

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARVELYS LOPEZ-OMAÑA

An Oral History Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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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



Marvelys Lopez-Omaña is a Venezuelan immigrant. Marvelys first arrived in Las Vegas in 1993 as a 17-year-old high school exchange student at Western High School. Her host family, who were Mormons, warmly welcomed the Catholic teenager and became fast friends.

Marvelys grew up in Caracas in an educated family, her father owned a toy business and mother was the business administrator. They also experienced the long and consequential presidency of Hugo Chavez. By 2003, Marvelys and her husband Moiseo Gomez decided to take the giant leap to relocate to the U.S. with their eldest child. They later had a second child and have become U.S. citizens.

Before emigrating, Marvelys attended medical school in Venezuela, which had been her childhood dream. Both she and her future husband connected as first responders to a major earthquake in Cumaná; he was a firefighter and nursing student.

In Nevada, she has become a respected mid-wife and has assisted with an ever-increasing number of births. Her husband is a registered nurse and works for the Health Department. In this oral history, Marvelys explains her work and passionate embrace of living here.

Photo above: Marvelys stands before dozens of photos of babies she has guided into the world.

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February 21, 2020
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

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Marvelys Lopez-Omaño 2/21/2020
Signature of Narrator Date

Monserath Hernández 2/21/2020
Signature of Interviewer Date

Today is February 21st, 2020. My name is Monserrath Hernandez. Here with me today is...

Barbara Tabach.

And...

Marvelys Lopez.

We're in the beautiful home of Marvelys.

Marvelys, can you spell out your name for us?

Yes. It's M-A-R-V-E-L-Y-S. And my last name is Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z. And my second last name, if you want that one, is Omaña, O-M-A-N—well, Ñ-A.

Marvelys, to start off, can you tell me a little of where you grew up, where you're from?

I'm from Caracas, Venezuela; I was born there December 21st, 1975 and that's where I spent all my childhood, is in Caracas, in the capital.

Growing up, what was that like? What kind of home did you live in? What were your parents like?

Because it's big—it's the capital of the country and at that time it was over a million, or I guess more at that time, a couple million people in the city—most people live in buildings. We had an apartment in a residential area. It was Colinas de Bello Monte—the area where we lived. I'm the oldest of three daughters. My dad had a family business; it was like a toy store, so it was fun growing up. I remember going to the toy store, and then they said, "You can pick just one toy." We would work and do something there in order to win it. They would travel to the different conferences around the world; like in Germany they do one, in New York they do another—it's like the big thing for toys all over the world. They will come with whatever is the newest thing about toys, so that was kind of fun.

What kind of toys did you gravitate towards?

Dolls. In a way it was kind of fun. I loved dolls. Just thinking ahead nowadays, I think what I do has a lot to do with babies. I loved my babies. Yes, we had Barbies. We had all types of toys, but I was kind of... We liked to play pretend, being the mom, being the doctor, the teacher; that type of thing. I remember that back then there were no cell phones or computers, any of those things.

What's the age difference between you and your sisters?

I'm the oldest. The middle one, I'm two years and four months older than she is. Then my youngest sister, I'm exactly eight years and eight months older because we both have a birthday on the 21st; for her it's in August and mine's in December.

What was the relationship with your sisters growing up?

Good. I think that we were close. We used to bump heads a lot with my middle sister when it was just the two of us because we fought. I remember my mom saying, "You used to stack things, like make a tower of Legos or something, and then your sister would come and throw it." I used to put things in lines. I was more organized, and then she was more...

Chaotic?

Yes, chaotic, like *no*. I have a memory of when she was little. We used to go to a preschool that was right next door from the building where we used to live. It was just in a house and it was just right there. She didn't like school. One time it was time for her to go to her preschool, and I hid her. They have a desk and they have the drawers. I put a towel and closed the drawer so the towel will go down and there was a hole under the desk. She will go in there and pretend that she was not there. Yes, we would do something like that just to protect her because, no, she doesn't want to go to school, so I will hide her.

How long did it take your parents to realize where she was?

Oh, not long. I'm pretty sure that it was not long. It's just one of those things that you remember.

One time I wanted to go and visit my aunt, and they lived in a different city about forty-five minutes away from where we were, and it was a weekday. I really wanted to go because they're my godparents and I have a very close relationship with them and my cousins. I wanted to go and then my mom said, "No, we cannot go." I said, "No, I'm going." At that time I was very stubborn. I was like, "I'm going." And then she's like, "Okay, well, you go." And then we packed a little pack and I took my sister with me. I was probably, I don't know, eight years old and she was six, or nine years old and she was a couple of years younger. Then we walked and we went several blocks out of my house. Then my mom came in the car to pick us up. The she was all stressed out. She's like, "I was kidding." I'm like, "No, I was not." We got in trouble.

Did she actually take you, though?

No, not that day. Not that day. We got in trouble. You never leave the house, anywhere, so little.

Did she realize when you were leaving?

Yes, at the time we had somebody that would work in the house and help, like clean the house and stuff like that, and she was the one who told her, "Hey, they actually left." And she was like, "What?" But we did walk a while before she found us.

It sounds like you were fiercely independent at an early age.

I think so. I feel that I'm very responsible. Growing up it was like I had my mind set, too, like, *okay, this is what I want to do.*

Did you always know what you wanted to do?

I think so. I think I was seven years old when I told my parents that I wanted to be a doctor and I wanted to help people. I lived in a country at that time and that influence. My parents were both university graduates, and everybody in the family was too. In my mom's side, my aunt was a

pharmacist. She also had half-brothers and sisters from a different marriage, and one was an engineer and another one was a doctor, so they all had professions. In my dad's side of the family, he was the youngest of four and he was the business administrator, so he ended up inheriting and having to take care of the toy store. My mom ended up helping in that business as well. But then my uncle was a doctor, anesthesiologist. They all had professions, so I think it was very engrained in our brains since we were young that were you able to make it, especially in that socioeconomical structure in Venezuela, you needed to have a profession; you needed to go to school.

I never got to meet my grandpa on my mom's side. He was a doctor, too. He died in January of that year, in '75, and then I was born in December of '75, so I never got to meet him, but I heard a lot about him. There was actually a library in the city where he practiced and he lived that has his name. There are things like that that are impactful to you. It was a good fact for me to say, well, that's part of my DNA, like that blueprint that you come with of all this information.

I think I was about seven years old that I can remember that I wanted to do that. My parents were never the type of parents that said, *no, you have to do this or you have to do that.*" My mom said, "You can do whatever you want to do as far as you enjoy doing it and you do it well." The doing well part was a little bit of a burden, like you have to do the things the best that you can. But it was true. You put your heart and soul into what you do and usually it will show. That has been kind of my motto in life.

It sounds like you had a very educated, professional tradition in the family. Any other traditions that you can think of that your family followed?

I come from a country where most people are Catholic, so we will celebrate all the holidays as Catholic people do, like Christmas and Easter. It's just different than here. It was like, what is it with the bunny and the eggs? That was nothing that I could relate with. I remember it being more about watching movies about the crucifixion. Yes, you will go to the beach and you will have fun with your family because it was a time when you didn't have school. But it was more oriented that way. Then Christmas was all about baby Jesus, and there was not such a thing as Santa Claus. We knew because there was the influence of the U.S. and other parts of the world of Santa Claus, but they would get away by saying, "Baby Jesus needs a lot of help." They would have helpers and then Santa Claus is a helper. But we grew up with the tradition that baby Jesus is the one who brings the toys and all that. We would go to mass Christmas Eve. It was just more related with that, so I grew up in that environment.

Any special foods that you guys would cook during these holidays?

Yes. In Venezuela we eat *arapas*, which is the typical cornmeal, similar to *papas* or *gorditas* depending on which country, but it's like a cornmeal. Instead of places where they have tacos, they have places where they sell *arapas* in Venezuela. You will open them and fill them with any kind of things you wanted, if you wanted to put meat or chicken or cheese or eggs, ham, whatever. That is very typical there.

During the holidays then they will make *hallacas*, which was more a tradition coming from the Indians, native from Venezuela at that time that it's where it came from. We had *cassava*, which was made out of the *yuca*. I found it here, so it's very precious.

Where did you find it?

Some of the Latin markets, like La Bonita and some other places, one day my mom were in and I'm like, "Look what they have here," *cassava*, so that was nice. The *arapa* mix, they sell it here

in all the supermarkets, so we are able to still get some of the stuff. There are two or three Venezuelan restaurants in town.

Where do you like to go to eat?

I'm very international. I love all kinds of food even though I'm vegan. I have changed a lot, my diet styles, since I move here, health reasons; things like that. But I love Venezuelan food. We cook it here. But there's nothing like homemade food. If we are going to eat Venezuelan food, we usually will cook it ourselves. We have plantains and black beans, rice, and then they have the shredded beef. That was typical; it's called (12:36) and it's a typical dish in Venezuela. *Arapa* instead of bread. Then for Christmas they will make the same thing, the ham and turkey, but the main dish will be the *hallaca* and the *hallaca* was made out of the cornmeal, but it has some spices into it, *anoto*, that will give it color, and then it will be filled in with meat and chicken and other spices and olives and raisins and some other veggies. Then they will make like a tamale, but it will be folded into a plantain leave and then you will boil it. That's what was typical to eat around that time. And they had (13:25), which was like a bread that is a cinnamon roll. You have to imagine that it was filled with ham and raisins and olives, and then you will put it in the oven and slice it and it was filled inside with those things. Those were typical things for Christmas time.

I'm getting hungry.

I know.

It sounds delicious.

How was school? Did you like school?

Yes. Because of the situation in Venezuela, at that time it was nothing like it is right now. It definitely has gone downhill a lot. If you wanted to have a good education, you needed to go to a

private school, and my parents were able to afford that. I went to a private school; at the time it was a Catholic school with nuns. It was all for girls. I did that from fifth grade until I graduated. Before then it was a couple of other schools, like from Opus Day there was Compitos, but then my parents moved from that school to another school because my sister was not adapting well there. There was a school before then where there were boys and girls. It was a very big school called Friedman. I was kind of getting bullied in that school when I was little, so they moved me. I was kind of—not very—but I was kind of chubby when I was little, so the people would do that with my cheeks or make some jokes; some things like that. Then they moved me to a school where it was just for girls, and I made good friendships there and it was good. I was a good student, got good grades. It's like I had my vision of what I wanted to do.

In Venezuela at that time, because I think it's changed a lot since we moved, in order for you to get into the university to study, especially for medical school, which is what I wanted to do, you have to take a test that everybody had to take; I think something similar to the SAT. But then you have to get very good scores in order to get in, because there is such a big demand for the career and there were no private schools for medical school. You just had to go to the public school, which the government takes care of all the fees. So you really don't have any burden afterwards to have to pay for any schooling or loans. It was a limited amount of people that could get in. My goal was aiming for that; to be able to get in and not be on a waiting list. That was me growing up: being a good student and getting all those grades and then being able to get in, which I did.

While I was growing, the school there are eleven years instead of twelve. So you go up to sixth grade and then you go into—they don't have middle school there—then you go to what is high school. Then they have two ways of going the first two years, which you could say that it's

similar to middle school. It's first and second year of high school; there is no division—actually, the first three years, and then the last two you have to decide if you want to go for science or for humanitarian; that was your thing. There is not like here where you have tons of different classes to pick from. It was just two. In one, you will see physics, chemistry, biology, English, math, Spanish; all those basic, history. Then the other one—instead of physics, chemistry, biology—it will have French, Latin, and English, of course, psychology; more humanitarian things, so you are guided toward careers that were not scientific. I went for the science one and that's kind of what you graduated with.

I have a cousin who became an exchange student. One day there was somebody visiting from here. For the U.S. in one of the weekends that we went to visit my grandma. “Oh no, this is your cousin.” I'm like, “I didn't know I had a cousin from somewhere else in the world.” “No, no, she's here visiting us as an exchange student.” I'm like, “What is that?” We kind of learned about all this. Actually, my cousin went to France for a year, and then they had somebody coming in, but I think it was from the U.S. I got very interested about it. I'm like, “I want to do that.”

My parents found out all the information with my aunt, and we were able to set it up. I came here and that was the first year. I was seventeen. I graduated from high school. I got into the university to go to medical school, but then they were able to freeze my spot for a year so I could come here as an exchange student. It was through World Experience; that was the company at that time. That was back in 1993, which is when I graduated from high school, and I came that summer.

I was here from 1993 to 1994, for a year; I lived here in Vegas. I went to Western High School. My house was very close. I could walk to the school. Summerlin Parkway was just dirt.

It was nothing. None of this existed at that time. The Stratosphere was not there. There are so many things that were different. I lived with my American family. They're still Grandma and Grandpa for my kids and they're still close. Now they live in St. George, Utah. We always were very close after that.

It was kind of getting out of the bubble because back then it's not something that I will say I was able to drive myself anywhere. You don't drive until you're eighteen in Venezuela, so I came here before I was able to drive. Because of situational—I would say back then it was about 80 percent of the population was in poverty, and you have to be careful where you go. I will mobilize myself in the metro, the subway, but I was kind of living in a bubble. I went to a private school with all girls, and that was before I went to the university. I was the oldest of three daughters. It was middle class, high middle class, but in a bubble. Being there I was never offered drugs. I was never in a group of people that was very diverse. We're a mix of all different type of skin colors and it was very different.

When I come here as an exchange student, it was the first time I will fly by myself without my parents even though I grew up going to Disney World and my parents had an apartment in Bonaventure and we would go to some summer camps; they will put me in there so I could learn some English. I have to say I had a very nice and balanced and loving childhood. I have to say I had a beautiful experience in that sense.

Coming here and then I have my American brother—I have two brothers and a sister—he's saying, "No, don't wear these type of clothes," or, "Don't do this; don't do that. People are going to think that you're a part of a gang." I'm like, "What are you talking about?" Or, "Don't relate with this and that." It was a very different concept for me. Going to a school where you have the dean that they are dressing like police officers and stuff like that, walking around the

hallways in the school, all that was very new. It was such a big school because I come from a smaller one. Like I said, I was in a bubble. Seeing people dealing some type of drugs outside of the school, it was culture shock in a way. I never felt different when I was in my country, in Venezuela, because we all look very similar. Here I was different. It was not in a bad way. I never felt judged or criticized because I was from a Latin background, and I still feel that way, which I think is good, right? But I was not shy of asking if I didn't understand something. Or, *what do you mean when you're saying this or that?* Or, *how is that you pronounce this?* I still ask people, *how do you say this?* To me that was a way of kind of opening up in the beginning. Just because you're from a different place, people are curious and they get close to you and you ask questions. It kind of made me feel special, so that was kind of fun.

I met people from different parts because the exchange student group, we were from all over. There were people from Germany and Spain and from Uruguay. I had a friend from Mexico. That was kind of fun, too, to get to relate with other students from all over. There was one from Japan. It was fun. I was here for that year. My parents had an exchange student from Alaska, from Juno. That is my sister, but I never really got to meet her in person because it was an exchange; me being here and she being there.

There was a religious culture shock, too, because I grew up in an environment where it was just Catholic. Yes, we knew there were some Jewish people, but it was not much of a blend there to think different. Then here there is so many, diversity. My American family, they are Mormons, and I was not very aware of any of that. They invited me to go to church with them. I'm like, okay. My English was at that time very limited. The first day that we went to that church, I saw that they had something that looks like...not like burying somebody, but they were doing—how would you say that; like *orna*?

An urn.

An urn, yes. Then they had this white sheet covering it, and there were all these boys around it, like with their arms bent, and they're praying and all these things. I'm like, oh my goodness, that's somebody that probably died and they are doing some type of thing there. No, that was not it. They were blessing the bread, and they used juice instead of wine, but they were blessing that to pass around for everybody to drink in community, but they had it all covered with this sheet. That was kind of funny for me to realize later on, oh no, not somebody's dead, thank goodness. But those deductions, you try to correlate with that.

We had very interesting conversations, my American mom, about the difference in the culture and the religion and all that because it was just very new to me. They did try to get me to partake in their religion, but I think I was kind of sitting on my ground, not that I was a hundred percent like, this is how it is and I'm rigid. But I was not at that point feeling like I needed to be switching religions or anything like that. There was a little bit of back and forth because they loved me so much and they wanted to make sure that when I die I will go to heaven and be with them; that's part of their beliefs. I was like, "I love you a lot, too, but I don't think that I need to be Mormon in order to be able to see you on the other side." That was kind of a fun thing in a way.

I remember having an experience, too, with my American brother, the oldest one. His birthday is in May and mine is in December, so almost five months apart, he was a little bit younger than me. My American sister was the middle one. She also has a birthday in May, but she is three or four years younger. Then there was the youngest one that was just a year younger than her. But there was a little bit of jealousy because my brother that was very close to me in age, I think that he was at that time seventeen, almost eighteen years old when I was there, and

he was going through the whole thing of being a senior and getting to drive and finding out what he was going to do for college. I was getting a lot of the attention from my American mom and dad. They were wanting to make sure I was feeling right and everything. I've always been very responsible and respectful and connect with people. I think he felt like I was taking something away from him, so there was a little bit of back and forth there where one day my white clothes were being washed and there was nail polish that was thrown in the washer with my stuff. All my white clothes are now stained with nail polish; things like that. But later on, years later, then he confessed and said, "Yes that was me. I was jealous. I'm sorry."

Then there was a time when my American mom says, "No, if you don't want to go to church with us, you have to go to your church. We will drop you off there. But you have to do the example because then my other kids won't want to go to church because you're not going." Because I'm like, "But that's not my responsibility, going to your church. I'm supposed to go to the other one." There was a little bit of that.

I think at the end, the beautiful thing was that there was clear understanding that above everything is love, and then that connection that we had was more than our differences. As human beings, our beliefs, we were above and beyond that. We were able to overcome all that situation. Like I said, they are like grandparents for my kids. We really have a close relationship and we respect each other's differences regarding points of view, regarding religion or culture, whatever. I feel blessed that I have two moms and two dads. It's awesome.

That's great. Then after the year you went back to...medical school?

I went back to Venezuela and then I went to medical school. There is different than here because it's not like premed and then you go to medical school. You go into the program already and it's six and a half, almost seven years, the whole career, instead of being eight because there is a lot

of prerequisites that are put away and then to go more into what is more the actual career. The first couple of years is more all the classes like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, histology; all those classes. Now, in third year of medical school is when you start doing your clinicals and all that.

When I was in the second year of medical school—I got a big influence from my American mom here. She was at the time the captain and she had been promoted to captain in the fire department. For me that was like, wow, I didn't even know women can be firefighters, because that was not something that I will see in Venezuela; it was more for men. Seeing her being promoted from being a paramedic to being a captain, she was the first one in the state of Nevada, I think the fourth one in the U.S. promoted to that. When I was here she was on TV and we were able to go to her ceremony of the promotion. Then later on she became the first here in the state of Nevada also being a battalion chief. She was an example for me to follow in that way, seeing somebody that is such an achiever and setting that example for me.

When I went back home, I learned that in the university campus there was a fire station. Then all the people that were part of the fire department were students, women and men, and they were all volunteers. It was not about making money; it was just volunteer work. You had from all different careers, so it just aligned out with your schooling as well. But then you have to do a shift, do the training and the whole thing with them; I decided to do that, not in the first year of medical school because it's more challenging as you're getting used to all this, but second year was easier, before you go into your clinicals, and that's when I did it.

That's where I met my husband. He was a student going to nursing school, and I was in the medical school. We were friends for a long time before we started dating, but that's where I met him. I had a boyfriend before that, which was my first boyfriend for several years, and we

are all friends because my husband and he are friends. They work together in things regarding the fire department and doing volunteer work for different things. But then, after that it was him, so...yes.

You would go on calls, right? You had to do shifts?

Yes, we had to do shifts. There was an earthquake in Venezuela. I don't remember the year. Like I said, I'm very bad about that. But we were a part of the task force. We were kind of the first responders if something like that would happen. We had the training for that. I remember one day going to the university to my classes. By that time there were cell phones, and so we got the phone call that we were being activated. We met at the fire station. Then it was like, no, they're going to send a Hercules; they're going to pick you up at the airport. Just whatever you have in hand, you have to come. There was a school that collapsed and a building that collapsed, and there's people trapped, and we need people to help with that.

Here I'm calling my mom to tell her, "Mom, I'm leaving. I'm going to..." It was in Cumaná, which is a different state. "There is an earthquake. We have to go to the airport. We are on our way to the airport and we're going to be picked up. We're going to go do this. And I will talk to you later." That takes a lot, right, for a parent...Now that I have my kids, I'm like, uh...I can't even imagine my mom being so nervous and how much they trusted me that they allowed me to come here as an exchange student when I was seventeen; that they allowed me to just be part of all these dreams. They trusted I was going to be okay and that I will do what I needed to do.

We got there and then we were able to be part of the rescue of somebody that was trapped. Her leg was trapped. It was a very interesting experience, being there. There were three legs and we knew that none of them had pulled because hers was also being compressed, and

then trying to figure out which one was hers versus the other two that were from a cadaver of somebody that was just right next to her. But then working with her to keep her calm and stable and the whole thing when you have people drilling and doing stuff to remove a column or something that had fallen onto her. Then she was able to be liberated. She lost part of the leg, but she was able to leave and all that. But those are moments that I always remember, all that. From time to time, they will stop all the drilling and all the things they were doing and they will make a moment of silence to see if they could hear anybody making any type of noise or anything to see if there were more survivors. They brought some people from Mexico, like *topos*. I don't know how you say that in English. They are the ones that are very small people and they will go in and try to see if they can find anybody there. That was some of the experiences we had and situations like this being part of the fire department and part of that task force, like emergency responders.

Is Venezuela susceptible to a lot of earthquakes?

There is a tectonic thing there, but it's not that many. That's the only one that I remember in my lifetime being there. Small seismic and things like that have happened, but not to that point. I think that they found out that it was not built correctly; the two structures that fell were because they didn't have all the structures they needed to have. There were quite a few people that passed in there.

Another one that we experienced, my husband was actually more involved than I was, is that there was a mudslide that happened. I think that was 1998. I cannot remember. It's been a while. A lot of people died. That was huge. There was a lot of raining in that time. The whole cities of, like, La Guaira, which are cities by the ocean, all that. They have a big mountain, the Ávila. A lot of people got covered. That was later on, so I remember I didn't go to that one; my

husband did go. We did lose one of our firefighters there. He was not able to get out. There were different experiences that we had.

In a way, you feel like you have a uniform, and then you feel like you are a superhero and nothing wrong can happen to you. As you grow older, because you're a teenager at the time and you don't have much responsibilities, you don't have kids, but as you grow older you're like, what was I thinking?

How long did you do that?

Gosh, I mean, I was in second year of medical school when I started and it went until pretty much I moved here, so that would have been 1994, when I was here in '94-95. I was the promotion 1995-96; that's when I did the year of training to become a firefighter, so that was my class, 1995-96. And then until I moved here, and I moved here in 2003, in January of 2003.

About eight years.

Where I was still—yes. I would teach classes. I was more in charge for a while of the medical department. We would make sure that the ambulances had all the stocks in all the things. There would be classes taught regarding medical things.

Was that a paid position or volunteer?

No, it was all volunteer.

All voluntary, okay.

All volunteer, everybody that worked there would just be volunteers. A lot of the skills that I learned for the first time was in an ambulance, learning how to do blood pressure, pulse, to start an IV; things like that. It was being so thirsty of learning and wanting to help people and the adventure. Sometimes you will sit there and it's like nothing is happening. Then you're wishing for a call. A call will be somebody in need, like a fire, somebody needs an ambulance, an

accident. It's just funny to see now, reflect on life that we were wishing for a call to happen, which nowadays you're like, hmm, not so much. I think I grew out of that.

My husband, on the other hand, he does a lot of the volunteer work here for the police, the fire department, so he still gets calls and he goes and he blocks streets with the lights and detour traffic, because I think he's still thirsty for doing all that. It's not like I don't, but I am on call 24/7, so when I can get my beauty sleep, I will get it because it's not very often.

What does he do right now?

He's an RN and he works for the Health Department as a surveyor. But his work is more set into office hours, so then he can probably play around a little bit more with his time off versus me; I don't know when I have the time off. I think that's the big difference. But he loves it. He's very passionate about all that and helping the community; for him that's huge.

That's great.

Not that it's not for me, but I think that what I do already helps.

It does, it does. During this time in medical school, what's happening politically in Venezuela?

A big mess. I grew up in a country that was democratic. Yes, it was a lot of corruption and, like I said, a lot of poverty, but you were still able to make a living, still be able to have a certain level of security and all that. As years go by and things start developing to people getting hungry to have a change that political change brought a lot of problems because then we were promising stuff like *we're going to make this a better country* and all that, and then the person that was elected into the government was Hugo Chávez and he changed the constitution, he changed the currency, he changed the flag, the name of the country; everything. It was just a whole transformation. There were promises for certain things and then he turned out to be more like a

socialist, slash, communist that it was all a mascaeraed into that democratic system, so it deteriorated the country and it created a separation, a big one. I remember being there the last few years and people going for strikes and going out on the streets. I remember getting out pans and pots and making noises. They call it *cacerolazo*. I don't know how you say it. You just bang on your pan and pots and make noise. You will hear the whole city doing that type of thing a certain time during the day or night. They would say, "At this time we're going to do this," as a way to protest. That was kind of like you can see the progression of it.

I went back after being here for a time once I was able to become a U.S. resident and I have all the status so I could travel back to visit and all that. You just feel that it's not the same, the same country you grew up with. There were signs on the streets. Everything is...red is their color. More like a socialist, which I don't think is bad when it's applied the right direction, but, yes, that was not the case. You kind of feel that in a way that is not a part of who you are anymore like it was, but you have the dream of the place you grew up. It's not the same one that it is currently. There is a gap in there between your memories and what you were able to enjoy and live versus what it is nowadays.

Were you or anyone in your family politically active?

No. I'm a very apolitical person in a sense. I'm not into a lot of this. What is fair is what I go for, I think. But, no, no, not like I can remember right now anybody in particular in my family that was doing that.

There was a combination of factors for me to move here. One, I fell in love with the U.S. when I was an exchange student. My family said, "Yes, go become a doctor and then come back here and practice here. We will support you. We'll help you." They went back to Venezuela

when I graduated from medical school; they came back to visit a couple of times, my American family here.

Did you graduate from medical school—in Venezuela?

Yes. Then they invited me to come another time here and I came to visit. My heart was also in...It kind of spanned my reality, what was possible. When you are seventeen years old, you see the world in different ways. I was able to do so much more here. I learned how to ski. I went to Hawaii with the exchange student group. I did a hot air balloon ride. My American parents got me to learn how to scuba dive. It was just a year of experiences and adventures and doing things. I went to Six Flags with the Ski Club, and it has the oldest roller coaster. If you were afraid of roller coasters before, never again. It was just a very different experience. I was very alive in doing and meeting people. I have such fond memories of all this.

My relationship with them was good, so I wanted to come back and I did. Several times before, we just came to visit or stay here for a little period of time until finally in 2003 it was like, okay, we're coming to move here, because my husband was an RN—well, we both had professions that could be applied towards getting a residency here. We had a lot of support. We have friends here. We have my American family. That's why we came to Vegas.

Was your family in Venezuela any way affected by what was happening?

I think everybody was.

Everybody?

Yes, yes, everybody was.

You came. Was that part of the reason that you came?

In part. My mind was set to that. I remember telling my husband at a certain point when we were dating, I said, "These are my plans. It's just for you to know that after I graduate, my intention is

to go back to live in the United States. So, just for you to know, I'm not going to stay here. Either you go with my plans, or this is it." I didn't want to waste my time with somebody that was not going to follow what was my dream. He's like, "Oh no, I'm coming." We joke a lot about that here and there because he says, "You're the doctor; I'm the nurse. That still applies to our family." I'm like, "No."

When you come in 2003, what part of Las Vegas did you live in when you first came?

My parents at the time had moved to Henderson. They had built a house over there, a beautiful home. We lived with them for a while we started all the process with paperwork for the whole...

We came here in a visa for just tourists. But then being here, he applied for the testing for the process for the entrance and all the things, and I was in the same process with the U.S. MLE, which was the test for medical school and the whole thing. At that time when we came to stay, my sister also came when she was already eighteen years old, so she could help me with my son that at that time was already fifteen, sixteen months. It was just to help me so I could study and my husband was studying. We had friends that have set up different businesses and stuff and said, "We will help you to find resources and things to work in the meantime." But the intention was always to get to study and do what we needed to do.

We had saved some money, which was not much compared to what you could make here, but to be able to help for a while with that. But my family, they were amazing. They were like, "You stay here for as long as you want. You don't have to pay us anything." They're really great. The money that we brought was mostly to be able to pay for the testings that we needed to do and then taking classes and things like that.

Once that whole process, then we had to hire lawyers to do all the transitioning and everything from here. He needed to find a sponsor because once he passed his [redacted] test and

he's working on his English, but he needed to start finding some type of hospital or place that will sponsor him, so request him to work there. I remember going with him—because my English was better than his; he was learning—going to an interview to see if he will get the position as an RN. Here I am talking to the person back and forth about all this stuff, descriptions for the job or his abilities, and he was not saying a word. When we walk out of there, I said, “The job is yours.” And he's like, “What?” “Yes, he hired you.” He was like, “Well, he hired you.” And I said, “No, hired you.” It was just like that.

Where was that job?

It was in—like I said, I don't remember all the names of the facilities. He's much better at remembering all these details. I will have to ask him. But it was like not a group home, but a nursing home, like a facility where people go there to get better.

A rehab?

A rehab type of place, yes, like a nursing home. He worked for them. He needed to improve his English and the whole thing and take his test. He got all that so we were able to get our residency. Well, he got his and I got mine because I was married to him. Then we were able to get our green cards to work.

The very first job that I had here was caregiver work because I couldn't do much of anything else, right? I took a class and I learned how to become a caregiver, which was just a day class thing. Then I was working for two companies, like seventy hours a week in order to make some type of living.

At that time we moved from where we were with our parents to a house in Vegas that friends owned that house, but it was not occupied by anybody, so somebody has broken in. They're like, “We want that to be habituated by somebody so that that doesn't happen again.”

The only thing we needed to pay was the utilities. They said, “Just live there and pay the utilities.” I was like, “That’s amazing.” It was a house with three bedrooms—or, four, four actually because the garage was converted to a bedroom. My sister and my mom at the time was here visiting and my husband and at the time Diego, we were living there for a while.

I was studying to take some other test and things. Now we had our working card and we were able to do a little bit more. It’s a hard journey. It took us about five years for all that process to be completed and then the process to wait for becoming a citizen and all that.

How did you come about in becoming a midwife?

Around that time—well, now we’re moving forward a couple of years, I think, because that was 2003 when we got here, and then in 2005 I had my daughter. I became pregnant with my daughter when I was doing the work on being the caregiver. My husband was already starting to work for the hospital that we had placed. Then I started looking for a place where I could have her that was a water birth; that’s what I was looking for because that’s what I was familiar with, with my son. I was like, okay, I want to have this experience. I was looking in Vegas to see what it was and there were no hospitals that offered that.

I took a childbirth education class because I wanted to kind of get on the same page. Through the person that was teaching the class, she told me about some midwives, and I’m like, “What is that?” “Oh yes, they help you.” I’m like, “Really? Okay.” I was able to then interview some of the midwives in town, and then I picked one and she is the one that helped me with my daughter. At a certain point when my daughter was probably a couple of months old or so, she’s telling me, “I think probably this would be something you would like to do. Would you want to try to come to some births with me? Would you want to see what it takes to be a midwife?” Of course at that time I was like, “Sure, I want to see what all this is about.”

I started going to births with her in 2006. Of course, I had a lot of qualifications already with all my education and then I found out what I needed to do to become a certified professional midwife and I started that journey with this other midwife and was with her for another year where we were sharing that experience. She was having some back issues at the time, so there would be births that we would go together and sometimes she would not be able to move so much and I would be the one going. That was more towards the end of that year or so. I opened Sweet Beginnings in 2007, but I was starting practicing with my friend in 2006.

Is this a highly regulated profession, licensing and all of that?

Not in the state of Nevada, so that was kind of one of the things that was interesting for me to learn through her because I didn't know anything about what it would take or anything like that. You have three ways of going. One would be being a nurse and becoming a midwife, so you have specialty. Then they are able to work in a hospital, now, because that was not back then where they could also do homebirth; before it was more under the umbrella of a medical practice, so that's how it was when I started all this. Then the other one is a CPM, certified professional midwife, where you get to have certain amount of training. You have a portfolio where you have to have a certain number of births, prenatal, postpartum, newborn exams and all that. And then, because I have all this education prior, it was under special circumstances and then they request all my records, and then after I have the requirements I have to take an oral exam that I did in California and then the written exam I did in Arizona. Now they can do it here online when you have the testing centers and things. I think that changed a lot because that was quite a bit ago.

That's like fourteen years ago.

It will be fifteen years this year.

The opportunity to use a midwife has increased?

I think so. Nowadays things have changed. Now they require you to have formal education. Now there are colleges, a midwifery college that you can go all the way even to a doctorate if you want to in the profession. In the state of Nevada there is no regulations. I have a certification of being a certified professional midwife, but there is no licensure in the state of Nevada; there is in other states. There are still quite a few states in the U.S. where there is not the bare minimum of this is the minimum qualification for somebody to be able to practice the profession. This is a national certification that we need to do recertification or CEUs; every three years you have to have all these requirements, so I follow that. For a lot of states, just being a CPM is enough so that you are licensed, and then there are other states where they say, “Well, you have certification and on top of that you take a license test,” and in that state that has to be more related to laws and things pertaining to that state, but here we don’t have that yet.

Does insurance cover your services?

Some insurance do.

That’s good.

Yes. Some insurance do. With some we are in network, not many, though; it’s just one actually that they do take us as in network. There is another they do; one is like a gap exception or special circumstance.

Like a referral kind of thing?

Where they said, “Well, there’s not a provider in network that is going to be able to offer the same services that you are,” so for that specific claim they will take you as in network. But then the rest is more out of network, so they have a higher deductible and they cover less percentage of the services. But, yes, a homebirth is what a lot of people are looking for; that experience. It’s

more personalized. For people that are not insured, it's way cheaper than going to a hospital, for sure, for those that have no insurance.

Is it a water birth that you do?

Yes, but we offer that. It's an option if they want to do water birth, or if they want to do a lap birth, we can do that too. I know that sounds funny. But, yes, we do that. We relate with other perinatologists and pediatricians and OBs in town. It's not that they are responsible for our practice, but we are able to refer people to do ultrasounds and we send them to do bloodwork and all this stuff that is part of the scope of what we can offer.

During medical school and your clinicals, did you take care or see any pregnant women?

Oh yes. Yes, it's part of obstetrics, and GYN is part of what we do in our rotations, and we do have to do a certain amount of births and all that stuff.

You were already familiar with what it was.

Yes. What I had to learn more was the ways of how would you do it as a midwife because it's less invasive and you work with herbs and we work with homeopathic remedies and supplements and nutrition, and you don't realize all the medications that you do in a hospital. The hospital is kind of like, oh, let's give you the Pitocin and the epidural and let's do this and that. It's more invasive. Especially there is where I learned. Women really didn't have much options; it's just kind of a baby factory. You go in, you get out with a baby in your arms. It's a process that is being done to you, not so much something that you are partaking. That's kind of why I did look for the options for when I had my kids because I wanted to have that. It was horrible. It's like, I don't want to have kids if that's the only way. Doing all that research helped me to become familiarized with the option of midwives and be able to do it that way, so that was my benchmark; it was what I learned from my own personal experiences and how empowering it

was. Then you really find your voice. It's a calling and it's kind of something that lets you know this is what you're here for. That's the best way you can serve the world. It's my passion and it's something that I think people really feel it and you're able to personalize that care and able in an intimate way to be part and honored to be a part of that journey with them.

How many have you been a part of?

Quite a few. I honestly stopped counting at a certain point.

Did you really?

Yes, because I have now an office manager and she does all my statistics for me through the Midwife Alliance of North America, which is something that we keep track on. I think if I count the ones that I did in a hospital setting in Venezuela plus all the ones I have done here, we're talking about a thousand plus. I think that I have gone that far, yes. Doing birth at home, you limit yourself with the amount of babies or clients that you are able to take because you don't want to go way more above what you can handle. I do have students; over the years I've tried to have one or max two at the time so that they are also learning and training, and then I work in collaboration with other midwives so that we help each other to cover.

I was going to ask, if two babies decide to come at the same time, what do you do?

Yes, you call for help. The importance is that there will always be somebody there with them. It doesn't happen that often, but estimated due dates are just an estimation, so sometimes you're waiting for a baby and waiting for a baby, and then finally when that baby comes, another mom decides to have a baby two weeks early, so that's when it collapses, not so much the ones that are due around the same dates. It's just interesting how it works. It doesn't happen often to be honest with you. I think God's timing is perfect and always has been in a way where, well, I want to be there for all of them, so...

On average how many patients do you take in a certain month?

Per month right now I'm trying to top myself at five; sometimes that turns into six or into eight. Like last month, three of my January moms moved into February, and it was not something that I have control over that. That's why I try to top it at five because I know that they can move either direction to one month or to the other, so then that will add or subtract from one month.

How far along are moms when they come in and ask you to be their midwife?

If it's a repeat client, I think that sometimes I find out as soon as they know. Sometimes they call me and say, "I just did a pregnancy test and it's positive. Are you available?" Sometimes they let me know even before the husband knows.

Because they want to get in line for your services.

Yes, sometimes they do that. Some others are because they don't know what their options are and they're looking into it, and then sometimes they don't come to you until later on. But I think that this is something that is more available nowadays than it was before. More and more people are looking for it. My office manager every week says, "No, these people are due in this month. You're already full, so I'm referring them somewhere else." I really try not to take everything that comes to me, but just tape it off at a certain number so I'm not increasing the chances of not being there for them. It's a profession where you're on call 24/7, too, so you have to practice some type of self-care. If you are just having tons of people all the time, then when do you sleep, or when do you take care of your own family, and when do you have time off? It's just very difficult. That's why we are starting to work in partnerships in a certain level even it's sharing time. Time off, I'm off seventy-two hours once a month, and then the other midwife is off seventy-two hours once a month, and then we cover each other type of thing, and that's still not enough, three days out of the month.

Do you find that your clientele is of a certain demographic? Who looks for this service?

I think mine is very diverse, very diverse, which to me is lovely because I get people here from all over different cultures, different religions. It's just fascinating to me that they are looking for that. I don't know if it's because I am already from a different country and they are looking for that aspect of it, but I find myself in a very diverse practice. I don't say that the majority are white or Hispanic or black or whatever religion. It's just all over. I like that because it means that the word is being spread for everybody equally of the options.

When you take a new client, what's the process of checking on them? How early do you start measuring them or things like that?

We offer a free consultation, which happens whenever they find out they're pregnant and they want to look for our services. They come in. We meet. It's about an hour where we explain the whole process because it's an evidence based practice. It's informed consent. It's a teamwork. We want them to feel that everybody is partaking in this and just not me making the decisions for them or them making the decisions by themselves. We work as a team. First we tell them, you want to make sure that you are with the right provider. Interview two or three midwives until you feel that that's the right one for you. But then when they decide they want to start care, then we set that up as soon as possible depending on where they are in the pregnancy. If it's early on that they come and meet with me, usually we wait ten weeks so that we can find a heartbeat with a doppler; if not, then we send them out to do an ultrasound. Also, we are able to do bloodwork and send them out to different places for that. We just work all those aspects. We are able to send for genetic screenings and testings. We meet them wherever their comfort zone. I don't think that because they're planning to have a baby at home that they're being taken away from technology.

If that's what makes them feel comfortable, we are still able to refer them to different places to get all that level of testing if it's needed.

When a patient calls you and says they're in labor, what are the steps that you take?

What's your routine?

First we make sure that they are very knowledgeable of all the signs of labor and when to call us so that there is no procrastination. I say, as soon as something starts happening, call me and let me know so that we are able to support you in that journey, so that's what they usually do. We give them all the signs and then they call, never text. I tell them, don't text me. In the middle of the night I might not be able to listen to my messages like that, my text messages. As soon as they let us know, I let the team know because we are usually two or three people coming together, usually two midwives and a student coming to the birth, and let everybody know, "Heads up, so-and-so is in labor." Then when things are getting closer, more active labor, then is when we head up to the birth. We want to be there with plenty of time to set up all the equipment that we bring. We have a whole setup of everything: Oxygen, ___ bags, suction, a whole station for baby if baby needs to be resuscitated, some dressing and blankets with a heating pad. We put all our stuff on display. Then we are there monitoring mom and baby, listening to the baby's heart rate intermittently. We do it every twenty, thirty minutes when they are in that active phase of labor. When they're starting to push, then we do it more often, every fifteen to ten minutes or even sooner if it's something that the baby needs to be monitored more closely. Then we're there to give them support, reassurance.

We ask parents to write a birth story that lets us know their preferences, so we try to be on the same page. That's a way for them to put out there to the universe, this is what we are envisioning; this is what we want, this type of experience, and what environment they want to

create. Do they want music as a background, or do they want aromatherapy? Do they like massage? Do they want hands off? Do they want it very quiet? Do they want to use water as a comfort measurement, or they don't want to do that? Some people want to create a visualization board and they put lights and something that they can look at that helps them to go back into their zone.

We always talk about that we don't have a guarantee that if you are planning to have a baby at home that it will happen at home because safety comes first. That's why we are there to monitor and make sure things are progressing as smooth as possible, but we always have our Plan B that if we need to go to the hospital, which one is the closest to your home? How long will it take us to get there? In a situation like that we call and let them know what is happening. We fax over records. We come with the mom to the hospital. There is that continuation of care. We stay there with them.

Then after that during the postpartum care we're with them two and half to three months after they give birth, so we are helping in that transition. With a family adding a new member, it helps through postpartum depression for them not to be having a hard time in that transformation. That's why we see them quite often after they give birth and for that long. That's just part of what we do.

I have two questions. I want to make sure we're respectful of your time because you have an appointment coming in. The first is your name, Marvelys.

Marvelys.

I apologize for not saying it—

That's okay.

What does that mean? Where does that name come from? When I saw it written out, marvelous, and you sound marvelous, a very Anglo version of it. Talk about your name.

There's not a lot of a story about it. It was a very weird name when I was growing up, but it's my mom's name. My grandpa, I think, was the one who found it in a book, a novel or something that he was reading, and named my mom Marveli with an *I* and no *S* at the end. Then my name ends with a *Y* and an *S*, so she did a change of that to make it a little bit different from hers. But I just was named after my mom. It doesn't really have a meaning that I can tell you. It was not a common name when I was growing up. It was actually a little bit bothersome because people would call—at that time there were no cell phones—of course they would call and ask for Marvelys, and it's like, who? The mom or the daughter?

Then later on people will give you a nickname. In the Latin culture if you are little...My mom would be Marveli and I will be Marvelita. I didn't like it, but my whole family that's what they would call me because I was the little one.

That's why I didn't name my kids like us. We wanted them to have their own identity. I love my name nowadays, but growing up it was not the ideal scenario. It was not until I was here as an exchange student that I realized how close my name was with *marvelous* because in Spanish it's different; it's *maravilla*, and my name is Marvelys, so they were not that close. But I love it; I love that it's that close.

That actually ties into my other question: How you connect your children and yourself with the Venezuelan culture? I just interviewed somebody else from Venezuela Saturday, and he had a refugee story.

Oh wow, that's hard.

Yes, very hard, very difficult. Your story is one of...marvelous-like. But, at the same time, it's your home country. We know right now, if anybody were doing research they would know the turmoil that is in Venezuela, especially today. It's crazy. How do you handle that Venezuelan connection with your family?

They were able to travel with me a few times when I went back home to visit family, but my kids were very little. It was very nice that they at least got to go a few times before I said, "No, no more, not until this changes, not until this is a little bit more stable." The last time I went there was a year after my dad passed away. I was there when my dad passed away; I just flew in knowing that he was very ill, but I went by myself. I think my youngest, my daughter was just a year and a half or so, maybe two when I went there the last time that I brought her with me, so she doesn't have much of a memory. My son was more like four or five years old, so he remembers.

There is a group of Venezuelan people here in Las Vegas, so we get to go to some gatherings and things that it helps to reconnect with the culture. The food they love; they love Venezuelan food. They like the music. My husband plays the *cuatro*, which is an instrument that they play in Venezuela with four strings; that's what it is. He sings and he plays the *cuatro*. I think that they're growing a little bit with all this and the dancing. But it's really different, obviously, because they speak Spanish, but they have an accent.

Which accent do they have?

From here. They both have an accent, more my son than my daughter. They understand everything, but when they speak they have an accent to it.

Do you speak to them in Spanish or in English?

We do both. When they were growing up, it was very important that my husband would speak English because he needed that. There was a time when we were living with my American family, for respect as well because they don't speak Spanish that we were trying. My husband, to pass his English test for what was required for him to get his license as an RN here, even me, I was speaking English to my husband. It was challenging because it was not our way of doing things.

I think that it was different once we moved and we were in our own space and he already has passed his test and then we had our daughter, so we could speak Spanish at home. For both of them, their first language was Spanish, but then as soon as they started getting interaction from school, the TV, and all that then they evolved with English. They do understand both, especially they understand Spanish, but they speak and do everything in English; that's the way they interact with their friends.

When my daughter wants to tell me something that she doesn't want anybody else to hear or whatever, then she communicates with me in Spanish, which is kind of interesting because that's something that she does on her own, not because we taught her. *Oh, okay.*

Then he speaks Spanish, but I think he has a stronger accent. That's the one who is eighteen now. We're telling him, "It's so important that you develop this because it will help you to communicate with places and more people in the world. And now that you're going to go out and you want to study and go to university and the whole thing, it's even more so. It's easier to find a job if you're bilingual."

It is, it is.

Yes. That's kind of what we've been explaining to them. I hope...It's there. It's in their brain. It's in their DNA. It's just more them wanting to do that.

Just to clarify, was your son born in Venezuela or was he born here?

It was here. It was one of my trips that I came to visit. I was in Utah. At the time, the family was there. But we went back to Venezuela. I finished all the things that I needed to do there because there is an Article VIII, which you go to the university for free, but then you have to work for...depending if it's in the city, it's two years; outside of the city in a more rural area, it's one year you have to work as a medical resident in a hospital or facility, ambulatory or something. You still get paid, but it's less amount of money in order to pay your dues.

I did that; went back and finished, to do all that. We were saving money, so I was working two jobs and my husband was working two jobs. We were saving money in order to be able to come here, and that didn't happen until January of 2003.

We like to ask our narrators how they like to identify, where they see themselves in the U.S.? You came from another country where you already had your education and came here ____ to do the equivalence of what you already had. How does that affect how you identify now?

I think that for me it has been a whole life transformation because when I was very little I remember having this dream where I was helping women and their babies. I didn't know what they would look like. In my mind and in my world that meant that I needed to be a doctor in order to do that. There was no other way. My mom said that when I was very little they took me to Disney World and I got lost following a stroller with a baby. I would go to a park and I will sit down and start conversations with the mom and asking questions about the kid, the baby that they had in there. I think it was something very engrained in me; I didn't know.

The midwife that helped me with my daughter, she said to me, “You’re a doctor, but you have the heart of a midwife.” I think that somehow things link one way to another, and I think there are no mistakes out there.

I just felt that it wasn’t for me to leave my family and go into a full residency as a doctor and work in a system that I was going to be more...in a system it is more numbers because you cannot...and it’s not the fault of the doctors. They want to help and all that. But then you cannot be as personal. In Venezuela as doctors we will take the blood pressure of our own patients; we will feel their pulse; we will talk to them about how they’re feeling; we will touch them. It’s just more that connection as human beings. Yes, we have to have some tough conversations sometimes, but there was the human aspect and you were having the time to do so. If your appointment was an hour long, then that’s what it was; everybody that was waiting in the waiting room know that they will have their time if they just wait patiently. But here you don’t see so much of that especially if you’re in the system where you’re working with insurance where you’re timely and they have to be seen, five minutes, ten minutes if you’re lucky, and poor doctors are just overworked.

There are. Boom, boom, boom, yes.

Yes. Sometimes you get used to it and you’re like, don’t expect more than what I can give you; this is all what I can give. It’s a system that was not really fulfilling the reasons why I wanted to be a doctor. Then I found that this was. That’s why I fell in my spot. This is something that I think I can do and I can be happy with. People enjoy doing this with me. It’s been very special. I helped my sister with my niece and my nephew when they were born; I was their midwife. Sometimes I tell them—now one is ten and the other one is seven—I said, “Who touched you

first?" They say, "You did." I'm like, "Yes." It's very cute. Create those memories, they're very special for me.

My kids don't know any different. My daughter when she was in kindergarten, one time I was driving her; we were carpooling, so there were two other kids in the car. We were taking them to a music class or something, and here I'm driving and I'm paying attention. They were asking about when they were born and where they were born, in this school. One of the kids said, "I was born in the hospital." Then my daughter looked at him and said, "What was wrong with you?" Because she knows that hospitals are for people that are sick. And he said, "What do you mean 'what is wrong with me?'" Nothing. That's where babies are born." She said, "Huh-uh. I was born at home." She didn't know any different. She just knows that the people come here are pregnant and they come back and they have a baby and the baby was born at their house. In her mind that was the majority. People went to the hospital when they're sick. She didn't know any better. I was like, wow, the innocence of kids, and their world where they develop and they're born.

That's quite precious. I love that.

Any last stories or anecdotes that you want to share?

Oh my goodness, I have tons, but...there is a lot of good anecdotes in there.

I bet there are birthing anecdotes, which would take up a whole two hours or more by itself.

This has been wonderful.

Yes, it's fantastic. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

Is somebody going to be born today, in the next twenty-four hours?

Well, hopefully, hopefully.

Do you induce labor, or...?

Sometimes we have to encourage labor if things are not really moving along and we are like, well, if the amniotic fluid is starting to become an issue, is starting to come low, or dates are super past, safety comes first, so we want to give options before we have none because then the baby is in distress or something. Yes, we use natural things to induce, herbs. There are many ways that you can do naturally to encourage labor. I have to say more than actually induce-induce, it's encourage.

It's a more positive word.

Yes, it is. *Come on, baby.* Sometimes I just imagine them holding on tight, pulling on the cord, like, *no, no, I'm not ready; it's so comfortable in here.* I'm like, *no, no, you need to come out. You're going to come out the size of a toddler.* In average, babies that are born at home are bigger than the ones that are born in the hospital.

Oh, they are? Why is that?

I think because we don't do as much exams, vaginal exams and things to stimulate labor early on. Sometimes when women are thirty-six weeks, thirty-seven weeks pregnant, then they start doing exams and that sometimes triggers things to happen, and we really don't. That's part of what we do is to provide information to parents and then wait for them, their decision if they want to be checked or not. But it gets to a point when we are getting to that. *Well, your estimated due date came and went.* If we start seeing that there is a concern, then we give all their options.

Quarterly we do a Prenatal Pampering. We want the older moms to meet and create connections for them to create community. We celebrate a pregnancy. We do many things. We have food that is homemade.

How nice.

Yes. It's fun. Then we have some games to kind of get them to know each other. They do some crafts, some affirmation things to put in their birth. It's just fun. Then we do one for postpartum as well, separate, when they come with all their babies and they share their stories and then they create that community as well. We live in a world that is so fast paced and now everything is virtual. That interaction person to person doesn't happen very often unless you really have the meaning of doing so, and so this is a way of creating that. I am doing appointments, which one comes in and the other one leaves, so if they meet each other it's in the hallway, one in, one out, and not really interacting. If I don't do these types of things, then they don't get to meet.

Once a year we do our annual client appreciation party. Last year was our tenth year doing it. We do it at a park and it's a big potluck. Everybody brings food. We have activities for the kids. Yes, it's fun. Then I get to see my very, very first babies that are this year are going to be fourteen.

Wow. That's exciting. That's a really wonderful community you're building.

We started this in January of 2006. Already in January, the first baby was fourteen, which I was at that birth more supporting mom and then being there for the other midwife, but I was not acting as the primary yet, but it was part of that process when I started my journey and I did that for a year. Then I started Sweet Beginnings. It's fun. The years go very fast.

I know.

I can't believe it. It's so great.

That's fantastic. Thank you so much.

You're very welcome.

[End of recorded interview]