

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARITA V. REBOLLAL

An Oral History Conducted by Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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

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

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PREFACE



Margarita V. Rebolal is a lifelong community organizer and advocate for Latinx civic engagement and rights. She shares what it was like to grow up in Ponce, Puerto Rico and recalls her childhood memories growing up on the island. After her father passed away, Rebolal's mother faced the challenge of raising and supporting eight underage children. In New York City, New York, the young widow found work and gradually sent for her children to join her over the coming years. From age seven to eleven, Margarita remained with their grandmother. New York would be a cultural adjustment for the precocious Margarita.

In this oral history, she details her life journey from New York to California, and eventually to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1996. Love and marriage, children, and a robust passion for community service and civic engagement. She is well-known for her role in founding the Puerto Rican Association of Las Vegas, creation of the Hispanic International Day Parade of Nevada, and being Executive Director of Community Services of Nevada.

Rebolal also discusses her 2019 campaign for the Ward 1 Las Vegas City Council seat.

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February 28, 2019
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

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[Recording begins mid-conversation]

I talked to Leo, the executive director. “Hey, Leo, my son said this. What do you think?” And, “Yes, Margarita, go for it.” It’s kind of like I got energized and I went on the last day.

What was the last day to register to run?

The second of February. And she was born on the thirty-first.

What position are you running for?

City of Las Vegas City Council, Ward One. Then I talked to Leo and he said, “Here, Margarita, you’ll be our candidate.” And I said, “I don’t know. I’ll have to think about it. I’ll call you later on tonight.” Then I called him and said, “I decided.” Then I said, “Well, I texted some people to go with me to register. Tomorrow is the last day to register.” And he said, “We’ll go with you.” I got that picture there. They went with me and I registered and here I am.

Here you are. And where are we? That’s a good segue.

That’s a perfect segue.

Well, we are in Margarita Rebolal’s house. It is February 28th, 2019. My name is Marcela Rodriguez-Campo and I am with...

Barbara Tabach.

Margarita Rebolal.

Margarita, can you go ahead and spell your name for us?

Margarita, M-A-R-G-A-R-I-T-A. Rebolal, R-E-B-O-L-L-A-L. I do use the initial V for my maiden name, Velazquez, which is V-E-L-A-Z-Q-U-E-Z.

Thank you, Margarita. I’m very curious to understand how you’ve arrived at this moment, so take us back. Where were you born? What was it like?

I was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, which is one of the towns in the southern part of the island. That's where I lived until I was twelve years old. My dad died when I was seven and the inheritance that he left for my mom was eight underage kids. Then what happened is about a year later I hear my mother talking to my grandmother, saying to her, "Well, I'm going to go and then I'll send for the kids." I was just a little girl, but I remember that. My grandmother said, "No problem. It's okay." She said, "I'm going to go live with a friend of mine," and she left for New York and she left us with our grandmother. Every time we saw an airplane flying above, all of us would go, "Bye, Mommy, bye, bye." We thought that our mom was on that plane.

Time went by. When I did go to live with my grandmother. Before she left, my mother had not registered me in school even though I was already eight years old. Later, I remember my grandmother said to my oldest sister, "Well, I think it's time for Margarita." They used to call me Margaot, M-A-R-G-A-O-T. "I think it's time for her to go to school." Then they went and got my birth certificate just when I was ten years old. But before that, my grandmother put me in a little private school paying twenty-five cents a week. By the time I was registered in school, I was ten years old. I went to first grade and second grade in Puerto Rico. But being that I had gone to the little private school that my grandmother used to pay twenty-five cents a week, I was able to really get into the whole shebang of public.

While I was in school, I was attracted to acting. I liked poetry. I liked singing. You name it. I got involved in everything in school when I was in the first and second grade. In Puerto Rico, in Christmastime they do all kinds of religious events. I was the choir lead singer in the first grade for the Christmas events in Puerto Rico. In the second grade they were teaching us English. During the second grade I was part of the Halloween children plays. One of the kids didn't show up, and so I had to play two characters since I have memorized everything about the

play. It was a Halloween show and I would change my mask to a pumpkin and then change my mask to an owl, back and forth, and I recited poetry during that show. In second grade we also had the Christmas parties and pageants and I was also part of the choir.

I've always loved music because my grandmother would get out of bed and go in the kitchen and start singing. I know all the songs from the old days because I would listen to my grandmother singing along with the radio. It was nice. Right now I still remember all those songs that I learned while my grandmother was singing them.

Then the time came to leave Puerto Rico; I was twelve years old. In May 1952, the three youngest of my mom's children were flown to New York, where my older brothers and sisters had been sent to already. The three youngest ones were the ones who stayed the longest with my grandmother, for an entire four years of our lives.

When you were in Puerto Rico, what was the situation there like at that time?

While I was in Puerto Rico, life wasn't too bad. I mean, we did innocent bad things as kids led by my oldest sister [Alma], like waiting for the hens to lay the eggs and exchanging them for candy. She is still alive. She lives in Puerto Rico. But we had fun. We went to church. Whenever they had the carnivals, we went to the carnivals and we rode on the *sillas voladoras*, the flying chairs, they call them. We had fun that way. We used to go swimming in the creek. We used to go fishing for shrimps, play spinning tops, and marbles. I learned how to fish for shrimp with my father.

Even though my father died when I was seven, he taught me a lot of things. He was a baker. Sometimes he would take me to the big bakery where he worked. At that time he was paid seven dollars a week; that was his salary to support the whole family. He would take me with him. He would lift me up and show me how deep the oven was and where they had the long

sticks to turn the bread over. The other thing he taught me was how to fly kites. We would go to the river and we would fly kites. I can start a kite without wind, getting it up there in the air is not that hard.

I have very good memories of my dad towards me, but not towards my mom because he used to hit her, yup he used to hit her. In those days men just—ooh, I get so mad—men used to beat their wives. It was part of the culture and I hated it. Sometimes he would come home drunk and then start fighting with my mom. I had two older sisters, so my middle sister would grab the youngest one, my two brothers and myself, and go next door to the neighbor, who had a really tall statue of the Virgin—Saint Michaels. We would hide behind that statue, afraid that our father would come after us. That was bad. Other than that it was not too bad when living with my parents.

One time I almost drowned. I have always been so nosy and so into everything. Where was a better humungous tree, known as Ceiba, which was uprooted. There was water in the hole. All the other kids were jumping back and forth over the Ceiba. They were jumping back and forth. At that time, I'm only about maybe five years old because my dad died when I was seven. There goes Margot jumping over the hole, but instead I went straight into the hole full of water. I remember it was like I was going into a black tunnel and I felt somebody grab me by my dress and pull me up. I don't know how long had passed before I woke up, but when I woke up I was at home lying down on a white sheet and all naked. I must have been about five. On the balcony, *balcón*, floor and I remember my mother saying to my dad, "*Carmelo, ¿se despertó la nena!*" Saying, "Carmelo, the baby is awake." I remember that. That was a good thing.

I remember our house was built on stilts, so I remember playing under the house with a neighbor. I can't remember her name. I was maybe five, six years old. My dad died when I was

seven. I remember we were playing and we're eating dirt cakes and everything. We actually ate the dirt. It was part of the whole game. It tasted kind of yucky, but we were playing house.

Then she says to me, "You want me to pierce your ears?" And I say, "Yes, why not?" So she pierced my ears. She took a needle and she put a cork behind my ear and she pierced my ears. They never got infected or nothing. When I got upstairs with two strings tied to my ears, because that's the way it was done and you're supposed to put saliva in the morning, the first saliva, and then roll it over back and forth so that it won't get infected, so I would do that, and all was fine.

My mother asked me, "Who did that to you?" I think it was Rosie; I think that was her name. She calls my dad, "*Carmelo, mira lo que le hicieron a la nena.*" Because I was his baby. I was his youngest little girl and I was his favorite. He came over and he asked who did that. I gave him the name. Then my mother just said, "Okay, just make sure in the morning that you keep moving the strings so that you don't get infected." It never got infected.

Then one day my dad comes home with a pair of ear loops. I felt so bad when I lost them because my dad had given them to me and I loved them. Walking one day I lost one. I don't even remember where we were going. Then I lost the other one. But I would love to have kept them.

Those are the good memories about my dad. He was a good dad to me. He was a monster with my older brothers. You know what he would do if they did something wrong? He would kneel them on the grater. In those days, that was acceptable, it was not child abuse. That was not brutality. That was nothing. Just like beating their wives was acceptable. They kept having babies. I mean, my mother, you're going to have eight kids from a guy who beats you up? There are still some women accepting it as a norm. He was good to me, but he was not very good with my mom or the older children. He supported us and everything with the seven dollars a week that

he earned and we always had food. It's not like we starved. We had a lot of bread at home and pastries all the time.

Talk about your mom.

My mom, poor thing, I don't know how she did it and then I feel sad when I think about her and I start crying. I don't know how she did it. She was a good mother. She even made all our clothes. I don't remember ever going to a store. The same while living with my grandmother who made all our clothes.

You said she left you in...

In Puerto Rico, with my grandmother, brothers, and sisters.

Because she needed to...

My father passed and a year later she left all of us and went off to New York because she had to, not because she wanted to. It took four years before I met with my mother again, but I never resented it because I know she did it to give us a better future. No, she was good. I was her favorite. I guess because I was the one that was most outgoing of the children, the adults and the younger ones, and I was always into everything. I was always curious. I was Curious George when I was a kid. She took me wherever she went and she took me shopping. Whenever she went shopping by herself, she came home with something for me and my middle sister would get so jealous, she would beat me up for no reason.

On weekends we would be the ones cleaning the apartment, which reminds me that in that apartment, when we first came to New York, me and my two younger brothers, we went to live in a basement and then we had access to the backyard. Coming from Puerto Rico and having all kinds of trees in our backyard and all kinds of fruit—there was a fig tree in the backyard and we didn't even let the figs ripen... We would be climbing all over that tree and eating the figs

until the landlord got mad and she said, “No,” and told us we had to move. In those days you had to purchase apartments. You didn’t just say, hey, there’s a vacant apartment over here; I’m going to go there and see if I can get it, no, you had to buy it. All my mother could afford was a one-bedroom apartment. She had to pay five hundred dollars to buy it empty, no furniture, nothing. You had to put everything in there.

What part of New York City were you in?

South Bronx. I grew up in the South Bronx, J-Lo Country; that’s what I call it, J-Lo Country. I remember getting lost when we first got there. First lived in a basement then we moved into an apartment, all of us lived there. We had a bed in the living room, practically in the kitchen. We had a couch that we closed during the day. We had one bedroom where I slept with my sister and my mother, and then my brothers slept in the living room. That was the life I had there while growing up.

When I first arrived in New York—we were learning English in Puerto Rico—first- and second-grade English. Because of my age they decided I belonged in the fifth grade. I didn’t have third or fourth grade. I was skipped to the fifth grade. Then to the seventh grade, no sixth grade either. I was a quick learner, but my brothers learned English faster than I. It seemed like in those days the boys learned English much faster than the girls because the girls were at home and the boys were out there in the street playing baseball, playing whatever they did, and my brothers picked up the English really fast. They were very young, too. I was twelve and each one is three years younger than the other one. I still have an accent, my deceased husband loved it. My brothers never had an accent, but me, I still have an accent. In those days we didn’t have the bilingual dictionaries. We just had English dictionaries. I would just walk around with my dictionary. Whenever I didn’t know some words, I would look it up in the dictionary.

I really loved reading magazines. That's what we all did. They always had these *novelas* in English and Spanish and I would always be reading either English or Spanish. In the English one is where I learned what the word *pregnant* was because in every single love story the girl always got pregnant in high school. It was a word that was repeated in every single love story.

One day, when I was in the fifth grade, the teacher comes to me towards the end of the year and she says, "Margarita, we are going to send a message to your mother," That's when I started using Margarita. Before I was Margot. "Margarita, you're going to go to junior high school. You're going to the seventh grade." I played dumb and I go, "*Por qué?*" I made believe I didn't even speak English in those days. She said, "Because you're moving fast and you're learning English, so we're going to promote you to the seventh grade."

One day one of the teachers caught me in the hallway and she said she wanted to talk to me. She asked me to send my mother a message about one of my brothers. I said to her, "I don't speak English." I walked away from her. Then my homeroom teacher comes to me the next day and says, "Well, what's this? I understand that you don't speak English. Why are you saying you don't speak English? I don't ever want to hear you say you don't speak English. You understand?" And I remember her words. That's exactly what she told me. I didn't ever say I didn't speak English ever again.

I used the newspaper and I used the love stories. I used the dictionary to do my schoolwork. In those days these were good teaching tools. Now they don't teach the kids anything, but that's beside the point.

What did your mom do for work?

My mother used to be a housewife and what she did is she would be cooking and cleaning and sewing our clothes. She made our clothes. I don't even remember going to a store in Puerto Rico

with my mother where she bought me something anything. She would always be sewing dresses or whatever.

One time I had lice in my hair. I was about five or six. She decided she was going to shave my hair off and make me a little dress that was going to be long all the way down and then with a little hat, like a little doll. When I would go in the street, the kids would call me and yell out, “*¡Muñeca!*” I felt it was an insult to me. I would say, “*Tu madre;*” your mother. I would get so angry at my mom and tell her, “I don’t want to wear this anymore.” “Margarita, wait until your hair grows.” That’s what mothers used to do if you had lice, your hair was gone and then they put homemade hats on you and so on and so forth. That happened to me, also.

Going back to the Bronx, I went to the seventh grade and that’s when my mother started teaching me how to cook. I was responsible for coming home—the older brothers and sister were working—and it was my job to come home from school and cook for the whole family. I learned how to cook when I was about fourteen.

What sort of things did you cook?

Oh, I cooked everything that she cooked. I cooked the rice, the beans, the *verduras*, everything.

But what makes it distinct, though, because not all Latino food is the same?

That’s true. The favorite dish in the house was yellow rice. We did cook white rice, but most of it was yellow rice with either beans or garbanzos or whatever. Then the beans, of course, we make them very different than other people. I mean, you’ve got to taste my beans. They’re really delicious. We ate steak, pork chops, chicken, salad; that kind of stuff, and the vegetables, corn, okra, asparagus, and *verdure* (root vegetables).

How many people were living together in the Bronx, how many of those siblings?

When we first moved to the apartment with another family. He would rent the room. My two older brothers already had jobs and they paid for their rented room. We had my sister, another older brother, then we had my two younger brothers and myself for a total of six because there was eight of us. Then my grandmother died and my sister comes to live with us and she had two small daughters. Then my other older brothers had to move out and get himself a room. We lived in that apartment for a very long time, very, very long time.

What kind of work was your mom doing then?

In Puerto Rico, she didn't work, like I said. When she got to New York, she had a very good friend, Maria Centrón. I'll never forget her. That's why my mother was able to go to New York because she had that friend who was already in the Bronx and they lived together for a while. Then she got her a job as a dressmaker because my mother used to sew. Then she became a ladies' garment worker, union member, and then she became a delegate. She would drag me with her wherever she went.

She worked in one of the factories in the Garment District?

No, in the Bronx there were buildings full of factories. On each floor there was a different company. Most of it was dresses. Most of it was clothing.

I was not baptized before I left Puerto Rico, so she asked her boss if she wanted to be my godmother. She baptized me. She was my godmother. My godmother would bring maids to live with her from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico. I would get friendly with them and I would say to them, "So how much money do you make?" And they would tell me. I would say, "You know you could make more money working someplace else?" I did that to two of them. They moved out and became independent.

Then my godmother one day said to me, “You know what? I’m going to be bringing a new person to live with me. She’s going to be the maid. And I don’t want you befriending her at all. Do you understand?” I was a kid. What the heck? But it’s just that I saw what was going on: maids being underpaid and I did not agree with that. She said, no more. Anyway, I did that to my godmother.

Then I made my communion. I made my confirmation in the Bronx. As a matter of fact, my younger brothers did their communions, also, but I don’t know if my older brothers and sister ever did.

Could you describe that tradition for us a little bit?

Which one?

The communion and that whole process.

Let’s go back. The New York school system had early release time. Every Tuesday we had permission for early release to attend Catechism at the Catholic churches. That’s how we got into the education in terms of religion. I was all for it. I was always, “Oh, yes.” My brothers and I went to Catechism classes and everything and we made our first communion that way. It was a tradition. It was something that was part of the educational system in New York, which doesn’t exist anymore. I think it still exists in the Hispanic countries, but in the United States it doesn’t exist, at least I don’t think so.

That was good and that’s where I got the idea that kids need religion in their life. You can’t raise kids without religion in their life and expect them to be decent-minded patriots. You just can’t. To me, they go hand in hand. That’s what I told my children. My kids made their communion. Now that we’re leaving in a whole different world, I feel bad because my grandkids

haven't followed that, but they're decent-minded people, though, because we're there on top of them to do the right thing. I am very, very, very blessed with the family that I have, I really am.

That's what the tradition was. You're Catholic. You go to church. You go Sundays and play the "sit up and sit down" game. Anyway, you do that and you do your communion and then you do your confirmation. But first, you had to get baptized. Once I got baptized I was very into the whole religion thing, really. Then I was promoted to the seventh grade and that's when I made my communion and my confirmation.

Earlier you mentioned that you've been working and you've been helping the community since you were thirteen. How did that start?

It started with my mother. My mother was as factory worker, a dressmaker, a union delegate, Ladies' Garment Workers Union. She would help people and I saw her helping people and fighting for people's rights and whatnot. The thing is with my mother, we all had the family together; we always had picnics, we went to the beach, we went to the lakes and we did a lot of things as a family. We even went dancing when I was sixteen. My mother, my brothers and my sisters, we would go dancing at nightclubs, and I was the baby; I was sixteen, and we were dancing. We had a lot of fun together. We had parties all the time.

You were growing up in the Bronx when a lot of music was happening.

Oh, yes, a lot, a lot of music growing up. The Salsa was there all the time. Salsa was created by Puerto Ricans in New York. People think that it came from Cuba. No, sir. It came from New York Puerto Ricans; that's where it's came from. We danced Cha-Cha. We danced all kinds of different dances that they had in those days. They had the Cha-Cha. It was crazy. We didn't have that much Merengue. It was more Puerto Rican music including boleros. Now you have a lot of

Merengue and Bachata and Reggaeton with Salsa behind, but in those days the ones who owned (Spanish entertainment) were the Puerto Ricans in New York.

What were some of the big names for the musicians or artists of that time?

You had Tito Puente, El Gran Combo, Daniel Santo, Bobby Capo, Pedro Infante, and Sara Montiel. Later in the sixties, you had Celia Cruz. Celia Cruz singing Salsa, when she came from Cuba, she got together with the Puerto Rican artists in New York and the band players and everything, that's how she got into Salsa. Celia Cruz didn't bring the Salsa to New York. She came to get involved with the Salsa music in New York, which made her very famous.

In the sixties, we had Tito Puente. We had Celia Cruz. We had so many more. We had Héctor Lavoe. They made a movie about Héctor Lavoe. J-Lo and Marc Anthony, they made that movie of Héctor Lavoe's life and it turned out to be a good movie, but the critics were freaking terrible to them, the Anglos, come up with, oh well, you know, couples who make movies together never turn out to be good movies, and that's baloney because I have the movie and it's a good movie and their acting was beautiful. They did really, really great acting.

We had a lot of bands like El Gran Combo. My goodness, I can't remember all the bands, but we danced like crazy. My brothers, oh my God, my brothers would do the split on the floor and they would turn around and they'd get up. I learned how to dance with my family; my brothers, my mother and my sisters. We all went out as a family Friday nights and Saturday nights. Then after the dancing we would meet at a Puerto Rican restaurant in Manhattan. We lived in the Bronx and a lot of the dances were in Manhattan, and then we would just go over the restaurant and they used to cook seafood soup. In the middle of the night, three o'clock in the morning we would be out there eating. Oh my God, lobster soup and shrimps, oh, it was really great.

I can't complain about my life, I really can't. I have had a good life. I'm very blessed. I had a lot of fun. Nothing is perfect, but what the heck? God has been good to me.

Tell me about how you started getting involved with the community.

That's right. That's where we started, didn't we? The community, going back to my mother, one of the things was this; one time we were at a picnic with friends and neighbors. We had a nice picnic at a park. There was this homeless guy who comes over and he asked for food. There was this lady with us that was part of the group and she said, "No, we're not going to give you anything," and she sent him away. My mother filled a plate and she went over and gave it to him. Then she said to me, "You never deny a hungry person a plate of food. You never do that." That stuck to me.

Then being that she was so involved in the community, I was always there. As I got older, I graduated high school and I got a job and I was always doing something. I was always doing things with the community as a group. We would cook. We would have picnics. We would have fun. If anybody needed anything, my mother was there to help and I'd be there, too. As I got older, I carried my mom's words with me all the way throughout my life, helping people. What else can I tell you? It's just my nature.

One of the things that happened in junior high school is that I always wanted to learn French. They wouldn't allow me to learn French, but the little white girls would go take French classes. I wanted to be a secretary. "Oh, no, no, no. You'll be better off as a nurse." "No, I want to be a secretary." "No, you've got to be a nurse." The little white girls could go into being secretaries and the little brown girls, Puerto Rican little girls and the very few African Americans, would go into nursing. In those days secretary was considered classier than nurses were; it was held at a high stature than nurses were, at least that's the way I saw it.

I attended Jane Addams High School in the Bronx Nursing Program; that would be my major in high school. In those days it was fantastic. I went to all-girls' schools, by the way, both junior high school and high school. In those days they had the trade schools. They call them vocational schools for the boys, vocational schools for the girls. In my school we had beauty culture; that's what they called it then. They call it something else now. We had beauty culture and we had nursing and I don't remember what else we had. I think it was just those two. When you graduated from high school, you were able to find a job and get employed.

One of the things in school, I never had any fights with anybody, only one time this girl wanted to fight me. We had gym. We all run into the gym class and we go into the gym. We all go crazy going to gym because we had to change to gym uniforms. You don't want to be late for class either. We all come running in and I grab a chair and I sat down. Then comes this African American girl, which was called black in those days, and she wants to take my chair away. And I said, "No, you don't. I have the chair." And she said, "No, that's my chair." "No, you are not. This is my chair and you're not going to take my chair away from me." Then she tried to get tough and I said, "Get out of here." I was still sitting in it. I didn't want it grabbed away. She said, "No, because this and that." And then she said, "Well, I'll meet you across the school after school hours." And I said, "No, you're not going to meet me because if you don't want to graduate...I do, so just leave me alone." I don't know what the heck she did.

Then my friends all come over. "Margarita, you've got to go there. We'll be with you." And this and that. I said, "Forget about it. I'm not interested." They said, "Don't worry about it. We're going to be there with you."

We get out at three o'clock and we go outside. The girl wasn't anywhere to be found, so there was no fight. But, no, I would not; I would not break the rules. As a matter of fact, I was a

stickler for the rules. In high school everybody had to walk single file this way and single file the other way; you could not cut through the monitors. I was a hallway monitor and nobody could cut through me trying to make it a shortcut. No shortcuts. You've got to go back to the end and then start all over again. Yes, I was a monitor at Jane Addams High School for the three years that I was there.

As a senior I got myself a job. In the summertime I used to work in factories. You weren't supposed to because you were supposed to be eighteen, but we all lied about our age and said we were eighteen and we would work in factories. Then as a senior I got a job at a theater down the street from the school as a cashier. My first night was horrible. I was short. I was giving people too much change back. If you are short, you've got to pay it. I don't even know whether it was true. Maybe it was the manager who said I was short and I wasn't short. After that I wasn't short anymore. I wasn't going to be short. You're not going to take my money away from me.

I worked that whole year in my senior year. I was able to pay for my ring, my prom dress, which I didn't go to, and all the expenses that were incurred in those days for a high school graduate. I paid for it myself with my hard earned money.

Then after I graduated, because I didn't want to be a nurse, I went looking for a job in some other field. The girls that were in class with me, most of them continued on to college and they became nurses; LPNs is what they called them in those days, licensed practical nurse. I didn't want to do that. I'm not going to be nobody's nurse because I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I've always been kind of bossy and I didn't see me being a nurse. I didn't see myself as a nurse. I got a job at a warehouse putting price tags on the merchandise. It was Holly Stores. I had a manager then who was very, very nice.

I used to make forty-two dollars a week, a lot more than my father's seven dollars a week. A lot had happened with the unions, too. After taxes, whatever I had left, twenty dollars would go to my mother to help her pay for the rent and the household expenses. I was going to sign up for the army. I went with some of my friends that said, "Let's go sign up for the army." Then I asked them, "Would the army ever send a check to my mother also if I join the army?" I took the test and passed it. They said, "No." I said, "Forget it. I've got to stay and help my mom." I got that job and I would give her twenty dollars a week.

When I was in the fifth grade—one other good thing about the old days—we opened bank accounts. They had the students open a bank account. I'm a Chase Bank person since I was in the fifth grade. I'm still with Chase. In those days it was called Chase of Manhattan. What they would do is every week they would send somebody—we had a monitor in each classroom. She would be the one that would collect the little books with the deposit in a little envelope and then someone from the bank would come and pick it up at the principal's office. They would take it to the bank to be deposited. The bank representative would bring you back your little book with your deposits and you saw your savings in the bank account grow. My brother would give me a quarter and my mother would give me a dollar, whatever they could; it's what I would put in the bank.

When I finished high school, I already had a bank account. Out of my paycheck, I would give my mother twenty dollars and put a little bit, like ten dollars, in the bank, and then the rest was for the subway to go to work and lunch. Yes, I did that. I'm still with Chase Bank. I tell them every time, I say, "You know how long I've been with you guys? You should have my picture right up there."

How long did you stay in New York?

I lived there a long time. I grew up in New York. I got married in New York. I got divorced in New York. I raised my kids in New York. I met my future husband at a wedding and we fell in love. In those days there was another guy that I really liked, but he was so shy. In those days the mother went to the movies; you couldn't go to the movies with a guy by yourself. You had to have your mom right there. He would want to put his arm around me, but my mother would look this way and he'd go...I said, forget that; you're not daring enough for me. Then I met my first future husband and we fell in love and we got married. I was twenty-one when I had my first baby.

Was he Puerto Rican, too?

Yes, he's Puerto Rican. He lives in Puerto Rico. I was twenty-one. During the bridal shower he got drunk. He was such a sweetheart and I had never seen him drunk or anything. During the bridal shower he got drunk and started a fight with his uncle who was doing nothing to him. He was just stupid. When I got home I threw the wedding invitations in the garbage because in those days they did the bridal shower before you even sent out the invitations to the wedding. I don't know, for some reason. But I went home and I took the invitations and threw them in the garbage. I didn't want to marry him. My mother, "No, no, no. He's okay. It's just that he was drunk." And this and that and made all kinds of excuses for him.

I married the guy. I married him. I've got the videos if you want to see them. It's part of my book. I married him. He was very loveable and whatnot and then we had our first child and then we had our second child. He kept drinking over the weekends. I stayed with him for seven years and we used to fight. He was a wife beater, also, and I resented it because of what went on with my mom. I refused to be like my mom and I refused to have any more kids. Eventually,

seven years later he comes home drunk one weekend—he was a weekend drunk. He supported the household and everything. He was just like my father.

What did he do for work?

Well, he did different types of work. He worked as a bookbinder. In those days they made books in New York, believe it or not, and everybody was a bookbinder, everybody was a dressmaker. Then he made the mistake of coming home one Saturday night, and goes into the children's room to wake them up, three o'clock in the morning, telling them they have to respect him, because the kids didn't respect him seeing him fighting with me. One time one of my kids jumped on him—my kids were very young—jumped on him and starting hitting his father. He goes in the bedroom to wake up my kids, yelling at them, and that's when I got so angry at him.

I pulled him out of the room. I pushed him out. I was so angry that I even put my nails right on his face and I scratched his face and then I called the police. Then I grabbed plastic bags and put all his clothes inside. I called the police and they came. In those days they didn't arrest the abusers or anything, but they would come. I said, "I don't want him here anymore."

And the police said, "Okay, let's go. Your wife doesn't want you here anymore." And he said, "Look what she did," as he pointed to his face. He said, "She don't want you here. Come on, let's go."

He went off to his family and I never let him back in the house again. Two years went by and he kept coming and coming and wanting for me to take him back. I asked my boys. My boys were six and seven. I asked them if they wanted their father to come home. My oldest son who was seven, he said to me— "You know, Mom, we love our dad more when he's not with us more than when he's with us." That was it. That's why I want the story to be told. Women need to

know don't stay with him because of the kids. The kids don't want him there. If you have an abusive husband or abusive wife, the kids don't want them there. They just don't.

Then I went about my business. I did what I had to do. When I got married, I still worked and I injured my back at work. I could no longer keep my job and the City and sent me to a training. In those days it was the city that would do worker's compensation. I went back to school for English, typing and math. I wanted to be a Secretary.

There you go.

Yes, I did that. While completing, the training, I met another insured worker there—Elias Velez. He told me, "They're opening up a clinic down the street where I live." After the training I would go for interviews and nobody would give me a secretary job, nobody, until I met Mr. Kasariz of the New York Dental Institute, who was about seven feet tall. He was interviewing me and said, "We need somebody with experience." And I said, "Okay. You're not the first one who tells me that. So, if nobody gives me a job, how am I going to get experience?" And he looked down at me and he said, "Well, okay, I'll give you a chance." And he did and I worked with him for a year and a half.

My job was in Manhattan and I had to take a subway every day from the Bronx. Mr. Velez had given my name to his supervisor at the new clinic. After calling him for one year asking, "Did you talk to your supervisor? Did you talk to your supervisor?", he finally did.

It so happened that the day that I received a call from the health center where my friend worked. I was home because Michael, my youngest son, was sick. I said to her, "Well, I'm home because my son is sick." She said, "Why don't you bring him with you, if it's okay? This is a clinic. You can let the doctor see him." I went for the interview with Michael. The doctor saw him, she gave me the interview, and she hired me on the spot. God is good!

I started working there as a receptionist and translator in the emergency room. The following year, when there was a position available for assistant supervisor I applied, but she didn't give it to me. She said, "I can't promote you because you take too much time off." And I said, "But I only take the days that I'm entitled to." She said, "Yes, but just because you have them doesn't mean you have to take them."

I never forgot that. It's amazing the things that people tell you that change your whole life forever. It was true because whenever the kids were sick or I just wanted to do something, I would just call in sick. Then I was never sick again the following year. I was never out. I would call my mom or my friends to stay with my sick child. I got promoted to medical records assistant supervisor, and I got promoted to the Medicaid office where we filled out the applications for people who qualify for Medicaid. I just kept applying and applying and being interviewed and getting the jobs, and I didn't know anybody up on the 5th floor, either. Then I was unit manager for one unit and then I was unit manager for another unit.

Then the personnel director position came up and I applied for it, although, I only had my high school diploma. I only had my high school diploma and I competed with six people; three of them had degrees already. I was promoted to the position. I was told afterwards, that the reason I was given the position was my response to their hypothetical question: Let's say that payroll and personnel are in the same office space. Let's say, for example, an employee comes up there to the window and they're looking for their paycheck and there's no one in payroll. What would you do?

I said to them, "Well, as nosy as I am, I would know where those checks would be." And they cracked up laughing. And I said, oh boy, they're laughing. "So I would know where those checks would be. Because I don't believe that an employee that has worked for two weeks—"

We used to get paid biweekly. “—who has worked for two weeks and comes upstairs looking for his check and there’s no one there, somebody has to get it for him. He should not go back and then come back. He shouldn’t be going back and forth.”

Later on, she told me that was why she gave me the job. The other ones created some other scenario: We will try to find somebody from payroll; we’ll have somebody paged; we will do this; or we’ll do that. But they would not solve the problem like they were supposed to. The director for the clinic told me, “Yes, your response is what got you the job; that one question.”

I was personnel manager for six years because I was at that clinic for eleven years. I interviewed all job applicants including doctors, nurses, etc. and I negotiated labor contracts with unions. Before that in between, I was also a union delegate. I was always arguing in friendly ways and I would win my cases. I was needed in administration. I was always defending over somebody something as a union delegate. As a matter of fact, I would do the same thing I used to do to my godmother’s maids. I would say, “You know you could do better than this and earn more money.”

It was great because what happened, I was able to negotiate union contracts. While I was personnel director. Doctors also unionized later on and everybody had a union. The nurses had a union. The regular staff had a union. Everybody had a union. But no big deal. We only had a strike once. That was before my time. I knew the union rules and regulations and I had my book, whenever any manager had a problem with an employee, they would call me. I would be on the phone and they would tell me the problem. I would say, “Well, why don’t you do this; do that; do the other.” Problem solved. I’m a good problem solver.

My daughter’s godmother and I worked together, she now lives in Puerto Rico. We’re still close. We used to have a lot of fun together. I was twenty-eight when I broke up with my

husband. I remarried when I was forty-four. But in between that I had a boyfriend and I had a daughter. Why did I have a baby? Because I was already in my thirties and I wanted to have a daughter and God gave me one. Her dad was a doctor at the clinic. He wore corduroy skinny pants and cowboy boots. Not very handsome but he was so smart. I learned a lot from him. He was very, very smart. He came to work at the clinic and I just fell in love with the guy. I just loved that guy. Then I got pregnant and he didn't want me to have my girl, he wanted me to have an abortion. "You're so respected at the clinic, and what would people say?" I said to him, "You know what? Nobody gives me anything. I don't care what anybody says because I'm my own person." Then I had my daughter. She's forty-four now. Yes, he gave her the name and contributed to her support.

When my mother was sick, I never went to see her at lunchtime. I worked in the Bronx and we all lived in the Bronx and I had my car. Once I broke up with my husband, I got myself my license and I got a little old car. I always had a car. I said, "I'm going to go see my mom at lunchtime and have lunch with her." I went to see her. My mother said that I was going to have another boy. I always told her, "No, Mom, it's going to be a girl." And she always kept saying, "It's going to be another boy." That day she's sick in bed and I went over to see her. I said, "I came here to have lunch with you." She looked so beautiful. Her cheeks were rosy and whatnot. Then she says, "Come over here. When is that baby going to be born?" I said, "Next month." That was October 24, 1974. Then she rubbed my stomach and she said to me, "You know what? You are going to have a baby girl." I go, "Mom, all this time you've been saying I'm having a boy. What makes you change your mind?" And she says to me, "You've been a good daughter. You want a daughter and God is going to give you a daughter." That was my last conversation with my mom because after that I went back to the office and I worked late. The next morning at

lunchtime, the caretaker calls me and says, “Your mother is not doing good. She is really doing bad.” She died that Friday. It was a Thursday and she died that Friday night. I was the caretaker for my mom all that time and I was afraid because I was a caretaker, also. Whenever she needed to go someplace, she refused to speak English even though she understood everything. In those days that’s what most people did. They understood everything, but they refused to speak English because of the accent, I would say, “So what? The heck with the accent.” That’s why I feel sad, because she never got to see my daughter. When I told my sons, my oldest son said, “Mom, you never know what you have until you lose them.” He was twelve years old. As a child I was the one my mother used as a translator, the one who accompanied her at union rallies and doctors’ visits, and in the end the one who made the arrangements to get her to her final destination in Puerto Rico where she is buried.

I was thirty-four was when I had my daughter, but I had my daughter after I had bought a house. In those days, in the 1970s, a woman by herself could not buy any property. I approached my friend and co-worker Carlos de Jesus; he was the executive director’s secretary. He was gay. We had a lot of gay people in the clinic. There were five hundred employees. We had doctors, nurses, lab techs, drivers; we had a lot of gay employees and Carlitos was one of them. He was the secretary. I said to him, “Carlos, we need to talk.” And he goes, “What?” I said, “I need you to be my brother just so I can buy a house.” My brothers can’t help me. They don’t have the job to qualify. He goes, “Where do I sign?”

We lived in the housing projects in the Bronx and one day my son said to me, “Mom, when are you going to take us away from this environment?” Even though they were going to a Catholic school. I said, “Well, one of these days I will.” I had my job and I was selling Avon

products. I was selling clothing. I was selling jewelry. I was hustling because I wanted to get my kids out of that environment they were not happy at.

Carlitos took time off from work. The process for the loan took a whole year. The person at the bank who had talked to Carlitos quit her job and never passed my papers onto somebody else. I kept calling the bank and calling the bank and calling the bank until they finally found the papers in that desk that the other employee had left them in. Carlitos went with me from the Bronx to Long Island where I was buying the house because I couldn't afford a house in the Bronx; they were too expensive. My salary was, I think, twelve thousand dollars a year. I went to Central Islip, Long Island. I looked at the houses for sale; they were thirty thousand dollars. Compared to the Bronx these were cheap, big houses for thirty thousand dollars. I closed the deal on the house when I was pregnant with my daughter. We moved in. My mother passed away and I bought the house. I was thirty-four when I bought my first home.

I was successful. I did it. I moved to an all lily white neighborhood, but then we had the white kids stoning my house, calling my sons names. You know what I said to my boys? I said, "Hey, guys, you know what? You don't have a problem. They have a problem. Just ignore them. If you ignore them, you'll be fine." That's what they did. My house had the indentations from the stones.

One time during open school night—the teacher says to me, "Oh, you're Mrs. Morales." That was my children's name. "Yes, I'm Michael's mom." She said, "For a Puerto Rican, Michael is very smart."

What did you say?

Nothing. Nothing because my belief is to ignore stupid people. If more people ignore stupid people, it would be a better world. But people take everything so personal and get into what was

said. No, I'm not going to argue about your insult. You're the ignorant one. You're the stupid one. I just walked away from her. That's what I did and that's what I told my kids to do. You just walk away. It's not your problem. They have a problem, not you. My kids have worked and lived with all kinds of different cultures and never had any problems.

It sounds like we're around the eighties.

We were in the seventies when my mother... The high school, it was the sixties. Junior high and high school was the sixties. Then the seventies—wait a minute. We're all the way to the fifties because I graduated high school in '59, so we go all the way back to the fifties. Then we go to the sixties and we go to the seventies. My daughter was the seventies because she was born in '74. In the seventies while I was working, I started college.

Tell me about that.

I heard there were programs at Fordham University for social workers and I said, "You know what? I want to go check it out." I registered for the program, but then I didn't really want to be a social worker. I wanted to help people, but I don't want to be social services. You don't really solve anybody's problems, I really don't think so. Anyway, yes, I started the program and then switched.

Then Reagan came and all the discrimination that was going before, he stirred up the whole thing just like this guy now in office is doing. He reduced funding the health center had been getting. Then he took the money away from the health center. The health center I worked with was a great health care provider. People didn't have to pay anything; it was free services. It was preventive medicine what we practiced there. It was all preventive. We had public health workers that if you missed an appointment, they go knock on your door. "Why didn't you bring

your kid to the doctor?” Or, “Why did you miss your appointment?” It was so preventive and it was fantastic.

A lot of the community people were trained to be healthcare providers. Remember when I said some of them had degrees when I applied for personnel manager? Well, they went through the program and some of them took advantage and completed their college education. I wasn't able to because I was raising my kids by myself. Then when my boys got older and I had my daughter—my daughter was born in '74. In '79, I started going to school at Fordham University and then I got laid off in '79 because of the Reagan cuts and patients were charged for the medical services and it all became chaotic.

I got laid off. I already lived in Long Island and when they told me I was going to get laid off, I went and bought a new car. I said, “Well, let me buy a car now because if I'm going to be unemployed, I need to have a good car to look for a job.” I went and bought a new car, a white Malibu. My daughter thought I bought it for her birthday. She said, “Mom bought me a car for my birthday.” She was five years old.

Then after that I went to the Department of Labor on Long Island where I lived and I filled out the forms for the CETA program. A CETA program helped unemployed workers—now it's dislocated workers—get training which offered job placement and so on and so forth. Then the interviewer said to me, “Would you mind working for the Department of Labor?” I said, “Oh, I wouldn't mind.”

My boys had already joined the Marines—well, one of them had joined the Marines, the oldest one. When he came home from bootcamp, I said, “Okay, we're going to go spend Christmas in Florida that year.” We got in the car and we drove to Florida and spent Christmas in Florida. I took a little tree and my daughter's smaller gifts and we had Santa Claus come to the

hotel room for her. Then we spent three or four days and then we drove back home where Santa had left her a bike. My son went back to the base a very happy Marine.

A week later, I get a call from the Department of Labor asking where had I been; that they had been trying to locate me because they had a job for me with the Department of Labor. I didn't get to collect unemployment. I really didn't. I worked for the Department of Labor in a temporary job for about a year and a half and then it was time for me to go.

There was an opening at a nonprofit organization and I applied. I was hired as a Community Outreach worker. You've got to start all over again. I was personnel director, but wherever you are you've got to go with the flow. I accepted the job. I got laid off from the Department of Labor on Friday and on Monday I started as a Community Outreach worker. A week later on the job and I am approached by the president of the Board of Directors offering me to be the acting Executive Director because the Board was firing the Executive Director and I was the only one of all the employees they had with any supervisory experience. This agency was on the verge of insolvency. It was going to shut down because the Director didn't pay payroll taxes. He was comingling funds because there was not enough funding so the board got rid of him. The agency didn't even have heat and it was wintertime. The oil company refused to deliver any oil because it had not been paid. The president of the board took me to meet the funders. He introduced me as the new Executive Director of Change. I met the politicians in play and I became friendly with them. I was also able to recuperate the relationship with the oil company.

Reagan eliminating the funding and we had to go to the legislators to talk and make our case. I had this employee, Ricardo, who worked with me and he was an accountant in his country, El Salvador. I said to him, "I want you to go with me to the legislature and testify about

the importance of this agency to the community. What you're going to do is you're going to testify in Spanish." Because he didn't speak English. I gave him a job even though he didn't speak English because he knew about numbers. You don't need to speak English if you know about numbers. He managed the books. I wanted to make sure we paid the new and old payroll taxes. I wanted to make sure we were doing things right. I said to him, "I want you to come and testify in front of the legislature because we need the funding. Write out what you want to say. You write it out and I'll translate it and I'll get somebody who will read it in English. Then I'll do my own. I'll go after you."

We went and we were there they whole freaking day, the entire freaking day. And the legislators are there, like this [demonstrating]. We were the last ones to testify. Ricardo came all dressed up in his business suit and his big manly voice and he starts talking and he says, "Good afternoon, gentlemen." No women, all men. They all just said, "Good afternoon." I think I am the first one to ever have a staff member testify in Spanish. They all sat up and they started listening to him even though they didn't understand Spanish. Then one of the legislators who was very friendly, he said, "You know what I understood about what you're saying? La Union Hispanica. La Union Hispanica; that's all I understood." That was the name of the agency.

By then I had already secured another man with a manly voice, too, an African American friend of mine. "Now you're going to read the English version." Then he went and he read the English version, deep voice, also. Then it was my turn and I made my presentation.

We got the money. They didn't reduce our funding. We got the money. It was amazing because I think it was the first time anybody ever made a presentation in Spanish to legislators.

What were the services that you provided?

The services that we provided... We had five programs. We had a social services office. We had a senior citizens' program. We had a youth program where one of our employees was a coach for boxing and what he did was go around the schools and invite kids to join in and get troubled kids in there so they could start learning how to box and do different things. We had the health clinic also providing services to the community, baby shots and stuff like that, outpatient kind of services. It was five of them. Oh, the translation services; that was the fifth one. We did written translations. We had a senior citizen who would do the translations. We had a senior citizens' program where they played piano and they played dominoes and they played all kinds of games. Then with the senior citizens' program, we delivered food to those that could not come to our building. We had a van and a driver. He would deliver food to the seniors. That's where all my community work comes from.

I want to switch gears for a moment. In the eighties in Ponce, which is where you said you were from, in Puerto Rico—

Yes, that's in the fifties.

But in Ponce there was a mudslide in the 1980s, 1983.

In Ponce? Well, I'm not going to tell you that I remember that because—okay. Remember I had my kids, so I had to concentrate on those things, also. What happened is this: That when we moved to Long Island, we lost trace of all the Spanish media, and unless it was in the English media, we knew nothing about it.

That's what I was going to ask you is, how did you maintain your connection with Puerto Rico?

Because I would send my kids to their dad every summer. What happened is that after I got divorced from my husband when I was young, I told him I was going to send him the kids for the summer because I wanted them to grow up feeling that they also had a dad. Summertime was daddy time. I would send them there for a month and a half. When my sons graduated, eventually my second son, a year later, joined the Marines, also, so I had two Marines. I had a license plate that read "Two Marines." He came to the graduation and stayed at my house with us. I didn't have a husband then. I didn't get married until I was forty-four. He would stay in my house and then show up for my son graduating boot camp, and there were a lot of older boys that didn't even have one parent there for them. I didn't want to see that. I wanted my sons to feel...

He loved them in his own selfish way, but he never did anything for them. Even the trip to Puerto Rico, I had to pay the flight and everything. He got remarried and he has four other children and he has a bunch of grandchildren and great-grandchildren now. But we're still friends. My first husband and I are very good friends still and his wife and I are very good friends. When I go to Puerto Rico, I go visit the whole family. As far as they're concerned I'm still part of the whole family. I go to his family. I go to his house. My mother-in-law every time I visit says, "You know that's your house." I said, "I know. I know I paid for the house, but I don't need it. I'm fine. I'm fine." That kind of thing. But I go there and she fixes food for me and we sit down in the living room and we talk like old friends.

He finally apologized to me maybe ten years after we separated. On one of my trips in Puerto Rico, we were having a family gathering and he came over to me and he started crying and he apologized for the life he had given me. I accepted his apology. I gave him a hug. I said, "It's okay. That was in the old days. It's all gone and we're happy now. Forget about it." They live in the house. I'm not interested in the house.

How did you get to Las Vegas?

When we moved to Long Island, there was nothing there. Long Island was like, wow. There was nothing, hardly any stores or anything like that back in the seventies, when I moved there in '74. I moved there before my daughter was born and my daughter was born I think a couple of months—no, I got the house before my daughter was born. I got the house the end of '73; something like that. She was born in '74. There was no Spanish anything. There was no news in Spanish. There was nothing. Just like California did not have anything when I moved there in '86. That's how I lost track. The only way I would know if somebody would call me on the phone and say something happened. It was very different. So, the Ponce thing, I didn't get to hear about the mudslide. I probably did, but it's not in here because it was nothing I was really...No.

Tell us how you got to Las Vegas.

I remarried when I was forty-four in '84. Remember, I was still going to school because what happened is I had to pause my education when I accepted to be the executive director of that nonprofit. It was a very stressful situation and there was no way I could continue school and keep the job. What I did is I kept the job for almost two years and I got tired of—I got everything okay and then I said, "Wait a minute. I've got to go back to school." My goal was to go back to school and get my degree. There it is.

I went back to school and I registered at St. Joseph's College and I was smoking. When I was executive director, all I did was drink black coffee and smoke. I got so skinny.

Smoke cigarettes, you mean, because you could do that in an office back then.

Yes. I was writing this, writing that, checking this, checking that, going to the legislators and whatnot. After I think it was eighteen months and I saw the agency was stable—I did a lot of

fundraising because we had to pay the twenty-four thousand dollars that they previous executive director didn't pay. We had to raise the funds and pay that. We had to negotiate that. They didn't charge us too much, but we had to pay at least twenty-four thousand dollars. I did fundraisers. I did garage sales. I did dances, organized dances and danced like crazy. I had fun doing it and talking to people in the community. I organized a parade. I did all kinds of things in such a short period of time.

Then when I saw that everything was stable, then I had one employee that resented the fact that I was a woman and I was bossing him around. Then I said, "You know what? I don't need to be here anymore." Oh, and a new board chairman came in and then he wanted to bring his friend in. No, I don't need this. I'm gone. I resigned. I gave him my resignation letter.

I went off and got a job at a little store selling merchandise. Yes, back down again. I said, no, this is temporary; I've got to go to school and find something better. I went back to school.

One day I'm driving to school and I lit a cigarette and I got a little woozy. My daughter didn't like to see me smoke. That "no smoking" sign is from my house in Long Island. I got into smoking and there was no smoking allowed in my house. I got woozy and there was a 7-Eleven across the street from St. Joseph's College. I got out of my car. I took the brand-new pack of cigarettes that I had and put it in the garbage can. I went inside and got my coffee and went to school. That was the last time I smoked.

Cold turkey.

Cold turkey. If somebody was smoking, I would be like, no, no, no, no, no, no. Cold turkey I stopped smoking.

After that my sons got married. I had a granddaughter and a grandson the same weekend from each son. When they told me that their wives were pregnant, I said, "Hey, guys, one of

each. I don't want two of the same. You know that." My granddaughter was born in California in the Mojave Desert and my grandson was born in New York, in Long Island. I'm telling you, I'm blessed.

That's beautiful.

They're all grown up and everything now. You were saying to go back to the eighties, right?

How did you get to Las Vegas?

I got married to a police sergeant and then he decided he was going to retire. Right after we got married—I graduated from college first because he wanted me to stop. I said, "No way, Jose, no way." My first husband did that when I started going out with him. I was taking computer classes and he told me, "You don't need to do that. You're not going to work when we get married."

Baloney. I worked all the time I was with him.

Then he retired and we were deciding whether to go to Florida or where. He had some friends in California and we came to visit. We went to Florida and looked at some houses. Then we came to California and we spent time with his friends and then we were looking in the paper and we saw San Juan Capistrano. We ended up in San Juan Capistrano. We got there in 1986 and we left in 1996, ten years, for Vegas.

What happened in between was that I got divorced from my husband and I lost my son. I was registered at the University of California to go back for my master's and my oldest son got killed in a car accident. He got killed in November and then I was very distraught. I was on the sofa for weeks. Then I said, "Mario wouldn't want to see me like that." Mario was my son's name. He was my cheerleader. He was always cheering me on. Everything I did, no matter what, it was, "Oh, Mom, I'm so proud of you." That kind of attitude.

In January I said, "I've got to go to school. I registered already." I'm driving to school and I got off at an exit and turned around and I didn't go back and I've never gone back. I just called and dropped out of college and never went back for my master's. I just couldn't do it, not without my son.

Anyway, in between, my husband and I got divorced and then when my son got killed, he comes back. Here I am, vulnerable. Then what he did is my grandkids and my kids love him a lot. I loved him, too. I still do to this day because he was a good guy. We just couldn't live together. He was my best friend. We just couldn't live together. We talked about everything. He was very smart. He could build anything he wanted to build. I got a horse in there that he built for the kids. But we just couldn't live together because we were too strong. Both of us were strong. Then he asked me if this is blue and I say, no, that's not blue; that's white. He would get pissed off at me. Or he asked me my opinion and I give him my opinion. "Oh, I knew you were going to say that." I thought, why the hell do you ask me for my opinion if you don't want to hear my true opinion? That kind of silly stuff. So we got divorced.

Then he moved here to Vegas. We got divorced and right after my son got killed he moved here. But he was going back and forth because my family was his family. He only had two children back in New York. We went to dinner one day.

I had already gone to Hawaii by myself just to get away. I took a trip to Hawaii by myself and just incubating and thinking and talking. I didn't have a good time, of course. I would try to go in the ocean and a stupid blue fish bit me. I say, "What about those blue fish in there? What about them?" "Oh, no, don't worry about them. They're fine. They're harmless." As soon as I put my foot in the water, one of them bit me. I said, "To hell with this."

When I come back then I think it was somebody's birthday. I don't remember exactly. But what he did is he invited us to come to a party at his house and we came. Then there was this woman that was interested in him who had a house in Summerlin. Then I go back and we're having dinner at a restaurant and he comes up with a ring, asking me to marry him again. He did it in front of all my kids, not by myself. I said, "Are you kidding me?" The kids are mine; we didn't have any kids together, but they are his grandchildren and children because they love him like a dad and grandpa. Then they all go, "Yes, Grandma, you could be with Grandpa again." And this and that. Here I am just not really excited about anything. And I said, "Yes," and I marry him again.

I was sure you were going to say you didn't.

I know. Me too. Wow.

By that time I had become a Mormon, by the way. I was a Catholic. But in California, when we first moved there, I tried to get involved in the Catholic Church, but those people—I always signed up to be a volunteer at this. I wanted to get involved because that's what I had done at the church in the Bronx. I was very involved with the church and we went on trips together. We organized the families and visited sick people in the hospitals and so on and so forth. I wanted to do something similar in California. We did it in Long Island, too; I was involved in the church. Nobody ever called me. Nobody gave a crap. They had this fancy church with microphones that sounded like I was in a movie or something like that.

Then the job that I had in California was that of worker's compensation counselor because that's a job I first started working with Marriott; that's the recruiter. I told him, "I give you eighteen months to give me a promotion." The eighteen months were close by and then this woman came to do some checking of the hotel, the employees, and safety measures and whatnot.

I ask her, “What is it that you do exactly?” And she told me. I said, “Oh, okay.” I went and looked in the paper and I saw a worker’s compensation counselor. I called. I got an appointment. I got hired. I left the Marriott and worked as the worker’s compensation counselor. But they didn’t have me as a counselor; they had me as an assistant, but a week later somebody left and they moved me right into that position and I became a worker’s compensation counselor. I worked with Crawford for four years, a private company. I was good at that. Then they laid me off.

They always lay me off before the fifth year so I can’t have any pension. I don’t have any pensions. All I have is my Social Security check. I started my own business in California and I did it for two years before I said yes again to my husband. He was already here. He didn’t want to go back there because they were charging him too much taxed because of his pension from New York and he was upset about that, and so I moved here.

I sold my house in Long Island. I still had my house in Long Island because my boys lived in Long Island; after we left to California, they stayed in Long Island. Then I divided the house into two apartments and the two brothers lived together with each family; now this is your side and that was it. Then they wanted to come out to California and they checked the police and came in for an interview and they both got hired as police officers after the Marines. Both my boys were first in the Marines where they scored three hundred points out of a possible three hundred points while in the Marines. They denied them the honor uniform. They should have got it; they didn’t. I sent my son the money. I said, “Well, Poppy, how much is the uniform?” He said, “A hundred and twenty-five dollars, Mom.” I said, “I’ll send you a check.” I sent him a check and then he calls me up, “Hey, Mom,” after he graduated boot camp, and he says, “I got here to the school and they asked me if I had gotten my blues and I said no and they gave them to

me, so you don't have to send me the check." I had already sent the check. He said, "Okay, I'll just tear up the check, Mom."

I didn't understand. Were they police officers in Las Vegas or in California?

In California. When my husband and I moved to California, then they came to California and they became police officers, both of them. Then my son got killed before his brother graduated, just before that. That was where they treat you like a king; LAPD where they treat you like a king. Remember the King incident? My son Michael, my younger son was involved in all that. He was in the police academy and they put all the guys in the police academy out there to try to...

He was on the street during the Rodney King...

He was in the streets during the riot, yes. He was in the streets, yes. He is a sergeant now. He is still with the police. He's been there twenty-six years now and he is now a sergeant.

What year was that that you actually moved to Las Vegas?

In '96. I moved here in '96.

We've been here about the same length of time. What did the city seem like to you when you came here?

When I came here Las Vegas was not much. All you could hear on the radio was cowboy music. There was no Spanish TV. There was no Spanish radio. There was nothing. The only little Spanish radio that played one evening a week, they were only playing Mexican music and I started complaining about that. I said, "Hey, there's other people here besides Mexicans. You need to start playing other kinds of music." "Oh, but the majority..." "I don't care. There are still other people here. We have Colombians. We have Puerto Ricans. We have Cubans. You need to

change your ways.” I didn’t say it that way, but kind of. Then Univision came and then Telemundo came and that’s how we started with the Spanish.

Then in the meantime—well, I came in ’96 and in ’97 I joined a Puerto Rican Club. It was a club. My husband and I joined and there other people. I said, “Well, if we want to make it official, we need to make it a 501(c)(3). My husband and I and some friends, we worked on the 501(c)(3). We made it the Boricua Association because they had been doing something illegal, which was they were having events and saying that they were nonprofit. I said, “You know what? I want nothing to do with that. We’re going to use the Boricua Association, the organization of the Puerto Rican community.” And that’s what we did.

We started a picnic. We’d cook all the food at my house. With my husband we did all the cooking for the first picnic and then we sold it at the park. It wasn’t like social media now or anything like that. We raised five hundred dollars and we gave our first scholarship, five hundred dollars. But as the time went by they were not too happy because I said, “No, the money we raise at the picnic has to go for scholarships.” They didn’t want that. They wanted to be able to travel or do other things. “No, no, no. Scholarship; that’s all I’m interested in doing, doing scholarships for students.”

By the time I left, five years later, as president, I had already started the Hispanic International Day Parade where you found me. In 2000 was the first parade. The second parade was 9/11 was in 2001, right? They said, “Oh no, you can’t do that parade because you know what happened.” I said, “No, no, no. That’s why we have to do our parade. Nobody is going to come and tell me what to do, okay? They did that. No, that doesn’t mean that you chicken out. You go on with your life and do what you’re supposed to do.” I changed the parade to Make America something; I can’t remember right now the full name, but I can give it to you later. I

renamed the parade from Hispanic Parade to America something. I can't remember the rest of it. We did the parade.

I started doing fundraisers, dances, dinner dances, and we raised funds that way. And we raised funds with a picnic. The picnic twenty years later, the carnival—they changed it to another name, but it comes from there. It's still going on every year, Memorial Day weekend. That's when we used to have it. It started with a deejay and now we get bands. Now we get about three thousand coming in there that weekend and people come from Arizona and California and Utah, to the Puerto Rican Picnic. It's still on. I'm proud of those people who continue something I started. You've got to appreciate that and I really do.

Absolutely. Oh, yes.

Now I'm back with them. I'm a member. I'm trying to help them. The problem I have with them is they never, never—because I was always political and I was always out there and people didn't even know how to pronounce Boricua. I taught all these elected officials how to pronounce Boricua. But the rest of the members, “Oh, we don't want anything to do with politics.” They still don't. They're crazy. I say, “You guys are crazy. This agency is twenty years old doing the picnic. You should be able to have an office.”

When I left them I already had an office. I had a computer, one of the old ones. I had an office with a computer, with a phone. I left them all settled. I had money in the bank from the last payment that I did, over thirteen thousand dollars in the bank. All they had to do was continue. They only continued the picnic and the festival. They still raise the funds and they still give out scholarships. How exactly, I don't know because last year I just came back as a member because I got out of it. They didn't want to do the parade, either. And I said, “You know what?

I'm leaving and I'm taking the parade with me." I took the parade with me and registered the parade with a 501(c)(4) and I continued with the parade and they continued with the picnic.

About how many people were involved in the Boricua Association when it first started?

When it first started we had about thirty people. There wasn't a whole lot of them because there weren't that many Puerto Ricans at that time. Now you have about eighteen, twenty thousand Puerto Ricans here. I say that they come from under the rocks just on Memorial Day weekend because that's when you see them at the park. That's when you see them. I've been trying to get them to get politically involved. In Puerto Rico everybody votes, everybody including the people in jail because they bring the voting booths to jail for people to vote. They leave the island and they just...Look at Florida. Hillary shouldn't have lost Florida. She shouldn't have lost Florida. All those Puerto Ricans that came they should have voted for her and should have been there. This time around I understand there was a very low number of Puerto Ricans who voted.

Since we're talking about political engagement, earlier you showed us all of these pictures of some of the politicians that you've gotten to meet. Can you tell us about who was the most impactful politician that you've met so far?

The first one I met was Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton when I came here to Vegas. If you want to meet the presidents, move to Las Vegas. Move to Las Vegas because in California in '92, the only one time I went to see him, I was not able to get in because I had ear surgery and they had somebody come and pick me up and I say, "We have the passes. We have to go up there." "No, no, we have to stay..." "No, we have passes." She didn't listen to me. By the time we got to the gate, they closed it, and so I didn't get to see him.

But then when I moved here in '96, I got involved with Bill Clinton's campaign and I met both of them. I met Al Gore. I also have pictures with Al Gore. I have pictures with Obama, pictures with Michelle.

That photograph of you talking to Obama, do you remember what you were saying to him?

You look real engaged with each other.

I was talking to him about education. We have to go back to the basic of education. When I was in school, the kids had gym. They could do sports. They didn't have to pay any money. You could do Little League. That's why I raised my kids in sports, Little League. My boy is still with Little League. Three generations already with Little League. But I was telling him about the failure of Nevada schools, how the kids are not graduating from high school, how we needed to do better. I think that's what I was talking to him about. I also talked to him about the nonprofit organizations that we're not getting the funding that we need to help the community.

With Bill Clinton it was different because all he talked about was the fact that he collects frogs and so do I. I was having a big frog here and he said, "Ooh, I saw that when I was coming down the stairs." I said, "Yes. Well, did you get the ones that I've been sending you. Every time we have something, I send you a frog." Then he just thought about it.

The last one I gave him was when he came as president. This trip here was his last trip as president in 2000. They called me up from Washington at work. Somebody said, "You got a call from Washington, Margarita." I said, "Yes. Who?" "Well, he didn't leave a message. He said he'd call again." Okay, so I go back to my desk. Then I get away from my desk and I get, "Margarita, he called you again." I said, "Did he leave a number?" "No. He will call you again."

Finally, the third time he got me and he says to me, "Margarita, this is so-and-so." I don't even remember the guy's name. "President Clinton is going to be in Vegas and we would like

you to greet him at the airport. Do you think you will be able to do that?" I said to him, "Well, let me think about it. Now, what do I have to do on Sunday?" It was a Sunday. I think it was on the first or second of April that year. I said, "Let me see. Well, what the hell do you think I'm going to tell you? No? Are you kidding me?"

They sent me all the information and I got there. That was a Friday and he was coming Sunday. I kept saying, "I've got to get a hug from him; I've got to get a hug from him; I've got to get a hug from him." When he comes off the plane and he shakes hands with all the people before me and he finally gets to me, I said, "President Clinton, I volunteered on your campaign in '92 and in '96 and all I want for my hard work is a hug from you." And he goes, "Oh, how sweet." And he put his arms around my waistline and I grabbed him. And this is the picture. See how I'm grabbing him like, I'm not letting you go?

Yes, yes. That's great.

Then we talked about the frog and whatnot. Oh, there were no reporters; that picture is in the paper over there. They must have had a telescopic lens. The next day, Monday morning I get a call from Jackie. "Margarita, did you see today's paper?" "No." "Do you have it?" "Yes." "Where is it?" "In the driveway." "Well, go get it." I said, "Okay, hold on." I go get the paper and when I opened it up, there I am. The picture is in the living room.

Oh, how wild is that.

Front page news in the Review-Journal. I go, "Wow." Then at the office my phone started ringing. "Hey, Margarita, I need your autograph. Hey, Margarita..." A lot of people. It was fun.

Then for Obama they just sent me emails and then they sent me the invitation for the White House Party. There were a lot of people from Vegas that were invited, but they were not there at this party that I was. They didn't get to see them. We got to see him and eat a lot of

shrimps. I love shrimps. There were a lot of shrimps all over the place. I even have the napkins. These are just videos. I know you're talking about getting some pictures. You're going to print this, right?

Yes, we can put it in the book.

I can give you the pictures later because I didn't take the pictures out. I have all this stuff over here.

That can all be done later when we get into the editing. Adding a few of your photographs would be nice.

Look at this one. This is from 2005. Look at that cover.

This is from the parade.

That's from 2005 from the parade. I've got more.

It would be nice if you have a set of these that you would donate as a collection in your name to the project.

Oh, I have plenty. I've got doubles.

What do you think the parade represented for the Latinx community in Las Vegas?

This is what was going on. Every time that Hispanic Month came—you know Hispanic Month is September through October. Then you go to the Latin Chamber, you go here, you go there, and then these companies would make their big announcements. "For Hispanic Month we're having this and we're having tacos." And this and that. One of them called; he was a president. I walked over to him when he was talking that day. I walked over to him and said, "Excuse me, sir. What you're having is not a Hispanic Month event. You're having a Mexican event." And he goes, "Oh no, it's Hispanic." I said, "No, you're not. What you just said there, it sounds like a Mexican event. Do you know that you have Hispanics here? You have Colombians. You have Puerto

Ricans. You have Cuban. You have all different cultures from different Hispanic countries. You know that?" He said, "No, no, no, because the Colombians come." "No, they don't because my friend over there is Colombian and she's never been to events like that. I'm the only who is always at the Mexican events and I see the people and I know none of them go because it's always a Mexican event. I've got nothing against Mexicans. They're my brother and sisters, but don't say it's a Hispanic event because it's not."

Then I said, "We need to separate. I talked to the members of the Boricua Association and we would like to do organized separation. What do you think?" The way I presented it to them was we could start it and then every year another group can take and take over and then they can run the parade. That's the way it started. The first years we had, I think, eighty-four participants. My idea was to bring everybody together. You have the goal in the website. It was to bring the twenty-one countries together so that we can learn from each other about different cultures because although we speak the same language, we all have different cultures, like you said earlier. Remember? You said about the food and that's exactly it. While at the same time we're teaching the people out here in Vegas that not everybody who speaks Spanish is Mexican.

That's how I presented to the board and they said that it was a good idea. I said, "We need to bring everybody together." And they said, "Yes." I started organizing the whole thing and I started going to different meetings with different groups and they all bought it. They said, "Fine, great." But then everybody that parade, nobody is going to run the parade. I ended up having the parade for thirteen years because nobody else wants to take it because it's a lot, a lot of work. I produced the parade for thirteen years. That's why when I left the Boricua Association, I took the parade with me, because I knew they were not going to do it and I

thought it was very important that we have this parade so that people will continue to learn from each other and the non-Hispanics learn from us about us. That's how that parade started.

How would you identify yourself? How would you describe...

Myself, I've been Hispanic. I always say I am Hispanic. I never use the word *Latin*, never, never, because I said *Latinos son los de alla del otro lado*, the Italians and some of the guys from up that way; that's the way I seen it; that's the way I grew up. I've always called myself Hispanic. Back in New York in the Department of Labor, there were these guys that were very well educated. They didn't even know—as Puerto Ricans we identify as Hispanics. We don't identify as Latinos because we're not Latinos; we're Hispanics.

What does that mean?

What that means is that we are from Spain. Spain is the one that came to Puerto Rico and discover us and everything else. We celebrate Discovery Day. Latinos would be people who come from, like I said, Italia. You had Rudolph Valentino, the "Latin Lover." You don't have Ricky Martin, the Latin guy, because he's Hispanic. He calls himself Hispanic. He doesn't say he's Latino. He's Hispanic. Because we come from Spain. A lot of people don't like Christopher Columbus. We have a statue in Puerto Rico. Other countries, other places, Mexico, they don't celebrate Christopher Columbus at all. That is a holiday in Puerto Rico.

What distinguishes Puerto Rico from other countries?

Well, the first thing you know is we're American citizens. Besides that, we have the most beautiful island in the world. I mean, it's surround by water, like Trump said. "Puerto Rico is an island surrounded by water." No kidding. Wow, what a discovery. No, Puerto Rico is unique. If you go into the west side and you look at and you read about Puerto Rico, we have done so much. For example, during the war, how many people did we lose? The Sixty-fifth Infantry, they

were all Puerto Ricans and they were fighting for the United States, fighting for the mainland, and they were never recognized until about maybe four years ago somebody recognized the Sixty-fifth Infantry. That's a disgrace.

Look at what happened after the hurricane, what this guy is doing to Puerto Rico, and that SOB—you can put that—what he's doing is he had business in Puerto Rico; he filed for bankruptcy, thirty-three million dollars of the seventy million dollars that Puerto Rico has in deficit belongs to this guy in the White House. Did you read that? If you look for it, you'll find it. It's there in writing. I'm not making it up.

Anyway, getting back to Puerto Rico, we have the tallest *El Yunque*, the waterfall, the tallest one, we have it in Puerto Rico. Then we have the satellite that's looking for the people like Trump who belongs out there in the outer space; that's the biggest one, also. We have so many people who win as writers. I can't give you any names right now because I haven't been reading any books in Spanish. I read all in English, by the way. I, myself, when I go in there and I read about Puerto Rico, shit. Then you have all this talent that comes out of Puerto Rico because in Puerto Rico they say that even the rocks can sing. *Hasta las piedras cantan en Puerto Rico*. And all this talent that comes out of there, you have Rita Moreno. She was the third one or second one when she got all the Emmys, the Oscars, you name it; she got them all. She is still working on TV. Have you seen her? *One Day at a Time*? Yes, I watch that show. She's amazing. I met her in person. I got pictures with her, too.

What was that like?

Really nice. She ran out of books; she didn't bring enough books. Everybody wanted her book. I go there to buy my book and they had run out. I said, "Well, I guess we'll just sign over here and let's take a picture." I gave her a paper to sign.

Do you remember when *West Side Story* came out?

Yes. I was in New York. I lived in the South Bronx.

What was that like?

I was a teenager at that time and we liked the movie. But because where I lived we didn't see what they had in the movies, I never saw it about the gangs and this and that because I had a very safe neighborhood where I lived and we all got along. We had the Jewish people. We had the Italians. We didn't have any African Americans there. But we had Jewish. We had Italians. My sister had an Italian boyfriend. His mother didn't like her. She was tough. His name was Mario, too. Everybody was named Mario in those days. Oh yes, the Italian guys, they were all named Mario.

The only reason I named my son Mario was because when I met my first husband he said that his name was Mario. Then after we had been going together for about six month or so, he said, "You know what? My real name is not Mario. It's Merido." I go, "Oh my god. You're kidding me." When I got pregnant I said, "I'm going to have a boy and he's not going to be named Merido. He's going to be named Mario. That's how you introduced yourself to me, Mario. That's the name the baby's going to have." That's why I named my son Mario.

It was nice. It was nothing like the *West Side Story*. I enjoyed the movie. I like musicals and everything else. But it wasn't anything at all like the movie. You imagine the guy singing, "Maria, Maria," you would have about fifty Marias coming out the window because everybody is named Maria. My family alone has about ten Marias. It's crazy. It was just a movie. It was just a movie and it wasn't like that at all when I was growing up.

When I was a teenager, we did have a lot of dancing. There were parties all over the place. Every Saturday somebody had a party. In those days you danced slowly and then the guys

wanted to get too close to you and then you had to push them away and that kind of stuff. Some guy always had a party. It was fun. We all got along. We used to play in the street together.

In those days nobody owned a bicycle. You rented a bicycle for twenty-five cents for the whole day. That's what it was. Nobody owned bicycles. We did own our roller skates, so we did do the skates. Then if we broke one, then we would make a scooter out of it, like in that movie with... What's his name? The guy that has the...

Michael J. Fox.

Michael J. Fox movie; that one. We would make scooters. We would play marbles at night in the summertime. We would have a box and we would make two holes in the box in front of the shoe marks. Put it upside down. Then all the kids would come with their marbles and try to get it in there. If they got it in there, you give them two marbles. I was always the one with the box.

We know that you're running for City Council for Ward One. What do you hope to see for your community? For Las Vegas? What do you want to accomplish?

My platform consists of—well, it's still my platform, and that is jobs, paying livable wages to people, to families. Families are starving here in Vegas. Families can't afford to buy a house anymore. They're out of reach because they have to have two and three jobs. Right now what has been going on in Vegas, which is all over the place, it's not just in Vegas, is the hospitality industry, what they've done is they have internationalized the company, so they've got people outside the country working for them. You call to reserve a room and they're not here in Vegas; they're someplace in Peru or someplace else out there, in Chile, in Mexico, but not in the United States. That's bad. What they've done is they have limited the number of full-time employees with benefits who are getting paid livable wages with benefits. They have made it into part-time or on-call. A lot of people are on call and then they are called in for one day a week.

Somebody from MGM approached me about they needed workers. I said, “Okay, let me ask you, how many of those jobs that you are offering are full-time?” “Oh no, they’re not full-time.” I said, “Well, forget it. I’m not going to help you with that.” I refuse to. Why? Because they should be ashamed of themselves. They have created a—my son says I shouldn’t say that—but I say a form of slavery with the working class. They have to work two and three jobs to survive. We’re very lucky. She’s lucky and I’m lucky that I was able to have a job for sixteen years with the agency that I was executive director, but there are too many families without full-time jobs. There are too many families not making enough money to support their families. A lot of them, of course, they qualify for assistance from the government, but the majority don’t even bother. They don’t want to bother because they’re too proud to do it.

That’s one of them. Well, that’s actually two, housing and livable wages. Then the neighborhood safety and the school safety and respect for the teachers. The teachers need to be respected the way they used to be respected when I was a child. They’re not respected by the administration and they’re not respected by the parents and they’re not respected by the students. That’s really sad. Again, I have to go back and say old-fashioned Margarita, religion is neither with these kids nowadays and the parents. For example, you have this thing that some five-year-old kid kissed a little girl next to him and they wanted to put the five-year-old kid in jail or something for sexual harassment. I don’t know where the heck it happened, but it happened here in the United States, yes.

We need that respect for the teachers. We need housing and we need jobs. We need camaraderie among the neighbors. There’s none. Nobody knows anybody. I know my guys next door because sometimes I cook rice for them. I say, “Okay, guys, I’ve got some rice for you.” Then if I need them, they’ll come and give me a hand with what I need. But there’s no

camaraderie. Nobody knows anybody. Nobody knows what's going on. Everybody is afraid everybody.

When I was working at the community center, we built a five-point-one-million-dollar housing project, forty units, forty houses that we sold to low-income families that were making eight-fifty an hour. They were able to do that the end of 2000, beginning of 2001. The people that lived there, they received twenty-seven-thousand-dollar down payment assistance. If they lived there for ten years, the silent lien that was on their home would be eliminated. They're there; they've been there more than ten years already. We used to get people from all over the country coming to see the pilot program that we did here in East Las Vegas. I used to get buses. I had to get on the bus and explain to them about the houses and whatnot. That was the first development that had been built in thirty years in East Las Vegas.

I'm not running in East Las Vegas; I'm running over here. Over here you have a lot of apartments, apartments all over the place, mostly apartments. It's just crazy that there's no affordable housing for low-income people or even middle-class people. Rentals, there's no affordable rentals, either. A landlord can right now go ahead and raise your rental. You're paying seven hundred and all the sudden he says, "Okay, you're going to pay eight hundred," and raise it a hundred dollars just like that, nothing. Either take it or leave it because there's a shortage of rentals and there's a shortage of housing that people can purchase. Those are the things that I'm really concerned about.

With that project what I did is I created a Neighborhood Crime Watch. We need to do that. We need to have safe streets. The way I picture it was you go to the different areas, and I guess you could do it by ZIP codes, and talk to people, get them to have town hall meetings. Elected officials need to have town hall meetings with the people where the people can come.

The City Council has meetings on Wednesday morning at nine o'clock. Who the heck goes to those meetings? Then they have the fricking nerve to say, "Oh, but we have the TV program." Yes, if you have a cable. I don't have cable. I can't watch it. I can't watch it because I don't pay cable. How many people don't pay cable because they can't afford it?

Earlier you started talking about the representation that's currently on the City Council.

City Council only has six and the mayor. What happens is there has never been—that I know of; that I'm aware of—a Hispanic city councilman.

Why is important to have a Hispanic city councilperson?

If it wasn't important, I wouldn't be running. You have taxation without representation as far as I'm concerned. We have 40 percent Hispanic households here in this ward and it's time for them to have representation. What I would like to do when I do get elected is have town hall meetings on weekends so that people that work can come to them, or in the evenings. This thing about City Council, they pass whatever they want and you have no one unless it's a specific problem that the person will go. Nobody knows what's going on. Every time you look at your telephone bill, there's a new tax that the city implemented. Any time you look at your electric bill, there's a new tax that the city implemented. Every time you look at your water bill, there's a new tax that city implemented.

People have to get more involved with what's going on with the city. How do you do that? I think you have to do that with town hall meetings often, not once a year like they've been doing. The last four years, there hasn't even been one around here, not one. Lois Tarkanian, she just spends her time sleeping during the meetings and that's all she's done. That's what that lady has been doing, sleeping on her butt there, sitting there and listening—I'm sorry if she's a friend of yours.

She's been in the position a long time.

Too long. Much too long.

Are there any final comments that you want to make before we finish your oral history?

In terms of what's going on in the city or how everything evolved?

Any last stories about the project, why this is an important project, maybe, or something that you haven't shared with us that you think is important for the Latinx or Hispanic, however you like to call the community.

Or words of encouragement for the Latinx/Hispanic community, to up and coming?

I think this is very good that this project was funded to do. I'll go back again to the guys. The guys here, they think they own the city and the women who live—I'm speaking on behalf of the women here, you've got so many talented women here who are never recognized. They don't even know they exist because the men are just putting themselves out there. Take the Latin Chamber, for example. The Latin Chamber doesn't represent the community. They represent themselves, those men over there with their businesses. They don't do anything for their community.

You know who started a scholarship system here? We did, the Boricua Association. Then the Latin Chamber guy, he copied from us. You know who started doing all kinds of events to raise funds with dances, music and presentations and whatnot? We did and then they started doing it. It's good that people copy from what you're doing because that means you're doing a good thing. But that's what's been going on here.

This project will at least bring out some of the other women, some of the women who have contributed to the stabilization and growth of the city of Las Vegas. That's what I have to say. Elected officials and people in power need to be paying more attention to the women of this

town and to the families. Families are suffering. Families are not getting their due. When I was a young mother, I was able to raise my boys with just the one salary that I had. I was able to buy a house although I did a little selling on the side, Avon.

Avon was good. I made money with Avon. I was working at a building with five hundred employees. Those books were there at every unit. Then when I got promoted, they said, "You can't do that anymore." But then I was getting a salary increase.

Nowadays I don't know how people make it. I don't know how somebody with two kids makes it, I really don't. My granddaughter is doing well because her husband is making good money. He does body and fender; he repairs that in California. His pay is good. But a lot of young people, they don't. I'm fortunate that my son is a police sergeant. My grandson is in Dubai making decent money. He was a teacher in San Diego and he decided to leave. He got married and said, "Off we go." He's in Dubai for five years now. My daughter got a master's degree and she's an executive with this electronic company. She is doing that. My granddaughter is a hair stylist. My other granddaughter works for a big company in San Diego. My youngest grandson graduates from Christian Community College in San Diego in the spring.

When I started college, it was because I wanted to set an example for my family. That's why one day I said, "I've got to go to college because I want my kids to go to college." That's mainly why I did it, for my kids. I used to take my daughter to college with me sometimes because I wanted her to feel the environment. When my daughter was in high school and her girlfriends didn't go to college or anything. "No, no, no, I have to go to college. No way, I have to go to college." She has her master's degree. She's been a teacher. She's now an executive with a private company because the teaching wasn't paying enough for the lifestyle that she wants to have.

Here we need to create opportunities for women, we really do. There are so many young beautiful women here in town and smart. One of my friends went back to Puerto Rico last Sunday. She moved back to Puerto Rico. She was an employee for a whole year. She is a well-educated person, degrees and everything and she couldn't get a job here because everything is part-time or on call. She said, "No, I'm done." She sold everything. She gave up her apartment and she went back to Puerto Rico. That's what a lot of people are doing that are educated. We're going to go back to the early nineties when people who work for the government didn't even have a high school diploma, or some of them for some jobs all they needed was a high school diploma; they needed nothing else. The way it's going, the educated ones are going to get their degree and they're going to get the hell out of here if they can't find a job.

We have to create jobs that pay livable wages to people. While I've always told the state assembly people whenever, oh yes, they're going to create this job, I said, "Listen, did you watch the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question? How many of those three hundred jobs that you are bringing to Las Vegas are full-time jobs paying livable wages? You have to ask that question. If you don't ask that question, you're going to continue this part-time BS, part-time or on-call stuff."

I think it's going to be great that you're—

That was too much, right?

No. I love your passion. I wish you really good luck on the campaign.

Did you find any volunteers?

No, but I shared your contact information.

I know you did. I saw it. But I didn't get a response from anybody yet.

Hopefully some people turn out.

I hope so. I picked up three kids yesterday, three high school kids yesterday.

That's awesome. Thank you so much for letting us interview you and I know you're going to do a great job asking the very difficult questions to challenge how things are now.

I would love to get elected because I know I could do a good job. I was putting on my things that I'm a visionary person. A lot of the time I surprise myself with things that I can...

[End of recorded interview]