AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY E. BRUNE

An Oral History Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

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*.

Claytee D. White
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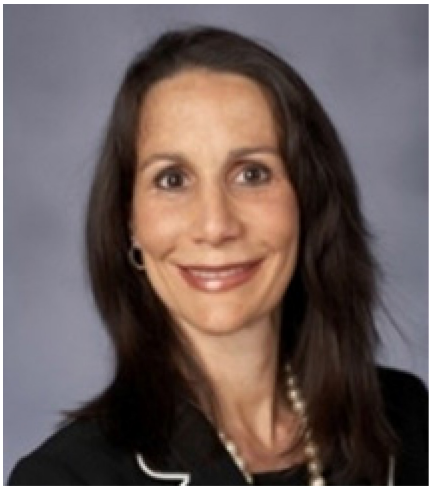
PREFACE



The tapestry of Nancy E. Brune's life story begins as a child being raised in Austin, Texas, by two culturally diverse parents, Jill Parker, a bio geneticist from England, and Roger Brune, a Chicano activist born to Mexican immigrants. As college graduates, her parents nurtured Nancy to seek her educational dream—which she did. She has undergraduate degree from Harvard, a master's degree in public policy from the Kennedy School at Harvard, and a PhD from Yale. Her post-doctoral studies include research fellowships at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania.

While her studies include living and working globally, Las Vegas became home in 2007. That year she, her husband Richard Boulware, and their three children moved to Nevada. Nancy spent the first three years commuting to Sandia Laboratories in New Mexico, teaching as an adjunct professor at Nevada State College and the College of Southern Nevada. Eventually in 2014, she was tapped to be the founding director of the Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities, a bi-partisan think-tank committed to working on economic and political issues in Nevada.

Throughout this interview, Nancy weaves highlight of her youth, her educational journey, of the challenges of being a Latina in college, and thoughts on being a nurturing parent to her biracial children in today's world.

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August 21, 2019
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

LATINX VOICES
OF SOUTHERN NEVADA
An Initiative of the UNLV University Libraries

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Today is August 21st, 2019. My name is Monserrath Hernández. We are in the Oral History Research Center. Today I am with…

Barbara Tabach.

And…

Nancy Brune.

Nancy, can you spell out your name for us?

N-A-N-C-Y. B, like boy, R-U-N-E.

How are you today, Nancy?

I'm good. How are you?

Great. Thank you so much for coming in.

Thank you for inviting me.

I want to start with your identity. How do you identify?

I think in general I identify as a Latina. If I'm back home or with a bunch of Latinos/Latinas, I identify sometimes as Tejana. Even though I am no longer living in Texas, I identify pretty strongly with originally being from Texas and I feel a pretty deep connection to Texas. Then probably, I guess, as a woman. I think my identity as a Latina is probably pretty prominent.

Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in Austin, Texas to a Mexican American, or he called himself Chicano, Chicano father and an English mother. She was born and raised in England. On my father's side, his mother had come over from Mexico. She and her family of ten brothers and sisters had fled the Mexican Revolution, so they came over and settled in San Antonio, I think because there were other family members there. They grew up there. My dad was born on the west side of San

Antonio. He and my mother met when they were late twenties. She had come over from England to do a post-doc, and so they met. My sister and I grew up with them in Austin, Texas.

Can you tell me a little bit about your mother and what she was like?

I was thinking about this the other day. On paper they were very similar, I think because of their backgrounds. My dad was first gen and his family grew up in extreme poverty, and my mother was also first generation to go to school, also grew up in a working class family and also grew up during the war. Those working class narratives are pretty prevalent in my household. My mom was recycling before it really became cool because she just grew up with so little. She would recycle plastic bags and yogurt containers that she used as Tupperware. We didn't buy Tupperware; we just recycled containers. I didn't have my first pair of jeans or store bought clothes until we were probably in fifth grade because she made all of our clothes. We gardened. I think that mindset of—not depravity, but not having enough was pretty prevalent in our household. Working class, came over to go to school for an economic opportunity, and then met my dad.

What school did she attend?

She did Kings College in London and then she did a post-doc at the University of Texas in Austin. I think my dad did his undergraduate degree at University of Texas at Austin, too.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your dad? What was he like?

I started again saying, because I don't think literally, they actually were on paper a lot of like, I think the poverty and working class and first generation going to school. But beyond that they were super different. My mom was very sort of puritan, scientist, very right-brained or methodical, and my dad was sort of a big picture dreamer, thinker. They loved each other deeply, but there was a lot of clashing of personalities, which led to a lot of challenges during their short-

lived marriage and a lot of chaos and drama and violence as we were growing up. They eventually got divorced when we were about twelve. At that point we were begging for them to get divorced because it had just been a challenging environment to be part of.

Do you have any idea how they met?

They share the story that my mom was doing a post-doc in Austin and was living on the second floor of an apartment building, and my dad was visiting his friend on the first floor of the apartment building. He happened to see her and was smitten with her and loved her English accent, so they went on a date and were married probably less than a year later.

Did you pick up any of her British accent?

No. Ironically, she's been here—she only became a citizen when I was probably in college because she very much identifies with being English. But she was working for the Department of Defense and had to do some top security work during the Gulf War in 1991, so the only way she could do that was to renounce her citizenship and become an American citizen. She's been here probably fifty-two years and she still has her English accent, her British accent, so it's cute. We would go back probably every two or three years when we were growing up to see her family and see some of the places there.

You've mentioned your dad did some activism work.

Yes. He identified with being Chicano, not Mexican American. He was really involved with La Raza Unida Party in Texas and really involved with the expansion of Chicano civil rights. Some of my earliest memories, identity formation, were just participating with him or being dragged along, my sister and I, to Chicano youth retreats where we'd spend the whole weekend holed up in these cabins with no air conditioning with people probably your age, a little bit younger, in high school and college, thinking about organizing and mobilizing and what it means to be

Chicano and how do you translate that into social activism. I actually often use Chicano when I was in college. By that time people had sort of moved past Chicano and would say, "Oh, you're so liberal." I sort of started back then saying more Latino than just Chicanos; Chicanos were passive, Chicanos civil rights movement. Not many of my friends to this day or my peers use the word *Chicano*.

Can you describe the neighborhood where you grew up? What was it like? What kind of people lived there?

Probably just middle class. We were fortunate that we grew up in a house where literally the backyard was a park. I remember just in the summertime leaving the house at eight o'clock in the morning, going to the pool, spending all day there, helping the lifeguard close down, and coming back at eight, literally every single day in the summertime. It was interesting because now as a parent you can't do that or you're arrested for letting your child go off. But that's how we grew up, really just free and carefree.

Did you have much family in San Antonio?

We grew up in Austin and everybody else remained in San Antonio, so for every holiday or long weekend, all the birthdays, we would go back to San Antonio. To celebrate our birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving, all the big holidays were spent with our family in San Antonio. My dad had a brother and a sister, and they had about four kids each, so it was cousins and lots of beer. I don't know if you've ever seen a thing that goes around Facebook: You know you're at a Mexican kid's birthday party when there is more alcohol than birthday punch, or there are more adults than kids. It was so true. Any of our family celebrations always ended with the parents drinking too much. Then there were fights. It was fun because the parents would congregate and then the kids would go off and we'd play. We were all the same age; there was like five, six,

seven, eight, nine through fifteen, so it was a really nice peer group or environment to grow up in.

What holidays would you celebrate?

All the big ones. Christmas, Thanksgiving, not so much Cinco de Mayo, but Diez y Seis de Septiembre. My birthday is in October, so we would go over for Dia de los Muertos, just everybody birthdays, big birthdays for my grandmother, parents.

What kind of food would you make?

My grandmother always made tortillas, and it was actually a source of resentment among my dad's sister and brother because they would just get mad—because my grandmother and aunt lived next to each other, very incestuous, and so it was almost like two households combined. My grandmother would never really cook; my grandfather would sometimes. Whenever we would go for holidays, she would always make homemade tortillas. They were like, "Why do you only make them when Roger [Nancy's father] comes?" For Christmas or New Year's it was menudo, which I'm not a big fan of. It was interesting, we never made pozole and I think it's because maybe the menudo is more northern Mexico focus because I know all my friends in California never ate menudo, but they always ate pozole, I don't know whether it's just that most of my family comes from northern Mexico and a lot of my friends in California come from Mazatlán and right across from Cabo, just sort of that region of Mexico, so I'll have to look into that.

What part of Mexico did your family—

The state of Coahuila. We would go sometimes to Saltillo with the family. We would make a big journey to Saltillo, which is where my grandmother and my grandfather had family. We always hated it because my grandfather was kind of tyrannical, and so he wanted to get there in record

time so he would never stop. We literally grew up with a pee can in the car where he would just like, “Use the pee can. I’m not stopping.” That’s one of the things that bonded my husband and I because I thought that was horrific, and he said, “Oh my gosh, we had the same thing.” His dad actually cut a hole in their van floor—they had three boys—so they could just pee or do other things and not have to stop, either. “You can relate.” We were destined to be together since we had that shared childhood experience.

How far of a drive is it?

I want to say maybe six hours. It’s three from San Antonio to Laredo and then, yes, probably six or seven, but if we would have stopped it would have been eight or nine. Then there’s the expense; every time you stop you want to get stuff from the store. That’s probably what he was trying to avoid.

What language did you speak at home?

We spoke English. I remember when we were young my mom took Spanish classes and we would sit around the dinner table and she would try to hold conversations in Spanish so that we could all grow up speaking English and Spanish. That worked for a little while, but then after a while, my dad wasn’t around for dinner much, and so it became challenging for her alone to teach us, so then we stopped. We didn’t really grow up bilingual. Then my dad also didn’t want us to learn Spanish.

How come?

I think he struggled with his identity. It was a love-hate relationship. He’s very proud of being Chicano and identified. But I think because he had suffered so much as a kid in being the only brown person in college where he had an accent and was poor and was made fun of, he wanted us to—I think he would have preferred that we see ourselves more as American and then

Mexican. I know in high school when I wanted to take Spanish, he said, "You have to either take Latin or German." His mindset was, if you take the SAT, you're going to be better prepared with all those roots that have Latin derivatives to do really well on the SAT and Spanish will not help you. But even when I became fluent in Spanish, he very rarely wanted to have a conversation in Spanish. It was interesting. I'm just remembering that.

[Your father] went by Roger, right?

That was his name. It was also very different; a grand part of Texas was part of Mexico from the beginning, and so, so few of my friends and none of my family members speak Spanish. My grandmother never spoke in Spanish to her grandkids or never encouraged them. She would only speak in Spanish to her brothers and sisters and then her kids, but she almost refused to speak—when I spoke to her in Spanish when I could do that, she would still go back to English. She named her kids very American names.

On purpose.

On purpose, yes. Alexander was Alexander, not Alejandro. Nancy, which I think is a really American name. And then Roger, not Rogelio, which you sometimes see in Mexico or Spain, other Latin Spanish-speaking countries. It was very interesting.

The ancestral roots were from that geographic part of Texas for generations.

Yes.

It wasn't part of a migration crossing.

Yes. It's funny because she did. Whereas I have friends who were in college with me who their parents or family had come over probably 17th or 18th century or early 1800s, not during the Mexican Revolution. She didn't speak Spanish. Her parents didn't speak Spanish. It's really interesting.

Yes, people aren't aware of that part of history always. They make assumptions.

Yes, yes. it's been interesting to see that people are giving the Castro brothers [Joaquin and Julio] a hard time because they don't speak Spanish, but very few people in San Antonio, especially if their grandparents…I don't think, for example, his grandmother came from Mexico. She may have, but I know his mom didn't. I think everybody just sort of wants to be American and Texan and there isn't maybe that pride in learning two languages or realizing that it's actually a richness or an asset as opposed to something to be ashamed of or forgotten.

That's interesting.

Yes, it's very interesting. It was interesting when I was in college to compare folks from California to Texas because I'd say none of the Latinos that were sort of active in the Chicano group—it was called Raza at Harvard—and that group from Texas spoke Spanish, but everybody from California did. A lot of them were more recent immigrants or their parents had come over or they came over when they were really small. There are some cute videos that actually describe it. I don't know if you've seen it. It's on YouTube. It's a pair of young Mexicans from California having a barbeque with a pair of young Mexicans from Texas, and it's stereotypical, but it's so true. We love our barbeque. We drink beer. California Mexicans drink it with wine. They speak Spanish. The Texan Mexicanos don't speak Spanish. It's like, oh my God, there is something to it, just the cultural differences and the linguistic differences between Mexican Americans from California versus Texas. My Mexican American friends in high school spoke Spanish. Very interesting.

It's a regional thing. Also how recent your family has integrated. I've seen that pattern, too.

Yes, yes.

Tell me a little bit about high school. What was high school like? Where you involved in anything?

Yes, I was involved in tennis, journalism, soccer. We didn't have Spanish Club. I think it was HRC, Human Relations Club. Student Council. High school was an interesting time. My parents had gotten divorced by high school and we had decided to not live with my mom and live with my dad.

Why was that?

I realized after my parents got divorced that my dad suffered from depression and I just felt as though he needed a lot of taking care of or someone to help him. He didn't have a lot of friends. My mother is more social, very resilient, doesn't talk about feelings or doesn't seem to need anybody, being very strong and stoic, whereas he was sad, would cry sometimes. I felt as though of the two parents he really needed us more than she did, and so I said, "I'd like to go live with him." And my mom said, "Well, we're not going to split up you and your sister, so wherever one goes, both have to go." And so we went to live with my dad.

But we probably didn't think through what that all meant, and so just the challenges of being with a parent who suffers from depression and can't work or just can't hold a job for long periods of time. If we were sort of lower middle income before their divorce and separation, we were definitely low income in high school, which is interesting. I didn't feel that we didn't have a lot. I think about it now and we got clothes the very first week of school, new back-to-school clothes, and then for the rest of the year my sister and I just shared them. Luckily we wore the same size, so it seemed like we had more clothes than we did. We had to coordinate. "I'm going to wear this on this day; you wear that on that day." We had one car and then sometimes we didn't have any car. We rented houses and were kicked out. I think by the time I went off to

college we were really couch surfing with people either at the church or a guy that my dad was living with. My dad and I literally shared a floor, slept on a floor in a room, just were couch surfing with someone. I remember there was a lot of anger at that time just because you don't realize what depression really is. I can recognize that now. It was good.

Applying to college, what was that process like? Where did you apply?

I applied to a lot of schools. I think maybe as a result of the chaos, the one thing I focused on was, maybe not trying to get out, but just going to college; that helped me stay grounded despite all the noise, just keep focus on what I wanted to do in the long term. I probably worked really hard and then applied to lots of different schools, which was very stressful.

Where did you ultimately end up going?

I ended up going to Harvard, actually.

Why Harvard?

When I was probably six years old or maybe in fifth grade, I asked my dad, "Where is the best school in the world?" And he said, "Harvard." And then I said, "Well, I want to go there." I remember I spoke before some Cheyenne High School students a couple of years ago. I remember being in ninth grade and for English for an essay we had to write our goals or who we were. Back then you printed out pictures. What's it called, like a vision board? I said, "By the time I'm sixteen I want to have a Corvette, have a boyfriend, be a model, and go to Harvard." By the time I graduated I had none of those things. I never had a boyfriend. I made the kids guess. "I'm not a model. I know it's hard for you to believe." I did not have a Corvette. Looking back, it's like, you really clearly didn't even think about the level of poverty. If you had really understood what income bracket you were in, having a Corvette was just impossible. But the one thing that did come true is I got into Harvard.

At Harvard what did you study?

I went as premed. I thought I always wanted to be a doctor my entire life, so I took premed classes. I was pretty good in science and math in high school, and then I got to Harvard and did pretty poorly on all the entrance classes, so math and chemistry. But then I also noticed that anytime someone talked about blood, I literally would faint, and I thought, *okay, I can't be a doctor.* Then I started working for a state representative and doing more policy work, so I ended up switching to government, so I was a government major.

What did you do at Harvard when you were struggling? Did you find any support system? Did you feel isolated? What was going on?

Luckily in our freshman dorm, because you have a freshman dorm and then you go to the upperclassman dorm, luckily in our freshman dorm my adviser who lived on my floor was actually a Latina from Texas, and there was a girl down my hall who her family was a farmworker family in California, and so we became best friends and we ended up living together. With my adviser and with Sylvia, we were all just experiencing the isolation together. We actually had to go buy a winter coat together because she was from California and I was from Texas and we had never seen snow before. I think so many of us there at that time felt as though we were a mistake and didn't belong because the affirmative action debate was going on there. We really bonded.

Every Friday night there was what they called MESA, which was Mexican American Student Association, because it was open to everyone. Puerto Ricans had their own group, (LAUL). All the Mexican American students would gather in a single dining room hall and eat together. They gave us a big brother, big sister. We would all go to church together on Sunday. I got really involved with the Mexican American group. Then there was also a political group, so

we all joined that together. Looking back, it's funny when I go to my Harvard reunions, I know so few people because that was my support group and I rarely socialized with people outside of that group because I think we were just struggling to hold it together. It was great while I was there, but looking back I thought, I missed out on all these amazing networking opportunities. My husband, his roommate was, like, the son of the Prince of Denmark, and he was very social, so he knows everybody, people who were in Obama's cabinet. I stayed pretty close to what felt like family while I was there.

Were there dynamics isolating you or did you isolate yourself?

I think I was just so miserable that finding my family there—Sylvia and Delores, we roomed together the entire time. I think that just became my family. A couple of people did leave the first semester and I know I was failing out. Literally I was failing my classes first semester. I think I just held on a little bit more. After I took time off and came back, I did try to spend more time with different sorts of people.

Where did you take your time off?

I was talking to somebody about this last night. If I had known a gap year was sort of a thing back then, I probably would have done a gap year, and I want all of my kids to do a gap year. If you don't know why you're going to college, it becomes actually harder and you get more distracted. Going away was hard and then also having this overwhelming feeling of not really belonging, like I was the mistake, the one person who the admissions committee made a mistake, so I was struggling. I told my dad I wanted to go—I guess maybe before I went off, I read the autobiography, and that was the biography of Dorothy Day. She was the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, very inspiring, a different Mother Teresa, if you will. She was an organizer and a union worker and really amazing. After reading that I thought, *I want to go work with*

Mother Teresa. When I got to Harvard, I was feeling like I didn't belong, very homesick for my family, and so I was failing all my classes. My dad said, "Please just stay there one year or two years and then you can take a year off." And so I did that and I spent a couple of months working for my state representative in Texas and then I spent the rest of the time living and working in a homeless shelter in New York City with a Catholic Worker.

What did you learn from that experience?

I think the experience made me realize that I wanted to go back to school because I realized that just handing out food or giving someone short-term assistance, a smiling face, a bowl of soup, was not actually changing sort of the structural reasons why they were poor or homeless, and so I felt the need to go back to school and get an education, get a degree so that I could go work and have some sort of policy job. It gave me purpose for being in school. Not surprising, I was a much better student after I got back those last two years.

After Harvard what was next for you?

When I took a year off, I had actually wanted to take two years off and maybe do some development work. My research found that most places where you do development work in other countries require two years. An obvious choice was the Peace Corps, and so a lot of folks that had graduated before me and some of my friends went off to do the Peace Corps. But I had also heard from those people that many times when people do Peace Corps experiences they are stuck in an office or they're stuck teaching English as a second language, which I did not want to do. I had wanted to go to Latin America and do international development work. My first choice had been Peru since I had read a lot of Alan Garcia's works. Before he was president (of Peru), he was in the Defense Ministry, and so he just had these incredible books. I wanted to go to Peru,

but at the time the (indiscernible) was slaughtering people. My dad said, “There’s no way you’re going to Peru. It’s super dangerous.” The State Department had watches.

I decided I would go to Nicaragua where the Catholic Worker community had some priests that were loosely affiliated with the Catholic Worker. They had a community in Mexico and Nicaragua. They said, “Well, there’s a community nearby here if Nancy wanted to come down.” When I graduated I received a ten-thousand-dollar stipend to do community service worker. That deal was that you would probably work here in the U.S. and that could supplement your income. I said, “Well, I’m just going to take that and go down to Nicaragua.”

I went down there and it was my own experience. I didn’t go with an organization or agency. I just…

You showed up.

Pretty much, I showed up and then was able to get really involved and plugged in where they had a need.

What kind of work did you do there?

I ran a pharmacy. I collected two hundred boxes of stuff before I left and then contacted Continental Airlines and they flew all my donated goods down to Nicaragua without charging me. They waived the baggage fees. In some of those things there was medicine and the community had also donated medicine. I trained as a pharmacist, worked with the community healthcare center, helped start a women's cooperative, and then taught kindergarten in Spanish and help develop and expand a youth health program, like a public health program for youth.

What did those programs entail, or at least the health program?

The idea was that the young people are the future, the generation that’s going to change things, and so you teach kids better hygiene practices or about diseases, illnesses, and then they can help

take care of the household or train their parents to adopt better hygiene practices or help the parents figure out how to treat the flu or asthma.

Were you assigned these things—

No.

—or did you come up with them as you saw the need in the community?

Yes.

How long were you there?

Three years.

What was that experience like?

It was hard initially. I was sharing this story with someone the other day; I can't remember in what context. It was very rural, so no transportation, no running water, no electricity. There are actual coral snakes in the community, and I knew at the time if I had gotten bitten, I would have died because there is no anti-venom medicine in the entire country, not even the U.S. Embassy had the anti-venom treatment. It was amazing because kids run around with no shoes, just the poverty. I lived with a family of ten, so eight kids, and literally we all slept in the same room and I shared a bed with eight kids. The second day I was there I contracted lice because in the community had hair or head and body lice. I think I lost probably thirty pounds my first month that I was there, and then my mom started sending me care packages.

One night I remember it had been a long day with the kids. I had seen a coral snake in the morning. I had just finished reading. I burned my bangs because I read by candlelight, and so every time I got too close or got tired, you would smell the burn. The kids had made me a drawing and I had taped it up on the sand wall. I laid down and I looked at the drawing. I was like, *it's interesting; there's a shadow.* I pull up the picture and literally it was this far. There

were three huge scorpions right there. I just started crying. It's just dusty. I can't take a shower. I said, "I'm leaving tomorrow." I just cried myself to sleep. *"I've had enough. I'm over it*." Then, I think, I left another two and a half years later.

What kept you there?

I think just the work because I always wanted to do that. The next day is a new day. It was hard, but it was super rewarding in connecting with people.

What kind of people did you work with other than the obvious, the rural population?

NGOs, the religious community, the Catholic community. At one point while I was I actually thought about becoming a nun, which was interesting.

My father, I'm just remembering, he actually dropped out of college for a little bit and initially joined the military, as his brother had done. I think he lasted maybe six months. He didn't do very well with authority. He lasted six months and went over to France, which is how he really developed a taste for international and appreciation for other cultures. I've actually heard that's where he started pronouncing his name differently. We pronounce our name Brune, and in France they pronounced it Brune or Brunay whereas most of our family members, including my sisters sometimes, pronounces it Brunee. I think he went by Brunee and then he went off to France and came back Brune. Then he also joined the seminary and he was pretty close to becoming a priest. He actually grew up…All of his friends were priests. I remember growing up and having all his friends that were priests coming to Sunday dinner. We went to church every Sunday. My dad and I lived together during the summer in a church.

I spent a lot of time with the religious community in Nicaragua.

Why didn't you become a nun? What stopped you?

I think it was, again, the restrictions; you just can't do certain things. My husband likes to joke. I don't like being told what to do, either. I am very much like my father.

What brought you back? You said you didn't want to leave.

When I was there I realized that the reason why the community was so poor had a lot to do with international relations and trade patterns, and so if I wanted to help lift Nicaragua out of poverty, because it's actually the second poorest country after Haiti in the Western Hemisphere, so if I wanted to help the entire country, because it wasn't just a village that was suffering, I had to come back and learn more about policy and become more well versed in international trade matters, and so that would require more school. It brought me back to a public policy degree at the Kennedy School.

What years were you in Nicaragua and what was the political—

Right after the civil war, so 1991 to 1994.

Who was in power at that time?

Chamorro, Violeta Chamorro. The community I was in was heavily Sandinista.

She was the first female president of Latin America, right?

Yes. Good memory. Oh, yes, because you were—yes. In our village I would sometimes go to bed at night and you could hear gunfire. You could hear the Contras getting closer and closer and coming through. There were a couple of times you had to go—not lockdown, but just hide and turn off the lights. It was a little scary. When we were driving to the city, sometimes you'd see the Contras were stopping vans and things.

Check points.

Yes, check points.

What kind of precautions did you take to keep yourself safe and others safe?

None. I joke with my kids now because I've lived a very naïve life just not realizing what could happen. Now that I'm a mom I would never want my kids to do what I did. I remember one time when I was in Nicaragua—and we've heard a lot about it here with the undercurrents. There are people dying in, like, Florida where they go out and there is a huge riptide. That happened to me in Nicaragua. At one point I said, "If you don't just calm down, you are literally going to die." I was waving and my friend thought, *oh, she's just saying hi*. But after a while he realized I was in distress, so the lifeguards came out and helped me go back. I later learned that thirty-five people on average, a lot of tourists, die in that same beach because no one knows about this riptide. There were just so many instances. I was in a truck and we went downhill off a mountain. Truly a miracle I made it back. I would just walk around at twelve o'clock at night visiting friends, not really understanding that there still could be Contras around here or anybody could just do something.

How would you describe that decision to leave? I know that sometimes you just get into that lifestyle. How do make a big change?

It was hard. The volunteers, the community. Two of the families had named me godmother of their kids. It was hard.

But you knew you needed to move on?

Yes, and part of me thought I would go back, actually. It was sort of like, I'll be back; I'm going to go off and get some more schooling, maybe come back to Nicaragua with a royal bang. I guess maybe two years later after I finally left, maybe three, I was able to consult with the Harvard School of Public Health, and their first project, I think actually why they hired me, is because the project had to do with Nicaragua. I actually got to go back and see them in that capacity, so it was really nice. Now with Facebook we stay in touch.

Are any of the programs that you established still going on today? Do you keep track of that information?

I looked actually for that the other day. The one that was the public healthcare program for youth was actually funded by a Swedish or German NGO. When I did a search, I did not see it there, so I don't know.

Coming back, what was that like? What did you feel?

I think the transition was hard. Truly, you go from a country with nothing and then you sort of realize the opulence and wealth, especially going to public policy school at Harvard, just very different wealth, so I think that transition was hard. That's why I was thinking, *I'm going back*. I remember telling myself, "I'm definitely going back."

You left your heart in Nicaragua.

I did. I sometimes say that my heart—sometimes people think I speak with a Nicaraguan accent sometimes. I'm Maria in Nicaragua or Maria Mexicana because I do feel a little bit…Yes.

From Harvard, getting your public policy degree, what did you do next?

Then I went to Yale for my PhD.

What did you study at Yale?

Political science. Actually, now that I think about it, I feel as though my—I won't say my trajectory. I often forget, but if I think about what's drawing me professionally right now, I actually wanted to be an urban planner coming out of the Kennedy School and then thinking about development in Nicaragua. My first choice was to go to MIT since they have a really strong urban planning program. I actually worked with an urban planning consulting firm while I was at the Kennedy School. I applied to MIT and that was my first choice. They accepted me, but they gave me no financial aid. I had no idea of what it ever meant to even get a PhD in

political science, but I applied because I was really interested in—do you know the political philosopher Robert Dahl? As I was applying to graduate school, he wrote this book titled *Economic Democracy*, and then I had also read Robert Putnam's *Social Capital*. Those two books had really spurred my thinking about community development and economic development and what it means to have strong economic development or community development. Robert Dahl was actually at Yale, and I guess Robert Putnam was at Harvard, but he had done a fellowship over at Yale. So I thought, *well, if I go to Yale, I could work with Robert Dahl who wrote this great book.* I applied, but I didn't really know what it meant to apply for a PhD program in political science. MIT said, "Yes, we want you, but we have no money for you." Then Yale the next day said, "We want you and we have a full ride for you." I said, "I can't not go where the money is," so I said yes to Yale. Literally I think two days later MIT called me and said, "We want you to know we have money for you. We just couldn't tell you until it was a hundred percent final." I said, "Oh my God, I just..." I guess back then I thought I couldn't rescind. Now it happens all the time when you say yes, but back then I didn't realize that I could, and so I said, "I have to go to Yale because I just accepted with them." I ended up doing that and it was not a good fit. I wonder how my life would be, how my trajectory would have been different had I done MIT.

Right now professionally—I don't know if we talked about this, but we have no community development corporations here in Vegas. For a population our size, if you look at New Mexico or San Antonio, even, there are so many community development corporations. I don't know if you're following the development of the Moulin Rouge site. Historic, incredible history, and, first of all, right now the current bids or the ideas for proposals don't seem to do justice. One of them is just to create another gaming enterprise there. I don't think that that sort

of project pays tribute to the history and the richness. I was telling somebody, "If we had a community development corporation, we could actually bring the public and private sector funds and think about community development in a richer, more meaningful way." But we don't have that, so it's just one-off people. I think the person working on Marble Manor is from out of state. We need some visionary thinking around community development. I'm just realizing that is my fundamental passion, so I'd love to somehow get back to that.

At Yale what were you working on? What kind of dissertation or projects did you work on?

I started off with social capital and economic democracy and couldn't figure out what that was. Then I started working with someone who did international political economy and became very interested in data and data collection. My dissertation ended up being an original dataset looking at the movement of capital. My professor was really into globalization at the time, early 2000s, globalization of people, of technology, of information, and so I sort of fell onto that bandwagon and looked at the globalization of trade and capital.

After Yale what did you do?

After Yale I worked for a bank for four months, hated it. That was my only dabbling in with the private sector. Then I did two post-docs, one at Princeton and one at University of Pennsylvania. Then I came here.

What brought you to Las Vegas?

My husband.

Oh. How did you meet your husband?

We actually went to Harvard together. We met our sophomore year. I met him my sophomore year because our rooming group had such a configuration where we had a single open bedroom

in what we called a U. Richard's brother had also gone to Harvard and taken time off, and when he came back all of his friends had graduated, so he was just randomly thrown in with someone who had a single bedroom that was available. His name is Thornton. Thornton and I shared a dorm unit. After my sophomore year I took a year off, and so I never saw Richard again. Then when I came back Richard had actually taken three years off from Harvard, and so our paths never crossed, but I always stayed in touch with his brother, Thornton.

Ironically, when I was at the Kennedy School, I was actually in school with one of their cousins, although I didn't know she was cousins with Richard and Thornton. Richard was doing his PhD in the sociology department at Harvard, but our paths never crossed.

Fast forward to 2004. Richard and I had been engaged to different people and we had broken up. I was living in L.A. and he was in New York. Thornton was here and said, "Hey, Nancy, come to my wedding," because we had stayed in touch. I had never been to Vegas. I was thirty-seven and I had never been here. I was in California and Sylvia, my roommate from college, said, "We have to go to Thornton's wedding. Get in the car. Let's drive and meet there. You can stay with us." The night before Thornton's wedding, Richard and I met each other. We both looked so different, it was like, "Who is this?" And he said, "Who is this?" We all went dancing that night. The second night at Thornton's wedding he caught the garter and I caught the bouquet. We've been dating ever since and we got married.

Whoa. Sounds like a movie scene.

When I tell people they say, "Oh my God, that's just like a movie." I moved to New York and then after we had our first kid, we realized it takes a village to raise a family, so it was either Texas—and he refused to go to Texas—or Las Vegas, and so we came here.

What year did you guys settle here?

2007. It was really hard.

When the recession—

Right before the recession, actually.

How did the recession affect your family or your husband's family?

One of his older brothers is in gaming. He didn't get laid off, but I think it was really hard to move up because there were so few jobs. We found a house near him so our kids could grow up together because we had daughters the same age. Within weeks of us buying that house, he went up to Reno and he's been working for Jacobs Entertainment, which is based in Colorado, but they're redeveloping that art, the downtown area up in Reno. Then we sort of benefitted when we first moved here; we lived with his mom for a year, year and a half, and then we were able to buy a bank-owned home. We sort of benefitted from the recession.

What kind of job did you go into here in Las Vegas?

It was very, very difficult to find a job here initially. I started working as an adjunct in the political science department.

Here at UNLV?

Yes.

What were you teaching?

Political science and world geography. I like the students. I was going to say I credit the students for helping me figure out who to support in 2008. If you remember on the Democratic side there were like twenty people.

Like today.

Like now. I was leaning towards Hillary [Clinton] at the time. Then I had these students who were Republicans, Independents, Libertarians, Democrats, and they were all talking about

[Barak] Obama. I thought, *there is something to this if kids who are normally not engaged*…Half of my class didn't vote. They were really jazzed by him. I said, "I need to start looking at this guy because if they like him, there must be something to it, and I want to support somebody who gets them involved and energized." I ended up supporting him primarily because of my students at UNLV, so it was interesting.

Kids want change.

Yes.

That's really, really nice. What kind of work were you doing on the side from being an adjunct?

I couldn't find a job. There was this organization—it's no longer around—that was at UNLV, the Institute for Security Studies. The head was a three-star general. I had heard it on KNPR that they had done a seminar on security, and so I literally just cold called and went in and said, "I'm here to volunteer. Could I affiliate or do something for this institute?" There aren't that many research centers here, and that was one of the first ones I had heard of. He said, "Well, actually we need a grant writer." I said, "I will do whatever. I'm happy to start as a grant writer." I did grant writing, but it helped me—I feel like I've reinventing myself a million times. I went from doing international work, development, financial, health. When I got here I had to reinvent myself in homeland security, international security space. I did that and then from that I ended up getting a job at Sandia National Labs in Albuquerque doing national security work and homeland security work.

You would commute there or did you move there?

I commuted.

How often would go over there and come back here?

Probably for the first year it was every weekend. I had just had my third child; she was three or four months old. I would leave on Sunday afternoon, drive to New Mexico, stay there through Friday, and then drive back, spend a few hours here, and then go back again. I did that probably for the first year. I don't know why I didn't think about flying. I think initially it was so expensive, but then I kept getting all these speeding tickets and I realized if you buy a dozen flights when Southwest has those sales at that time, it was actually pretty cheap to fly. Probably the last two years I would go up Monday morning and then come back maybe Thursday night.

Where would you stay in Albuquerque?

The first year I had an apartment and by the time I left I was just staying at a Motel 6 and just camping out and coming back.

And you did this for how long?

Almost four years. That was my longest job to date, too. Now I've been at the Guinn Center a few years more, but at the time four years was the longest time I had ever been at a job, which is just so different than…My dad thought I was crazy. My mom was with the same job for thirty years.

While your husband was here with the kids.

He was here.

How many kids did you have at the time?

Three. Yes, he's a saint.

What's he do, what kind of work?

We came out here because he was a federal public defender. He was working as a federal public defender in New York and then came out here when there was an opening here. Then five years ago he became a district court judge. He was nominated by Senator Reid, supported by Senator

Heller, and then Obama approved it and the Senate confirmed him, so he's got a lifetime appointment. Governor Sandoval held that same sort of position, Judge Dawson and Judge George, Judge Navarro. Have you interviewed Gloria Navarro?

No.

She is the chair of the district bench. She would be good, actually.

Did he go to Harvard Law School?

He went to Columbia Law School.

He wasn't at Harvard the same time Barack Obama was.

I'm trying to think. He was in their sociology program that same time because that's when I was at the Kennedy School—actually no. He started Harvard Law, I think, the year I was a senior. They probably overlap because Richard took time off. He was finishing up at the college when Barack was there.

In law school.

Yes. I never asked him. I know that he met—he actually went to a party when he was at Columbia and he had a dance with Judge Sotomayor.

She's a Latina.

Yes. She's super cool, yes, definitely.

After your time over there, what finally brought you to work here in Las Vegas?

I think after four years it had just become really hard. The kids were getting older. I think when they were young they're more resilient, but as they get older they're involved in more activities and I think my absence was more apparent as they got older. Quite frankly, it was taking a toll on our marriage. I thought, *I'd like to get back to Nevada and get back to my real job*, which is policy. I had been thinking about starting a Latino policy institute. Actually, when I first arrived I

had those conversations with some people here, and often they said, "No, no, we're already doing that; we've got that; we're starting a Latino policy institute." And I thought, *okay, well, I'll wait for that person to start it and then maybe I'll support*. I don't think that ever happened, and so I was like, *well, I'm going to start a Latino policy institute*.

Then as I was thinking about this, a group of folks had already recognized the need to start a bipartisan policy institute here in this state, and so they hired someone to do a needs assessment to figure out, do we really need a policy center? This was almost right before Lincy and Brookings West had launched because I think we almost sort of launched at the same time. At the time there was nothing. That person somehow connected with my husband and said, "We want to start a policy institute." He said, "Oh, policy…You should talk to my wife." They connected with me. Fast forward, they asked me to be the founding executive director of the Guinn Center.

What does the Guinn Center do? What kind of research or policy?

We are a statewide bipartisan policy center and we do research on pretty much everything that affects Nevadans and even folks in the Intermountain West. Most of our work to date has been on education, K through twelve, higher education. We've also done some work on health, looking at behavioral health, workforce issues. We've just finished a paper looking at the uninsured population here in Nevada, who doesn't have insurance. I think the vast majority of people your age, younger people who aren't insured. Water issues, tax issues. Looking at personal care aids now.

Talk about the namesake. How is it named the Guinn Center?

This was before I came on. I guess the core group had been talking about this for a while with Senator Bryan, Commissioner Rory Reid at the time, even Senator Reid. I don't know about

Governor Sandoval. They had the center and then one day somebody said—and this was after Governor Guinn had passed—"Why don't we name it after Governor Guinn?" I think the thinking is it was perfect because, first of all, he was so—I unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet him, but he was so adored. Everywhere I go someone always tell me their Kenny Guinn story and they're in tears and I'm practically in tears. He just seemed like, again, really humble beginnings and never forgot that. He was just as happy talking to Senator Rosen as the guy at the gas station, very down to earth.

He was known for three things. One was being super committed to educations. He started the Millennium Scholarship. He also is known for being very bipartisan and would roll up his sleeves and work with whoever. He was not Republican or Democrat; he was about Nevada. When I did some research, he was a registered Democrat initially and then he became a registered Republican, I think, right before he ran for governor. I think he thought he was more likely to get elected. Then the other thing about him is that he knew the state budget better than anybody else. When the Legislative Counsel Bureau staff would come to him and say, "Sorry, Governor, we don't have money for that program," he would say, "Actually, look at Line 16 right here. If we move this money here…"

With those ideals we stood up the Guinn Center, so we focus on tax policy, we are bipartisan, and we've done a lot of work on education.

Good, good.

Yes, it's a great…

How long has the Guinn Center be open?

We are five and a half years old, and I've been working there six and a half years because I started working on it while I was finishing up at Sandia, so it's my longest job ever.

What are your hopes for the Guinn Center? What is the Guinn Center trying to accomplish? What is your big vision?

I think we're in a great place. I think when we first started even our own board was wondering, how can you really be bipartisan? We've actually been very successful, in part, because we use the academic model. First of all, we have a bipartisan board and they sort of collectively either suggest or approve loosely things that we weigh in on. Then when we publish a paper, we always send it out for external review, so we follow the academic peer review process, and that way they read it to make sure that we're being accurate and that we're not driving a particular agenda. They may not agree with our conclusions, but at least they feel as if we're treating the subject in a fair and balanced way. They usually are okay with the publication. That served us really well.

We did a big paper on Question 3; that energy choice last year where both sides were putting millions of dollars into it. We had someone from Switch and someone from NVEnergy read our paper, and they were both upset that we weren't more on their side, but they both found that it was fair and balances, and both sides referenced the Guinn Center. "Well, the Guinn Center said this." It is a good place to be in.

You won't know this reference, but I often with folks share that we're becoming like the EF Hutton of policy centers. There is an old accounting firm and the commercial is like, "When EF Hutton speaks, people listen." I feel as though the Guinn Center very much is in that space where we almost monthly get people calling us and saying, "Where does the Guinn Center stand on this issue or that issue?" I think we're in a great space.

I do think what I would like to see us do more of is less research. For some issues you have enough data. One issue that we're looking at, for example, is the wild mustang issue. The science is there, right? But what you really need to do is sort of get past the emotion and do

almost more a mediation convening so that people can have a productive discussion about what to do about the wild mustangs. I think because we are perceived as neutral and independent and fair, we're being asked to play more of those types of roles or do more statewide convenings, and so that is my next vision for the Guinn Center.

I think I'd love for us to have a bigger national footprint. We've been so focused on Nevada issues that we haven't had time to participate in conferences or travel to D.C. But there is a definitely a gap between what D.C. folks understand as happening in Nevada and what's really going on here. After the 2016 election, it was interesting to have so many national folks contact us because they realized with the current discussions at the national level, they really need people to be boots on the ground and sort of push back at the state level, and the folks in D.C. found out that they just didn't have those connections. Whatever happens in D.C. is so important, it's almost like a bubble. We had lots of people reaching out to either partner with us or ask us what was going on, on the ground. I'd like to somehow use that to have the Guinn Center be more of a national resource in national conversations.

A starter.

Yes.

Talk to me about your writing that you do in your spare time.

Not as much as I used to. I am actually trying to negotiate potentially just some time off to work on some nonfiction writing and then some fiction writing.

You write in your spare time, right? Have you published anything?

I have. Today it's been mostly short pieces, either op eds or longer essays or blogs, but nothing that you could pull together to be a book at this point. I don't know if you've heard this, but there is actually a Mexican saying or an idiom, and I changed it because it's 'every man.' The actual

expression is, “Every man should plant a tree, have a son, and write a book before he dies.” I’ve changed it to, “Every woman should have a daughter, plant a tree, and write a book before she dies.” I feel as though that’s my goal. I’ve had a daughter, planted a million trees, and so I feel like I have to write that book before I die.

There you go. I like that. That’s great.

I think the idea is legacy. You can interpret or probably tweak it, but the idea is those are things where you set down tangible roots and a legacy. Maybe it’s not a book. Someone could argue, well, the Guinn Center is the equivalent; that legacy. It’s not named after you, but you’ve basically created a whole institute, which hopefully will live on in perpetuity if you’ve done the work well. My dad wrote and aspired also to write, and so I feel almost as though someone’s got to execute that dream.

How do you mentor your children? How are they culturally—do I recall that your husband is African American?

He’s African American, yes.

You have a lot of different cultural roots with these children. How do you instill all of that in your children? You have three. Did you have any more after that third one?

No. My husband jokes. Just the other night he said, “I know if you had been here and not been in Sandia, we probably would have had five kids right now.”

I feel as though I actually could do a lot more in that realm. It’s been challenging because two of my kids look actually more African American. If you saw them you would say, “Oh, African American.” Even my own daughter said that in school she’ll say, “I’m part Latina, part African Americans,” and her friends are like, “You’re not Latina.” They have their own conception of what that looks like. Given that Richard’s family is all here, I think they hear the

history; we drive by the Westside. He is very active about having those conversations and talking about Emmett Till. I think they actually get more of that in elementary school, as I'm thinking about my daughter and last year they studied the Holocaust, and so she was just obsessed with Anne Frank and was reading all the books about her and wants to go to Germany. They'll talk about Rosa Parks. I don't think they've actually even studied—she mentioned Dolores Huera or Cesar Chavez, but those are the only historical Mexican figures or Latino figures that they have learned about, and that was only last year they mentioned that. I don't think our schools are doing a good job about teaching the realm of different heroes of different traditions—American, Indian, etc.

The canon is very rich.

Yes, yes. You almost do the easy ones or the one that comes to the forefront; that comes to mind.

Minorities seem to be part of the appendix material that you never get through.

Yes, yes.

It's kind of like do it on your free time or your environment, your parents teach you about it.

Yes, yes. It was funny because Assemblyman Harvey Munford had a bill a couple of sessions ago. It actually passed. The bill [Assembly Bill 234] was to require multicultural education. I was like, *really? That as opposed to literacy?* It was important, but if you have so few dollars that wasn't a high priority. Then my daughter is in middle school last year, and they started reading *Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The teacher wanted to say the N word as they were reading. I think at some point she said, "Well, I don't know. Let's take a vote. Are you guys okay saying the N word, or should we skip over it?" My daughter is one of two kids who is African American. My daughter came home in tears because she felt so self-conscious, the

weight of saying, no, this makes me feel uncomfortable, was part of this eleven-year-old to say, no, this is not okay. She did, God bless her. I admire her strength. But I thought that is actually why we need the multicultural education in teaching because—

That shouldn't even be a question.

That shouldn't even be a question, right? The teacher should be taking leadership or understand what it means, but then also not put it on a kid to…

Culturally sensitive what we say.

I heard in one of the high schools here the teacher didn't even give them a choice. She just said, "We're going to say it." This poor African American girl in high school had to just sit through…

Classmates taking every opportunity to say this word because it's such a taboo.

Yes. So, I could do more. My firstborn was fluent in Spanish and then when the second one came along, we got lazy. There is very few Spanish programming for kids. They have 'Dora,' but that's like Spanglish. It's not really completely in Spanish. I keep telling them, "Once you learn it we'll take the summer and maybe go to Nicaragua and spend time or do an exchange program." My little one this summer sat down for probably two weeks with Rosetta Stone. After the second week he was speaking sentences in Spanish. They keep telling me, "Just speak to us in Spanish." But then they get really frustrated when they want something and I don't respond. I'm just like, "Time out. Chill out." I just really have to hold the line and be like, we are only speaking Spanish.

You mentioned before this interview your work with the World Bank. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

With that I was doing a consulting project and we went to Ecuador. We were looking at corruption. I got to travel to Ecuador a couple of times to meet with government officials and

different NGOs to talk about corruption and develop some recommendations around best practices to address corruption in public agencies. What else? I thought I had traveled somewhere else with them, maybe it was just Ecuador. Then I did some work on Argentina, but we didn't travel there.

Can you tell me why you decided to stay in Las Vegas when you arrived as opposed to Texas? I know you mentioned something how Las Vegas is so unique that anything is possible here rather than in other parts of the country because there are already entities there that are doing the work there. Can you talk about that?

I guess I would say it was not love at first sight here and I struggled. When I got here I immediately tried to look for a Latino group. I'm trying to think what I was involved with. Just looking for a political group or like a CDC or community organization to try to get involved. I started working as a bilingual mediator with the neighborhood Justice Center and as a bilingual CASA. I realized pretty quickly that if you want to get involved here, there is a lot of opportunity. A lot of organizations are looking for volunteers, for board members, and so it's a very flat community in that sense. I went to Sandia for professional opportunities, but even when I came back I would stay connected and involved. I guess I got pretty involved with politics, too, before I left for Sandia. I'm just thinking about the dates. That was very easy.

Coming from New York or Boston, there is a real pecking order, so you have to work your way up, and even San Antonio. The machine is so entrenched that it's really hard to move up because you have to pay your dues and it's really hard to become a precinct captain. Here, they are looking for precinct captains. If you have a pulse, please join us and sign up. It's been a great place to get involved. And it's a very small community.

You're involved on a lot of boards, aren't you, personally?

Yes. I'm trying to get off some. It's a very small community, too, even though we are 2.5 million people down here. It's just one or two degrees of separation, so you have to be careful what you say to someone because chances are they went to high school with you.

Big city, but small town vibe.

Yes.

That's how I get around, too. Can you tell me how you feel about the term *Latinx* being used in academic settings or just this new jargon that's being used?

Yes. It still feels very foreign to me. I think since we had this conversation and I went back to my husband and said, "I'm justified," because I took a picture of that. I was talking to, I think, Jocelyn Cortez, who I think you've interviewed.

Yes, we have.

She and I were both commenting that it just feels so foreign to us. Yes, I prefer *Latino* or *Latina*. I understand the motivation or the pros, how some groups may feel more included by using it. But it just feels very foreign to me, so I'm much more comfortable with either *Latino/Latina* or *Tejana*.

What makes Las Vegas home for you? What do you like about Las Vegas?

That's a really good question. Other than my time in Texas—I spent my first eighteen years in Texas, which is why I feel so attached still, and all my family is there. I moved around a lot, so Cambridge, New Haven, L.A., and I actually never really got involved because I was transient. This is the first place other than Texas where I really laid down some roots and made an investment. I think now there is even an additional…My kids are all Nevadans. As much as I get so frustrated with some of our policies and things, they're Nevadans, which is really interesting.

It's also just a beautiful state. I just love the richness and I love driving out to see the rural communities and the landscapes. There is so much beauty here.

Your kids really are battle born.

They are, yes, yes, lots of battles involved.

Do you still visit your family often in Texas?

I do. We probably go back once or twice a year and my mom has been coming out here more frequently, so, yes.

What is your mom like now as she's older, now that she lives in Texas and you live here? Does she still speak Spanish to you?

Oh no. No. There was just actually on my Facebook…She's very involved with the church and she does a lot of missionary work. She went to Haiti and Costa Rica, clean water projects and things. Her church recognized her for her community service. I was just reminded that the greatest legacy that she and my dad left, despite their personal shortcomings and things, was their commitment to the importance of service to others, service, faith, and just taking care of each other.

That's great. What do you want your kids to take from the kind of work that you do and the kind of work that your husband does?

I think the service to other, the interest in public policies. We talk a lot. Just the other day I'm laughing because my son said, "What should a kid be talking about, dogs or AB309, which hopefully will bring more money to the schools?" I'm just like, "Oh my God." They'll just rattle off these things. "Well, the Guinn Center is working on X or Y." I thought, they've really been listening. The other day my husband was telling me that he and my son were in the store and my son was talking about minimum wage or wage policies in Texas. My husband was just sort of

pushing him and asking him questions. He said, "Nancy, he basically on his own came up with our current tax policy." It was just so interesting.

How old is he?

He's only eleven. The other day he did an essay—I was sharing this with someone—he did an essay on his own—I didn't even ask him—this summer talking about how horrible payday lending was. I thought, *oh my God, who is this kid?* An eleven-year-old. I said, "You should publish that in the paper. Even an eleven-year-old can figure out that this is not a great policy or a great instrument. Why can't our legislators?" Scratch that, too.

All this policy work, what is your favorite policy to work on, and why?

That's a good question. I think just policies where I feel like I'm actually having an impact or making a difference for people.

You've been collecting all this data. How have you seen Nevada come out of the recession, or after the recession what is Nevada looking like as it is finally getting back on its feet?

The takeaway from our research that we did a couple of years after the recession—we did a big State of the Latinos Report where we looked at the state of Latinos in Nevada compared to their Intermountain West partners, and we just did another paper recently—most Nevadans have not recovered or their income has not recovered to prerecession levels. Even though we've experienced tremendous growth, not everyone has recovered equally, and so you see greater inequality. I think where some incomes have maybe recovered, I think probably the hidden secret is people are working more than one job. Low wage jobs not able to pay rent means that you now have to work two jobs, right? My sense, and I don't know how to make this connection, but it feels to me every time we open up the R-J newspaper, there is another instance of a kid being killed or a kid being abused. I think if you combine the opioid addiction and the fact that parents

are just under so much economic stress and without those good coping skills, they're taking it out on the kids, and so it feels as though what we're seeing with the kids is the symptom of just tremendous economic insecurity and fragility among our families here. I think there is a lot of work to be done on supporting our families with childcare. It's actually more expensive to put your kid in childcare than to go to college. If you were to have a kid, that tuition to enroll your child would be more expensive than your tuition at UNLV now.

We were just talking about that today.

Yes, so wait.

My daughter is a living example; in Boston her childcare went up a thousand dollars a month.

Oh my God, that's huge. Usually you see it gradual, but that's…I have a friend who the husband I was talking to, his wife has a master's in nursing, and after their second kid she just stayed at home because she was not making enough to cover childcare costs, and so what was the point? Yes. I know that Ivanka Trump has been looking at this issue, and I guess Congressman Lee said that they're looking at some childcare bill right now; there might be a childcare stipend that they're talking about modeling after the Affordable Housing Tax Credit program. I don't understand how that works.

It's hard. It's expensive to have kids.

It's super expensive.

And we need them.

Do we, though? As my daughter says, "Do you, though?"

I always like to think so, yes.

They enrich our life.

Yes, yes, they're cute.

Any other stories you would like to share? Any thoughts on the work that we're doing, the project itself?

No, I think it's great. I'm excited to go in and listen to some. I don't know how…Are you planning any public event? What's your rollout?

There are public events. In fact, there is one that will be coming up in October that's research week, and we will send out some sort of publicity about that….There will be three people that we've interviewed and the students will be…I don't know for sure how we're going to set it up…Q and A, kind of mock mini oral histories to demonstrate what our work is about. Then we'll have something in the east side library in the early spring. We will have community events going on. As we get all of these materials done, meaning they're edited and bound and all that, they become more available through the Special Collections and through the website.

What themes? How many people have you interviewed thus far?

A hundred and six, a hundred and seven.

I thought it was more for some reason. I know there are different countries, born and raised here, recent immigrants. Are there any themes that you're seeing?

Oh yes.

It would be interesting to do—will you partner with the Believer Magazine? There is a theme or pull out some of the stories or even do a—

That's what we've actually been working on with our podcast. That's what we're doing. The students on the team have seen the trends and the themes, and so we pull out the interviews that have those themes. We play it and then we dissect it in conversation where we record. It will be available for the public sometime in October during research week.

When is research week?

The fifteenth, the second week of October.

And are you partnering with the Women's Research Institute on anything?

Not yet.

Officially you'll be working with Caryll Dziedziak, so something might happen there.

Yes, we are working with people at that, but they are different things. But we can. We're open.

What percentage of the folks that you've interviewed are female?

As of right now more than half of our narrators are women.

Oh really? Okay.

This project, unlike our other projects, has been very diverse as far as generational. We have people of all ages, a really wide range of occupations. It's been really good. We've only just scratched the surface.

I know. I love that.

What part of Las Vegas does your family live in?

We're Centennial.

How have you watched Centennial grow since you've been there?

When we moved out there, it was the edge of Clark County, and now with Skye Canyon, it's past us. It's crazy how much growth there is out there.

I live over there by Elkhorn and Durango and that area has come closer—

Oh, yes, yes. Do you still live there or you moved closer?

My mom lives there, yes.

That's exactly where we live, pretty much. We're on Elkhorn and Tenaya, so just a little bit farther down.

My mom lives there. When we moved there her community had just been built and Skye Canyon wasn't even a thing. My mom lived on the edge. Now five minutes up more they're still building.

I'm excited and I can't wait for them to start building that Northwest CSN campus out there.

My mom is right next to it.

Yes, yes.

That lot has been allotted to CSN since we've been there.

Right.

It's been sitting there for a long time.

They just need money from the legislature to build it. I'm involved with CSN.

What do you do for CSN?

I was an adjunct there.

What did you teach?

Political science and world geography. I think one more, maybe just those two. I am their inaugural chair of the Institutional Advisory Council. That was a couple of years ago. In the legislature there was an effort to break up the system and pull the community colleges out from the research universities. We were one of, I think, two states where there is a single board governing research universities and community colleges, and so some folks are concerned that the community college doesn't get as much attention as the research universities. There was an effort led by a lot of my Latino counterparts or peers to pull out the community colleges and have a separate system. As a compromise the legislature said, "Well, let's not break it up entirely. If your concern is that there is not enough community interaction with community interests and the community colleges, let's stand up these Institutional Advisory Councils and

they can almost act like an informal Board of Regents or advisory council to the community colleges." They're very informal. We have no authority.

Like a hybrid system.

Not even. It's more cosmetic, to be perfectly honest.

They want to do like California where there is a UC system and then a community college system.

Yes, exactly. We're actually on a big higher ed governance project right now, just a crazy system.

What other boards are you involved in?

Goodwill, board of Goodwill, and Get Outdoors Nevada, which is a group that seeks to preserve our beautiful landscapes and clean up trails and build trails. There are a lot of trails out in Centennial area, the Centennial Library that go around. Get Outdoors Nevada tries to do a lot of volunteer cleanups and trail building and restoration so that folks can take advantage of our public spaces.

That's awesome. That's great.

Yes.

Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]