a young adult in a very confused adult world. After sharing my story as an immigrant and that, she came to me afterwards and she cried for the first, I would to say, four or five minutes. She said, "Your story is my story. I've been head of household since I was eight years old." She says, "Graduating seems so far away for me because my priority is my younger siblings, my ill mom, and then when my dad comes back in the picture from being out in a drunk absence, long-term absence, then he comes back and everything that we've worked so hard to stabilize is down the drain." She says, "How did you do it?"

I had never been asked, how did you do it? I never thought I did anything different than the other kids in my neighborhood. One of them had to have been the go-to child and one of them had to start working sooner than later. When she asked me that, it really floored me that my story had an impact and someone was going through that. As she shared more about her life, it was like looking in the mirror.

But the fact that she had the courage to ask for help and I never did—I didn't know I needed help; I didn't know that I needed somebody's guidance—made me realize how hard our kids have it today, the challenges. She had been approached by human traffickers, sex trafficking recruiters, drug trafficking recruiters. Obviously when you're low income, you're going to live in the ugliest part of town and that's the first place they recruit. The challenges that she had trying to keep her younger brothers out of those hands.

She struggled a lot, but she graduated. She's a mom. She's an advocate for a nonprofit. She's paying it forward. I wish that she would have gone to college, like she had hoped to, but she chose married life instead and working so that she can continue to help the younger siblings.

I want to ask you about role models. I know you've spoken a lot about your dad. Anyone outside of the family especially during your work career?

David Sanchez, the first HR director I had at the City definitely was one of them. When I met our SNHEP or Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program family, Bob Agonia, John Medina and Fred Montez definitely were big role models because I got to work with them and in hand almost every day as we were growing SNHEP. Mr. Farrell, my elementary schoolteacher. Sister Helen. There are so many.

What did these people have in common that made you look up to them?

They were fighters. They didn't put people in a box. I think the first thing I noticed as a child was how quickly we were categorized. My dad always corrected us if we started adapting that kind of profiling or categorizing people. "*Todos somos iguales. Y tu tormenta no te define sino tus acciones para seguir adelante.*" He would always tell us, "*Lo que la gente quiere tu tienes que hacer lo contrario. Todos van a querer que seas esto, o que seas menos. Tu tienes tus acciones, que tienen que ser las que enseñan.*" He always taught us that work ethic and our actions defined us, and if we made mistakes, get up; shake it off; learn from it; don't do it again; learn from it.

My mom was a lot tougher. My mother was raised with a lot of hitting, and so that's how she was with us. My dad was more the storyteller and sharing his childhood to somehow simulate whatever experience we were going through.

My dad's nickname for me was *guerrera*. I was his *guerrera* since I was little. It's a hard name to live up to because even strong people need a little bit of assistance. I felt overwhelmed a lot. I think I felt, one, that I wasn't doing the right thing for those that I was translating. It was such a big responsibility for me. As my siblings got older, I think I struggled a lot. Could their lives have been different if I could have done something different or more for them?

I wanted to ask you about your identity. First off, how do you identify; as Mexicana, Latina, Chicana?

I always say Mexicana. I think Latina is the name I'm given when I'm in the professional world, but I always say I'm Mexican. I was born in Mexico, so that makes me Mexican.

How did you deal with that growing up especially when "Mexican girl" was used to tease you? Was there ever a point you felt ashamed of your heritage?

No. Everything that hurt me made me stronger. It made me work harder to give that. When they would say "the Mexican girl," in my mind I wanted to learn English fast and I wanted to be the

best Mexican girl that they would ever remember. If that's the label they had on me, I wanted that label to be remembered as a good label. I wanted to make my dad proud and I knew how much it meant for him—my dad and I were super close—I knew how much it meant for him to be good people. Never worry about how much money you're going to be paid; worry about doing the right thing and that will attract your pay later. Never be stingy with your money. No matter how much money you earn, always be ready to buy somebody else a meal. Always be ready to give somebody a better opportunity.

Being in the role that I had at the City of Las Vegas, I was blessed. I was blessed to learn the inside of that opportunity. If I had never had that opportunity to do an on-the-job training and interview with David Sanchez, I would have probably never applied for a government job. Our hood kids, we were never taught that. We were never talked to about government jobs. Dish washing, fast food places, housekeeping. But we were never taught about how to apply for a government job. When I had that opportunity and I learned how easy it was—just prepare yourself—I started talking to them since they were in middle school. Don't make mistakes; don't do this; don't do that. Be ready to pass the background. From here, what are you excited? I was a little recruiter and at a very young age and I didn't know it.

I think my final question is, what are your hopes for the Latino community? It could be in general or specifically here in Las Vegas.

Not engaging in the hate is my wish for them. The same way I was taught by my dad, the store and profiling does not define me. It's my actions. To defy their assumptions is more important. I pray and I hope that our Latino community continues to be pursuing higher education; that through love and equality that they learn to not hate those that are trying to keep us down or forcing us to separate families and create walls and borders and all of those things; that we find a

way to be smarter to beat those things through our actions and not get caught up in the ugliness. I think we waste too much time being ugly and fighting back when the silence is a bigger weapon.

Any last stories or something you want to mention?

I love that Mexican girl. I may have not had a childhood because I was the resourceful part of the family. I used to be upset, why does my mom force me to do this? Why is she volunteering me? I'm so nervous. But that person also forced me to be the best that I could be. It allowed me to give myself a voice that has helped many people. And I don't say that to boast, I say that because I feel that my father's words were always, "You don't do for yourself; you do for others. When they excel, they're going to do for others and that's how we bring ourselves up. Never look down at someone unless you're giving him a hand up." I think that's been in my nature always to serve and give a hand up. I don't care what color. I don't care what nationality, ethnicity. It has to be in your heart without a color, without a bias to be able to help. If I wasn't a Mexican girl that was made fun of or pointed to or pushed to translate, I don't think that I would be that person today.

If you could go back, what would you tell that Mexican girl on 28th Street?

What would I tell her? Because she is a little feisty thing already. It's going to be worth it, because back then I didn't know it would be worth it. Morals and values with my family were such a big deal that I envied the pretty girls that got to wear pretty clothes and I didn't have pretty clothes and they got to wear makeup and they had boyfriends all the time. I envied that. I wanted that for myself. But the morals and the values that my parents taught me and being that Mexican girl to translate for the neighborhood and go to my brothers' conference meetings and all that gave me such a good life. It's like when I did my profile of what I was praying for God to give me as a husband, I made my list. God had his list. I got so much more. Out of my life I feel blessed that even fast forward to today in 2018 I'm able to share my story and I'm able to see a

lot of the young adults going through the same thing I went through in the seventies and the eighties and the nineties. To be able to shift gears and be able to remember someone sitting down to talk to me made a world of difference.

One of our city employees, he was a senior analyst, Bill Berg, he offered to pay for my college. He goes, "Do you want to go back to college?" I said, "I do, but I can't afford it. My husband doesn't want me to take a less paying job to go to college." He says, "I'll pay for it. You can go to college on my dime. You're worth it. Investing in you is well use of my money."

I couldn't take him up on it, but imagine how happy I was when I was able to enroll and crossing that stage and graduating. Not that I needed that piece of paper for my career because I was retiring, but it was a personal satisfaction. I'm the first one in my family to have a college degree. I was the first one. For me to instill higher education in our youth and in my home for my children, I had to walk the talk. I had a very demanding job at the City and I was a single mom. My kids came first, so their school, their soccer, their activities, homework. By the time they went to bed and my house was clean and backpacks were set for the next day, I started homework at eleven thirty at night. Two thirty in the morning, my kids would get up for bathroom breaks and go back to sleep and I was still typing papers. Then it was five thirty, six in the morning, repeat, repeat. But that was a sacrifice I chose in my journey because I knew how important that was for me.

I went to Harvard University for a leadership program and to know that the Calvo name, my dad's name, my family name is part of their records is something that not only made me proud. Every now and then I would catch myself and say, "I'm in Harvard." It was just one week, but it still had such a big impact on me to be able to say, you're not quitting; keep going; keep

going; you're almost there; graduate; graduate. It would have been so much easier just to make my life slightly better in my comfort of schedule to just quit, but I didn't.

Thank you so much. This was fantastic.

[End of recorded interview]

