

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH YAZMIN BELTRAN-ELIZADE**

An Oral History Conducted by Rodrigo Vazquez

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada  
Oral History Project

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

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2018

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

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

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

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



Yazmin Beltran Elizade with interviewer Rodrigo Vazquez (2019)

Yazmin Beltran Elizade was born (1985) and raised in a Mexico that was increasing in violence and danger. Over the years, her father Jose Beltran dreamed of the opportunities of a better life in the United States. Eventually, that dream became a reality in Las Vegas when Yazmin was a teenager. By then, she had aspirations to become a lawyer and fight criminal activity.

Yazmin's youthful goals modified. And she embraced the path to a career in journalism. She did not shy away from reporting on the unsavory topics such as the tragic disappearances of women in Mexico known as *las mujeres de Juarez*. Spanish being her native language and English skills based on early education, Yazmin found ways to perfect her skills taking ESL classes at CSN and also a class with her mother Tayde Elizade from the Latin Chamber of Commerce.

She is the loving mother of two and continues to build her career local media. In 2019, she wrote an article for the Nevada Independent about the Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada:

<https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/oral-history-project-will-preserve-stories-of-latinos-who-shaped-southern-nevada>

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in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Rodrigo Vazquez

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Rodrigo Vazquez 02/04/19  
Signature of Interviewer Date

**Today is Monday, February fourth, 2019. I am Rodrigo Vazquez and I am in the Oral History Research Center here at UNLV. Today in the room with me is...**

Yazmin Beltran.

*And Barbara Tabach.*

**Yazmin, could you spell your first and last name out for me, please?**

Yazmin, it's Y-A-Z-M-I-N. Beltran is B-E-L-T-R-A-N.

**Perfect. What I wanted to start with is your childhood. Tell me about your childhood.**

**Where are you from? Where were you born?**

I was born in Mexicali, Mexico, and I spent all my childhood there pretty much from the day I was born until I was eighteen years old. My parents moved from Mexico City to Mexicali. They decided they wanted to be in the border. My dad would eventually come to the United States and started working in California and Nevada. He would go back and forth from the U.S. to Mexicali. While we were there they didn't have traditional jobs, like in an office or a factory. They were always trying to do their own business. The way they did that is they started selling things and buying things in a little place called Calexico, California. They would go buy and then sell them in the swap meet. We were very close to that. I would always go with them to buy the stuff. We didn't have a regular childhood because we were always with them and looking at what they were doing and trying to see what they were doing to support us. That wasn't hard for me. It was actually kind of fun because we would go there and see these things in Calexico. I would go always for the toys. That was my fun place. We would get toys and my mom would be like, "Okay, I'll buy you if you stay here quiet while I go and take a look at the clothes." It was like a swap meet that they had in Mexicali. That's what they did.

I eventually went to middle school, high school. When I went to the university, I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer, so I was admitted at the faculty of law at UABC. I decided I wanted to do criminal law. What I did see and what I noticed is that the corruption in Mexico was very difficult. I was talking to friends and we were talking about how difficult it was for lawyers especially in criminal cases that corruption was going to be an issue. People get killed all the time. I started thinking, is this the road that I want to take? Do I really see myself in this career? I started having a lot of doubts. I started having a lot of questions.

That's when in my first semester I decided this isn't for me; I want to go with my dad, because he was living in Las Vegas and my brother was with him. I said, "Okay, I'm going." I decided to tell my mom, "Do you want to do this?" She quit her job, pretty much packed everything, and we rented the house that we were living. Just like that, with faith, that's when we drove here. I thought it was going to be the easiest thing. I thought it was going to be just come to the U.S., change my status from tourist to student visa. I was like, it's going to be a piece of cake. It was the most difficult thing, the total opposite. I had no idea we needed to pay money. We needed to prove that we had a great income. I just didn't know. I just thought it was about changing the status, enrolling in college, and that's it.

***May I ask, what year was that?***

This was 2003.

***You were how old at that time?***

Eighteen.

***You made this big change in your goals and you're coming to Las Vegas, okay. I wanted to make sure I had the historical context.***



**That's interesting. You say you went to school up to your first year in university over in Mexico, right?**

Yes.

**Could you go into what your entire education was like from elementary school to middle school? You also said that you go often and work with your parents. How was that able to happen with your schooling?**

When we were kids? I know I kind of jumped from the childhood to the university. It was me and two brothers, my youngest one and my oldest one, so I was always in the middle. I can tell you that we didn't have a regular childhood. It was a little bit complex because of that business that my parents had. It wasn't a fancy business. They were selling things in a swap meet. It was their business, but, at the same time, it required for them to be outside, go and look for things to sell. They would leave us alone for a long time. Now that I think about it and I have two children and I live in the United States, when I think about the things that me and my brothers went through and I look at how I am right now, it's like you can't do that here; you can't leave your children unattended and things like that. But I know they did it because they wanted to provide the essential, which was a roof over our heads, food, clothes. I see the struggles that they went through and I see why my dad eventually would come back and forth from the U.S. He would stay for a few months with us to help my mom with the swap meet and then he would be like, "No, it's not enough money. I have to go back to the U.S." He had a tourist visa, so he was able to do that. But it was always that uncertainty. My dad would feel scared. *What if I don't get it renewed? What if something happens there?* It was that fear.

***How long was the tourist visa good for?***

I think it would renew I don't know exactly after how many years, but they would renew a permit. I think the permit would renew every six months. As long as he didn't stay over the six months, he was okay. He would risk that; if the U.S. sees that you're working, he would get it revoked and probably get a penalty.

***He had to work under the radar.***

Kind of like that, yes. He understood since very early years what an immigrant feels like when they're on this side. His advantage was that he had family, so he felt a little bit of support, but that thing changed when we were kids there and he was like, "Okay, I heard about this great opportunity in Las Vegas, in Nevada." I will never forget. I think I was thirteen years old, or twelve, and my mom says, "Are you sure about this? You don't know anyone in Las Vegas." And my dad is like, "Don't worry. I have this friend who says he can give me a roof while I get everything set up, the job and all."

My dad comes to Las Vegas and the friend drops him off at, I think, the Silver Nugget Casino, a very dangerous area. At three a.m. he drops my dad off and he's like, "You're on your own." My dad tells us the story and he's like, "I'm a grown man and I never felt so scared in my life because I was in a new city. I didn't know anyone." He says that he entered the casino and he pretty much was asking security for a phone or water because he had the phone of someone else. He ended up in the Mission, like in a homeless shelter, because there was no people that he could call. Eventually he got in touch with someone else, a total stranger that picked him up.

When he was living this very stressful situation here in Las Vegas, we were there in Mexicali and it wasn't easy because we were not poor, but, at the same time, the money wasn't enough. We were able to go to school. We were able to get what we needed, but the money was always an issue.

My dad had this dream that I'm going to make it here; I'm going to make it in Las Vegas. The construction jobs are paying so well. I think they were building Mandalay Bay at that time. He's like, "I know I can make it here." He did very good. He was able to support my mom and us when we were going through high school and when I was able to go into the university. I think I saw that somehow. I started seeing that and the U.S. isn't that bad, I started thinking.

I remember when I was little and he would say, "Oh, I heard things about Las Vegas." I had this idea that Las Vegas was just an adult city and there were no children in Las Vegas. I was very young. When I finally came to visit him and I saw the city, I just fell in love. I was like, man, I wish I could move here one day, but I was barely getting into the testing for the university and never thought about it again because I saw myself being a lawyer in Mexico. Then those questions started arising. *Am I going to be able to do my career here?* I knew I was probably not going to be able to do because of the danger. I think the desire and the spirit of my parents to do more and the desire and the spirit of my dad was also a huge motivator for me to come here without no idea what was going to happen, nothing.

**When your dad essentially first moved to Las Vegas, you said you were around twelve, thirteen?**

Yes, eleven, twelve.

**How long was the gap before you actually saw him again? I'm assuming he moved here more permanently, right?**

Yes. I think there were times I wouldn't see him for several months. It was difficult because I know he was working a lot and, at the same time, he didn't want to move. It was probably six months, the longest. My mom would come and visit him, but we would have to stay here. I think maybe six months was longest that I didn't see him.

### **What made you get into law in the first place?**

I think I always wanted to work for—I always wanted to be an attorney general. I wanted to be part of that organization because I knew they were dealing with the criminals and the drug cartels. I was like, I want to be able to do that. I didn't want to be a cop or anything. I wanted to be part of the entity that worked to get the criminals and that was my goal. I wasn't trying to go into politics or change laws or anything like that. I wanted to be part of that organization that would work investigating and getting those big cartels; I had this huge fascination for that, so that was the thing. I said, "Okay, I have to start somewhere. If I start being an attorney and then I get my way into criminal law, I think I'm going to be able to do that."

One of the things that really got me thinking, too, was that I called the office that they had in Mexicali. They gave me the opportunity to do my internship there. I was talking to the director. He was very nice in telling me, "Okay, yes, we can get you here." We were working to get that set up, and he got killed days later after I met him outside a restaurant.

### ***How was he killed?***

The investigation, they think it was a drug cartel, but he was shot. His car was completely shot up outside the restaurant. The pictures from the newspapers were very explicit. He pretty much was in his car, pulling in reverse, and then people started shooting.

### ***That must have been frightening.***

It was. My dad was in Las Vegas and he was like, "I don't want you near that." That's what he said. He's like, "I want you out. I don't want you to go back. You can continue with school if you want. You can continue to go to law school, but I don't want you near that atmosphere. I really don't want you back." That was a factor for me to really think about. *Do I really want to do this, or do I want to go somewhere else?*

**I think it's interesting how you have these two contrasting things. You had this idea of law, maybe a more idealistic one or you thought it was a certain way, and then you faced a reality check in a way. Then, on the other hand, you have Las Vegas, what you thought was not a great place, right, just what it was rumored to be. You felt like you were going to be the only eighteen-year-old in Las Vegas.**

No kids or anything like that.

**Yes, no kids, nothing. But then you ended up loving the city. What about Las Vegas immediately won you over?**

I saw my dad with this kind of energy and feeling like this is the place. Somehow he injected that to me and my mom, I'm pretty sure. Now that I'm adult—and this is just briefly—if I go to another city, you immediately feel a vibe, like, no, I don't see myself living here. I've been to Arizona and New Mexico and Texas, and you feel like, no, I don't see myself living here, but that didn't happen when I moved here. That didn't happen here when I got to Las Vegas. It felt the total opposite. It just felt like home even though the casinos. I didn't see it the way I see it now because now I have kids. I see it a little bit different. But back then I just fell in love. I fell in love with the roads. I'm like, oh my god, the roads are so awesome. The lights. Everybody is so nice, like the drivers. Everything about the city, I just loved it. When I started going to CSN and I started going to work, well, where is the university? Oh man, I was like, I want to be here and I want to do a career here. I want to stay here. That's when I started ESL classes because I didn't know how to speak English at all.

**When you got here at eighteen, you didn't know how to speak any English?**

I thought I did because they taught us a little bit in school, a few classes in Mexico. I'm like, oh, I know. I remember when I went to a drive-through and I was asking for food, the person at the

drive thru was kind of mean because she couldn't understand what I was saying. I was like, I don't know anything. I started buying little books with basic sentences and phrases like, *where are you from?*, *what's your name?*. I realized I really didn't know the English language. I would be watching the local English newscasts, and I would be like this is hard!, I don't understand what they're saying? They were talking so fast. I would put the closed captions and the closed captions had this delay. I got a little bit panicked because I was like, what am I going to do? What did I get myself into? This is just the beginning because I felt like I was living in this new place and it didn't matter my education. I had to start all over and especially with the language. I started going to ESL. I'm going to take the first ESL classes, the basic. Then I found out that CSN was offering ESL classes, too, so I started taking those. There were levels. It was like learning English from scratch; that's how I felt it.

**What year did you start going to CSN?**

CSN was after my son was born, so it was after 2005. I would say maybe 2007, 2008. That's when I started going to CSN and taking the ESL classes and started going up on the levels. Yes, I had my second child back then. I was like, okay, I'm going to continue. I declared a major; first was English, because I wanted to learn English. I didn't know what English was. Then I said, well, maybe business. Then I'm like, I'm going to go for journalism.

The reason why—and I'm sorry I didn't tell you this before—when I came here in 2003, I knew I wanted to study. I was going with my mom. The Latin Chamber of Commerce was offering classes for adults, and she was taking those classes. She was like, "Go with me." I went with her. She would take the classes and I would sit down at a computer because they had these computers and they were like, "You can use it. You can browse the Internet." I remember I was browsing and I went to Yahoo dot com dot MX because I was like, I want to see the news in

Mexico. Something got my attention, Ciudad Juarez, the killings of women. They were investigating more. That was it when I started reading that article, and then I read another one. I started getting so involved in Ciudad Juarez. I was like, what is happening? In Mexico I had no idea that was happening and I would follow the news back in Mexico in my hometown. I started looking at the forums and people talking about it. I was hooked. After we went home I literally spent a week just reading article after article after article after article.

I was reading a lot and I found a comment from a guy who put up posts and it was an editor for a newspaper in Reno. He is like, this is a topic that is so interesting and I cannot believe Mexico is not covering it enough. He put it like that. He is like, "If there is anyone that wants to write for my newspaper, go for it." I contacted this editor and I'm like, "Hey, I just got here. I don't have any experience as a journalist, but I would like to investigate more and write." He's like, "Go for it. Send me whatever you want."

I started doing it on my own. I started investigating and looking at the organizations that were working in Ciudad Juarez. I was like, okay, I'm going to contact them. I wasn't a reporter. I was not a journalist. Now that I look back I'm like, oh man, I was diligently investigating like a reporter. I started calling people, calling the organizations, calling even the police over there, everybody. I'm like, "Can you help me a little bit more to understand this? I read this article and *blah, blah, blah.*"

My first article, I sent it over to this editor and he published it. He sent me the paper copy. He's like, "You're doing good. Do you want to do more?" I said, "Yes." Everything for free. I was writing for free. He was not paying me.

***Was this in Spanish or English?***

In Spanish. After a few articles I contacted El Tiempo here in Las Vegas, and, of course, they said no because they were like, “You have no experience.” They were very nice, but they were like, “No thank you because you’re a rookie with nothing but a dream.” That didn’t stop me. He was very nice. The editor was like, “But I tell you what. Someone is coming here to Las Vegas and they’re going to do an exhibition about *las mujeres de Juarez*, so if you want to go, I’ll send you the info.” I felt like, okay, this is a good sign.

After that I started creating contacts. This exhibit took me to my hometown. There was another organization doing something in my hometown. I drove to my hometown because I still had this tourist visa that was valid, so I went. I interviewed the people there. The people there got me in touch with several mothers of the victims. I was getting myself prepared in journalism and I didn’t even know. I had no idea. I was just writing. I wanted to write about that specific topic.

After that I didn’t stop. I would keep writing for this Reno newspaper for free. I had my children. I continued writing a little bit more. Then I had my second child and I stopped. I’m like, okay, I’m not getting paid. I have to stop and look for an income.

In 2008 I started my first job in the hospitality industry. After that in 2013—I’m just going to jump here really quick—from 2008 until 2013, after working in so many jobs, I’m like, I want to go back to writing. Thank God when I contacted El Tiempo, there was another editor and I told her my story. “Look, this is what I have. I have a few examples of my work if you want to see them.” She was like, “Show me.” I went there and she hired me. I felt like writing for free, even though my parents would call me crazy and my husband back then was like, “You’re crazy. Why are you writing for free?” It’s just that you don’t know the opportunity is going to come eventually. I know they’re not paying me and I spend money going to Mexicali to cover



this event and talk to the mothers. It was just crazy. But I got the opportunity and I started as a freelancer for El Tiempo and eventually I became a full-timer.

***I have to ask. That whole scenario of what was happening with the women in Juarez, weren't you afraid? You're a young mother. You sound very brave to me. How would you describe that time?***

Everybody asks me the same questions, even my mom. My parents were like, "We want you to stop writing about that." My parents got in touch with the editor and they're like, "She is not even twenty-one. You know that, right?" I wasn't even twenty-one. The editor was like, "Yes, I understand your concerns." She is like, "No, you don't understand. If she's writing about that even here in Nevada, their cells, those crime organizations have cells." I'm pretty sure in a lot of cities of the United States, so my parents' fear was that. What if she goes back to Mexico and this happens? I wasn't scared. I don't know why. It was almost like something got ahold of me with this passion inside. My family in Mexico, because I went to see my family and I showed them the newspapers, they're like, "Why are you writing about this? Why are you writing like this?" I'm like, "Because people need to know what's going on. People need to know that nobody is doing anything. People need to know the impunity. People need to know the pain of these mothers that are looking for justice. Why not?" I wish there were more voices of journalists to talk more. I had this huge dream of moving to Texas and be in El Paso. It was crazy. Now that I look back, it's like, oh my gosh, I had all these dreams and energy and desire. No, I wasn't scared. Things changed after I had my children. Things definitely were like, wow, how was I not scared? Sometimes I ask myself the question. When I read those articles, wow, I really wasn't afraid at all. I can tell you it was because of the conviction, because after reading so much. You read about impunity. You read sometimes, but you don't get that involved.

*No one ever threatened you about writing these articles or doing this investigation?*

Well, two things happened. One time I got an email from like a weird...And I feel silly because I opened it and I knew I was not supposed to. I saw this weird email and I'm like, I'm just going to open it. It was Hotmail, my address back then. I opened it and it started going super slow, like the picture was opening very slowly and I think it was the connection, so it didn't hit me right away. It was like opening slow. I remember going, what is that? There was this awful picture of a woman mutilated and it was just that; a woman mutilated.

I got in touch with my editor right away, and I'm like, "Look, this is what I got," and I forwarded the email. He's like, "Well, I think I know what this means and I think you know what this means. What do you want to do?" Because he was planning on flying me to Reno because I think one of the TV stations saw my articles and they wanted to do an interview. I got really excited. My parents, of course, said, "No, you're not doing that. Forget it." My editor was like, "Do you want to change your name? We can change your name, not putting your name anymore. Do you want to keep writing about this?" I think that's when I said, okay, maybe I need to take it slow, after seeing that picture. I didn't stop writing, but I did ask him to not put my name anymore on the articles.

After that, like two days later—and I don't know if this is related; I'm pretty sure it's not—I was coming out from my apartment. I was unlocking the door of my car, the middle of the day. There is this weird guy with a machete. I remember I got super cold in my body. I don't know if he was a neighbor with a machete, if he was someone walking with a machete, but he was looking right in my direction. I remember, oh no, I got really paranoid. I think paranoia kicked in finally after seeing that picture and after seeing a guy with a machete just walking on the complex; that was just odd. Maintenance wouldn't have a guy in plain clothes, but maybe it

was just a random guy, I'm pretty sure. But just the fear when it really kicks in, it also made me realize and wonder, how many people feel this way after they write about something that's not easy or after they write something that you know is going to upset people?

That's when I decided I wanted to be a journalist. I want to keep writing, but I want to do it right. I want to go to school. I want to take the classes. I want to learn the ethics. I want to learn everything about the profession. I just don't want to write. I want someone to edit my work and tell me the structure, everything. That's when I decided I'm going to pursue journalism and I went for it.

**I think it's fascinating this passion you're describing for journalism and especially the story that you wrote about the women of Juarez. Is it the same energy that you had going into law? I think you just maybe found an outlet finally to express that in a way that wasn't corrupt.**

Yes, and I think I felt safe here. This is something: I heard a lot of people from my community. It's not that my city was dangerous; it was, not unlike many others in the border. But when I came here, Las Vegas, and even just being here in the United States, you feel safe. You feel secure. You don't feel fear. You feel like you can talk, you can write, you can express yourself and that's beautiful. I think every single immigrant is going to say that we feel at home. I feel the definition of being at home is feeling safe. I've been trying to go back home. *Was I feeling safe?* When I read the stories about immigrants and when I hear them, they want to feel home and home means safety. That's I think helped me to get into that. When people would ask me in Mexico, "Are you scared?" No, because I feel like I was safe here. Even though I wasn't a citizen, even though I was not even a resident, I was just a Mexican citizen in the United States, but I was still feeling like this city and this country embraced me and the security that you feel

like, okay, nothing is going to happen here, because you see that people here respect the laws, the government. I don't know. You don't see the same type of corruption that you see in Latin American countries, in my country. You don't see that. I know times are changing and I know we're starting to see different things, but even in the midst of all this chaos that's happening and these agreements between the parties and the government, I still don't feel it. I still feel like this is a great country. This is a country that gives everyone the opportunity to be okay, to have a chance for a better life, so that's how I felt.

**Can you go through your—because you came on a tourist visa, yes?**

Yes.

**I guess you technically weren't working, but you were writing articles under the tourist visa, right?**

Yes.

**How did that change? Are you a U.S. citizen now or resident?**

Well, when I got here I was a tourist and I needed income. My dad was working in JCPenney, and he would be like, "Do you want to come work for me? You can clean." I said, "Yes." Of course, I would clean. Then he would be like, "I found out about this job cleaning windows outside a mall. Do you want to do that?" "Yes." I would be super excited, honestly. I never saw that, ooh, how am I going to clean windows? No. It was the total opposite. I wanted to work.

Then I met a lady. "I need help cleaning houses." I would tell them, "I don't have papers." They would be like, "Of course. We'll pay you cash." I would go clean houses, doctors' offices. I ended up at Mandalay Bay, but one of the restaurants there, cleaning a kitchen. My respect goes to people that clean kitchens, any restaurants, because it's one of the toughest jobs. My body was hurting from head to toe. I couldn't believe it was a job so demanding and I think

because you're always trying not to slip. It was crazy. Just to give you an example, I would do everything for cleaning. I was making my own money. It wasn't a lot.

But then I got my husband and he was like, "We need to help you get your legal status." He became a citizen. He was a resident. He became a citizen and that's when the process for me started. After he got his citizenship, we started the process. Immigration asked me, "Did you work?" Yes. "Did you use another name?" No, because I was working, getting paid cash. They had this thing where they forgive people that work as long as they didn't use another person's identity. We were paying taxes. That's when I got my resident, my green card.

I remember the first day as soon as I got—because they give you a work permit first, and then after you get the work permit, you can get the driver's license and then the Social Security; something like that. That's how it started. I started being a resident and then eventually my citizenship.

**Your husband, he was already a resident. Did you meet here or did you meet him in Mexicali?**

I was investigating so much on the Internet about Ciudad Juarez, I met him on a Yahoo chat. I was in this chat trying to find out more and he was there. It's so funny because he's from the same hometown. We're from Mexicali, but he was living in Tucson, Arizona, and I was in Las Vegas. I think that was really destiny. I was about to lose my connection, I remember, on the computer, and I said, "Hey, I'm going to lose a connection." Something was going to happen with my computer that it was going to get shut down. I don't know if it was going to do an update. I cannot recall. But I remember vividly that I said, "Hey, my computer is going to die or something." He sends me his messenger MSN address. I write it down and, *boom*, my computer goes crazy. A few days later I'm like, ooh, I'm going to add him to my MSN. Messenger or

something like that. I added him and after that we started talking on the phone, chatting, and he came to Las Vegas. We met at the airport.

***By technology.***

Yes, right.

**It was MSN Messenger, awesome. You said you had two kids, right?**

Yes, we had two children.

**How old are they?**

My son is thirteen years old. My daughter is ten. We got married in 2005. We stayed together for years. Then in 2013, when I decided that I wanted to write and El Tiempo gave me the opportunity, that's when things got really rocky for us because he didn't like it. He didn't like the fact that I was a reporter. He didn't like that I was going out more and networking with people. He was like, "I don't like that." And I was like, "Well, this is my dream." He's like, "Well, choose. Do you want your dream or do you want me?" I said, "Don't do that to me." But then...

***There you are. How does life change when you got this career going for yourself in Las Vegas? What's it feel like today?***

It feels surreal because I feel so happy when I look back to when I got here, the struggles that we went through, because we went through many struggles with my parents and my brother, and now being able to do what I love, being able to look at my hands. I was cleaning bathrooms. I was cleaning toilets. And I was happy. Now when I look at my work tools, it's a computer; it's a recorder; it's my phone. It's amazing being able to do that. This country has given me that chance and I feel grateful every day. I feel very grateful and when I go interview and write a story about a guest room attendant or if I have to write a story about someone, I can identify myself. I know what to ask. I know what questions or how I am going to get close to them

because I've been there, or even as a mom, if I have to write a story about something related to children, I can relate, so I'm really grateful for that; for the opportunity of being able to go through all of that and then becoming a journalist and not the opposite. I think life has given me so many lessons that I can now in this profession apply.

**You started essentially writing in Spanish, right?**

Yes.

**Then you took a break from that and then El Mundo is really when you got going, right?**

El Tiempo, yes.

**El Tiempo. Sorry. Do you write only in Spanish now, primarily, or do you write in English, or both?**

When I was at El Tiempo, my editor would ask me, for example, "I was in this meeting with the Review-Journal," because it's the sister publication. "They like this article. Write it in English." That's when I started, okay, I need to write this in English. Then I met someone from the police department that had a nonprofit, and he was like, "Do you want to write for this newsletter?" And I said, "Of course." I would write in English. That's how it started.

Mostly, my work has been in Spanish, but I got into the habit of eventually if I want to do something greater than the coverage in Spanish, I'm going to have to start putting myself out there. It felt almost like when I started for that small newspaper in Reno. Writing for this newsletter I had a friend who asked me, "Do you want to write for my magazine, an article about economics?" I would be like, okay, this is going to be practice for the English side.

Then after El Tiempo I went to El Mundo and El Mundo was all Spanish. Then MGM Resorts hires me as a communications partner, so that's all English. All my (coms) that's when I really got into the English writing part. Even though we were like corporate communications, it

was also like writing for a newsletter. We had daily newsletter. I had to make sure that all of that was written correctly. We had to write letters from the CEOs, letters from the vice presidents. We had to write campaigns for the employees. My English boot camp for writing was MGM Resorts because I had to write everything in English. Whenever they needed something translated in Spanish, I was so excited. *Finally I get to do what I know. You weren't supposed to do English. This is just a rare, rare occasion.* It opened my eyes to be like, you know what? Maybe this is the second step. Maybe Spanish is good. It's my language. It's my roots. But my mind was like, okay, maybe the next step is English. I started going crazy and that's when I did this practice of writing in English.

Eventually the opportunity for innovation came and I started producing TV. After they laid us off, the English came back again. Our boss told us, "Here, guys, here is the thing: The media is changing. We're going through layoffs. Don't get stuck into Spanish." Our boss told us, "Go for English." He spoke with me privately. He's like, "Go and apply to Fox 5. Go and apply to Channel 8." And I did. I had to do testing and everything in English. The test that the news station gave you is like, "Write this in English in twenty seconds," and how do you put this and that? I think somehow life is pushing me to get out of my comfort zone from Spanish and start really thinking about writing in English. Here at the Nevada Independent it's mostly Spanish, but when we have to edit our articles, they get translated. If we need to add things, I have to make sure that the grammar is okay and I have to make sure that the structure...I have to write sometimes paragraphs to include in my stories. So slowly...

**I see. You've been incorporating more English.**

Yes.



**I was wondering, do you think you can walk me through your time at each publication, El Tiempo, El Mundo, but also the kind of stories that you were covering locally and what your favorite kind of stories are?**

In Tiempo, since it's a community newspaper, we didn't have a beat, so if I needed to cover anything from breaking news, police-related crime, immigration, concerts. El Tiempo, I was there from 2013 until 2015. Then I moved to El Mundo. I was there for eleven months and that's when I transitioned to MGM. During my time at El Tiempo and El Mundo, it was covering from immigration community, presidential rallies, sports. I didn't know how to write anything about sports, so I had to teach myself how to write about boxing and how to write about the NASCAR and the Monster Jam and UFC. I didn't know anything. That's the beauty of it. I loved that because it pushed me how to write about, I don't know, culture. I wasn't very familiar in covering arts, but El Tiempo specifically if we had to cover something related to art, I would be like, okay, I'm going to get creative here.

The presidential rallies, I would have to say elections is my favorite. Covering elections is one of my passions. You get to meet people that you don't usually meet, but you meet them and you have the opportunity to talk to them. When we interviewed the running mate that was running with Hilary Clinton—I feel so bad I lost his name.

***Tim Kaine.***

Yes. We had the chance to sit down at a round table, just Hispanic media, and talk to him. That was a very nice experience because we were able to connect with him and ask questions.

***And he speaks Spanish.***

Yes. We did both, but he wanted to do it in Spanish. I know eventually we would ask one question or hear it in English. Covering that, talking to them, asking questions. Luis Gutierrez

came to El Mundo and we interviewed him. You get to see another side of them. They're not like they're on TV all the time. When you're in person, you can ask more questions and they can be more candid and more open. I will say that covering the elections, asking questions to the candidates, one of the things that I love about the work that journalists do is that you don't take sides, at least in the atmosphere that I surround myself and the other colleagues that I have. It's really nice when you find colleagues like that that are not going to take sides. We're just going to be unbiased and be able to ask the questions that we would ask a Republican or a Democrat.

I'm passionate about that and covering immigration, helping people navigate, informing people about what options they have here. Do we have anything that we can offer to the community? Any way we can help them? I've heard people that say, "Why are you covering that? Why are you writing about that?" Because I remember when I first came here even writing about, I don't know, CCSD is offering free classes, I would love to do a whole article on vaccinations or ESL classes or whatever the schools are doing to empower minorities or what the schools are doing to empower women and those type of stories. I'm always passionate about finding out more education and how people can take advantage of that.

**I think you bring up a really interesting point about consciously shifting your perspective on culture and things are different, right? You were talking about learning about all kinds of things, like Monster Trucks and NASCAR and all of this. When you first arrived and decided you were going to live here, what was the biggest culture shock for you and for your family? It can be a change in culture that's positive or negative.**

I will say, to be honest, walking, even though this city is beautiful because I love it, but not feeling that familiar. It's going to sound crazy, but how the streets look, it's not like it is in Mexico, and seeing people that are not Latinos. Oh wow, I'm in a place where white people,

African Americans, do they have the same energy? Are they kind? Usually Latinos are very warm and kind. It was that. Also, walking to the store, to anyplace, hey, I'm listening to any Spanish at all. It's all a new language. I don't want to say it was a negative shock. It was like, wow. Those were wow moments, a little bit scary because now it's like a fish swimming in the ocean. You have the fish in this little *pecera*, pool, but then the fish is like, okay, you're going to be in the ocean now with so many different fish; that's how it felt being in a different atmosphere that it wasn't familiar. It wasn't like, I can go eat tacos, *los tacos el esquina*, tacos in the corner, no, no. I think that was the most shocking, but not in a negative way.

It just seems that you've always been a very observational person. How did your diet change?

**Did you guys eat the same foods? What did you miss most about Mexico after you left?**

The tacos, the Chinese food, because, believe it or not, Mexicali has the best Chinese food, even better than San Francisco. It's been rated. There was a huge newspaper that did a story about that. Missing the food, missing those flavors, the ingredients you can find. I always had this idea, oh, the ingredients are not the same; they don't taste the same. I think that was one of the things that we missed the most, and family, of course, not having our family close, not having our *tíos*, *tías*, uncles, aunts, cousins, not having my friends from childhood. I could just wake up and knock on the door of my neighbor and my friend was there. Not having that and starting all over. When I first got here, I didn't know anyone. Now that I look back, it's like, would I do it again? Would I really do it? I don't know. I got here eighteen years old, left everything behind, and didn't know a single person, no friend that I can call, no friend that I can talk to. *Hey, can you tell me where to go? Where are the classes? Where is the university? How do I get there? Can you show me the process if I want to apply for admission?* No, I had no one and no family because our family is kind of scattered, California, a couple in Arizona, but that's it. Nothing

here. At Christmastime, New Year's was lonely for us because it was only my parents and my brother and myself in a small apartment, and then after my husband and our kids. It's usually like that. With time I started meeting people, but it took me years to build friendships, years to start meeting people and getting connected. I still don't know a lot. Now that I look back...

***What neighborhood did you move to?***

I moved to Pennwood and Decatur, and I thought it was the coolest place. When we got our car stolen, twice, I'm like, okay, maybe we're not in the best neighborhood. I told my parents, "I think we're not in a nice neighborhood. The apartment complex looks so pretty and all, but we keep getting our car stolen." Twice it was stolen and the third time we caught the guys trying to open it, so it was almost a third time. I'm like, "Dad, we need to move. I think we're in a red zone."

There was the publication from the R-J; it was a small publication where it had a little map with all the crimes. I don't know if you've seen it. I remember like, *okay, let me see. We are in this area. It doesn't look that bad.* I would drive with my dad. "Let's go Desert Inn all the way to Fort Apache." We found a nice place over there, an apartment complex. We were like, "Maybe this is a good area." That's when I started looking at areas. Where is the southwest? Where is the east? North Las Vegas? Henderson? It was a process and I was working the process and I didn't even know. I honestly didn't even know. When you're a reporter you need to know right away, okay, where is this place? It's so funny because back then I was doing it without even trying. I was doing it without effort. I was just doing it and I was learning about it without even knowing.

**Did you always enjoy writing? Do you read a lot?**

I do. I do like to read. Remember I sold my TV? I had recently started at the R-J with El Tiempo. Since I was a freelancer, I'm like, okay, I don't have any money to pay this month's insurance; I'm going to sell my TV. I remember my kids went crazy. "How are you going to sell the TV?" I'm like, "We're going to be fine. I'll buy you a new one." That never happened. 2013 until now I didn't buy another TV except for them for their room, and it's only cartoons and stuff. But I didn't buy a TV because I started reading a lot and writing a lot and that's how I got more involved with books. I would rather sit down and read a book than watch TV. I'm in the news. If I'm in the news, I'm just going to read them from my app. But I feel like I have this passion to grow. I really want to become a better reporter. I really want to become a better writer. I want to be able to write like my colleagues, the ones that write for the English side. I love everybody there. I wish I had their brain. I haven't asked them, what do you guys do? But they probably read a lot. Yes, that's one of the things, too, that I've always been passionate about reading, but I didn't think it was going to grow to this point until after I got into journalism.

**After you started getting obviously more involved in journalism—we talked about it a little bit. It's a very time-consuming career field, the media is, right? Especially when you started working for El Tiempo and then El Mundo. Were you still keeping up with news that was happening in Mexico? Were you still following that?**

Yes. That hasn't stopped. I think being in the Hispanic media you have to; you have to be able to know what's going on in Latin America, not only in Mexico, but Latin America because you have a Hispanic community here in Las Vegas. They deserve to know what's going on here for the Hispanics, but, at the same time, what's going on in their countries. That grew even more being in television, producing newscasts for Univision Nevada here in Las Vegas. When I went to Texas to produce San Antonio, I would wake up in the morning and start watching the

newscasts and reading the digital sites from Mexico and really getting involved, Excélsior, El Universal, all the newspapers from Mexico, and the most important newspapers from Argentina, Peru, to see what's going on in Latin America, Venezuela, Colombia. I would keep myself in front with the latest news and I think it's important. I think as journalists you have to.

Hispanic journalists have an even greater duty to their readers or the viewers here in the United States because it's not like if I was an American journalists and I'm only writing for people in English. Yes, I'm going to write about what's going on in the U.S. and the reporters write about what's happening in the world. But for Hispanic journalists, you have a duty because you're writing for people from so many different countries, but they're under the same umbrella; we're all the Hispanic community. It's not like we say people from El Salvador; people from Colombia. We all fit under that umbrella of Hispanic, so I think it's important for journalists to know what's going on in the United States, but in our own countries.

***I'm going to ask because you mentioned earlier that immigration was also a topic that you have a passion for reporting on. Can you expand on that? Tell us more about that passion especially with the political climate and the border and the children being separated from families and all of that. Do you feel that you could share something about that with us?***

Yes. From a reporter's perspective it's one of the things that affected me the most, being a reporter and a producer, was the separation of families in the border. I was actually in Texas when the whole thing happened. I remember I was producing the newscast and I had to write the scripts for the newscasts and help my reporters to write something presentable and unbiased. It was a fight; it was an internal fight and, at the same time, it was a fight with our newsroom because you have—and it's crazy. In journalism right now you can actually see when you're taking one side. I'm the type of journalist that I don't want to take sides. I want to be able to

present families being separated and the pain of the mothers and the fathers and the children and what our government is doing and why are they doing it, but I also want to present the other side. I want to present, what's happening in the world? Why is this happening? Can we go and talk to the Border Patrol? Is it really that bad? Sometimes people that are above you don't like that because, oh that doesn't sell. What sells is having the mom and the kid crying. We're going to focus on that. I'm like, no, reporters are not supposed to do that. I think we're supposed to present both sides. If one side is stronger, yes, we present that and we also presented the other side as weak, but we are presenting both.

Another topic of immigration is a mother, I think, was in the limbo of deportation because she didn't have her driver's license. I remember I saw that story when I moved back from Texas, but I had been working with the police here Las Vegas. This was a story here in Las Vegas. I remember talking with the police. I was an immigrant myself, undocumented at one point, too. I remember I got a ticket and I didn't have money to pay for it and I had to do community service. I had to go and clean bathrooms with one organization, but I paid my ticket off with that. I remember one of the news stations here in Las Vegas pictured this mom that didn't have the means to pay for that and now is in the limbo of deportation. I'm like, well, if I was a reporter or the producer, I would have asked the police department what options did you have? And that didn't happen. I saw one of the PIOs from the police department got really upset and he posted on the website. "How come you guys didn't say that we offer this? If you don't have money, we offer this? We have community service or we offer payment plans." That's the kind of journalism and the reporting that we owe to the community, especially with immigration. With immigration we have to be very careful. We have to be very careful how we present the news, how we present the stories.

The reason I'm very passionate about it is because I want to inform people. I think people need to be informed. When I was going through my process to become a resident, I believe they wanted to charge me seven hundred dollars for a background check. The background check for the FBI is only fifty bucks because you only have to pay for the fingerprints and that's it. That lawyer wanted to charge me seven hundred, almost a thousand dollars just to do a fifty-buck fingerprint thing. That's one of the things that makes me question about immigration. People get really cheated all the time. People don't really know how to navigate the system. People don't know where to go to ask for help. *What organizations can help me?* Situations like the mother that was in the limbo of deportation; that's when the reporters and the journalists have to be able to put that information out there. Don't sell the news. Also inform that there were other options for this lady so that people that are probably going through the same thing can navigate that situation. I think that's why I'm passionate about that.

**With that being said, you brought up how you should not only know about the news in your community, but also the news from your country or Latin America in general. How has being here amongst all these other people and all these other nationalities changed how you identify yourself?**

Being surrounded by other nationalities?

**Yes. Has it made you more aware, would you say?**

To be honest, yes, it changes you. It changes you a lot. I'm an interpreter, too. When I do interpreting over the phone, and I love that I can combine those two jobs—when I hear the people, you can tell when the Social Security office asks, "Where are you from?" *El Salvador*. "Where are you from?" *Peru*. You feel a sense of connection. It's not that the United States is only Mexicans or the majority of the people in the Hispanic community are Mexicans. You have



to get rid of that label. I think it's making me more aware that if I thought my country was bad in the sense of corruption and crime, I can tell you now that I have seen people come in from El Salvador or Guatemala or the people that I've interviewed that have it even worse. It's making me have more empathy, to be more aware. If I thought I was suffering, that's nothing. If I thought I had it bad, there is a lady who came through the caravan; there is this child that came through the caravan. It opens your eyes when you are here surrounded not only by other Hispanics, but people from Africa, people that came as refugees. It really opens your eyes and it makes you feel like we are all in this together. I wish everybody knew all the people that are here that were not born in the United States are not here trying to intrude or trying to invade, they just want to work and they just want to—and I'm going to repeat that again—be in a place that feels like home; that finally feels like I can make a home here and I can raise my family here and I can be with a peace of mind that if my son gets sick, he's going to receive good medical attention, good care, and that if my son is going to school, or my daughter is going to school, they're going to learn because the education system here is good and that if I'm going to be a victim of a crime—I hope not—but if I'm going to, I know that authorities have my back; that I don't have to sit down in an office and my request just typed in and never going to be processed and never going to be investigated. I don't feel, and I know many people don't feel like that here in the U.S. They know they can go to the police. They can go and report. Telling you these things, I feel them in the U.S. and I know a lot of people feel the same way. Yes, we're not perfect. I say we because I consider that this country adopted me already. We are not perfect, but we are better than other countries and we are better than other places. If we weren't I wouldn't be able to see so many people from different nationalities walking around, working, driving a cab, driving Uber, working in those casinos, going to school. Even my colleagues that are Hispanic—and I

understand the climate is awful. We are not perfect. The reason we keep seeing this flow of immigrants and people coming is because they know, they know.

**How have you seen the city evolve through your reporting since you started both when it comes to the people and, otherwise, politically, infrastructural-ly; all of that?**

It's a huge change because I remember even when I was living in my other place, I was living next to a field that was plain open and now it has huge stores and more buildings. It is amazing. It's amazing to see how it has grown, the growth to Las Vegas throughout the past years it's been going through, not only casinos, not only the stadium, not only that we have sports teams now, but in the political sphere, too. We have more women involved. Just this session we're making history. Seeing the empowerment of women in the city and the state, it's an example. We are now the example for the country. That makes me really happy. I know now that I have children, and one of the things always is I really wish we could improve our education. Why are we always at the bottom? We have a new superintendent and we have seen changes. I know the city is growing and seeing the new legislation for different things that have been improved, without mentioning one in particular, I think we're getting there and we're going to get there. Having a new governor from another political party, it might seem small, but, at the same time, it's not, and I love that about Las Vegas; that if people want a change, they'll make it happen and the results are there.

It's been exciting to see the way our city has grown with the roads and we went through that recession in 2008 and you didn't see anything being built, homes forfeited. We see these house complexes, condos, apartment complexes, and it's exciting. I'm glad I'm here and that I can be a part of the community and be able to witness that.

**Going off of that, how would you like to grow as a person? It seems like you've just continually kept growing. What would you love to do? What would be that new dream that you have?**

I feel like I would like to grow a lot. I think my next goal in life would be to be more aware. I consider myself open, but to be even more open, to embrace change, to embrace the challenges. I think my next dream will be to write for—I am working for an English publication, but to be the reporter for that beat in English, to be the reporter assigned to that beat and it has to be in English. I think that's my next step. To be able to apply one day to a newspaper that I know is going to be only English; in the professional side that would be my next step. Am I close? I don't think so because Spanish is my first language, but you want the story to be perfect. You're like, how do I move this? How do I say this? Even in my own language it's like, wait. I cannot even imagine how it's going to be for me to write in a language that is not my native language. But when I read the stories from my colleagues and when I see them on the field, I want to do that. I'm like, I want to be able to do that; I want to be able to go in that mode and get that deadline and start writing in English and make a bigger impact. Right now we are informing the Hispanic community, and when our stories get translated to English we're informing the whole state. But to do an article in English from a Hispanic perspective or an issue that you know affects Hispanics, but you want to make people from that other language aware; that I think is going to be very exciting and that's going to be a change and a challenge for me, and I hope I can make it.

***Are there any mentors there for you doing that already that you look up to?***

Yes, there is one reporter that I look up to, Michelle Rindels. She is my hero from the Nevada Independent. All of them, Megan and Jackie and Riley, when I read their stories, it's like, oh my god, how can they write so perfect? Of course, Jon Ralston, when I see the way he writes. My

editor in Spanish, Luz. To me the way I see them, they're all my mentors and those role models that I really want to get a bit of everybody and create my own and be my own. When I see them and when I see their work, I wish I could write like that.

**You're at an exciting publication right now with the Nevada Independent. Talk about getting that job there.**

That job, I remember I applied when we knew the layoffs were coming for Univision. I was like, okay, I'm going to reach out to them. I sent Luz and Jon an email. I just grabbed their emails from the website. I sent them my work. I wrote this nice email. "I want to see if you're looking." Luz got in touch with me. She is like, "Can you get me more examples of your work?" I did that. We set up an interview to meet. She was like, "Okay, we'll let you know." Then they called me for a second interview and that's when Telemundo San Antonio hired me. I said, "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I'm moving to San Antonio. It's a great opportunity." She was like, "No worries. Let's stay in touch."

Things happened. It didn't go as planned. I ended up coming back from San Antonio after a few months to Las Vegas. I remember the next day after I was back in Las Vegas—when you feel like something is pushing you, like, hey, do this, like in your heart, that little fire, you don't even think. I'm like, okay, I'm going to get in touch with Luz. I just did it. I felt like I'm just going to do it. I said, "Hi, Luz, I'm back in Vegas. I was wondering if you guys are still looking for someone." I think they had someone or the person was leaving because he got another offer. They didn't even know. I just knew they hired someone after I declined the offer, the other interviewee. She is like, "Yes, let's talk." I remember she set up another interview for two weeks. I'm like, don't lose faith. It's two weeks. That's when I met with Luz and Michelle.

They interviewed me and they said, “We’ll let you know.” After a few days they offered me the job as a freelance reporter.

My first assignment was a story about refugees. This is something that I’m pretty sure is never going to go away that every time I write a story it feels like the first time. Every single time I submit a story for my editor, it feels like it is the first story that I’ve written as a journalist. I feel it in my stomach. It’s like, it’s probably not going to look good; it’s probably going to be bad and they’re going to...But it’s just that excitement, that expectation of yourself. I want to do something and you’re doing something that you love and you’re doing something that you like and it doesn’t feel like a routine. My job is not a routine; I never feel that. That’s why I’m so passionate about this profession. I’ve been writing for so many years and this publication I know and I’m a few months, but to be able to write and feel like it’s your first article, it’s such an amazing experience. It’s beautiful.

**It’s also a newer publication, right? It’s more statewide than a lot of these previous places that you’ve worked. Is that a goal of yours? I know you said that first you want to cover a beat in English, right? But you can be honest. Do you want to write for a national publication? Is that something you would like?**

Eventually yes. I’m happy where I’m at. The way I picture myself in the Nevada Independent is to maybe one day jump into the English side, to have a beat or just to be a reporter for the English side, and then just do some work for the Spanish. I want to push myself to that; I want to be able to write in English. But eventually, maybe in a few years, yes, I do see myself working for a nonprofit, like maybe ProPublica or The Marshall Project, a news site like that. I see that. I visualize it and I picture it, but, at the same time, it’s like, is it going to happen? You have to read more than what you’re reading. You have to write more than what you’re writing. But I do

see it. I love when I see those stories, for example, in ProPublica and they come up with these investigations. It's like, wow; that type of research. I'm not making the other ones less, like the New York Times and the Washington Post. Those are publications that I respect, too. I read the Wall Street Journal. I read everything. But I do see myself in a nonprofit at a national level one day, I hope.

**You brought up earlier that the media is changing and that they let you guys know that the media was changing. What kind of voices do you feel are missing from the media? Earlier you also said that you're a Hispanic person writing in English, so it's from your perspective. Do you feel like more voices need to be included in the conversation, and what kind would you like to see included?**

Minorities. We need to have more minorities. We need to have more reporters that are from minorities; that background. We need to be able to write—and I see it in the English publications. I'm like, I wish we had more. I think we need to have more women enrolled, more women talking about issues, and minorities talking about the issues that affect minorities and to be able to report that. I think that would be a huge step forward if we do that.

From the digital side perspective, I think we live in an era where journalism reporters need to take our job as something sacred because in our hands we have these amazing tools that we can communicate faster than we ever did. People have access to the information in a way that it blows my mind every time I see my phone and the news. When I think back, going back to when my dad would read the newspaper, you don't have that anymore. You can just grab your phone and see. The media has so much power and I think we have to use it wisely. I know we're not doing a bad job, but I think we can definitely do better.

**Can you elaborate on that? How would you like to see it changed for the better?**

For example, the reporting that we do for the president, sometimes I think we focus on things that are not as important as if we were reporting about other issues. I don't think people really want to know about how many times the president tweeted on Sunday. Is that really important? Do you really want to spend twenty seconds of our time writing a deal about that? Or do you want to write about things that matter, things that are happening? How about a follow-up with the separation of families, what's going on in those shelters? How many children are still left? Why are we writing about the executive time, the schedule that just came out on Axios? I was reading that in the morning and I was like, okay, well, it's executive time. You know what I mean? Use the tools wisely; I wish we could do that. I wish I could see that on the major newscasts. I watching an interview with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. They were talking about that. I say, what type of courage are we really giving to the president? Just to mention one topic. Are we really doing the public a service reporting so much about certain things? Really, do people care about that? I think that could be a good example in my opinion.

**What has been your favorite story that you ever covered? Or a story that impacted you a lot? How about that?**

I want to say the refugee story, my first story with the Nevada Independent; that really impacted me because I had no idea about the process. I knew part of the process, but I didn't know that people can actually spend years on those camps. It sounds crazy. How do you know that? But I really didn't know. I didn't really know people would walk for so many miles and days. I knew the travesty of the sea, but hearing it...It's one thing when you see it on TV and when you read about it. But hearing someone sitting right next to you and telling you their story, telling you that that person worked in Afghanistan working for the federal government, the government of the United States, and he can't even bring his family, hearing that changes you. Hearing that and

listening to that it changes you as a person completely, and that's one of the things that I love about this profession. That story, the separation of families that we covered in Texas, I never, never cried like I did during that week because it was very, very draining. Your energy after the newscast was done, everybody...And I knew everybody was feeling the same way because reporting that constantly and me having children and looking at the children, it was very difficult not to break and not to feel affected. That story, the separation, and the refugees and the influx of children traveling when it started in 2014 and I was working for El Tiempo. I think those stories have impacted me tremendously.

**How do your parents feel now that you're a journalist and you've continued to cover it?**

**Are they still scared? How do you feel? Do you still feel safe?**

I do feel safe. I do feel very safe. If I have to, I will tell you, now that my kids are a little bit older, if I have to—I drove by El Paso and I almost go to Ciudad Juarez, but I'm like, okay, I'm not going to do it because I'm going to panic everybody in Vegas. I would write again about that. Now that they're older I feel very safe. You see a lot of crazy things happening to journalists all over the world, in Mexico, too.

My parents, to be honest, they don't like my profession. They feel pride and they feel happy when they see me. One of my first interviews for El Tiempo was Harry Reid. My dad still has that screensaver with me and Harry Reid because he thought it was the coolest thing. But they don't like it. They feel like me as a mom and a reporter is not a combination. I can tell you that my mom is like, "I don't understand. Your kids need you. You should have a balance." My dad tells me the same thing. My dad is like, "Why don't you go back to the casinos? Why don't you go back to work there?" Because it's not what brings me fire. It's not what lights up my heart. It's not what drives me in the morning. It's not what pushes me. Yes, it's draining and,



yes, you get tired and sometimes you can't even write because you're so stressed out and you get this block, and that has happened to me. It's like, oh man, I can't even write a sentence. But you know it's temporary and you know you need to recharge batteries and be better. But, no, they don't feel happy.

**How has having, I guess, more constrained time, how has that affected any traditions that you, one, have brought from Mexico, you and your family, and that you have made here?**

**How have those traditions changed?**

It's difficult. Throughout the years I'm trying to be more, okay, I need to set up more time for that tradition. I spent New Year's with my family in Mexico. I never did that, not even being in Mexico. In Mexicali we were always separated. My other family would go to Tijuana or Mexico City. But this past year I'm like, okay, I think I'm in a good place emotionally and I feel like there is a little bit more balance, so let me go back to those roots. I took my children and we went to Mexicali and we spent that whole tradition being with my family, cooking and making everything. I think now that I see what families go through and that not everybody has that luxury, I can take advantage of that. I can be like, you know what? It's not going to hurt me if I go. The same here at Christmas, my mom wasn't here, but my dad and I said, "Dad, let's do a posole. Let's do this special drink. Let's make it happen. Let's do it." I know our time is very limited. I know I can get called into work, maybe, but it doesn't matter. I think finding those moments to keep those traditions alive is important.

***How are you handling the language with your children? Are they learning Spanish?***

Yes, they do. The rule that I kind of apply is only Spanish at home because I want for them to be able to be fluent. My son, perfectly, he perfectly speaks Spanish and English. My daughter was struggling because she wanted to speak English all the time. I'm like, "No, Lily, you have to

speak Spanish.” I know they’re scared because my husband back then was like, “They’re going to get confused. You need to talk to them in English. Don’t talk to them in Spanish.” I’m like, “No. They’re sponges. They’re not going to get confused. Trust me on this. Let’s just talk to them in Spanish.” I was even trying to put French. I would buy them DVDs. “Come on, let’s learn French. Let’s do it. You can learn five languages.” But he got really freaked out. But, no, it’s Spanish only at home. I put my daughter to read with me because I read in both languages. I try to read in Spanish with her so she can get familiar with the grammatical, and I do the same with my son, so, yes, they know both.

**And you’re teaching them how to write as well, or...?**

Teaching them little by little. My son knows, but my daughter is kind of like, “How do I write this?” She’s struggling the most, but, yes.

*I was interested...We hadn’t touched on the cultural part, like holidays, you’ve touched upon that, a little bit with the news and the food traditions and making sure the kids have that sense of...Because your parents are still here?*

Yes, they are still here.

*What kind of careers did they pursue here?*

My dad, went to school in Mexico. He did a technical school after high school. My mom didn’t finish high school. They wanted to stay in the hospitality industry, housekeeping; that was their goal. It’s so beautiful because I was interviewing Tom Rodriguez the other day, and he said, “The Hispanic community, it’s not only about the big casinos, figures and the politicians.” And he said something that I got so stuck in my heart. He’s like, “Steve Wynn had a dream. He built these amazing casinos. But what about the Hispanic people that wanted to be in that casino and that was their dream?” When he said that the first picture that came to my mind was my parents.

My mom works at the Wynn, and when she got her job as a guest room attendant, she was the happiest, like the happiest. She was so excited. She got her uniform measured and she went to get her shoes. She is so proud and I love that because she's proud to be...She is like, "They give me lunch in this buffet." And I know because I've been in the casino industry. I'm like, "Yeah, Mom?" And she's like, "Yes, it's so..." To me it's so cute to see that. When Tom said that I was like, yes, my mom's dream was to work for that casino.

I applied one day. I didn't get hired and she got hired. I'm like, "Mom, you're lucky. You're smarter than me because they hired you and they didn't want to hire me. I tried two times." I see that pride. She's happy. She loves her job. I don't know how she wakes up in the morning, I have no idea how she does it, but she wakes up super early. She is never late. She is never late and she cleans so many rooms every single day and she comes home and if she wants to go out with my children or with me or help me with something, she would. I love that.

My dad pursued the same; he works in housekeeping, but for Vdara, and he's the happiest. He is like, "*Mija*, I don't know why you don't get a job here. You could be answering the phones. You would have a good salary, days off, retirement." But, you see, Tom said that's their dream; that's their goal, and they're happy, and they're good where they're at. I'm like, "Dad, you just have to understand that I have other dreams, but be supportive like I am of you."

My dad says he's going to retire there. My mom, she's looking for a change. She's like, "I'm getting tired, but I don't want to leave the company." I know eventually she might change into something. But my dad is definitely loving it there. He's a utility house person and he loves it.

**Growing up what did your mom do, and your dad? What were their professions? Where did they work?**

My mom and my dad never—well, my dad, yes. Let me rephrase. My dad for some time was selling these new cell phones. There was a new company in Mexico that came from Spain and they had these beautiful cell phones and it was the newest thing. My dad got into that and he did really well. He was making good money until the frenzy for those phones stopped. That's when he had to go back to the U.S.

But my dad, his thing has been selling and restaurants. He was a waiter and he did very well. That's a good thing. I remember when I was eight years old I would invite my friends and my dad would come out with his tie. I had a couple of friends say, "Ooh, your daddy's so cute." Things like that, like children. He would come out and smell really nice and very sharp. Yes, he did very well in the restaurant industry as a waiter and then into sales. I know he felt like the money wasn't enough, so that's when he was coming back and forth from the U.S.

My mom, her mentality is I want to be my own boss, so that's why she got into that swap meet. *Okay, I'm going to go buy in the U.S. and sell the things.* She's always been like that so she got into that. She worked for a factory for a few years, I want to say, but I think she worked for one year and then resigned and then she went back, but she didn't stay. She is like, "No, I can make more money selling," even though the time was more consuming. She had to leave us at home, like I told you, by ourselves. We didn't have anyone that picked us up from school. In her mentality she would have money more tangible than if she was in a factory.

***This is really good. Any other stories that we haven't touched upon that you'd like you to share with us?***

**Or that you want to share; that you want to talk about?**

Oh man.

*This is a very interesting situation: you've interviewed some of the students who are working on this project. How do you see the value of this project? We haven't read your article yet.*

*When are we going to learn about ourselves in that?*

This is very interesting because this is one of the articles that I loved from the beginning, but, at the same time, when you set that bar high...I set my bar extremely high and now it's like, how do I reach it? I struggle because I'm like, what is the message that we want to send out? What is the message that this project really wants to send? I think the first word that comes to my mind; it's *inspiration*. I've heard it from your students, too. It is inspiration. You want to be able to inspire people. You want to be able to inspire the people that are here, the people that know the stories, and the people that are coming tomorrow, and the people that are going to come in a few years. You want to inspire everybody. I think the Hispanic community has that ability to inspire not only people from our own community, but people from other backgrounds.

Like Tom was saying, "I know some people were born here. Some Hispanics didn't have to come; they were born here. But their parents did, or maybe the people that are cleaning one room right now, she did. What are their stories?"

That's one of the things that impacted me when he said that. It's like, he's right. Where are those stories? Yes, I see like a big politician, but I want to learn about someone that can be my reflection, someone that I can identify myself with right now. I think this project gives that opportunity and I love it for that. I love the fact that you guys are taking the time to learn more, to understand more, and to see different perspectives and to hear from different people. *What was your childhood like? Why are you here? What are your dreams? What are you doing right now? What are you going to do tomorrow?* I think that's an amazing thing.

I think when people read that if they feel scared, feel any fear or uncertainty, they're not going to. How can you feel uncertain if you are reading so many stories of people that are here and they've made it? I'm not saying in the way like, oh they made a name for themselves, no. They are living here. They are still here. They're living their lives in spite of whatever happened, in spite of anything.

**Thank you for joining us today.**

Thank you.

*We really appreciate this interview. This is great.*

Thank you so much.

**[End of recorded interview]**