

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH KELLY D. BENAVIDEZ**

An Oral History Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

---

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada  
Oral History Project

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

©Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2018

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

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

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

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

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

## PREFACE



For Kelly Benavidez (b. 1976), life began in the northern California community of Daly City in a Spanish-speaking household. Her parents, Amelia and Genaro Benavidez, were among the few Latinos in their area at the time. Her parents felt strongly about immersing Kelly and her older brother in their Mexican culture. They made the important decision to return to Jalisco, Mexico with their young children.

A few years later they moved back to the United States—North Las Vegas specifically. By now Kelly was in the third grade and had lost much of her English skills. She was assigned to ESL class. For her father, construction work was plentiful and there was the bonus of lots of family already living in Las Vegas.

Kelly attended Area Technical Trade School for hotel management, and was then recruited by Mesa State College in Colorado. She once had visions of becoming a police officer, only to

marry one instead. She talks about her husband, Robert Williams, adjusting to her Latino family and how she personally identifies as a Chicana.

Kelly's career in community service took hold when she volunteered for Dario Herrera's campaign. At the time of this oral history, Kelly is a liaison to Clark County Commissioner Lawrence Weekly, with whom she has worked for nearly two decades. Her list of community involvement is extensive: Las Vegas-Clark County Library District Board, the Fernando Vargas Foundation, Las Vegas Latin Chamber of Commerce, Hispanics in Politics, Latina Network, among others.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Kelly Benavidez  
January 29, 2019  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

Preface.....iv

Childhood, born 1976 in San Francisco, CA; working relationship with Spanish language; Mexican parents and their migrant stories. Posada tradition. Respect for proper pronunciations; son learning Hebrew at Adelson Education Campus; naming her son; mixed race and generation household.....1 – 8

Transitioning to and from life in Jalisco, Mexico; stigmatism of ESL (ELL) learning. Term *Chicana*. Choice of Las Vegas to live in 1982; North Las Vegas neighborhood; Broadacres Swap Meet; Von Tobel Middle School and diverse population. More about her parents, their work in Mexico and in U.S.; father’s severe fall in construction of New York New York.....9 – 15

Eldorado High School; Area Technical Trade School for hotel management. First job selling shoes at Meadows Mall. Worked for Larry Mason’s school board campaign. Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado loved to diversify student population. Father’s construction site accident; transfer to UNLV and job at MGM.....16 – 23

Her over eighteen-year position with Commissioner Lawrence Weekly, community service initiatives, Latino Leadership Conference at West Las Vegas Library. Campaign volunteering; Dario Herrera, increased participation of Latinos. Learning her job and her appointment to the Library District Board. *Rain of Gold*, Victor Villaseñor is favorite author. Latina Network professional organization.....24 – 31

Food, love of cooking. Changes in the Westside district she has observed; project funding; Workforce Connection, Latino Police Officers Association, NVEnergy. Community centers and Latino population’s use. Fernando Vargas Foundation. Tom Rodriguez and Latino Youth Leadership Conference.....32 – 38



An Initiative of the UNLV University Libraries

Use Agreement

Name of Narrator: Kelly D. Benavidez

Name of Interviewer: Maribel Estrada Calderón

We, the above named, give to the Oral History Research Center of UNLV, the recorded interview(s) initiated on 1/29/19 along with typed transcripts as an unrestricted gift, to be used for such scholarly and educational purposes as shall be determined, and transfer to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude the right of the interviewer, as a representative of UNLV, nor the narrator to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly pursuits.

I understand that my interview will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, distributed, placed on the Internet or broadcast in any medium that the Oral History Research Center and UNLV Libraries deem appropriate including future forms of electronic and digital media.

There will be no compensation for any interviews.

[Handwritten Signature]  
Signature of Narrator

1/29/19  
Date

[Handwritten Signature]  
Signature of Interviewer

1/29/19  
Date

**Today is January 29th, 2019. My name is Maribel Estrada Calderon. With me are...**

***Laurents Banuelos-Benitez.***

***And Claytee White.***

**Today I will be interviewing Kelly Benavidez.**

**Kelly, can you please spell out your name?**

Kelly, K-E-L-L-Y. Benavidez, B-E-N-A-V-I-D-E-Z.

**Let's begin with your childhood story.**

I was born in San Francisco, California. My parents are Amelia Duran Benavidez and my father, Genaro Benavidez. I had an older brother that was four and a half years older than I. We grew up in San Francisco, in Daly City. We were probably one of the only Latino families in the neighborhood. My parents spoke very little English. It was interesting that all our friends only spoke English. We understood Spanish because my parents would speak to us in Spanish, but we were really hard to communicate with them in Spanish. They would talk to us in Spanish and we would answer back in English.

Obviously, all my extended family lived in Mexico. One day my dad said, "You know what, this is ridiculous. We're moving to Mexico." *We're moving where?* We had gone there on vacation in the summers, but it's very different moving and packing up and leaving. He said, "Yes, it's ridiculous that you guys can't communicate with your own grandparents. You guys need to learn Spanish."

We packed up and moved to Mexico and we lived there for two years. My parents built a home there. That was probably the most amazing experience. I got to grow up with my cousins and my grandparents and learn Spanish. Thanks to Dad, I speak perfect Spanish, read it and write it. I continue to practice as much as I can. But that was probably the best decision that my



parents ever made.

**Tell me more about what it was like to be one of the few Latino families in San Francisco?**

I think at that age you don't really think about it. You just go and play. I think maybe it was a little embarrassing at times because my parents didn't speak English—so there was a communication barrier...kids may be coming over and not understanding what my parents were saying. Other than that, for me, it was just normal. You didn't see those differences that our family was unlike everybody else. My parents worked very hard, but my dad worked the night shift, and my mom worked the day shift, so that an adult could always be at the house. We were never around babysitters or caretakers. They always figured out a way to take care of us in their own little bubble.

So when we went to Mexico, it was very liberating because we had extended family and we could go out. It was totally a different experience and I think maybe that's why I connected so much with my Mexican roots.

**What were your parents' occupations in San Francisco?**

In San Francisco, my dad worked at a bakery and my mom actually got a job working at a bank. She was an accountant at that time. Even though her English was limited, her mathematical skills were amazing, so she was able to hold a job that in those days was probably difficult for somebody that didn't speak English very well. They did very well. We had a great life in San Francisco. For them to pack up and just move to Mexico—I can imagine how hard it was.

**Did your parents migrate from Mexico to San Francisco?**

Yes. My dad's story is really interesting. I apologize if I get a little.(emotional)...

**CLAYTEE:** *We make everybody cry.*

My dad came from a family of thirteen. Very hard in Mexico with that type of a huge family. My

grandfather was actually a part of the Bracero Program, so my grandfather would come and work throughout the fields and just go back every summer or every time they had a break, and that's when there would be a child conceived, every time he would go back, and that's why there is a family of thirteen. The funny thing is that a lot of my uncles and aunts are born on the same month because it was that rotation he would go there and spend time with the family and he would come back through the Bracero Program.

My dad, very, very young, knew he wanted something better, so he left at fifteen. He left his little town in Mexico and crossed the border and made his life here. He did any job that he could find. He kind of grew up at fifteen. I think of when I was fifteen I wouldn't have been able to leave my home and act like you were an adult, but he did.

At that time, back in those days, you were able to go back and it was a little bit easier to cross the border. My dad is very, very fair-skinned, blond hair, blue eyes, so it was easier for him to assimilate into the culture and go back and forth. During those trips is when he met my mom, and they started a courtship and four years later he went back and married her. When they got married my dad brought my mom back to the States and my brother was born.

During that time, I believe, and don't quote me, but I think, it was an administration that was allowing Mexicans to become legal. If you had a child that was born in the United States, your U.S. child can petition the parents, and so that's how my parents were able to become legal. But during that time, they had to go back to Mexico during the paperwork portion of it. My brother was born. They turned in their paperwork. They went to Mexico and lived for about a year, I believe. Then when they came back, that's when I was born, a couple of years after that.

**What towns are both your parents from?**

My mother is from El Grullo, Jalisco, and then my father is from El Limón, Jalisco, which is

literally about a ten-minute drive in between both the towns, and that's about two and a half hours away from Guadalajara, which they now go back and forth. My dad is actually coming home tomorrow. My mom is there right now.

We all live under the same roof; my mother and my father live in our home. We do that because it's easier for us. For me I'm the only child now; my brother has passed away. To me to be able to be with my parents, to be able for my son to experience (them)...For me that's the most important part is that my son is able to experience his grandparents.

**How old were you when your parents decided to move to Mexico?**

I did first and second grade, so it was a while ago. It was for two years. When we came back to the States, my parents made it very, very clear. "In the house you speak Spanish. Outside you can speak whatever you like. In the house we speak Spanish." Still to this day, my parents live with us and we speak Spanish to each other. When my brother was alive, we would go out and we would be in a crowd of people and if it was something that I needed to direct to him, I would say it in Spanish. People would say, "Why do you do that if we're all here and we're all speaking English?" I said, "You don't understand. For me it's uncomfortable. I can't speak to my brother in English when we are accustomed to speaking Spanish in the house." So because he's in my house...Even emails or texts, it was always in Spanish with him. Now I kick myself with not doing that with my son, but my husband isn't Latino, so I didn't want to make him feel excluded. Now I'm having difficulties with my son not speaking Spanish and he's in the same position where I was where he is able to understand everything because my parents are there, but he won't speak back in Spanish. I know he understands everything.

**Tell me about the time that you spent in Mexico.**

It was a small town. Just the spirit of being in a small town and experiencing anything from

playing in the streets freely or going to the same school that my mom went to when she was a kid. Being able to walk to my grandparents' house and knowing that it was okay. Hanging out with my cousins and playing in the streets.

The holidays over there is so important, Christmas. I think that's why I'm so disconnected with Christmas here because in Mexico it wasn't about Santa and the toys, it was about the experience of the Virgin Mary coming and doing *posadas* where you go from door to door and the kids would dress up. It is a totally different experience. It is more spiritual, I guess. It definitely connected me. Those two years connected me to my culture and my family.

**Can you tell me more about the posadas?**

I am really torn because I really want to take my son—for him to experience it—but it's always during school time, so it's not like I can pack him up and take him. In the posadas, every neighborhood gets together and every day a neighborhood gets picked and they do a posada where they dress up a little girl as the Virgin Mary, they dress up a little boy as Joseph, and they get a donkey, and they go from house to house singing carols. You sing carols and you're asking for them to open the doors to their home. Of course, the last house is the one that opens the door to the kids, the carolers. There is always a party, and they always end up with hot chocolate and the *pan dulce*. Little things like that.

The kids don't get the big gifts, game systems and all that. They don't care about that. It's about the fun of experiencing the meaning of Christmas, which I try to instill that but it's so hard here because here it is so commercialized. Everything is about the gifts and what you're going to get. It's just a total different experience there.

**What was your educational experience like in Mexico?**

Interestingly enough, because my Spanish wasn't that great. Going to school and being the only

kid that didn't speak Spanish, you got made fun of because the Spanish that I did speak was with a very strong accent, *ariba, para ya*; there were certain words that they would be like, ha-ha. You try even harder. *Okay, let me say this correctly.* Just being there for two years, it definitely promoted me; when I speak Spanish, I try to speak it very properly. Even my friends that have grown up here and maybe learned the slang Spanish, when they hear me they are like, "God, you say it so proper." I say, "Well, because when I learned it, I learned it the proper way."

I remember coming home and I would tell my parents, "You don't say *parkete*." *Parkete* is a slang word in English for parking. People would just say it. Well, no, it's *estacionamiento*; that's the proper Spanish way to say it. I would come home and tell my parents, "Why did you teach me the wrong way? That's not how you say it. You say it like this."

Those kinds of things where I definitely make it a purpose to try not to speak slang in any language, so even in English I try to speak as proper English as I can, just like I try to speak as proper Spanish as I can. Nowadays I have a girlfriend of mine who doesn't speak Spanish, but she is like, "I love it when you speak Spanish. *Guacamole*." She is like, "Why do you say *guacamole*? Why don't you just say guacamole?" I said, "Because if my parents every heard me say guacamole, they would slap me." Like *tortil-yas* [mis-pronouncing]. No, it's not *tortil-yas*; it's *tortillas*. The funny thing is my son knows how to get under my skin, so he'll be like, "Did we get *tortil-yas*?" I'm like, "I don't know what you're talking about. Tell me the proper way. That's not how you say it."

It is interesting. My husband is half-black and half-Irish. Then the combination in our household...I tell my husband, "All we need is for our son to grow up and marry an Asian Buddhist and we will be so multicultural." We are very Catholic. When my son was in kindergarten, Adelson was like—they have a great program and you want to give your kid that

extra boost. Adelson, Adelson. We're like, let's put him in Adelson. Adelson is the most Jewish school that you can send your kid to. It was very interesting because that year, even though it's very academic, they also teach Hebrew and they are also very religious, which we were very open to because we want our son to be exposed to as much as possible.

Imagine him in kindergarten, right? He is in school and going through his Hebrew. He learned Hebrew. I'm like, this is sad; my son speaks Hebrew better than he speaks Spanish. We are at dinner one day and he goes, "Mommy, can we pray?" I'm like, "Yes, let's pray. Let's pray..." He goes, "That's not how we pray, Mommy. We pray like this. *Halal...*" He is doing his whole prayer in Hebrew, which was great, but I'm like, are we confusing our child? We would go to church on Sunday, but they celebrate the Shabbat on Friday. On Monday he would go to school and he would be like, "Mommy, why do we go to church on Sundays?" Or, "Why do we have the cross?" It was very hard for us to explain that not one religion is better than the other, it's just different. That's what they believe in; this is what we believe in. We just decided that probably wasn't the best fit for him.

I told my husband, "Yes, I'm going to love when he gets older and we ask him, what do identify with?" When I was pregnant, I was trying to name (him) that was very Latino because I wanted him to identify with his Latino heritage. But my husband's last name is Williams. I'm like, he needs to be a very Latino name, but then...His name is Santiago Genaro—Genaro is my dad's name—so he is Santiago Genaro Williams. When I was pregnant, I was trying to find a name and I went through all the aspects of names. My husband was like, "No, I can't even say it; I can't spell it." I wanted Xavier with an X, and he's like, "No, nobody's going to be able to pronounce it."

As women you kind of know how to get to a man, right? My husband is a fanatic of

baseball. Benito Santiago is this famous baseball player. I'm like, "Babe, I got it. Santiago." So he is like, "Santiago..." "Like Benito Santiago." "Oh, that's it. I love it."

We had picked Santiago and then because of my dad we picked Genaro, so, yes, it's Santiago Genaro Williams. The funny thing is my son turned out to be a very good baseball player. He says, "I love my name because it's like Benito Santiago." I'm like, "Yes, it's Benito Santiago."

Our house is very interesting and especially with my husband and the combination of my parents living there. It's an interesting dynamic because when I was dating my husband, I lived in my own place even though my parents lived here in town; they lived in Sunrise Manor. But I would call them all the time and my husband would say, "Do you call your parents every day?" I was like, "Yes." He's like, "I don't talk to my parents every day and they live here, too." I'm like, "That's the Mexican in me, I guess." Every day is like, "Hey, *¿Cómo estás? ¿Qué pasó? ¿Qué hay de nuevo?*" You just touch bases. When we started dating, we're very cuddly, feely, hugging; as soon as you see a family member, it's the hug and the kiss. Well, my husband didn't grow up very cuddly and huggly, and so he was like, "You know, I need to tell you something, babe. I love your parents. I love your family. I feel really uncomfortable the hugging and the kissing. I don't like that. I don't do that. I didn't grow up with it." I'm like, "Okay, when we get to my parents' house, then just tell my mom. Just tell her you don't feel comfortable and she won't do it to you." And he's like, "Yeah."

The typical Mexican family, every Sunday we would get together for dinner. We're on our way there and he's like, "Yes, I'm going to tell your mom, yep, yep." We get to my parents' house and my mom opens the door and he's like, "*Oh, ¡mira! ¿Cómo estas?*" I remember I looked at him. He was already in the midst of a kiss and he looks at me and he's like...I go, "I

thought you said you didn't like it. If you don't like it, just tell her." And he's like, "It's okay. She likes it."

Now, of course, the minute he sees my aunt, my cousins, he does all the hugging and the kissing. His sister has been around, and his sister says, "Who is this guy? This isn't my brother. He doesn't do the hugging and the kissing." I said, "Yes, once you're in a Mexican family, you don't have a choice. You kind of have to go with the flow."

**Let's talk about your transition from Mexico back to the United States.**

That was a little bit harder, because, like I said, we lived in a small town and because my parents wanted us to be submerged in the Mexican culture and the Spanish, I kind of lost my English. If you think of when you're that young, if you don't practice it; you don't use it, you lose it. When I came to the United States, it was really hard for me because my English definitely depleted to the point where when I started the school system, I was in ESL classes, which was interesting because even though English had been my first language, I lost that. Going through school and being in ESL classes, I remember there was that stigmatism of, oh, you're in ESL. Now it's called something else, I believe. It's not ESL anymore.

**LAURENTS: *ELL*.**

ELL. There you go. Back then it was ESL. That was interesting, the change. I've always said this to people. I wasn't white enough, obviously, to be American, but I wasn't Mexican enough to be Mexican. When you're here they say, "Oh, she's Mexican." But when I go to Mexico, they tell me, "Oh, it's Chicana." You never belong. You're always like...

**What grade were you in when you entered school here?**

I got here was third grade. From third grade I've been in Vegas. Since the third grade I've been here.



**Can you define the term *Chicana* for me?**

Chicana is when your parents are Latino, Mexican, but then you were born and raised in the United States. The funny thing is I didn't identify with being Chicana. I didn't know what it was. I had heard my dad use the term, but I don't think he really knew because of his limited education. I don't think he really knew what it meant because my dad grew up here in the United States during the whole Cesar Chaves and the grape boycotts. He was in California during the midst of that, so I think he had heard about it, but didn't really understand what the whole Chicana plight was.

I didn't get to understand those type of roots that I had until I went to college and started studying the Chicano history and reading *Rain of Gold* and those type of classes that really open up your mind.

**What brought your parents and your family to Las Vegas?**

Remember I said that my dad comes from a family of thirteen? Well, out of the thirteen, ten were living here in Vegas. Ten had come here and that was back in the day when construction was in a full boom. All my uncles were working construction at that time.

**LAURENTS: *What year was that?***

That was in '82. When we got here this was not supposed to be our stay; we were going back to San Francisco. That's all my dad knew; he was going to be able to go back to the bread company that he was working at and my mom was going to try to get back into her job. We were coming back in the summertime, so it was going to be a pit stop to say hi to all the family and then we were heading back to San Francisco.

When we got here all my uncles were like, "What are you doing? Why would you go back to San Francisco? The cost of living is so expensive. Here, it's a boom. There is jobs

everywhere. You could get a job tomorrow." Kind of thing. My dad was like, "Well, let me try it out." So this is our pit stop. Thirty something years later this has been a pit stop for us. We just ended up staying.

**Do you remember your first neighborhood here?**

I do. I lived in North Las Vegas. We lived right across the street from Broadacres Swap Meet on Alto, which is funny because now the area that Commissioner Weekly oversees, the area that I have to monitor, is my old neighborhood. All those schools, Myrtle Tate, Fay Herron, Von Tobel, those are all my schools. My parents still have their house on Lynn Lane, which is right by Eldorado High School and that was my high school. That is also all that area that I now oversee. It's just kind of come full circle for me of when I go into those neighborhoods, I know them. I know them like the palm of my hand. I walked to school every day.

**LAURENTS: *Can you describe those neighborhoods, growing up?***

We definitely weren't the only Latino family in that neighborhood even though it was an eclectic kind of neighborhood because there was all types of colors and flavors and older people and younger people and families. It was interesting. It was very welcoming. It didn't feel uncomfortable. Like I said, Broadacres Swap Meet was right there, so that was our little weekend thing; you were going to Broadacres and hanging out. All my uncles and cousins and aunts, they were not that far. On the weekends it was like a family reunion every weekend.

***Can you describe the Broadacres Swap Meet for someone who hasn't been there?***

Broadacres Swap Meet is an outdoor mall. You can find anything you want. If you haven't been there, you have to go. You can eat all day. You can shop all day. You can dance now. That wasn't something that was back when we used to go every weekend, but now they have an entertainment portion. They have bands playing. You can sit there and listen to music and have a

cold beer and have the kids ride the horses. It's just like an overall Mexican theme park. It's fun to just go and have a good time, especially when you're on a limited budget. I haven't been there in a while, but back in the day it was like a dollar to walk in. You paid your dollar and then you could spend the whole day just walking and walking. Your parents would buy stuff they don't need. That was clothes shopping for us for school. We didn't go to the malls. We went to Broadacres Swap Meet and they bought you your clothes that you needed for the school year.

**Can you talk to me about your middle school experience?**

Middle school was really fun for me. I think middle school is when I burst out of my bubble. I was in student council and I was in bowling, so I was really active. At that time, Von Tobel was very interesting and we were a mixture of whites and blacks and Asians. It wasn't segregated at all, so it was cool to be in that environment where everybody was the same and we all got along. I could hang out with my Mexican friends during lunch, but then I was in student council where the majority of the kids in student council were white. It was just really cool to have that. What's funny is that I still communicate with a lot of the kids that went to Von Tobel. Once we graduated from Von Tobel, you either went to Rancho High School or Eldorado, so we all split depending on the neighborhood you lived in.

**When you lived in Mexico, your dad was a baker?**

No. He was a baker in San Francisco. When we moved to Mexico, in Mexico he did farming. He owned land in Mexico. The town where they're from, sugarcane is the big thing. He did sugarcane and that was how he supported his family, and obviously with the money they had saved from being in the United States. Your money goes a little bit farther when you're in Mexico. They had some savings.

My mom ended up being a house mom, which was really nice because we had never

experienced that when we were in San Francisco. I cracked up because I told my parents, "That's why you guys probably lasted longer because you never saw each other." It was like a tag team. I appreciate their sacrifice, but I don't know if people would actually do that now. They were very adamant of like, we want our kids to be safe. And because they didn't have extended family to say, *Can you watch the kids?* they were uncomfortable leaving us with anybody. My mom worked all day. My dad worked at night. My dad would wake up in the morning, take us to school. It was always a tag team. *All right, I've got to go work, see you.* They didn't really see each other until the weekends. But during the week it was clockwork. My dad didn't know how to do my hair. I had long hair, so my mom would do my hair while I was sleeping. I remember this. I had long hair, and so it was the same hair style every day; it was a ponytail. She would do my ponytail while I was sleeping, make sure my hair was all nice, and then she would go to work. My dad would wake us up. *All right, eat breakfast, let's go, let's go to school.* We had such a routine. In San Francisco the routine was very relaxed. Even at that age I remember not feeling stressed. I would go to school and my mom would have my lunch done and I'd come home and my mom was there and my dad would come home from being out in the fields. It was nice. It was just a great experience.

**In Mexico was the farm a family farm?**

No. My dad had land. My dad banked land. Like I said, he had come to the United States when he was fifteen. As he was making a little bit of money, he would send it back and buy as much land as he could.

**Did you ever work there?**

I was young. I remember my brother did more than obviously I did. My brother was only four and a half years older than me. I remember that's how he learned how to drive because he was

driving the big tractors. He was like twelve years old and I remember him driving the big tractors.

**Once your dad moved here to Vegas with your family, he switched to construction?**

Construction, yes.

**How was that transition for him and the family?**

I don't know if it was much of a difference for us. My dad has always been a hard worker. The one thing that I think my dad missed out on was he never took a break. We couldn't go on vacation because for him it was like, *I can't ask for a vacation; you just don't do that.* We would explain to him, "You don't understand. If something happens to you, they just replace you the next day." I remember him going to work sick. I remember him going to work hot, cold. There was never a day off for him. As I got older, I remember telling him, "You know you have vacation time, right? You can take vacation." For him there was no vacation.

In the summer of my freshman year in college, so it was the summer of '95, my dad was working at New York New York when they were building it. My dad was the guy who fell from the airshaft. Literally that was the last day he ever worked was June 10th, 1995, because he fell through the airshaft and broke his back. He broke his leg. He broke ribs. He was in ICU for three months and then he went to a rehab home. He was literally out of the house for a whole year.

I remember telling him, "Do you understand? Do you think that New York New York stopped construction because this happened to you? No. It's that life goes on and you needed to take your time. I don't know if this was a sign of God telling you, 'Look, you need to take time for yourself.'"

My dad had always been just rigid and everything had to be by the book. After that accident we could totally tell this whole change of like, life is too short. At that point he didn't

have a choice; he couldn't go back to work.

**CLAYTEE:** *Was he in a union?*

He was. He was in the Laborers Union. He is still in it. He's now a retired Laborers Union. Then he ended up being on the board for a while.

*Didn't they give vacation?*

No, he could have taken vacation. That's what I'm trying to explain to you. He could have taken vacation. It was just for him that he felt like he had a job and it was an obligation for him to have a job. If you know a little bit about construction, construction is a seasonal kind of thing. Like the New York New York project, you start the project and once you end the project you might be out of work for a week or two until the next project comes up. To him it was like, I can only relax when there is no project. But then even then he would go and look for work. Okay, this is a break for you. Enjoy that you have this break until the next project. But for him, it was like, well, what if the next project doesn't come? So he would go right away to go look for more work when he could have just enjoyed that you can have a little break.

**Do you remember any other construction sites where your father worked?**

He did a lot of schools, which is funny because—he remembers all of them—we'll be driving and he's like, "I did that school." My husband works for Metro. My husband is a police officer. One of their substations was the old IRS building on Decatur and Alta; that's the old IRS building. Metro took it over and used it as one of their outstations. Well, my husband worked there. My dad constructed that building and so my dad would tell my husband, "Oh, yes, you know how the hallways go like this and then the bathrooms...? Yes, I did all that." There is a lot of projects that he knows. For him schools were a big thing. He's like, "I built that school." A lot of stuff he's done in town and that he was involved in.

**After you graduated from middle school, did you go to Eldorado or Rancho High School?**

I went to Eldorado because back in the day Rancho didn't have the best reputation. It wasn't the easiest school to go to. There was a lot of gang violence. That was back in the early nineties. Eldorado was the school that I went to. Plus, my brother had gone to Eldorado. You want to follow those footsteps.

Back in the day there was a trade school called the Area Technical Trade School. Those were trade schools that the Clark County School District was trying to implement. It was kind of like a Vo-Tech. The only difference was if you got selected to attend Vo-Tech, Vo-Tech was now your high school, so you don't attend any other school.

I kind of wanted to be at Eldorado because all my friends were at Eldorado. The Area Technical Trade Center had two sessions; you can go to the morning session, which was first, second and third period, or you can go to the afternoon session that was fourth, fifth or sixth period. Then half-day you would go to a trade school and the other half you would go to your regular high school. You qualified to go during your junior and senior year.

In that time, I think I just wanted to graduate with two certificates. You would graduate with your high school diploma, but also with a trade diploma. I went to the Area Technical Trade School for hotel management. I figured, why not? You're in Vegas. You might as well get as much as you can out of it. I did first, second and third period at ATTC, which is what they used to call it. In the afternoon I would go to Eldorado High School. And as soon as I got out of school, I had a job. It went really quick and I loved the experience of feeling a little bit more independent when you're a junior in high school and you're going to a trade school. It made the day go quicker because you weren't stuck in one school all day long. It was literally three classes here and three classes there. It just made me feel a little bit more grown up, I guess.

**What was your first job?**

My first job was at—and maybe this is why I have shoe problem—I worked at Wild Pair, which was a shoe store at the Meadows Mall. I got the job when I was a sophomore, the end of my sophomore year. A lot of people that went to buy shoes there, I knew. They're like, "I remember when you used to..." Larry Mason, who was part of the school district, was one of my clients. He would call me and be like, "Are you working today?" "Yes, I am." He's like, "Okay, find..." Because he wears a size thirteen. He would tell me, "Any shoe that comes in in a size thirteen, just put it aside." He didn't even care if he liked them. We worked on commission. He was one of my best customers. He would help me out. "What do you got?" I was like, "I got these." He's like, "All right." I'm sure he never wore half of the shoes, but he was one of my good customers. I loved working there. Plus, it was sociable. You're in the mall. Who doesn't like being in the mall?

**What was the mall like?**

I think teenagers now are so unconnected. They're not connected to their communities. The mall was the only place to go Friday when you got out of school. It's like, let's go hang out at the mall. You didn't have money or anything, but you just walked around the mall and that's where all the girls would go hang out with boys and the boys would go check out the girls. That was our social place was the mall. I got to hang out at the mall and get paid. My dad wouldn't have let me just hang out at the mall anyway, so you might as well be there and get paid for it.

**What happened from your high school years into college?**

When I was in high school, like I said, I was really involved. My dad always told me, "Hang out with smart people. Hang out with smart people that can teach you something. Don't hang out with the dumb people. What do you learn from them?"



I was never athletic, so athleticism was not in my world. But I wanted that leadership. I wanted stuff to do, and so I got into student council. I knew Larry Mason and he was running for the school board, so I worked on his campaign when I was in high school. I got really involved in leadership. Anything that had to do with leadership, I was there. The administrators kind of had an eye for me, too. The school administrators, anytime something would come across their desk, "Hey, Kelly, you might be interested. You might look into this."

My high school counselor was amazing. He just really took me under his wing and I think because he knew that my parents weren't very educated. My dad always told me, "I want you guys to do better. I don't know how to get you there, but I want you to go do better." When I was in high school, I was like, maybe college is for me; maybe I can go to college. My dad, still very old-school Mexican, was like, "Look, if you want to go to college, you better figure out how to go to UNLV"—or back in the day, community college—"because you're not going anywhere else." I'm like, "But I don't want to go to UNLV and I don't want to go to community college." I sat down with my counselor, who I still talk to now, and I'm like, "Look, I want to go, but financially there is no way." And he's like, "Okay, here. Start doing this. Start doing that and filling applications."

At the time Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado—I had no idea where this place was—was looking at bringing in diversity into the school. It was a very Caucasian school and they were looking for diversity. Well, they had a leadership scholarship. He is like, "Look, apply for it. I actually know the admissions director." I applied for it. I remember just working like crazy on my essays and making sure that everything was good to go.

I don't think I told my parents. I think I just filled out all my information. For one thing, I thought it was going to be a fluke anyway, and then I knew my parents weren't going to let me

go anyway. I was just like, let's just see what happens.

I filled out all the paperwork, sent it out, communicated with the admissions director. I think they knew already that I was going to get it, but I didn't know. I really would call them every day. "Did you get my application?" Back in that day you didn't do it online. You actually had to send everything in the mail. I remember when I certified mailed it. When you go and certify mail it, they ask you the value of the package that you're sending. I told the lady, "You don't understand how much this is. This is my life. This could get me a full-ride scholarship." And she's like, "Honey, it's just paper." I'm like, "No, it's not." I had to make sure they got it. So when they finally said—the admissions director called me, Paul Jones. I still talk to him, great friend of mine. He called and he is like, "You got it. Sit down and talk to your parents." Because I had told him, "I don't think my parents are going to let me go." He is like, "Look, it's all done. I'll help you in whatever I can. I don't know what to tell you."

I go home. My mom has always been more supportive. I think my dad was always the more protective one, like, my little girl, there is no way I'm letting her go anywhere. I remember my mom was like, "Okay, go ahead and tell your dad. Good luck with that."

I was like, "Dad, I'm going to go to college." And he was like, "Yes, I know. That's good. Good for you. UNLV?" I'm like, "No. I'm going to Colorado." He was like, "No, you're not. Didn't I just tell you I'm not paying for you to go out of town? We can't afford it. I don't have the money. You're not going." I said, "Yes, see, I'm kind of not asking for permission. I'm kind of telling you. I have everything paid for."

I remember this look, like there is nothing you can say. There have been certain times where I've had those conversations with my father where he knows...I can think of three times I've had these conversations with my dad and I see this look on his face, like I can't tell you no; I

don't have a choice. That one was one.

The second time was when I bought my own place, and he was like, "You can't move out." And I said, "No, I'm telling you I bought it. I bought my own." It was a condo. For me in my early twenties, I was like, "No, I bought my own place." I remember that look. And he was like, "Well, then why are you telling me. You already did it." And I'm like, "Yes."

The third time was when I was going to get married and he was just not having it. Those three times I just remember very specifically that there is just that look that your father gives you. I don't know if it's being proud or just being defeated, but either way it was that look of like...Yes.

**Latino families, some of them are very close. What was your transition like in just moving away from your parents to Colorado?**

It was hard. It was really hard especially because I was one of the few little brown faces in Mesa State College. Like I said, they were trying to recruit diversity. It was you were Latino or you were black, and there were very few of us, so we all stuck together. It was like, look, you don't look like them; I don't look like them. We would stick together. We were really a tight-knit group. They encouraged us to start groups, like the Latino Student Union or the Black Student Union. Well, there was only four of them and only four of us, so we were like, okay, you be part of our union and we'll be part of your union. Yes, we kind of started those groups, but we were all in the same groups because there wasn't enough of us.

Like I said, the admissions director, Paul Jones, really recognized it, and I think because he was one of the few administrators that was black. They had one or two Latino administrators. He knew that we needed some mentorship. He knew that the kids were going to need some cuddling, and so he kind of really helped us through the transitions. We all came from families

that we couldn't afford to go back home for Thanksgivings and that, so he would host us at his house.

I'll tell you this story; I tell this when I go talk to students about college. I didn't have the experience of my parents telling me, "Hey, this is what college is like. This is what you're going to experience." My parents were like, "Okay, well, good luck to you. See you when I see you." I didn't know that there is a tradition of your family takes you to college. My dad is like, "Look, I'll help you out with the plane ticket. I don't know what else to do."

My brother had just gotten out of the Marine Corps, so he had one of those big old sea bags. I literally had a sea bag full of my clothes and then you had to take the sheets and the comforter for your bed. I had a little suitcase. Literally it was the suitcase, the sea bag and a box, and I got on the plane.

The admissions director had called me and said, "Hey, when are you coming to campus?" And I'm like, "Oh, well, this date." He goes, "Oh, your parents are bringing you?" I'm all like, "No, I'm flying." He goes, "You're flying? What about all your stuff?" And I'm like, "I'm bringing it." "How are you getting from the airport to campus?" I was like, "Oh, I'll get a taxi." "No, no, no, I'll pick you up." I was like, "Okay."

He actually was just in town in October, he and his wife. They came over for dinner and he tells this story. The funny thing is his wife tells me, "Do you understand that he tells this story when he does—" Because now he is a director at a college in Georgia. But she was like, "He uses this story."

He pulls up to the airport. I wish I could have taken a picture because I'm standing there with my sea bag, my little suitcase and my box. He was like, "You were the most pitiful looking little thing. I could not believe that you came to college like that." He never said it to me right

then and there, but he really did like, "Honey, do you need anything?"

I get to my dorm. The girl that was my roommate happened to be this Caucasian, blond hair, blue eyes. Her parents drove up to campus with a U-Haul. A U-Haul. She had a frig, a microwave, a TV, a VCR, a computer. I had already set up my little bed and hung up my little clothes. It was her mom, her dad, her sister and her grandmother that had dropped her off. The parents are like, "Oh, honey, are your parents here? We would love to meet them." And I'm like, "No, it's just me." I remember sitting on the bed and they were just bringing and bringing in stuff. I guess it was a cool thing because it was things that I obviously didn't have. I was like, well, at least we now have a microwave, a frig, a TV, all these things that I just didn't have. I think kids don't understand. It's not like my parents did it on purpose. They didn't know. Obviously I would never send my kid to college like this, but my parents had no idea. They were doing the best they could. *Go conquer the world. I don't know what to tell you.* There wasn't much that they could help me.

Those are experiences that make you; eating Ramen noodles. We were in Grand Junction, Colorado where there were no Mexican markets. There's no *pan dulce*, no tortillas. I remember calling my mom. "Can I get a pack of tortillas? Can you just send me..."

I would come home. There wasn't money for me to be coming home. Paul Jones, the admissions director, had this bright idea. I love him to death and I tell him all this time that if it wasn't for him, there is no way I would have made it. He goes, "Look, I came up with this program that you're going to go recruit in Las Vegas. I'm going to send you to these high schools. You've got to go and you recruit and you talk to students." I was already part of the leadership program. He is all like, "I will pay for you to go and come back." Those were my only little outings to come and see my parents and it was because of him because there is no way I

would have been able to come.

**CLAYTEE:** *Tell me about summers.*

I came back for the summer. I told you my dad had the accident that summer. I was getting ready to go back to Mesa. June is when he had the accident. Paul Jones was like, "Look, are you going to come back?" I said, "I can't leave my mom. I can't leave my mom with everything." My dad was literally still in the hospital. He was still in UMC. I said, "I can't go." And he goes, "Look, give it a semester. I'll hold your scholarship for a semester. We'll look back at it in a semester."

He kept in contact with me. Like I said, we're still friends to this day. I didn't want to lose my semester either. I ended up enrolling at UNLV, so I was still going to school. I was making sure my parents were okay. I never went back to Mesa.

Everything happens for a reason. At that time, then MGM had just opened up, and so I started working at MGM. Life brings you...I wouldn't have changed that experience for anything. You really grow when you leave home and mommy and daddy aren't telling you what time to be home or, did you get your homework done? You're on your own. The culture clash was coming back and having to be under the rules of, where are you at? All those little things make who you are.

**What degree were you pursuing?**

When I started—it changes a couple of times—public administration. Then I was like, no, I want to be a police officer, and so I wanted to do that field. Public administration is what I ended up with, but not really what I wanted to do.

**What did you want to do?**

I wanted to be a police officer, so I did the best thing, I married one.

**What motivated you to go into public administration?**

I always wanted to be a CEO. I had no idea what the hell a CEO was, but it just sounded cool and I wanted to be a CEO. That was the title I wanted. Plus, it was so diverse. You can pretty much do a lot of stuff with it.

**CLAYTEE:** *Tell us about the work that you do here now.*

Now I do a little bit of everything and that's what I love about it. Commissioner [Lawrence] Weekly is an awesome guy. He's not the typical politician, so it's not all about, what are we going to do under the umbrella of Clark County? He likes to do a lot of community service stuff, so we do a lot of community service. Anything that has to do with children or seniors, we're all over it. We have programs throughout the year and because we've been doing it for so long, it just goes from year to year and people will expect it now.

We just wrapped up the whole holidays. We fed three hundred and fifty people for Thanksgiving. For Christmas, we gave three hundred and fifty children toys and bikes. Every child walked out with a bag of toys and a brand-new bike.

Those are things for me that my job isn't behind a desk and that's what I enjoy. There are times when I can feel like we really make a difference. It's going to be hard for that transition when Commissioner Weekly leaves; in two years he will be term-limited. I'm crossing my fingers that the next person that comes in maybe has the same sense of doing community-oriented projects.

We do a lot of things with students, too. For Hispanic Heritage Month, we do a huge Latino Leadership Conference at the West Las Vegas Library. This year we celebrated our seventeenth year of doing it, which is interesting because there are now teachers that were high school students and now are teachers bringing in their students.

**How did that program begin?**

When I first had started with Commissioner Weekly, Senator [Harry] Reid had brought this program. He did a one-day event and he asked for our assistance and I kind of helped him, and so we did it once. I told Commissioner, "Let's do it again." There wasn't any funding through Senator Reid's office, so he was like, "Well, let's see what you can do. Go run with it." It just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

Ruben Silva was a student. He went through the program. He was a student and now he is a teacher. Krista was a student and now she is a teacher at Rancho and brings her students, which makes me feel really old sometimes.

**What lessons do you provide for students?**

We do an opening session where we bring in a speaker. This year it was actually a professor from UNLV. I'll give you name later because I don't want to mess up her name. She does Chicano history, too, at UNLV. She is a professor.

**CLAYTEE: *Anita Tijerina Revilla?***

Yes, Ms. Anita came in and she floored these kids. She did the opening session. Then we break out the kids in sessions where they go in and do different classes. One is leadership and setting your goals. The other one is social responsibility. We partner up with Latino Police Officer Association and they come in and tell the students how important it is to just do the right thing and how they got there. A lot of those officers obviously have had stories of, when did they ever think they were going to be a police officer? And now they are a Latino police officer. Things like that.

They go through sessions and then at the end we do a closing lunch. We do a *taquiza*; we bring in a guy to make fresh tacos for all the kids. It's more of the fun wrapping-up event.

We've seen a lot of kids go through it. Obviously, I don't remember everybody's names



and faces, but when they see me they are like, "Ah, I went to your leadership conference." It makes all the difference.

***How do you transition from the work that you were doing into working for Weekly?***

I've always worked for Weekly pretty much if you think about it. I went straight from college, graduating, and then working with him. This is the only job I know.

***After the shoe store it was...***

I worked the shoe store. During college I worked at MGM. At MGM I worked at—I don't even know if they still have them—the Star Lane stores. They were little stores they had. If you park in the garage at MGM, you have to go through Star Lane, which is all those little stores that you would walk through to go up to the casino level. So all those little stores, we worked. When MGM was the big place to have the fights, we always worked the fights.

Actually, I worked there and then the state had done a grant and it was called the Family Resource Centers. I don't know if anybody remembers those. The state had some funding and they did these resource centers in different community centers. I was a manager at Stupak Community Center. I was part of the Family Resource Center. That's how I got my foot into doing what I do now.

Mind you, remember that when I was in high school, I worked in campaigns. I always had my name out there. My interest was to run for office; that was my dream. I was going to run for office, so I figured you've got to be in the midst of things; you've got to be in the right place at the right time. Because that was my goal, I wanted to run for office someday, any campaign that would ask me, oh, can you volunteer? Sure. I was single. I didn't have kids. I had the time that I was able to be everywhere. I was never home. I was always doing something. I worked in Dario Herrera's campaign when he was running for commission.

### **What was it like to be a young Latina involved in politics?**

It was really interesting, but it was fun, and it was nice, and it was welcoming, because there wasn't a lot of us. Now there is more, which I love to see. There is a lot more Latinas out there wanting to be involved. But back in the day there wasn't too many of us. When they saw a Latina come through the door and you were young and you were hungry, they would take you in and they would want to show you everything. Larry Mason took me under his wing. Anytime there was a luncheon or a meeting, if I could go, he would go, "You want to tag along?" I would tag along.

When this job came up, when Commissioner Weekly was looking for someone, he was very specific on what type of person he wanted. He wanted somebody that spoke Spanish because of the district he was representing. He wanted somebody young because I think he wanted to be able to somewhat train. He didn't want somebody coming in with their own agenda.

I remember coming in for the interview and when I went in for the interview, when I saw the people that were sitting in that lobby to interview, I'm like, come on, there's no way. There were some veteran people that had been in politics forever that were wanting this job. They were already people in the community. I was like, there's no way that they're going to give me the job, when I was looking at the quality of people that are in this lobby. There's just no way.

I remember I went in there and I gave it my best shot. I was like, that was a good experience. I went back to doing what I was doing. I got the phone call and he was all like, "Hey, this is Councilman Weekly." I'm like, "Yes, sir." He's all like, "Would you like to come and work with me?" "Of course I would, yes, yes."

### **Describe your first day.**

I tell him now—now that I know him. Obviously, we've been together for a long time. But at that

time, I was my very early twenties. Being that your boss is an elected official, it was very intimidating. I remember I was all like, "Can I get your coffee?" And he's like, "No. No." I'm like, "Well, what do I have to do?" He goes, "I don't know. Just go figure it out." It was an interesting learning curve because you have to learn with the times and this isn't a job—there is a new liaison now because the commissioners have changes. There is a couple of new staff members. You can't really give them a book and say, "This is what your job is." Your boss is an elected official and whatever that elected official needs or wants that's your responsibility to get it done. Weekly is one of those guys that I could have said, "Okay, and how do I do that? Who do I call?" "I don't know. Figure it out."

I appreciate at that point my parents being so tough on me because it taught me, no, you've got to go figure it out. Nowadays I tell my husband it's hard for these young folks, unless you explain everything to them, *step one you do this and step two and step three*, they can't get from step one to step ten on their own unless you tell them exactly what to do.

When you're working with somebody like Commissioner Weekly, he's not going to tell you that. You've got to go figure it out. Get the job done. He doesn't care or he doesn't want to know how you got it done. Just go get it done. Now I try to teach that to my son. Go get it done. Figure it out. I don't have to tell you step by step. Figure it out. You might figure out a better way to do something than I know how to do it. Just go figure it out.

**Did you ever think that you would work eighteen years for Commissioner Weekly?**

No, because in the beginning—he's a great guy, but he's also has a very strong personality, and so I kind of felt like he would fire me at any time. I was always in the fear. Now I'm all like, I know you too well.

**Tell me about your duties as the chair for the library board [Las Vegas-Clark County Library District]?**

This is interesting. I was appointed to the library board. When Councilman Weekly was a councilman in the City of Las Vegas, he appointed me to the Library District. Mind you that was eighteen years ago. But they are term-limited. Just like regular elected officials, they are term-limited. I was term-limited.

At that point, like I said, I lived in my own condo. I lived at The Lakes, so that was in the city of Las Vegas. I was appointed by the City of Las Vegas to be on the library board. I finished my term limit; I was out.

During that lapse of time, which was about four or five years, my husband and I moved. We bought a house that happened to be in the county. By that time Commissioner was a commissioner in Clark County. I lobbied my commissioner at the time, Susan Brager. I lobbied her and asked, "Would you be interested in putting me on the library board? I've already sat on it in the City of Las Vegas. Now I can represent Clark County if I sat on the board again." She was like, "Of course."

I called to make sure that everything was kosher because I didn't know if that was something legal. It ran through legal, and they said, "As long as you're representing a totally different demographic, then it's okay."

Now I am on my second term. I am the only board member that's ever done that that I've come back after being term limited.

**What does it mean to you to be a chair member?**

There is more diversity on the board, but back then there wasn't a lot of diversity in the library board. For me, I always want to be—that's one thing Commissioner Weekly taught me; if you're

going to go out and do something, do it for a reason, do it for a purpose, be there for a greater good. For me, I want to make sure that those people that don't get to go to a library meeting and maybe talk about what their issues are or other people might not see where this might be uncomfortable for this segment of people, I want to be that voice that people can say, uh, that's right.

We are going through right now rebranding of the library district and I want to make sure they incorporate, what's our Latino community going to say about this? We have a very big Asian community now. Does it reflect? When you're looking at branding, sometimes one thing can represent something totally different in a different culture, so we need to be sensitive to that. Those are things that I like to be on the board.

Bringing programs, the leadership conference at the West Las Vegas Library, it's in conjunction with the Library District because it's in the library. I kind of mix both my board duties with my work duties.

**Since we're talking about libraries, can you talk to me about your favorite Chicano writers?**

*Rain of Gold*. I like *Rain of Gold*, Victor Villaseñor is the author and all his books are amazing. I actually got to meet him. If you know Tony Sanchez, who is part of NVEnergy, that's his uncle. I didn't even know that. When Tony married Elaine—we've been friends since we were in college, all of us. When they got married, they got married in Mexico, in Rosarito. I'm at the wedding and I see him and I was star struck. I'm like, "What are you doing here? I know who you are." Tony is like, "Oh, yes, that's my uncle." I was like, "Oh, okay." But all his books are amazing. That's probably my favorite.

**When did you first encounter this book?**

Through Chicano Studies. When I was in Colorado, I had a class with an amazing professor and that was a book that was one of our assignments. After I read it I was hooked, and so I couldn't get enough of him. They said they were going to make it into movie and I'm still waiting for the movie. But the movies aren't ever as good as the book itself.

**CLAYTEE: *Have you seen the movie Roma?***

I haven't but that is on my to-do list. But I've been reading all the background of it.

**What other organizations have you been a part of?**

I was part of everything under the sun and then when I got married and had my child, I really tried to limit the things that I was doing, just because I didn't have the time and I don't like to be on boards just to be on boards. If I can't commit to really being there, I just don't. There was a laundry list of things. When I look at my resume, I'm like, how did I squeeze all these in? But you just do.

**Tell me about Latina Network.**

I love Latina Network. I have to say I love it because of the professionalism. Obviously, you get to network and meet all these professional Latinas. But it is also my connection with my Latina girls. I don't have sisters. To me they are like my sisters and we hang out outside of the Latina Network meetings, but those are always fun. The last one I hosted at my house was last year and I invited my gynecologist and we did questions that you're afraid to ask or that you're embarrassed to ask. She loved it so much. She's not Latina. But she was all like, "Can you do it again? It was so much fun." We get together and we drink and eat and just socialize and you learn some things, so it was a lot of fun. I try to go to as many as I can.

**CLAYTEE: *I want to talk about food.***

Oh. I love food. If I were to die and come back again and choose a career, it would be cooking. I love, love to cook.

***Tell me about the kind of foods you grew up with that your parents cooked, your mom probably. And then I want you to tell me how those foods changed when you married this African-American Irishman.***

Growing up, obviously very Mexican. Beans are always cooking in the house; that was a staple. Beans, tortillas; those are staples. Then the holidays were always tamales, *pozoles*. But my dad likes to cook, so my dad would cook a lot of Americanized food, like baked chicken. We would explore that as well.

My husband had a culture clash, too. Now that my parents live with us, when they are at our house, when they are not in Mexico, my mom does a lot of the cooking. He is like, "Do we have to have Mexican food again?" I'm like, "I'll cook this weekend."

When my husband and I moved in together, it was interesting because we would open up the frig and I'm like, this is so a picture of our relationship. We had salsa that I had made and then barbeque sauce. He had bologna and I'm like, "What's this?" And he's like, "You've never had fried bologna?" I'm like, "No. What's fried bologna?" We had *jamaica*. To him, *jamaica* is hibiscus juice. It's a flower and it's red. I had made a jug of it in the house. He poured it thinking that it was Kool-Aid. He's like, "What is this?" I'm like, "It's *jamaica*." He's all like, okay. But then the next day he would have Kool-Aid.

It's very interesting, yes. Now I love it because my son gets to experience all these things.

**Let's talk about *pan dulce*. Your dad was a baker, right?**

Yes.

**What did he bake?**

He was in San Francisco and he didn't bake Mexican bread. He baked the traditional sour bread. In San Francisco, they're known for sourdough bread; that's the type of bread. There was always bread at our house. We had bread all the time, but it was the sourdough, traditional San Francisco sourdough.

**What is your favorite *pan dulce*?**

*Conchas. Conchas*, ah.

**Can you describe them?**

*Conchas* are these round heavenly puffs and they have coated sugar. When they bake it, the sugar hardens on the top. You get your coffee, *café con leche*, and then you cut it and dip it slightly and it soaks up the coffee, ah.

**CLAYTEE:** *I love it.*

Yes. That's my favorite.

**Can you talk about the changes you have seen within the district over time?**

When I first started working for Commissioner Weekly, the Westside specifically was known for being an African-American community. Now, if you look at it, Latinos are everywhere. When you are looking at programming aspects, we have the Pearson Community Center, which is catty-corner from this building here, or you're looking at the Doolittle, which is City of Las Vegas, but at that time was under our jurisdiction, their programming has to change because your surrounding community has changed.

*I didn't realize there was another community center other than Doolittle until I walked in here today.*

This is the MLK Senior Center. This isn't a community center. It's just a senior center.



***What kind of programming?***

For seniors. Every day they have lunch provided and then they do programming, too. They have programs where United Blood Services might come in or UMC might come in. They'll have different classes.

Actually, Commissioner Weekly has secured money to expand because the facility itself is pretty small. They are extending their facility so by next year construction should be starting and it will move pretty quickly once they start.

***When a commissioner needs money to do a project—you were talking about the thing that you did with Senator Reid and the next year you did it yourself—how do you go about acquiring monies to do that programming?***

The county doesn't have specific funding for a program like that. We partner. That's what you have to do; you have partnerships. We did a great partnership with Workforce Connection. Workforce Connection helps us with the transportation because that is our biggest kill is the transportation. Workforce Connection helps us with transportation. Like I said, the Latino Police Officers Association is one of our partners. They help us with providing some funding for the breakfast. NVEnergy gives us some funding to provide the lunch. I start putting all the money together and that's how I pay for all the bills.

***That is amazing.***

***Can you tell me more about raising a bilingual child?***

I wish I could, if my son was bilingual. It frustrates me. I think my husband somewhat blames me. He is like, "I told you. You should have only spoken Spanish to him." In my mind, when I was single that's what I was going to do; I was only going to speak Spanish to him. But when you are in a household like mine, I didn't want my husband to feel uncomfortable. Then I had to

translate everything. I would be like, “*Oh, ¡que bonito niño! What a cute little baby! – ¿quieres leche? Do you want milk?*” I didn't want him to feel left out or not incorporated. Then I just dropped the Spanish and started English. Then I was hoping that once my parents moved in that my son would pick it up like that. Well, yes, he understands everything; it's just he's not speaking it. I threaten him all the time that I'm going to do what my parents did and I'm going to send him to Mexico and he's going to have to deal with it.

***How old is he?***

He's ten.

***Perfect age.***

Yes.

***LAURENTS: With the Westside being historically black and you're seeing more Latinos move in and the community centers having to adapt their programming, have you seen or felt resistance or conflict with that change in the community that's been here, or has it been accepting?***

I don't think so. I think as long as they are respected, I think that's what it is. They feel like, it's my house. So if you're coming into my house, as long as you are respectful in my house, I'm going to be okay with it. I think that's what it is; we're still telling them, it's your house, but there is enough room for everybody. I think once the Latino community starts coming in more—because that is our disconnect is that the Latino community doesn't feel like “this is our center” yet or “these are our programs” yet. It is like, how do you reel them in and try to feel that community sense inside of a community center? And you do that with the kids. When the kids start incorporating basketball and different activities, then you have that in common. Your kid is playing with my kid.

### **Can you tell me about the Fernando Vargas Foundation?**

Fernando Vargas is a boxer. He has been boxing for many years, semi-retired now, originally from Oxnard, California, but moved to Vegas after he transitioned to that semi-retired. He opened up a boxing community center in North Las Vegas right off Civic Center and Lake Mead, a small, little gym. He welcomes all the kids in the community. They had asked me to go take a look at this center. He is doing some amazing work. His wife, Martha, and he took it upon themselves and put together this little program.

I said, "How are you doing all this?" They are like, "With whatever we have." I'm like, "Well, do you have a foundation? Do you have a board of directors?" They had no idea what that meant. I'm like, "Well, the problem is that if you want to go for funding, you have to have that nonprofit structure umbrella."

With that said, they roped me in and a couple of people in the community. Felipe Ortiz is on the board of directors as well. We've just helped them out. They are in the stages of getting to a bigger facility. If you ever have time, walk in there after school. That place is packed. He structured it to a point where the students come in, they sit down and they do their homework, and if they can show that their homework is done and complete, then they can box in the boxing ring. He shows them how to spar. Some of the kids that feel like they have nowhere else to go that's their place to go. Like I said, I'm very picky about the organizations that I devote my time to and I really believe in what he is trying to and I think he needs community support. He and his wife can't do it on their own.

### **Do you have any other stories that you would like to share?**

Oh, I can keep you here all day. No. Thank you for the opportunity. You guys got me all revved up in the beginning.

**CLAYTEE:** *We love the stories that you told. Of course, we've already interviewed Larry Mason.*

Yes. I love Larry. Like I said, there are people in the community that...Tom Rodriguez, he was another one. When I was in high school that's when they started the Latino Youth Leadership Conference at UNLV. I was a sophomore when they first started the program. Now, the program was supposed to be only for juniors and seniors, but because it was a brand-new program, they didn't have enough students that had applied, so they let me come into the program. I was one of the first participants that went into the program.

I just remember Tom Rodriguez's speech. He was like, "Look, you will not leave this conference the same way you walked in." And at the end you do, you feel like you can conquer the world. There is much more outside your little bubble.

**What was that conference like?**

I still talk to a lot of those kids that I was in the conference with, and so they become your family. Magda Melendez, Jose Melendez, all them, Africa Sanchez; that was my community. We all still talk to each other and we all have kids now. It's nice to see that progression.

***Have you attended any of the conferences recently?***

The last one I attended was a few years ago. I was really involved in the beginning. Life happens, my ten-year-old son. I have been a big proponent of—I don't want to go save the world and leave my son on the side. I want to make sure that my husband and I raise our son to be a productive member of society. Just like I did my job when I was younger and I didn't have that responsibility, I think I provided as much as I could. Maybe when my son is at an age where he flies on his own, I'll go back to that. But right now, I need to make sure that he stays on the straight and narrow and that he is learning those things that he needs to learn from his mother

and his father.

*I think that's smart.*

**Why do you think projects like these are important?**

Especially kids that go through history classes—it's never somebody that looks like me or it wasn't somebody that I identified with. I remember going through these programs and you would see like Tom Rodriguez or the Mariachis. I'm like, wow, there is actually somebody that looks like me that can be a professional. That does a lot for a kid's psyche of knowing that "if she can do it, I can do it kind of thing." When you're talking about these stories, when you're listening to people's stories and you can identify with it and say, wait, that sounds like my story, even if it helps one kid to think outside the aspect of just your home and your structure. I know my parents, if they knew better, they would have done better. They did the best that they could.

**Thank you so much for sharing your story.**

*Thank you so much. This was wonderful.*

Thank you.

**[End of recorded interview]**