AN INTERVIEW WITH ERMA LINDA RIVERA

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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Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries
Director: Claytee D. White
Project Manager: Barbara Tabach
Transcribers: Kristin Hicks, Maribel Estrada Calderón, Nathalie Martinez, Rodrigo Vazquez, Elsa Lopez
Editors and Project Assistants: Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez, Maribel Estrada Calderón, Monserrath Hernández, Elsa Lopez, Nathalie Martinez, Marcela Rodriguez-Campo, Rodrigo Vazquez

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

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

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

PREFACE

When asked about how she identifies, Erma 'Linda' Rivera puzzles: *Am I a woman, am I Latina, or am I a wife or mother?* The reality is that she matches all those identifiers and more. Add activist and civic leader.

Linda and her and her husband, Jose Felix Rivera, made their way from Arizona to Montana and finally to Las Vegas in 1985. They were attracted by hiring opportunities with the Bureau of Reclamation. Felix took at position at Hoover Dam and Linda began her civil service career.

Linda was born and raised near the small town of Clifton, Arizona. It was there that her Hispanic pride flourished; a pride of heritage that inspired her and remains a significant in her life story. Within this oral history, she threads together her unflinching focus on assuring minority representation and opportunities, in education, in the workplace and throughout life. Through her position at the Bureau of Reclamation she and the Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program established a scholarship program.

When Linda retired from the Equal Employment Opportunity section of the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation. She remains an active volunteer at local schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Erma Linda Rivera
January 9, 2019
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

LATINX VOICES
OF SOUTHERN NEVADA
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Today is January ninth, 2019. This is Laurents Banuelos-Benitez. We are in the Oral History Research Center and I am joined by...

Maribel Estrada Calderon.

Nathalie Martinez.

And Barbara Tabach.

Today we're interviewing Linda Rivera.

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

The proper name is Erma, E-R-M-A; Linda, L-I-N-D-A; Rivera, R-I-V-E-R-A.

Thank you. One of the first questions I want to ask you is, how do you identify, as Latina, Chicana?

That's always a question that I've always asked myself. Am I a woman, am I Latina, or am I a wife or mother? I think when I started I would say as a young girl, but as I grew up and started to work within the community and started to really filter out—I am a Latina.

How did you come to that conclusion? Was there a certain moment?

Yes. The moment hit when I went, in 2011, to a nationally recognized program called the National Hispaña Leadership Institute [NHLI]; it actually mirrors the program of WRIN (Women's Resource Institute of Nevada). They brought Latina women together of all the ethnicities; not only the Mexicana, but the Puerto Rican, the Cubana…all of the segments of what makes up the Hispanic community. I realized then that I was rich in culture, rich in tradition, and rich in values that really define the Latino community. We're very humble people, but, yet, we strive not just for self, but for family and others. That's where I defined myself. Not only am I a woman, not only am I a mom, but I am a Latina and I'm proud of that.

Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood and your family?

I'm the second of four children. My mom was a homemaker. My dad was a chemist for a then well-known copper company, Phelps Dodge Corporation located in Morenci, Arizona. The little community that I grew up was Clifton, Arizona. It was predominately Hispanic, Mexican born or from Mexican roots. I am U.S. born, my mom is U.S. born, my dad is also, but our grandparents were the ones that came from Mexico. We grew up with traditional traditions that are celebrated in our community. Tamales is for Christmas. Menudo is for New Year's. We just celebrated the Roscón with the Dia de los Reyes [kings cake], and everybody was dying to see who was going to get the little Jesus in the *pan*, in the bread. It was very much entrenched in a bicultural community because not only did we live around first-language Spanish, but then we had to immerse into English-only by going to school, so we had a balance. I grew up with, I think, a good balance.

In the time when I grew up, I was being groomed to be the best housewife ever, because who was going to marry me, if I didn't know how to make a good tortilla or if I didn't know how to make a good meal for my potential husband? For me the education piece, other than getting out of high school, wasn't a sense of urgency; to get to a college as it was to be groomed as the best potential housewife. The men, on the other side, they were the ones that were like, "You've got to do better; you've got to do this; you've got to do that. What are you going to do? How are you going toe support your family?"

I had a good well-rounded family, a very spiritual family. A lot of my background from spirituality comes from my dad. My dad had always taught us to be good servants of the community, of the people. You are here to serve, not to be served. Very humble beginnings and hopefully a humble ending for myself. A good, well-rounded family. I was very blessed with a good solid family.

You mentioned that it was a well-rounded family, so I'm assuming you spoke both Spanish and English at home.

Yes.

With some of our previous interviews, we've encountered, especially the ones U.S. born, a lot of them were told not to speak Spanish growing up. Why did your parents encourage both languages?

Because we lived with our *abuelitos*; our *abuelitos* lived with us, and not to be able to communicate with them was a deep sign of disrespect. And so you had to emerge and keep your language in order to be inclusive of the *abuelito* or the *abuelita,* because how were you going to lead them out at the dinner table of speaking of your daily activities and exchanging what you did or did not do during the school day, during an evening out with your friends? We were taught that we were not to be disrespectful because they were part of the table and they were the head of the table simply because they were the elders. We were very bilingual. We were brought up bilingual.

The downside to that though is that while we were encouraged to keep our language orally, we were not really encouraged to keep the writing piece. But we did read and we did speak. The reason why we were encouraged to keep the reading piece was so that we could read to our *abuelos* or *abuelas*, like the daily news, and then translate what the news was saying.

My nana, she would love to see the soap operas and she would make up her own story. She did not really understand, but she knew the characters of the stories and in her mind, "*verdad mija, mira que dijo este hombre*." No, Nana." We would have to kindly and very sensitively bring her back to, this is the point of the story; you're going in a way different track. But do it very respectfully so.

Do you remember what kind of *novelas* your grandma would watch?

Well, they didn't have the *telenovelas*, the soaps, on Univision or Telemundo or any of those. So it was CBS—*As the World Turns*, *Guiding Light*. There was one in the morning that I can't remember that she used to watch, but I know the main character's name was Victor. She just was in love with Victor.

The Young and the Restless.

That one, yes, *The Young and the Restless*.

You mentioned that your grandparents were the ones that originally came over to the States, correct?

From Jalisco, Mexico.

Do you know what brought them over?

Like what brings everybody over today is survival. As I grew older and got more entrenched in working with the Latino community and listening to people's stories of why they came over, my Nana had a story to tell of where they lived in Jalisco, Mexico, and during different seasons Pancho Villa would go to these different camps and in the different camps he would highlight or pinpoint different young women that he would love to be entertained with, to put it in a more respectful way. My Nana and her youngest sister had been highlighted as the return of him, he would want to have a closer relationship with them, if you will. Their brothers and sisters planned to get them away before that season because, I guess, from what I know and I haven't studied it, is he would go from camp to camp, little town to little pueblo, wherever it was. Anyway, they came from Jalisco, Mexico, and that's what brought her here.

What happened in the crossroads, wherever they crossed, half of the ones that came went to California and half of them went to Clifton or Metcalf, another little community; it's no longer

there. It doesn't exist anymore, but neighbored the copper mine. That's where the families split. My Nana and her younger sister, for whatever reason, headed towards the Metcalf, Arizona communities. What brought her was just trying to escape; they didn't want to be Pancho Villa's next concubines.

We're now in the 21st century, the stories are still basically about the same. We're still trying to be better. We're still trying to go for better. We're still trying to find safety and comfort and just live in a peaceful manner.

What about your grandfather?

My grandfather died before I got to know much about him. Mostly it's my grandmothers. My other grandmother, on my paternal side, I don't know much about her either; she passed when I was younger, but she was the solid rock of the family. She had thirteen kids. She ran a little *ranchito* where my father grew up. But I don't really know much about her, to be honest with you, from her past. Just my Nana I do for sure.

What was your early schooling like in Arizona for you?

It was good. I can't say that it was normal because the community in itself was a small community. Probably our classrooms didn't have any more than maybe twenty-five students and most of us were Hispanic, and so we didn't have the struggle. The teachers themselves struggled with us because a lot of us carried dual languages or we were bilingual. They would look at you like, *did you understand?* And we would look back and say, "Yes, we understand what you're telling us," because we grew up in that environment with the bilingual language.

I can't say that I had a bad childhood. I think I had a normal one for the time and era and the place where I grew up. I don't have any terrible memory of something happening. I think it was all just normal for whatever normal was at the time.

Can you describe the Latino community in that area at that time?

Growing and thriving and hard workers. A lot of them were, again, working at the copper mine. A lot of people didn't leave because they were comfortable. They reached their comfort levels: a good income, good healthcare, good education K through twelve. If you wanted to leave and prosper any further than that, then we had to pack up ourselves and leave. And a lot of us don't do that because we don't want to leave, and a lot of times we didn't have the encouragement of parents to leave. If we decided to go to a college or pursue higher ed, it was going to mean a four- or five-hour drive, a couple of hundred miles away. My community is southeast of Tucson, Arizona, which would be U of A. Now, of course, there are multiple community colleges, there's online colleges, there's a lot of ways.

But in my time of growing up in the seventies, because I graduated from high school in 1970, that was it. Maybe in today's era we're more apt to let our kids go forth and conquer, but in my time, you pretty much stayed close to home and there wasn't that strong encouragement. A lot of the Latinas of my era—probably about half of us were married before we even graduated high school because that's what we were groomed to be and we married our high school sweethearts. We married probably our first boyfriend.

I'm remembering now. My youngest daughter has just turned thirty-one and she's going to just hopefully get married here in November. But at thirty-one I already had my oldest that was in the ninth grade because that's what I was groomed to do. I didn't have to get married, but that's what I did. I got married because that was my way out. That's how I saw it, as my way out, because in that time you weren't going to go live with your boyfriend, my goodness. You would be ostracized from your family and put in a closet somewhere and forget about being invited to the *quinceañera* or to the baby shower or the wedding because, *o, allí viene aquella*. The way out

for us then in a small, little thriving community that was company owned by a thriving copper mine where people found they not only offered elementary school to high school—healthcare because they had their own hospital, their own doctors that they got, they also provided housing, so it was comfortable.

It wasn't until 1983 when they suffered a huge, huge labor dispute and the copper prices plummeted. People were scrambling to try to figure out where they were going to live and how they were going to survive and keep their families. There was no more housing. There was no more medical care. The schools were trying to stay afloat by receiving the assistance from the state; it was a public school.

For the time I thought I had it pretty normal. It wasn't until I got out where I had *aha* moments of potential discrimination, *aha* moments of unequal treatment, *aha* moments of, *are you kidding me? There's so many of us that you can't employ one of us to do A, B, C, D or E? You're kidding me*.

There is where I started when I started in my profession because my husband said, "Marry me and other than housework, you won't have to do anything." Until I figured out the first month of my marriage, well, where is the bread and where's the butter and where's the flour to make the tortilla? Because guess what? You had to jump right in there and try to figure out how you were going to survive. And then when you start your family immediately, like we did, it took two of us to make it.

I started off working, believe it or not, in a school system, Solomon Hill School District number five, just as the receptionist, as the assistant. Now that I've come full circle in my career, those gatekeepers of being the assistant, of being the receptionist, of answering the telephone are so important to any business that they should never be overlooked because they are the

gatekeepers that can get you into the next place. It was then that I entered into the work environment that I thought, *well, wait a minute, we bring a lot to this table*. I had my *aha* moments.

Life took me on. I was happily married. I worked at the school district. I graduated from being the receptionist to being the business manager. You never know where the path is going to take you. I graduated to being a business manager for the small school district. Then the strike happened. My husband was one of the first ones that lost his job. We had to re-bundle ourselves. What are you going to do? There was no going back home because once you got married, *de primero cosa que te decía, ya eres harina de otro costal*, you are from a sack of a different brand now, and so you figure it out. My husband and I, we had to figure it out. We had two small children—our eldest two children.

He applied for federal work. He got accepted and went into the Justice Department. Lo and behold, don't you know that he was actually a border patrol agent and he had to leave because he could not—like I said, it's kind of like going around the circle—he had to leave because he could not tolerate—I don't know if tolerate is the right word because I know he gets very, very emotional when he talks about families coming and having to capture the families and having to detain the families and then listening to their stories of why. It was very difficult.

He had a prior occupation working with a copper mine and that was being a steam plant, power plant operator. It was through being in the government that he figured out, let me apply for a job going back into power plants, but this was a hydro plant, and don't you know we landed up at Hoover Dam. He was among the first Latinos to be hired as a control center operator at Hoover Dam and he retired in 2014.

I, on the other hand, followed him as a good wife, always thinking that he was the main

breadwinner, giving him his place as the head of the household. But then I applied and at that time you take a civil service exam. They're long gone. You don't do them anymore. What they used to do was a civil service exam. Because of my work with the school district and because I had done other things, a natural ability to organize things, I took the test and I qualified for different types of occupations.

I do not have formal education. I have a lot of life-learning experiences and I've had a lot of people that have seen something in me that have paid for my training, paid for my yearlong beautiful experience with NHLI, the National Hispana Leadership Institute, where I got to spend time in Congress, where I got to spend time at Harvard, where I got to spend time working on a project. I started my civil career in 1984.

I want to get to all of that. I want to back you up a little bit. Can I ask you about your husband's background and how you met?

Don't you know, he was the high school jock, the football player that I just had to be madly in love with.

What was his family background like?

He's actually probably the one...He was born in Brownsville, Texas. They came across from Matamoros, Mexico. His mom was raised in Victoria, Texas. He was a migrant fieldworker. His dad, when they landed up in Safford, Arizona after—I don't know, he tells a lot of different stories about cherry picking and cotton picking and tomatoes and grapes and all these things. The other day he was telling the kids a story about how his dad and his mom and an older brother and sister had to go out and pick, I think it was cherries, and he stayed behind in one of the trucks. He was supposed to take care of a little brother and the little brother started to bother that he needed to go to the bathroom. And he said, "Well, there it is. Go ahead and go." He fell into the

irrigation ditch and he had to jump in to get him. He tells stories of that.

His dad and his mom were actually—and I never know what the correct definition is—but he was a firstborn from his family, firstborn in the United States. His parents crossed from Mexico. Very poor. Very different from me, because where I thought I came from a family of privilege because my dad had a good job, they didn't. They struggled with their nine brothers and sisters. They worked at early ages of getting out to the farms.

I met him in high school. He truly was a football jock for Safford High School and I was a cheerleader, believe it or not. I don't look like one, but I was a cheerleader. We went across the field and we kind of introduced ourselves at a game. Then later on I had a girlfriend that was dating his best friend. That's how I met him.

My granddaughter was asking him, "Tata, how did you propose?" My daughter just got engaged in December. She says, "How did you propose to Ala?" That's what she calls me, Ala. The other grandkids call me *Abuelita*, but she calls me Ala because she could never say *Abuelita*. He said in his very much macho way, "You're going to marry me and that's it." She says, "You didn't even say please, Tata?" He said, "No. You're going to marry me. That's it. Let's go, let's go, let's get married." Although it really can't happen that way, it kind of happened that way. Like I said, I'm going to celebrate forty-eight years of marriage. But we grew up together.

How do you remember the proposal?

How do I remember it? Basically, about the same. "Well, aren't we going to get married?" Because I had been groomed to be a wife and I didn't see any further education in front of me, I thought, *well, I guess, okay*. Who knew? It takes work. I don't recommend it. I think people need to build a relationship and I think they need to communicate, and I think they need to learn. But, again, it's how you're brought up, your values of your home base, of your parents, whatever your

spirituality is to your foundation to staying strong and keeping that relationship going and fighting for what you want. For us divorce was not an option. It was not an option, so you fought.

You married right after high school, correct? What was your first home like? You said once you got married you were on your own.

On our own. We lived in a little casita that was on my mother-in-law and father-in-law's property. It didn't have a bathroom. It had a kitchen and a bedroom. I remember for the first couple of months we lived there until he and I started to talk about, "Well, what are we really going to do? Is this it? There has to be more." But I shared a bathroom with my in-laws in the main house, in the main *casa*. If I needed to really get down and cook something serious, which at that time when you're eighteen years old, what are you going to really cook other than basics? I had to lean on my mother-in-law.

He was working for the company. He got a job with the Phelps Dodge Company, and it got to the point where we bought a mobile home and we bought a lot and we placed it in a lot. My first little place where he took me as his wife was a little casita probably as big as this room and probably the next room and that was it. I didn't have any heat. I didn't have any cooling. It was just a little casita. I shared the amenities, a bathroom, with my in-laws in the main house until we were able to save enough for a down payment for a mobile home.

Can you tell me a little bit more how he got involved with border patrol?

He applied for a job because it was out of need and desperation. He was the first one out of a job because in those strikes, it's usually last in, first out. He was one of the last ones in, so he was one of the first ones out. The only way to continue working in that time was if you crossed the picket line. Unions at that point in time, they're tight. It's a *familia* that you don't break. Again,

you do these things based on experience, based on need, and based on survival. He did cross the picket line because who were we going to go to for financial help?

I have a lot of empathy for the federal employees who are on furlough or out of work because of the federal shutdown. Being a federal employee myself and him, we've lived through several shutdowns. Where you think or your imagine or you're led to believe that federal employees make all of this great money, some maybe do, but a lot of don't because they live from paycheck do paycheck. I have a lot of empathy for them.

When he went out and we had our kids, he didn't want to go back to picking cherries. He didn't want to go back to the life that he felt that he had left. He had a family to support, so he crossed; he crossed the picket line. It cost us friendships. It cost us some family turmoil. But the glue to my family was my dad who was not from the union, but was from the management side, if you will. We would stick together. We were unified as a family and we were going to stick together. If he felt that Felix, my husband, needed to cross—his name is Jose Felix Rivera—if he needed to cross, there was a reason why. And my brothers and my sisters and their spouses, quiet, just like politics. You don't talk politics when you're family because we have different beliefs and we think differently, so respect that way. He applied. It's hard to walk down the street and people pointing at you because you're the one that dared cross to the other side.

He was going through. The border patrol or the Justice Department was going to be hiring. He took a test. He passed the test. He got selected and that's how he got in.

How long was he there?

In the Justice Department with the border patrol, a little over a year. After he was out on patrol, he decided, this is not the place for me; I can't do it. But then it's like being connected; you're connected to somebody. You build your network and you know where your interests are leaning.

The power of network is very big. Only at that point we didn't know what our power of network was all about. We didn't even know the word *network*. We just knew they were our pals and we could talk to them. He had friends that had gone on with the Department of Interior who were now working in hydropower plants, one in Hardin, Montana, Yellowtail Dam, and they encouraged him and walked him through the application process. Because he was already in the federal sector, he already had a foot in, and so he got picked up. Lo and behold, he got picked up, and so we bundled ourselves and we went off to Hardin, Montana, from the desert USA to freezer box in Hardin, Montana. We were up there for a year and a half.

Then in 1984 or '85, the Bureau of Reclamation, Hoover Dam, did what they call in the federal sector an A-76 study. It means they're going to study the competition. Is it more cost-effective for federal employees to operate and manage the dam, or is it more cost-effective to have contractors do the work? Then they did that big, huge study. Lo and behold, it was determined that federal employees could operate and manage the dam itself, so it was like winning a lottery. He applied for that. Lo and behold, don't you know he got selected. That was because the federal sector, not because they were looking for, purposefully looking for diversity in the power plant. He was a good, qualified applicant. He didn't get selected because he was a Latino. Obviously, he got selected because he had the qualifications to be able to do the job.

What year is this again that you moved here?

In 1984. That's how we got into the federal sector. That's how I got into the federal sector. I took my civil servant exam and I got into the federal government and I started as the clerk and I grew up. When I retired, I had made it all the way up to leadership level for the region. I was an equal employment opportunity manager where I managed a civil rights program. I managed not only the complaints of discrimination, I saw the complaints, I saw the trends, I developed training

around the trends that were coming into the federal sector. I also developed an affirmative employment plan and there's where I got really, really, really, really involved and expended a lot of money into trying to reach to women in minority that were not seeking STEM-related occupations because there is a big, huge federal need. I think the need is across the board. I was able to leverage my job with what I was doing and the outreach and the education piece to try to get individuals to—have you ever thought about this type of occupation? So that drove me. That really drove me.

When you first got here, where did you first live?

In Henderson, Nevada.

What was the area like at the time?

Desolate by itself. You could drive from Henderson and drive desert before you got into Las Vegas. Now it's all one blur. There was no Green Valley. There was no Anthem. There was no District at Green Valley. There was nothing. It was little Henderson. I'm a great believer of there's a divine plan out there for you and the plan was, I guess, for us to land up where we are. Not that we strategically thought about it, not because we planned it, not because we knew, we had any fortune teller or insight or knew about economy or any of that, it was but for the grace of God that we landed up where we landed up.

What were your first impressions of Henderson and Las Vegas?

Wow. This is where we're going to be? Literally, it is us; all our family is back in Arizona or back in Texas. It is us. It was a matter of building, getting out there and looking at it from a positive perspective versus a negative thing. We could have done the "woe is me" thing. Woe is me, I want to go home. No, you have to pick yourself up and move forward positively and do the best that you can with what you've got, and we did. We've made good friends. We have solid

friends, professional and social friends.

Can you tell me about that first experience with the first job in the civil service system when you got here? What was that like?

It was very interesting. I was always looked at as odd man out because here comes this short, little, skinny little Latina lady. It was a blue-collar work environment. They were always jiving each other, like, "Does she really know what she's doing?" I was in charge of the payroll. Like everybody, they have a system as to how you put in time for your pay and all that. Every time I would open my mouth—I had learned the contract pretty well because I had to because they were paid in accordance to a labor law and a labor agreement. I had to fight my way in to stand up and be counted and earn my respect among the ranks. Very few women in the blue-collar environment. But I managed to survive only because I think I had respect for the work that they did. Blue collar, they were electricians, power plant operators, mechanics, hydroelectric mechanics, laborers. I had a lot of respect for what they did and I always gave them the respect, but I wanted it back too. I was going to respect what you do and appreciate the fact that you've been here beaucoup hours, but appreciate where I'm coming from too. I'm trying to get this right. It took a little bit of time.

You learn and as you grow and you graduate and you move on, you're going to stumble into that one person that sees that something in you, and that's what happened to me. I had an area manager. He's now passed. His name was Blane Hammon. He was the project manager of what then was called the Lower Colorado Dam's Office, which encompassed Hoover Dam, Parker Dam and Davis Dam. He saw something in me. He said, "Linda, this is what I want you to do for me." He raised me up, "You can do this. You can manage a program. I want you to manage this program for me. I want you to establish for me an outreach program where it takes

us out into the school that's going to use—look at what we have here. This is the greatest educational environment anybody could have."

Because even back then we were seeing in the trends that the blue-collar work environment, especially in the trades crafts that we needed, very few. They're hard to find. I developed an outreach plan for him. He let me. "You can do this."

He got promoted to the regional office as one of the assistant regional directors. He pulled me back up with him. He said, "Not only can you do an outreach for me that concentrates for outreach, but I also think you can manage a civil rights program because you have the ability to look beyond."

People can come in and say that it's discrimination, but is it? Is it really just a bad communication style? Is it really just a bad relationship? Is it just a bad experience that you had? Is it baggage that you're bringing in your past? That's what I was seeing oftentimes. I wasn't the judge. If people wanted to file claims of workplace discrimination, I had counselors that would counsel the situation. But a lot of times—I mean, you can research and do your Google. Google is everybody's best friend. Cases of discrimination are very, very, very few and far and in between because there is a fine line that's drawn. A lot of it is based on communication and relationships with people. It stems from when you were little, this and that or whatever. You were going to ask me a question.

Can you tell me how you put together that outreach program, the first one he put you in charge of?

The first one was, number one, just to sit back and look at different models that were already there. It's not rocket science, but it is. One of things, as I've said, you have to knock on the door and that's the easy piece. It is getting in the door that is the hard part. Building relationships with

other federal agencies. One of you mentioned that Bob Agonia had referenced my name for this project. He worked for the Department of Energy at that point in time. He oversaw federal contractors. Learning about the programs. The federal government has a very, very hidden underutilized program called Special Emphasis Programs. What it is, is really diversity groups; Hispanic groups, women groups, Asian groups, African-American groups that are supposed to be working in concert together to see how they can educate, recruit and hire into the federal government. We all have our different little ways. Our story as a Latino community is a little bit different from the African-American or the Asian community and the women community at large because the women community really is a large group. It could be all of us that belong to this group.

I developed—Bob had already started it—what was called Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program. But the seed that gave the leverage for participation and growing the outreach was the Special Emphasis Program, but we linked it to the Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program, which targeted group was Hispanics. I partnered with Reclamation, my agency, with Energy, with IRS, with Bureau of Land Management, with Social Security and FBI that are really all located within Southern Nevada. Now, they're not big organizations. There are maybe one hundred plus people in their little agencies because they report back to a home base. But they have responsibility to carry out these programs. Sometimes that's what you need.

You need to figure out, what is the leverage? What is it? Because one of the things that I found out in building an active outreach program was the systemic challenges that came with that. One of the biggest systemic challenges that I came across was white males in management hiring officials telling me, "Why would they want to come here?" My response was, "Why wouldn't they? Look at the wages that these people make. Look at the careers." I have forty-two

years of service. People aren't just going to pack up and leave these jobs, but they need to be given an entree in. But you have to figure out how to challenge it back respectfully and know the answer before you ask the question.

How did you know you were successful with that program? What were some of the measurables?

When I retired, I had reengaged an internship program that was dormant, programs that really nobody wants to use because it's a pipeline into these federal jobs. When I left there was eight hundred and forty-five, almost nine hundred employees within the Lower Colorado Region. Eleven percent had come in from the student base, student employment, had stayed on, supervisors, hiring officials. It was just an eight-week internships in lands, in environment, in biology, in the blue-collar work environment, and then the student had to do a project at the end. There is where I kept telling the student, "Be yourself, be honest, be reliable, show up on time, be dressed for work. Because I'm going to tell you now that oftentimes they'll come back and say, 'How can I keep this person? How can I keep that person?'"

The other little secret was hooking onto your HRO, your human resource director, because they're the guys that can make it happen. I knew I was successful because it got funded every year. The budgets got smaller, but when I would make my pitch, they would give me the money to fund the program.

Going back to when you arrived here, what was the community like in Henderson at the time demographically, culturally?

Oh, I couldn't even find masa to make tamales. It was like my normal food was nowhere to be found. Yes, I could find pinto beans with all the other beans. To make chile, we're Tex-Mex, so like green chile fresco, red chile dry from Hatch chile, New Mexico, not even the Anaheim, but

the Hatch, New Mexico chile, my first Christmas I wanted to make tamales, I didn't even know where to find...I could make it from scratch, but I knew I could also buy the masa already so I could fix it myself. We were far and few and in between. Now I laugh because it's at Albertsons, for God's sakes, masa.

Then introducing it, I remember sending my husband to work with *burros*, bean *burros* and mixed *burros* and taquitos and all that. He'd come back and I go, "Well, you ate your lunch." He goes, "Yes, and everybody else. Next time you pack me some taquitos, make sure you pack me a dozen or so." He started to introduce the *comida*. It was the food and we were far and few and in between. When you finally did run into somebody that could relate to you, it was like, "Oh my goodness, this is a treat."

When was that?

In 1984-1985.

No. Your first interaction with Latina, your first community that you found, the* familia*?

The *familia* that I found, probably as I graduated—maybe the nineties, really when the population was booming and I started to get if there and I started to work with Rosemary—I don't know if you've interviewed Rosemary Flores. She is the initiator of the family—well, it was actually Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch that was the initiator of the Family Leadership Institute and then Rosemary and I started the Family Leadership Initiative and really learning the stories of the people, of how humble and why. In my own mind, it was kind of like, man, these people were leaders, and we don't even know we're leaders. How else did we lead ourselves here? That's when I got really, really embraced with working with Rosemary and working with Dr. Clark and working in the Western High School and Rancho High School and Desert Pines and Lunt Elementary, Elaine Wynn Elementary, and going and being with the people. It's so refreshing to

me. It pumps life into you.

One of the things I remembered—my youngest son—we adopted two children; they're brother and sister. Actually, they're children from my husband's sister who died when she was twenty-six. Gabe and Clarissa were like four and three. Gabe has a disability. He doesn't have any thumbs. He was in elementary school. He was doing a class in computers, learning how to use the keyboard. I kept getting messages, progress reports that Gabe wasn't participating in the computers and that he couldn't do the typing and he couldn't pass timed tests and all that kind of stuff. Of course, he's thirty years old now, so this is a long while ago when I got started and it really pissed me off.

I went to a meeting with a counselor and I go, "I don't understand what's going on." They brought in all his teachers and what they told me that was my Gabe was that he didn't want to participate, couldn't type, couldn't do this. I heard a lot of couldn't; he couldn't do a lot of things. I said, "I thought the only thing Gabe was missing was that he couldn't pass a timed test." And I said, "Anybody ever notice Gabe and his hands? I'm just saying. Anybody notice? Teachers?" Everybody looked at each other and one teacher that was just...I just needed a dart. I said, "Gabriel doesn't have thumbs, so he accommodates himself. He's typing, but he needs to lift his entire hand to be able to do the return or whatever your thumb is used for. And how dare you all tell me that my kid is not a leader. Have you ever figured out that he may not be a leader, but he's a dam good follower and he follows good instructions. Have you ever thought about putting his profile up in front of you as your student to figure out why he's not excelling the way you think he's supposed to be excelling? He's the bottom of the food chain. All the other ones at the table, they're all going to eat before this little guy gets to the table. So he's kind of left behind already. What he needs to know is to learn how to fight to be the first at the table. But you guys are all

educators and you haven't figured that out."

We all left and we did a development plan for Gabe and all this kind of stuff. Then I started to think to myself, if I sit here as a Latina that prides herself in articulating well in English and could probably get by pretty well in Spanish, what do parents do that don't have a command of the business language or the common language or the U.S. language of English? What do they do? How do they get by? How are their kids going to make? If mine isn't going to make it, how are theirs not going to make it?

That's when my wind picked up and I took the SNHEP yet to another level and we developed what they called then the Hispanic Roundtable where I used my power of influence, my network base, because by this time I had developed a network base not only within the federal community, not only within the educational system, but there was another executive order out there. You always have to figure out, what's your leverage? What's your hook? What is going to get you to that table? How could they possibly turn you away?

What year was that?

Oh, Lord, who knows, *mojita*? It was a nine-point plan. It was actually the Initiative on Hispanic Excellence of Education. I know that's not proper, but those words, if you look it up, you can put it together. I read up on it and it said you're supposed to be doing A, B, C, D and E.

So I went and I knocked on—then it was Carlos Garcia was the superintendent of schools. Then it was Auggie Orsay. Then I can't remember the guy that didn't last long. I can't remember his name. I remember knocking on their doors and introducing. I took my cadre of people. You never show up by yourself. You have to always have some muscle with you. So I called Bob Agonia. I called Rosemary Flores. I called Sylvia Lazos. I called these people that I knew their faces were constant in their view at board meetings, on Latin Chamber of Commerce,

and this and that.

I knocked on the door and I had my *papalitos*, my little plan, and I said, "This is who we are. We'd like to have a conversation around education, and we'd like to see what the dropout rate looks like. And we'd like to see what the promotion of the students look like. And we also want to see what your faculty looks like. Because I think there are some things missing, we think. We don't know. I'm just saying, we don't know."

I lost track of what you asked me. That's how I got started. That's how I got started working within the community. Something in you burns you. You have a passion for. And where are you going to take that passion and for what good is it going to do? It was never about me.

Then the scholarship program, we had a huge scholarship program. It's so humbling and so surprising to see the students that got our SNHEP scholarships. They're doctors, they're lawyers, they're teachers, they're doing viable things in the community. They look at you, "Oh, Linda, I remember I got that SNHEP scholarship." I was never asking money for me. I was asking because that was one of the challenges that our Latino community had was doing partnerships with UNLV. Is Dr. Juanita Fain still here?

Oh, absolutely.

It takes a village to raise a child. She was instrumental in getting us or helping us match scholarships. If we give one, will you give one? They all have vested interest from a business perspective. They need to get all sorts of people into the college so that it can get where it needs to go. Sometimes people talk about diversity like it's a bad thing. It's a good thing because that gives people the opportunities. It opens the doors for those that may not have the opportunity.

Not only starting from my outreach, what I needed and what I saw was also taking what had already been passed whether they thought—they didn't really mean it. Bless her heart, she's

passed now, but my regional director, we had gone to an SNHEP function. It was our annual big, big hoo-ha. We gave out probably something like twenty scholarships valued at a thousand dollars each; that's twenty thousand dollars. How we had raised that funds—federal dollars can't actually go towards a scholarship, but you can do it building partnerships and federal contractors and private entities, MGM Grand, all of those that want to give money.

I remember I invited my regional director and gave him big kudos for helping us get to where we needed to go and look at all of these students, just put him up on a pedestal, which are things as you grow in your careers that you just have to do. Give people credit where credit is due even though they didn't do anything but show up and sit there and smile and shake hands. But they have the power of the pen. They have the power.

So he calls me aside and he says, "Linda, I want you to go back and I want you to figure out...There's got to be a way where we can triple our money to support this program." I went back to my contractors. I went back to our appropriated lines of authority. I went back and reached into different executive orders. I took him serious. If he thought he was just going to tell me just because it was a nice thing to say because it was the moment...I went back to the Bob Agonia and to the John Medinas and to all of those people that I dealt with on a daily basis. You guys do it, too. You guys network within and you brainstorm ideas and you try to figure out how you're willing to going to take this seed and make it into a flower. We all do it. We have those confidantes.

I went back in and said, "What do you think I should do?" "You've got to go for it; you've got to go for it." They all helped me with the research. It was easy because they all helped me with the research and the language, putting it into the language.

I go to the person that's assigned to my program for money. I sit there and I go, "My

regional director, *blah, blah*. He told me I should do this. *Blah, blah, blah*. Here is some language and here is where I think we could get the money legally and how we could do it." Only to be told he didn't really mean it. I said, "Really?"

I picked up the phone. There's no cell phones at that time. I picked up the phone. She says, "Who are you calling?" I go, "I'm calling the regional director to ask him, to see if he really meant it." "No, no, no, no, we'll figure it out." I go, "Okay, we'll figure it out."

They didn't make my life easy because I had to turn in a requisition. *Ay dios mío*, I must have written it a million times. I didn't just write about myself. I had help with it from my constituents, from my counterparts out in the federal sector as to what words to use. But it is building that structure of influence and knowing who you can count on and making meaningful outreach programs that really work.

I retired in 2016. The student program is still alive and thriving. Right now one of the agencies that's been fortunate enough to continue to work because it's an energy, falls under the energy packages, so they got appropriated funds to run the power and stuff. I called my successor. My successor is a Desert Pines High School graduate, an African-American woman who entered into the Student Employment Program, who I watched grow, who I knew had a heart for equality, who I knew had a heart for social justice. I groomed her before I left. She's thirty years old. She probably is going to be...I wouldn't see her staying here. I see her going into either Justice or probably go into Interior in Washington, D.C. She's from Desert Pines.

Were there any other students that you saw? You mentioned Rancho High School. Any other anecdotes from your experiences in those schools?

With the students? I don't know if you know—let's see, you probably do know. I don't know what her married name is anymore. Let me think of a good one because there is a lot of them. *Ay*

Dios mío, you put me on the spot here. She's an attorney. I see her and I see her billboard. *Como se llama esta muchachita.* Oh, I can't think right now of somebody that comes to mind. But she's an attorney and you see her on the billboard. I reach out to her for advice every once in a while. But I can't think of her name. I'm so embarrassed. *Ay ya ya, no se.*

You said you created a program to help parents who didn't speak English navigate through the school system. Can you tell me more about that program?

The Family Leadership was actually a program that was initiated and founded by a woman named Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch. She comes from Texas. She still does a lot of international speaking and a lot of international training. But the jest of the program was she created a model, a ten-month model, ten modules that would introduce first-generation parents into defining themselves. Who are you? Why are you here? Where is the leader in you? Where do you want to go next? How do you take those paths forward?

We introduced it to the Clark County School District. The only thing was is that we ran into some challenges, some systemic challenges, but we were able to have it in a couple of different schools. Those parents are now working within the school system. They learned through the modules that they had a voice and if they couldn't communicate or articulate well, they were at their leisure to ask for an interpreter. You have parents that think their kids could never go to a charter school who went to a charter school, who navigated the system from "I don't want my child here, but I want my child over there" to parents who are actually involved in school. Some of them came from other countries and already came with a degree of sorts where we were able to connect them with CSN where they could just redefine some of their past curriculum that they took so that they could re-bundle themselves and move on into their respective field.

It was aha moments for many parents. They did a lot of journaling. They did a lot of mapping. A lot of aha moments for them was, again, we don't give ourselves enough credit because we are leaders. We're leaders of our families. We are leaders. We are self-sustainable. We can do this.

I'm still stuck on the question of, who else, *ay Dios mío* that I see.

You can add it when you edit.

Yes. Chelsie Campbell might be an SNHEP scholarship recipient, Chelsie Campbell. You'll have to ask her. But I want the attorney's name. I see her on the billboard and I can't think of her name right now. But there are several. Truly there are several of them that I run into every once and a while and it's like, "Do you still remember me?"

I never saw myself as the trailblazer. To me it was just something that needed to be done and I was just part of doing it.

Earlier you mentioned that as a federal employee you've gone through several shutdowns during your career. Could you describe that first one that you went through and what was the scenario behind that?

Well, it's always about money. It's always a partisan thing; one group wants something and the other one doesn't want to give in. Everybody thinks they're right. You go through a federal shutdown because either, A, they don't want to increase taxes or they don't want to decrease taxes; they don't want something.

It's a lot of work to shut down the federal government and there's a lot of consternation around it. There are exceptions to the rule for a federal shutdown depending on where your money comes from. Not all agencies are funded through appropriated funds. Some of them, like Hoover, are appropriated differently because they have contractors; they're part of the power.

You're scared. My first one we were young. I was scared. *What do you mean there's not going to be no paycheck?* It's a lot of unknown, a lot of fear of, what if? What happened? How long? Fear drives you because you don't know and you start looking to see in your pantry what you have to make it last a little bit, and how are you going to balance what it is? Because it's unknown.

I think this shutdown currently is probably going to be longest ever. The last one that I had, some of us are declared essential personnel where there is no choice and you have to go to work. But the ones that you really feel bad for—again, it's all on your money management and what you plan for and what you do. "Earn it and burn it" is a model for a lot of people. *Let's earn it and let's just burn it. Who cares about tomorrow?* I see that. Having lost a son early—he was thirty-three when he died—I can see in the younger generation where they live for today because they don't think that they need to save for a tomorrow because, life, you don't know if you're going to be here tomorrow. You have to have some sort of a safety net.

But a lot of us were scared because we don't know when we're going to go back to work. A lot of personal emotions take place because, why is that person essential and I'm not? My job is just as important as that other one. What they don't realize is that none of us are getting paid. So fear. What do you fear? You feel fear especially if internally you know your financial situation. If you're a saver and you can drag it out for two pay periods or maybe three pay periods, you're going to be okay in hopes that everything is going to be okay. But if you're the one person that's working and the other spouse is not working, and you have a lot of individuals that have health issues or around this town gambling issues, you run scared. You run scared.

What year was that first one that you went through?

I think 1990, maybe. I'd have to look and see my first one…

Your youth in Arizona, what did you grow up eating? Who taught you primarily how to cook those tamales?

My mom and my *abuela*, my Nana.

Can you tell us a story from that time when you were making tamales?

What we ate was *frijoles* and *arroz y tortillas y chile*. Not too much chicken, I don't think because we had chickens, but that's who laid our eggs. I don't eat chickens today because they laid the eggs. Couldn't do it. I can't do it. But my mom and my Nana were the ones that taught us early on. I was probably about eight or nine years old when I rolled my first tortilla. My mom would make the masa and prepare everything and then we were in charge of rolling out. It didn't matter if it came out round or not round because—here versus in Mexico or even in Texas, they eat a lot of corn tortillas; we eat a lot of flour tortillas from the Mex-Tex community. I would roll them out and then I graduated into cooking them. Because we were still little, we could roll out, but we couldn't cook. The tamales was a Christmas tradition….my *abuela*, my Nana, would teach us and we would all get together around the holiday time. In that era our Christmas meal was tamales. Our tamale making was Christmas Eve. We would spread the *oja*. We all had specific jobs. I fortunately or unfortunately was a great masa spreader, so that's what I got to do was spread the masa. But then I graduated into preparing the meat and doing all of that.

It was fun because you got to hear their stories. You got to laugh. You cried. You got to play Mexican music. You got to eat the tamales when they were done. You got to just seeing her move or navigate around the kitchen and how fluent she was, my Nana and my mom. Now I see it and now my girls tell me because now we do it. We make the tamales and we get around the table and we remember the old stories.

My husband, he is really the one probably you should have interviewed. He gets these

kids, "My mom used to kill the pig and they used to cook the *cabeza* and then they used to peal the meat from the *cabeza* and those were the real tamales. You guys don't really know what it's like." On and on and on. I go, "Oh my gosh."

As a matter of fact, I'll show you a really quick picture of my tamale making this last year because we still do it. Let me see if I have it. See, there's our tamale making. We still do it.

Where do you primarily get the ingredients now?

To the market. There's Cuevas. I do Cardenas.

Where do you live now, here in Las Vegas?

No, I live in Henderson.

You'll have to send us this photograph to put that in your interview.

Tamales, I will.

Sticking on traditions, you briefly mentioned *quinceañeras* growing up. Did you have one?

I didn't have a *quinceañera*, no.

Did you want one (indiscernible)?

No, I didn't. I guess no because, again, it goes towards how much do you need a *quinceañera* versus how much do you need this? It was always the other need. There's a sacrifice. Today disclosing I hope in confidence that I'm a practicing Catholic. Today's homily was talking about the love that the Lord has for all of us no matter what you believe or who you are; that He just loves and that love is shown in many different ways. One of the things that was so true today, because I am a parent—if you're not a parent, one day hopefully you will be blessed and you will be a parent if you choose to be—is you do things for the love of your kids. It wasn't that my parents did not want to. It was you have to decide; you have to figure out a true balance of what's best for the whole, not for the one.

No, I never had one. I never really missed one. My girls had one, but that's because I thought it's a beautiful, beautiful tradition, just like the Rosca is a beautiful, beautiful tradition of eating on the sixth of January and having your family over and talking. It's just a beautiful tradition to have.

You said your daughters had one. Can you talk about what went into preparing for your daughter's *quinceañera*?

It's like a getting married type thing. It's a fight. *¿Cómo te vas a poner ese vestido? No haci no vas a entrar a la iglesia. ¿Y cómo que él va ser tu chambelán? No!* It's kind of like, you're fifteen, but I'm still running the show.

There's a lot of planning. It's not about the party. It's about the spiritual meaning behind it. You're becoming a woman. You're practicing the virtues of Blessed Mother; humility, meekness, love. You're transforming from that child that you were into that woman. The mass for us was paramount. The party was a nice thing to do and the dance and all of that and the transformation of the *vestido* and all of that in becoming a woman. But the seed for us and for all my girls is the meaning behind it. You're coming to church to pledge that you will continue to carry out the virtues of Blessed Mother and that you are transforming to that womanhood.

Where did you hold that ceremony?

At the Saint Peters Catholic Church since I've been a member there.

What role has the church played in connecting you to women, Latinas, in the community?

I think a lot because we share the traditions. Just expanding the network base, the celebration of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. But it's not only that to the Hispanic community, it's also to the Filipino community because there's a lot of things that we have in common. Also being open to trying other things outside of the Latino traditions that have also broadened my perspectives. But

the church is certainly one where you can broaden your perspectives and learn more about the traditions and why it's done.

One of the *aha* moments that I had is that I thought everybody was a Mexican. I thought everybody was from Mexico. Little did I know that they came from other places. How dare you people come from other places? I didn't know that. But that's an aha moment. When I had the aha moment was when I went to the National Hispania Leadership Institute where I was probably the only Mexicana, but there was also somebody there from Honduras, there was also somebody there from Puerto Rico, from Cuba, from El Salvador, all my sisters. There was twenty per class and five of us have stayed real tight, really, really tight, and then branching out and grabbing more people to go. Rosemary followed me because I introduced her to it. Then Rosemary introduced Meli—she was Riboff when she went. She's got a different name now. Meli went.

Pulido.

Yes, Meli went. Then from there we branched out to do youth and one of Meli's daughters got to go. There are others that are within the UNLV system that were lucky enough. But like everything, it has its day. Maybe one of the mistakes that we've done in these special diversity groups—in the congress you have the Black Caucus and you have the Hispanic Caucus and all of this. I wonder anymore based on experience how we could have blended to survive, to be more powerful, instead of keeping. One is, as you guys know, one of the things that was hard for me is, what do you mean we can't stand together as Latinas, Latinos? Within our communities there's envy; there's fights; there's different hidden agendas, and instead of working together, we pull apart.

One of the key successes that we haven't talked a lot about was this Hispanic Roundtable. In talking to my confidantes, Bob Agonia and Rosemary and Dr.Christine Clark and people that I

really felt that I could be myself with, was to say that one requisite of being in this table is that you've got to leave your ego at the door. You've got to leave your agenda at the door because the agenda is the student and the parent that's struggling to make it ahead. That's our focus. Not what's in it for me, but, yet, what's in it for them and how do we move them forward within the system? How do you teach parents? We already come with a challenge because we're taught from being little that you don't talk back to authority, you don't. You just don't do it because that's being disrespectful. Well, no, you can. Respectfully you can. Why can't you ask why? Just because the teacher said no? Well, I need a follow-up. What's behind the no?

Two of my kids are educators. Well, my son was an educator. He's passed. But my youngest daughter is an educator. I always ask her, "If you're going to say no, have a reason for your no and be ready to explain it. Explain yourself as to what's behind the no. It's just not a no." It's been an interesting track of mine, I guess, now that you guys made me talk about it.

Tell me more about raising your kids here in Las Vegas. What was it like?

Jeez Louise, I had to know where they were all the time because *ay Dios mío* you all get into so much trouble. Where I grew up everybody knew everybody. You couldn't even walk two houses away because, "Hey, *allí va la hija*, come back." Here it's easy to get lost in the shuffle because nobody knows anybody, really if you think about it. A lot of trust. A lot of reminding of values. A lot of reminding of, this is who we are. Raising them in a fast-paced...They did good, but it's hard because you have to keep—not that you have to keep your eye on them. At some point here, raising in a city like this, you have to trust that you've taught them enough that they're going to make the right choices.

Did they grow up speaking Spanish as well?

No, no, and that's my fault because by that time the first language was English. Now they speak.

My youngest one that's in school and teaches school, she pieces it together very, very well. My granddaughter just graduated with her master's from AC, Austin College in Sherman, Texas. She did her student teaching in Los Fresnos, down in Brownsville. Man, she's picked it up like this [snapping] because she'd had to. Lo and behold that's where she wants to be because she's found a connection. See, your life goes full circle because now she's back where my husband grew up, in Brownsville, McAllen and Harlingen, Los Fresnos, San Benito; all of that area. Hopefully she'll get a teaching job here pretty soon. My grandson is back there and they're picking it up. But, no, mine didn't.

Where did your kids go to school?

They graduated from Basic High School, but they graduated from UNLV.

What did they tell you about going to Basic High School? Were there any problems with their identity—

Not then. Oh, no, no, not then.

Were there a lot of or Latino classmates for them?

No. There were far and few and in between. There was more so in Gabe and Clarissa's class because it was already the nineties or 2000s or whatever it was. They graduated from Foothill, and so there was a little bit more diversity.

Still I would say that although there is diversity within the Henderson/Green Valley/Anthem proper, I think if you really want to keep in tune with and connected with the roots, you have to be willing to work your way into the inner cities of Las Vegas and I don't mind doing that.

Right at the beginning you mentioned because of your career in civil service, you also spent some time working with congress. Did you mention that?

Yes, I had to do a week with congress, with then Senator Harry Reid.

Can you tell us about that experience?

It was scary because, again, it goes back to who you are. You think you are humble. What do you think you know? I think it's lack of confidence that you can really go in and state your case. Now that I think about it and I've been a little bit more schooled and been around the block a little bit more, he was very gracious. He was very open. He was very welcoming. Yet, he knew. My project was education and he knew. But there's so many things that go into coming up with policy or anything like that.

It was scary. It was like, where is this hall? How do I get there? When you come from a community like Nevada, it's a weak transit system, bus system and stuff like that, but you use a car to get to wherever it is you need to go. When you're in Washington, D.C. you pretty much have to walk or take a taxi from this block to that block and that's a waste of money and that's a waste of time and resources, so you might as well just walk. Just being in the whole environment of government is kind of like, oh gee, what am I doing here? It was scary.

You better know what you're going to do when you get there. A lot of research. A lot of prep time. Then getting in and walking and actually being received was something that I'll never forget. They were ready for me and he was ready for me. I had to make an appointment. It wasn't just stop by and let me talk to Harry Reid. It was part of the prep because the week before we had spent in Harvard University.

The lesson of Harvard University is one that is like, dang, I didn't know I was doing all of this; and, look, it's at Harvard University. But you have whatever it is that you want, you're little circle of whatever it is that you want. I taught this in a class. I developed a little class. But this is what it is; this is what's driving you. Then you start to connect people that can help you get what

you want. It's the power influence. I just never knew that's what it was. I just thought I had friends that could help me. I didn't know it was the power influence. Who knew? It was learning that at Harvard that helped me reach out to my friends that could connect to get more information and then they helped me put my speaking points together.

That's one thing I have learned over the course of time that when you're going to go see a congress person that you're going to ask for, you have to something to ask of, you better be prepped. You better be prepared. There's nothing worse than thinking that you can do off-the-cuff. You have to have your ducks in a row and prep prepared with your speaking points. What are you going to ask for, and are you prepared for the answer? Are you prepared for the questions that they're going to ask you?

What was your goal going into that meeting with Harry Reid and what were the results afterwards?

The goal was to just shine a light on our educational system, the issues that we were having from a federal perspective of growing the pipeline into employment, and that I felt that a key barrier was education as a whole because we found that a lot of women and minorities were not following STEM academic tracks and that there were several federal initiatives that could help us do that.

Then he wasn't the majority leader. I think he was probably in the minority or growing in his own rank and before he became the majority leader. What as a federal leader could he do to help span to other federal organizations to resurrect or pump life back into the initiatives that we had? How could we do that and how could we work together?

"By the way, we have a program that's called the Southern Nevada Hispanic Employment Program that does this annual event. We do some diversity training for our employees. We pay

for the training for our employees to attend. Then we finish with this great scholarship luncheon where we actually give out scholarships. Would you like to be the keynote speaker?"

He said he would, so I walked away with a keynote speaker. That's basically what it was, was that I went and asked him for that. But he also helped by leveraging. He helped a lot, with what he could. They still have to be nonpartisan, you know what I mean? They have to show that they're equal to everybody. That's what I went for, prepared, and I walked away with a keynote speaker. "Could I put you on the agenda? Who shall I speak to? Shall I speak to your scheduler? Who would that be? Would it be local from the Las Vegas office, or should I work with someone here in Washington?"

Ay ya yay mujeres, are we almost done?

Last question. The national Hispana Leadership Institute, where was it held and when?

I was the class of 2001. It was home based out of Washington, D.C. We met four times throughout a fiscal year. The first week we met in San Juan Bautista and it was the aha moment of identifying, who are you? Who are you really? What are your values? What do you see yourself doing? What is your background? Who helped you get here? What do you see yourself doing? It was self-discovery week. We had profound educators, teachers; Linda Allred was one of them. She's a congresswoman or senator from the state of California that was one of our speakers. Consuelo was there, Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch was there.

The second was probably my most intimidating one because it was going to the Center of Creative Leadership Development. That's a big leadership development corporation where they develop leaders. There's where you had to swim on your own because your class didn't get to go. You got to go by yourself and be integrated with other corporate leaders, other people that came from different—mostly white male. You had to go through those surveys, of giving people

surveys. What kind of person is Linda? What kind of this? By the time you got there, they had already analyzed the responses of people that you had given the survey to. And the survey couldn't be given to family members. The survey couldn't be given to your people that love you and were going to say great and wonderful things about you. It actually had to be given to probably the people that didn't think you were all that great. Because the purpose was to develop you as a leader. As hard as it was, I reached out. I think there were ten or twenty of them.

One of the things that I said that I was afraid of going to this center was fear of white males—I was intimidated by that—and that I was going to know what to say. They assign you a personal coach. They talked me through that. At the end of the rigorous week—you did team building exercises to see who was going to help lead you out of the mess that was created. It was a designed class. But I was always the one that was never afraid to ask for help, and they brought that up. I thought, *oh, they think I'm a weak person*. But really asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength because you're actually asking, how can we do this better?

What a lot of people don't know, but you're going to make me say it anyway, is at the end when your personal coach goes through your results, there's—I don't know really what to call it—fifteen percentile of people are this, a core normal group is this, and then there are just some that aren't going to make it as a leader; they figure they don't have the qualities. I think it's all science based. They have all these criteria. Here I come, this little fearful woman, afraid, and don't you know I fell in the upper 15 percent. They likened my leadership to Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez. I'm sitting there like, *what? Those were the results of the people?* I thought they didn't like me. I thought they were my archenemies. But I wanted a true, true sample. I wanted to know and that was a risk in itself.

When they gave me the results of all of this, my weakness of all of that thing was that I

needed to branch out more into other communities and not stick so much to the Latino community because we can't do it alone. We need all of us. We need all of us to make it. There's a lot of people out there who want what we want. They don't have to look like us or be us, but we have to trust that they're sincere and that they want to. That was my homework, to come back and build a partnership with a different group outside of the Latino community, because you can feel real comfortable. We slip in and out of Spanglish all the time, right? You guys chuckled when we talked about the *quinceañera*. You chuckle because you know about the tamales. We chuckle because we know about whatever it is because it's something that connects us, right? But going out your comfort zone, it's a little hard to connect.

What partnership did you create afterward that?

The Black Employment Program.

What experiences developed your fear of white males?

Just that they were the authority. Just because I grew up thinking they were the authority because they were always the bosses, because they were always in leadership roles, they were always the elected officials, they were always the principals, they were always the leader, the authority. That's all.

Talk about the Black Employment Program a little more detail.

It was a dormant program within the federal community that could be raised up. All it needed was some life to be pumped into it. I had to build trust first with other agencies that had the program, introduce myself. They were like me, skeptical. They would look at me like, *how sincere truly are you?* Blacks in Government, national program, was going to be held in Las Vegas and I said, "We could pull a program together for all of us. I'm willing to do A, B, C, D and E." It took a while. My assistant and my counselor happened to be African American and I

pushed them out into the front lines and I said, "You guys can do this." It kind of grew from there. I pushed them out there because I said, "We can do this. I may be able to sign the requisition to give you the money to do whatever, but we can do this." Helping them stand up.

The woman that succeeded me in my position is African American, because of the Black Employment Program, because there is light in her eyes. We all have it. We just have to look for it. It doesn't matter what color you are.

What obstacles have you encountered in the creation of all these programs and the implementation of them here in Las Vegas?

The obstacle has been the power base. How do I explain that? I guess the way I could explain that is through a story. Again, a lot of people have passed on.

When we met with the Foundation, Jim Rogers, he had an intern Francisco Aguilar. I think Francisco might still be working for Nevada Energy now. I'm not sure. Don't quote me on that. He was or link to Jim Rogers. We were going to see if Mr. Rogers would give us some money for some scholarships, and he invited us to lunch, because he was a champion for education. He had his own idiosyncrasies and stuff like that. He was one of those you either liked him or you didn't, right? He was just one of those.

We went, *we* meaning me and a couple of different people, and we had lunch with him. I did the big ask. He says, "Well, that's easy to do. Why don't you just go see...?" And he started naming all people from corporate world, MGM. I looked at him and I said, "Well, I would if I knew them."

Those are the obstacles. Do we know who to go to? And if we do, do we carry enough influence for them to open the door to us? You have a lot of *ganas*; you have a lot of want. You have a lot of fire. But it's getting the obstacle of somebody actually opening the door.

We see that today with our new superintendent of CCSD. In my many years of volunteering at Elaine Wynn Elementary School, or at Lunt, and all of these schools, we can't hold on to our teachers because they don't think they get paid enough. I see because my own kids were teachers. I expend a lot of dollars for school supplies to help them so that they can have what they need in the schoolrooms because budgets are tight. And he knows this because he has people around him, certainly, certainly that have told him that in order to have quality teachers, they need quality pay, right?

Those are the stories we talked about years ago and we're still talking about them today. Why? There's a lot of us, but we don't seem to have that power or that influence. I don't know why. That's the obstacle is the lack of power behind us or the name recognition. *¿Qué se yo?* Something in us is missing, not the lack of *ganas*. I think the obstacle was the power.

What do you do to influence others to want to keep following your steps and fighting for other underrepresented communities?

I think that you have to have that fire in you; that little something whether it be a personal thing that happened to you. I think really is I was going to give credit to anybody why I did it was I'm still seeing that teacher telling me that my son was a non-cooperative student and then learning that—I can articulate well in two different languages.

I think the advice that I would give is you have to stay motivated, and you have to keep going. You have to take risks. One must be able to build the power of network, but never misuse the network for personal gain because it will turn around and, oh no, *esa no más quiere, tu sabes*. It's wanting to keep staying on track, building that fire all the time, and seeing the little successes as huge successes. Just getting to the table and sitting around that big old conference room of Carlos Garcia was like, *fijense* [Spanish/1:42:52]. Who knew we were going to sit here? Who

knew that we were going to get to that table? Celebrating that little piece of, look, we're here, guys. Now what do we do? And then staying on it. You have to stay on it.

One of the things that I encountered was we get to these tables and we say a lot of things, but do we follow through? Do we really show a result? She asked me, what was my success like? Well, my success was always keeping the budget going and increasing the pipeline and it's still going, but it took work and work. And then learning how you have to know the answer to the question before you ask it.

I already know that the vacancy announcement for the summer hires is going to come out early February. But probably November of last year, maybe even October, I would have already gone to each of the managers to say, "I know we're going to be in dire straits, but I'm going to come and do an ask. Can you support it? And can you take one or two students?" I already knew back in October that when I did my formal presentation of asking that I was going to get the money because I already knew I had their support.

The advice that I would give is don't give up, take risks, and strive for a result and celebrate those successes even if it's a little success. Feel good about what you're doing because you're not doing it for you, you're going it to impact many others.

This has been a great interview.

I have one last question.

Ah, you would.

Just to end on a happy—

I was trying to get you off the hook here.

I know, I know.

Just to end on a happy note, I noticed you have a birthday coming up. How do you

celebrate birthdays?

This year I'm going to celebrate it at the hospital. My daughter is having her gallbladder removed on my birthday.

I don't focus on me. It's not about me. I don't focus on me. I don't have a birthday. I know it's my birthday, don't get me wrong, and my kids will call me and my husband will pat me on the back and kiss me on the cheek. But it's not about me. Lucky.

Real quick, how did you celebrate your kids' birthdays? Was there a piñata?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There's always a party. Not my kids, but my husband, my husband turned sixty-eight and I invited fifty of his friends. They all showed up. I always make his favorites. His birthday is December the 22nd. I had mariachis and I had made tamales. That was the picture of my kids making the tamales. I made what I thought nobody was going to eat, menudo. I don't know if you all eat menudo. Yes, see? I didn't think nobody was going to eat menudo because a lot of his friends are non-Hispanic.

Last year when I did his party, I had made green chile enchiladas, *arroz frijoles, birria*, tamales. You know what *birria* is? It could be a piece of meat. It's kind of like a Mexican barbeque. You just cook the meat and then I dress it up with chile jalapeño and carrots and all that kind of stuff and have the tortillas and then make little burritos or little taquitos out of it, all the condiments.

This year he had been wanting menudo, and I refused to make menudo because if you all eat menudo, you know what it takes to make menudo. Not the best flavorful piece of thing to make. It's made out of beef tripe.

I didn't know that.

That tells you everything. I made the menudo. I have a big old twenty-two-quart pot to serve

menudo. I'm welcoming my guests and I always start off with giving a lot of accolades to my husband because I always tell everybody, "Do you want to talk to the man in charge or the woman that knows everything?" My husband is a trooper. Then I go on to tell them because there's a lot of different ethnicities there, not only Latinos, but a lot of whites, some Asians, some African Americans, and so I go through the litany of the list of the menu. "This is what it is." I'm very blessed to have a very large home and I tell them where it is. And I said, "This year at my husband's request I have made a pot of menudo." I didn't think nobody was going to know what that was. Do you know that it was the first to go? I saw people—and I had bowls—with the bowls of menudo and the dressing, because people would like to add to it. It's like a soup-type thing, a cilantro or oregano and the onion and the lemon. Before I knew it, the whole pot was gone.

So, yes, I celebrate them. My kids' birthdays are always a big meal. "What would you like to eat?" If it's a milestone birthday, I will throw in a mariachi just to serenade. I celebrate the anniversary of my son's death with a mass and food afterwards. I make a big to-do for them, but I don't see it for myself. It's not me. It's not me. It's not me.

I want to thank you for sharing your story. It was wonderful and great to listen to. Any last things you want to add before we cut the tape?

No, I don't think so. I wish I could remember more names. That's been a deficit…Thank you all for inviting me.

[End of recorded interview]