

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA MENESES**

An Oral History Conducted by Elsa Lopez

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada  
Oral History Project

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

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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

Olivia Meneses was born in Mexico City, Mexico, in 1952, to Amparo Moguel and Roberto Meneses. She reflects lovingly of her upbringing with her four siblings; of being raised to be bilingual and to appreciate music and culture.

In this oral history, Olivia describes a period of her life, from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, when she was moving back and forth between Mexico and the United States. Then in 1995, she and her family established Las Vegas as their home. She shares her immigration story, giving birth in the U.S., and dealing with INS. Securing a job did not come easily, but eventually she was able to teach Spanish to young English-speakers—a job she is now retired from.

Most important in her life was providing for her two children Javier and Olivia. Both are exceptionally creative and successful in their endeavors. As their mother, Olivia has found great joy in nurturing her children and watching their accomplishments. She also loves engaging in social activities such as playing canasta and a book club for Spanish-speakers.

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September 18, 2019  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Elsa Lopez

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Olivia Mercedes 09/18/2019  
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Elsa Lopez 09/18/19  
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**Hello. The date is September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. My name is Elsa Lopez and I am here in the Oral History Research Center. I am joined today with...**

***Barbara Tabach.***

**And...**

Olivia Meneses.

**Olivia, can you please spell and pronounce your name out for us, first and last name?**

Yes. O-L-I-V-I-A, Olivia. M-E-N-E-S-E-S, Meneses.

**Thank you. Olivia, how do you identify?**

Identify as far as what? I can identify as many things...As a mother, as a...what? Ethnicity? I don't know. Be precise with your question. How?

**For example, if someone were to ask you what your nationality is, what would you say?**

My nationality is Mexican, and I'm proud of being a Mexican because of the Mexican culture that I like a lot.

**Yes. (Indiscernible)**

Because my mother was a wonderful lady who gave us a lot of love, and the main thing for her in her life was their kids. She put first the kids above anything else. She provided us with lots of love, caring, examples, and that's what counts.

**Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Mexico City.

**Tell us a little bit about your childhood.**

My childhood was wonderful. I went to bilingual school since kindergarten through high school, and it was not a religious school. We didn't use a uniform. It was a mixed school. I have lots of friends that I still have today, and we remember us like brothers and sisters; my house was three

blocks from the school, and they remember very well how I used to (say), “Hey, come on, let’s go to my house to eat.” My mother had five kids, so she used to prepare super meals because from the five kids that she had, every day there was one or two from my brothers and sisters who went to eat at home. She had to have a big table and prepare to everyone. They still remember the food that my mother made.

I am the youngest one from my family. I have very good memories. Of course, there was no technology, so how did we entertain? Okay, television just appeared at home a year after I was born. But how did we entertain, we played outside. We ride bicycles. It was a safe street, a safe city. We skate. We play with our cousins. We just played. Games inside the house if it was raining. But no TV at all when we were kids.

**What did Mexico City look like at the time when you were a child?**

Beautiful, beautiful. It was beautiful.

**Can you describe it?**

Yes. You can go from one place to another. I live in a ZIP code, for example, that if you want to go...My mom and my father loved to go to museums and sightseeing. If you wanted to go to the Palacio de Bellas Artes, okay, it was ten minutes’ drive, and then you walked through the Alameda. Alameda was the central park for Mexico City where you can walk and sit there and feed the pigeons and then went into the museum that is inside Palacio de Bellas Artes. We used to go a lot there also to see concerts. We were kind of an artistic family because we liked symphonies, we liked plays. I remember seeing *My Fair Lady* when I was five years old in Palacio de Bellas Artes. It was like, *really?* I remember that I was sitting almost on the floor because we have a balcony. First I was, okay that’s good; I like the songs. Then afterwards, after one hour and a half, I fall asleep, obviously, five years old.



But it was great to be living there. It was safe. There was no traffic, no nothing. It was beautiful. We went to Castillo de Chapultepec; also, to go and see the Museum; that's where they have the bottle of—well, several bottles. We saw at that time the original pieces that were at the Castillo de Chapultepec of Maximiliano who was in the 1860s an empire, again Mexico. He bought many pieces for Carlota, and they came from everywhere. We saw beautiful things at the *castillo*. Right now, unfortunately, those pieces are mostly gone. I'm not going to say by whom.

**What about your childhood home? What did the house look like?**

Oh, it was always full of people. We loved music. My oldest brother is eleven years older than me, but he loved music. We had a grand piano. He had his friends to come on Fridays and Saturday nights to play piano and the bongos. I love music, so I would run down the stairs and sit on the stairs and look at them, how they played the bongo and the piano and how they danced. At that time the bossa nova, I think, was the current music that they were singing. Well, what can I say? It was always full of music. If it was my father, classical music. If it were my brothers, then it was all different kinds of music. Then I started growing up with one of my sisters that we were very, very joined together, and we loved The Beatles. We put Beatles in this old stereo system. It was funny.

**BARBARA: *The turntable?***

Yes. Everything integrated in one and it was funny. We had fun. We kept all the lone players this side and we labeled them, my sister and I, Amparo and Olivia; that's my sister's name. My father looked at us like, oh my God. He asked, "Please when I arrive home, please do not play your music." "Why not?" "Because I can't stand all that shouting." "Yes, we cannot stand your music, either." Wow. But it was wonderful.

**What is it like growing up with five siblings?**

Oh, great. The five of us were very, very different, each one of us. No one is alike in the world. Nevertheless, we grew up in the same house. We came out differently. Somehow my sister and I, Amparo and I, we were more or less the same, maybe because we were the youngest ones and we identified a lot with my mother. The other ones, they saw the reality different, and we were looking at them and how they were making mistakes, because we made mistakes all the time. Still now I make mistakes. We are not perfect. We tried to not make the same mistakes as them. It was fun. But, as I say, my sister and I were always together. We shared the same bedroom. We went to the same school, and after we finished high school we went to the same college. We were together all the time.

**What is your sister's name?**

Amparo, just like my mother.

**What are the names of your other siblings?**

The first one is Pedro. The next one is Roberto, as my father. The next one is Rosa Maria. The next one is Amparo. And then me.

**Let's talk a little bit about your parents. What were their careers? What did they do while you were growing up?**

What they were doing?

**Yes, what were their jobs?**

My mother, the only job was being a mother, not a housewife. I put housewife, but she was a mother, period. My father worked hard. He was a very smart guy. On his own he created an industry that made posts for lights for avenues, but they were made out of steel. He created this big, huge enterprise on his own.

***He manufactured these?***

Yes.

**How did he begin his company? How did he create the company?**

On his own.

**Was he the one who created it?**

Yes, he created it. He was kind of a genius. His family was kind of genius. He had a brother that if you Google it you will find that he was given an honor from the French; Legent was a famous cardiologist in Mexico. They were kind of genius, some of them.

**Your father's side of the family.**

Yes.

**He created this company. When did he begin to build it up?**

Well, I was little, so...

**You were still younger, yes. I wanted to know—were you aware of what your father was doing when he went to work? What the working conditions were like?**

Yes, of course. He worked hard and he was not an easy person in the sense that he didn't sleep well; he slept only a few hours. I remember that because our room, my sister's and my room was near the bathroom from the house. He woke up at three or four o'clock in the morning and he loved to get into the tub. But the noise from the water running—and we had to wake up at six because our classes start at seven. My sister and I look like this, *what? It's four o'clock in the morning. What are we going to do? We are going to arrive sleepy at school.* There was no way... There was another bathroom, but he loved that one and that was near our bedroom. Then afterwards he took a bath, giving it five, and then he would start making calculations with the soap on the mirror. I don't know if you saw this, Brilliant Mind, which talked to me because when they start the movie, I said, "Oh my God, that's my father. No, no, no. I'm leaving, I'm

leaving.” But, yes, that’s the way he was. An idea came up and then he start. Instead of going for a pencil and a yellow pad, no. with the soap he would start writing or making some calculation or formula. Then he would call one of my brothers. Both of them studied engineering, also. He called them and they start talking at five o’clock in the morning. It was like a meeting. And my sister say, “Really? Really? Mom, can you do something?” *No, I can’t.* “Can we move from bedrooms?” *No, you can’t.* “Okay.”

**Your older brothers, did they ever work for your father’s company?**

Yes, they were working for him. One of them now is in charge of the company. I was never involved there, none whatsoever. Well, I helped for just a year, but it was not what I like to pursue.

**Yes, not your passion.**

No, no.

**Tell us a little bit more about school. You said you went to a bilingual school. What was that like? What was the name of the school, do you remember?**

Modern American School.

**What was it like going to school there?**

Great, unbelievable, great. They had very good teachers. They were worried about quality and not quantity. For example, if we have a music class, they hire the director of the symphony of (BSX); that was our teacher. If we were studying English literature, they would bring someone from England who had a master’s who studied English. Those were our teacher.

**So, it was a very affluent school.**

Yes, yes. It was like what they call here a Challenger School, because it was a private school.

**Oh, it was a private school.**

Of course, yes. Public schools are very poor there, very, very poor.

**You said you went there from kindergarten all the way through what grade?**

High school.

**Was this the only school you attended for primary and secondary?**

Yes, yes.

**Do you remember any teachers at the time that you remember fondly; that were your favorites?**

I was very fluent with one of my—there were several. It was different. When you are in high school, you don't know really—well, in third grade, in primary I was in front with my teacher. She was so nice. She helped us with math, *blah, blah, blah*. She was great because we have three hours of English and three hours of Spanish, and the Spanish covered all the subjects, and English have to cover all the subjects; that is one. Then when you arrive to what they call here middle school, we called them *secundarias*, but they are three years. There are three years of *secundaria* and there are three years of high school; that's how it is divided. Primary school is from first through sixth grade; that's primary. Then secondary is three years, like middle school, but three years of high school. That's a little bit different.

In high school I was very fond of teachers. One of them who taught math, I was in love with math and he was great. I enjoyed his classes a lot. Nevertheless, I enjoyed also Latin American literature. I have a very good teacher, also. He came from Spain. We were involved in this literature from Latin America and Spanish literature, and, also, with a Russian teacher that she taught us American literature.

**Wow. That's amazing. What was it like being taught by these people who are professionals in their fields?**

Oh, yes, yes, yes, all of them were very good.

**That's great. You told me before that you still keep in contact with some of your friends from this school. Were they in your same classes?**

Yes, we were in the same classes. Fortunately, they are still alive. They have reunions every year. I don't go. I don't travel as much as I used to. I don't travel to Mexico now. They send me pictures and say hello to everyone. If you are there, give me a call and I can talk with them and that's how we get in touch with them, and Facebook, of course.

**Were these friends that lived in your neighborhood, or did they live in different parts of the city?**

As I told you, the school was in a zone, and since there was no traffic whatsoever, they could come from several zones. In order to go through the school, they have to go through my street. When I was going to high school, I was the youngest one and I said to my mother, "Don't take me to school anymore," because she didn't allow us to walk. It was three blocks. I said, "Mom, come on." She said, "No." Now she said, "Since I know your friends, they can pick you up at the front door." That's how I get to the school at five to seven to get to school because I don't want her to wake up early now for me.

***Was she afraid for some reason?***

I don't know. That's the Latin mothers, my kids keep saying. "If you don't wear socks, you will slip and die." That's what they say to me laughing. That's the way I am. If they are going to leave the house, up till now, "Do you have your sweater? Your water? Do you have a jacket? Do you have socks?" "Mom, yes." "Okay, bye."

**I want to hear a little bit more about your mom. What was she like?**

Oh, wonderful, beautiful woman, most beautiful woman ever inside and outside.

**What kind of food would she make when you invited your friends over?**

She loved Mexican food, so she did every single dish that you can even imagine. When I was little I refused to eat. I was like, “No, I don’t want this. I don’t like this.” “You haven’t even tried it, Olivia. Try it.” “No. It looks awful. It looks awful. No, Mom, no.” I saw how she enjoyed the food. Then later on, like in high school, then I started tasting the food that she was preparing because I saw my brothers eating. My sisters and I were picky. We just wanted chicken and soup and that’s it. Then we started trying all these wonderful meals. Oh. And I learned a lot of those. I learned how to cook a lot of those. Of course, I only make them on special occasions because today in order to make those meals you have to have a big kitchen, helpers. I don’t know Santa Claus helpers or whose helpers because my kids don’t help. If I have friends here that are from Mexico, when we have a reunion, we go and we cook and then we cook there, but we cook all of those because you have to cut a lot of things, a lot of pots, and to clean that kitchen takes a while.

**Did she have help?**

Yes, two maids.

**What are the specific dishes that she taught you how to make?**

For example, on special occasions like Christmas, we used to have (22:36); that is a Spaniard dish. We have the turkey, but it was prepared American style because she lived in Los Angeles for a while. Ham, but the natural ham of the pork, not now that is processed. She went to a special store to ask for the ham and how they caught it; she asked for that. Then she made...I don’t know...four dishes or five dishes plus salad plus *blah, blah, blah*. That’s Christmas. It was very important. For birthdays, whatever we wanted.

**Did you have family that lived nearby, extended family?**

Yes. I had my grandmother that was my mother's mom and her sister lived ten minutes from our house. In that time there were no supermarkets, so in Mexico—still some towns today, they have to do that. My mother used to go every single day to the market to buy the food for that day. She would drop us at school, then she went to the market, visit my grandma, the sister, buy the things, come back home, prepare the food, pick us up, *blah, blah, blah*. Yes, we have a lot of cousins ten minutes' riding from our house.

**What did family get-togethers look like?**

Oh, it was great. We had lots of fun. Either it was in my house or in my aunt's house. She had five kids, also, so we were more or less the same age. We played together. We made trips together. It was fun. We went to Acapulco a lot because my mother was born in the state of Chiapas. At the age of five, my grandfather—it was a certain post that had to do with...like the IRS, the example of IRS, but this time the post was in Acapulco, in the state of Guerrero where now the beaches are. If my mother was here, she would tell you how they moved from Chiapas to Acapulco. One part of the road by train, one part of the road by horse, part of the road by donkeys. It was unbelievable. I still have pictures of her. She loved Acapulco. She lived there fifteen years. She was a great swimmer. I have pictures with her in a swimming suit and the socks because she always had cold feet, and I have cold feet, also. You will see always me wearing socks, always.

**She wore socks to the beach?**

Yes, to swim. She had many cousins and they knit out of wool socks especially for people that had cold feet. Then said, "Can I wear them to swim?" And my grandmother said, "Yes, sure. Why not, Amparo, whatever you want." You can see her with a swimming suit like this, long, and the socks.



**It was a different era, a different fashion ability.**

With the socks. But that's fun.

**Did your parents always live in Mexico City?**

Yes.

**They stayed there?**

They stayed there in Mexico City.

**You said that your mother had been to Los Angeles. Was that before?**

Because my grandfather, after he had been fifteen years in Acapulco, like being in charge of the IRS, then they sent him to San Pedro, California to the same post. In those times there were different things. My mother was twenty years old. They moved to San Pedro, California. I don't know why they had diplomatic passports because they were working for the government—my grandfather was. But exactly for sure, I don't know. I think I still have that passport that says *diplomatic* or whatever. Exactly what was the post, I never knew my grandfather. He died the year I was born. Unfortunately, I never met him.

**How long did she stay in California?**

As a matter of fact, she married there. My father was working in Sinaloa. It's another state. Then he traveled to L.A. and they were married there.

**But they didn't decide to stay.**

No, no. My father was working for a company in Los Mochis, Sinaloa, and then they moved back from Los Mochis that they stayed only two years that I remember because my mother told me. That's when the oldest brother was born. Then they moved to Mexico City and then they stayed there.

**Your father's company, was it very successful?**

It was. Nowadays it has competitors. It's the market that offers better product or better price.

**But at the time was he one of the only manufacturers?**

Yes, there were one or two companies that work on that.

**Were they both in Mexico City?**

Yes.

**That's so interesting. Tell us a little bit about your life after high school, after your private schooling.**

I went to college.

**What did you study? What college did you go to?**

This was weird. Okay, the thing about Halloween. Before the Olympic Games in Mexico, there was—it was all around the world; it started in Paris—the movement from students that started in Paris. That movement arrived to Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. That is the great university in Mexico that is a public college. Students got involved with this movement by letters because, of course, no internet and phone calls were very expensive. They were starting a movement and it was misinterpreted by the government. The thing was that there was going to be for the first time Mexico was going to be recognized in the world because if you said—I used to travel a lot young with my mother. We went to Uruguay. Where are you from? Mexico. *Where is Mexico? Is it in Africa? In Asia?* No, no. Mexico is down where United States. Do you know America? *America? United States, no.* There was a lot of confusion. We were happy Mexican people; we're happy because now with the Olympic Games they were going to place Mexico where it was situated. But then it happened that then the students from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México got together to confront the government because they didn't agree with what the policies were, *blah, blah, blah*. But Olympic Games were coming in a few months.

What they did is they sent the military. First they picked them up and arrested them. Then the thing went worse and there was the \_\_\_\_\_ de Octubre; that's when they start killing students. It was horrible. It was just days before the Olympics were inaugurated.

***What were the students protesting for?***

Unfortunately, Mexico after Porfirio Díaz who people said it was the worst—no. He was a dictator that helped with all the bad after independence. We have independence in 1810 through 1890 something when Porfirio Díaz took power was a chaos. That's when Santa Anna gave all our territories to the United States and *blah, blah, blah*. Porfirio Díaz, who was military, took government. There was no constitution that there were only six years; he changed it so he stayed in power for twenty-five or twenty-six years. But it was good because it brought peace in the country and it brought what we call black numbers. We were in red numbers; we owe everything, *blah, blah, blah*; everybody stole, *blah, blah, blah*.

Then started the movement of the revolution with Madero. They were against Porfirio Díaz. As always, people were against him; people were not. There was a revolution. Making it short, from Porfirio Díaz to 1952, all the presidents were generals, were from the military and later were from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional; that's what it was called. After Porfirio Díaz until recently, this Partido political party has ruled Mexico. Students were against how Mexico was ruled by the party. There is nothing you can do, not even students, and we have seen it all around Latin America, all the dictatorships that they have been, and they have suffered. Some dictators want power and money. Unfortunately that's what the students were looking for, more freedom, freedom of speech, and that was prohibited.

***Did anyone in your family participate in those protests?***

No, we did not. We did not, no, no, we did not. That's why I say unfortunately. Well, fortunately, the Olympic Games started. They placed Mexico and now when you travel and you say, where do you come from? Mexico. "Oh yes, we know, Olympic Games." Do you see the way it is in the map? Yes. I wanted to go to this university, and my sister, too, but then my brothers went there at the time and they had to stop studying because there were the strikes and *blah, blah, blah*. They said, "No more." They talked with my mom and she said, "No. There are two options. They can either go to Americana school or to the Anáhuac College." There were two private colleges. There was no other option and we went to the Universidad Iberoamericana school, a college. It was Catholic in certain ways because at the beginning when it was created—just it gave classes. When I arrived there were no Jesuits, no. Everybody was a professional one. That's where I study and my sister, too.

**Just quickly, your brothers, they were in university during the time of the strikes. Did they witness the strikes? They were there, so...**

No. They back off. They went to work with my father. They waited until the waters were calm and then go back again and study.

**During the time where there was the unrest—**

Yes, it was unrest, yes.

**—school was not in session?**

Yes, the school was not in session, of course, no. As a matter of fact, Universidad was guarded by the military.

**There was a lot of military presence at the university.**

Yes, of course.

**What about in the rest of the city?**

In certain places there were. They were looking for the *cabecillas* or leaderships, but they never find. They confront each other in a place called \_\_\_\_\_, but it was like behind downtown Mexico, and that's what is called on October second and celebrated La Matanza de dos de Octubre, (SPANISH/39:22).

**Did your family witness any of the military presence, or were you guys far away from the location of where—**

No, we were far away from the university. We weren't allowed to go out.

**I imagine.**

No, no, we weren't allowed.

**It's too dangerous. Tell us more about your time at university. What was the name of the college again?**

Universidad Iberoamericana.

**Tell us about your time there.**

It was great. I liked it. The thing is that I started studying and then when I started I was used to waking up at six o'clock or four o'clock depending on my father. Then my classes start at four o'clock p.m. I said, "What? I'm going to drop school. I'm going to fall asleep." Nevertheless that's how my school started. At the beginning it was hard for me to go to school from four p.m. to ten p.m. I have three classes every day from four to ten. The beginning was hard because the first two hours after eating, because we have our dinner served at two o'clock—after you finish eating you feel full. Your metabolism is calm and you want a five-minute nap. No. I have to run and go to...I arrived to the class and I said, "Oh my." I'm sleepy.

The first year was hard because of that. Then afterwards you start making friends and that's when the fun started. The first year was hard. It is difficult to have friends when you have

different classes and you don't know anyone. Afterwards you encounter the same students that are studying your career or the same area and you start making your own friends. That's when things got exciting. While we enjoyed going to school, we enjoyed working and making the projects. We were encouraged to work together. We worked in groups. We went to one house or the other house. We didn't sleep. I remember having a Remington and I remember either in my house or a friend's house and we carried that Remington, typing machine. I don't know if you have seen one. I don't think so.

**Probably not.**

Just Google it and say what was the type of machine in 1970, the typewriter? Oh, okay.

**You had to carry it for projects.**

Yes, because we have to make our work. It was like, *ck,ck,ck,ck*. If you made a mistake, fortunately they created this eraser, but you still see it. Oh my gosh.

***It's a lot of work.***

It was a lot of work. We have all the books and then we have...It was unbelievable. But it was fun because we spend all the night working, and then we finished the work at two o'clock, and then we run to school to turn in the project or whatever. Then we start laughing. "Do you remember that day?" "Yes." And we usually get..."Do you remember carrying that typewriter?" "Yes." Yes, it was different.

**What did you study at university?**

(SPANISH/43:24).

**What kind of classes prepared you for that field?**

It was administration, economy, and law, basically.

**What did the class sizes look like?**

We were twenty-five max in each class.

**Oh, really.**

Yes, yes.

**Kind of like a regular school, like high school.**

Yes. They were peaking that. They didn't like a lot of students in their classrooms, and the classrooms were like auditorium. All the classrooms were auditorium-style, so it was good.

**I'm assuming you were with a lot of the same people, so they were in these very close-knit classrooms.**

Yes, yes, yes.

**Did you have any favorite professors? Favorite classrooms?**

Yes, there were two. I had one that was the—we have accounting, too—economy, Economy II, I think. He was great. He was very smart and he teach us not how to read books, but how to select a book that will give us that information. At that time you have to go to the library and you need to scheme if that book is going to give you, so he taught us that. Instead of bringing home or being at the library with twenty books, we went to the library, we schemed them, and then we brought two books, and that's how. That was a good teacher because in those times when you cannot have access to internet, they teach you how to make a project with just looking and scheming. It was good.

The other one was from administration, a great professor. I love him. Instead of teaching the old ways of teaching, he encouraged us to create something; to create like a play in order to pretend that you are the CEO of a company and you are going to replace the director of any section. We created a video. It was fun to make it. It took a lot, but we created a video at our

school, The Chair. That's why I love him, because instead of giving "open your books on Page 255 and look at the diagram"—and you were like, *really? No thanks.*

**Did you have any other mentors during your university years?**

No.

**Was this college a bilingual college, or was it in Spanish?**

It was only Spanish.

**I also wanted to ask...Oh yes. Why did you end up choosing industrial relations as your major?**

Again, it was a conflict of interest in the sense that I love math and I thought at that time that industrial relations will have a lot of things to do with calculations in math. It didn't have. We have accounting, but what I liked most were the social classes, the aspect of social. For example, administration and how you deal with personnel. As a matter of fact, my thesis has to do with how to promote personnel to a better job and a better salary. I created like a diagram and an interview, whatever, and that's what my thesis was about.

**When you graduated what were you hoping to do? What were you hoping to get into?**

When you graduate you think you are going to be the CEO of Pepsi Cola, Coca-Cola, IBM – whatever. Of course not. I started working as a personal administrator. Then I changed jobs and I went to work at this interdisciplinary group that we were engineers, administrators, accountants, architects; everything. It was a pool of all these degrees, and we were asked to help the president of a company, so that's what I love most. That's when I got pregnant, after three years working there, and I said, "No, my son is first," and that's when I quit.

**What was your job title at this company?**

Director of planning.



**What was the name of the company?**

The name of the company exactly, it will be hard because it was not a private and it was not governmental; it was in between. It was called (NAME).

**I'm curious. What did your father think about the work you were doing? Was it anything similar to what he was doing?**

No. By no means.

**Oh, not at all?**

No, no, by no means. Remember he was creating machines. He was creating how to carve the steel, how to rotate the steel. Different job.

**Not like an engineer.**

No. He was an engineer, yes. But he created machines and he created formulas in order to produce that kind of post, nothing to do with what I studied.

**You were more of an administrator.**

Yes.

**You said you worked with your father for a short amount of time.**

Oh yes, because I love to put the names on the things that he was making, the plans, well, the things that me made. I worked with him putting the name of the thing, the title, and his name and the date. In that time it was like a spider that you work with; they put names with ink. Different times, again.

**Yes, very different times.**

Now you can do it in the computer. Nicely done and not like spending three hours in here.

*Not as laborious.*

Yes, yes.

**You said you had your son shortly afterwards. Tell us a bit about motherhood.**

Oh, beautiful. The most beautiful thing in the world. That's the best experience you can ever have.

**Was this also in Mexico City?**

Yes, he was born in Mexico City.

**You met your husband—**

In Mexico City, at school, in high school.

**Oh, you met him young.**

Yes.

**Were you dating in high school?**

Yes, we were dating off and back on.

***At what age did you come to the United States?***

When I came? Okay. I came in 1983 to visit my in-laws, and I was pregnant, six months with Olivia. Then suddenly, just like that we stayed and I jumped the six months' validation of being a tourist, so I stayed illegally.

***Okay, so you came on a tourist visa.***

I came in through a tourist visa. Then I gave birth and then we stayed here. I stayed in Texas and the six months' permission had run over, so... Then we moved to Las Vegas and that's when I started struggling at, what I am going to do? Because I am used to work, so I needed to work, but for work I needed a Social Security. So, how did I get that? Okay. There was a law in the 1980s that if you came or stayed illegally you could ask for immigration. Don't tell me how did I find out. Maybe, probably I went to several lawyers; they just kept my money. I don't know. Maybe

talking to someone that says, “Okay, go to immigration directly and they will guide you.” I went to immigration and they guide me and that’s how I obtained my legal status.

*Was that a green card at that time?*

Yes. But unfortunately I asked for me and my son. They gave it to me and my son was pending. Every six months—then I received this at home, and this is the funniest part. “This is your Social Security number.” And for Javier says, for my son says, “This is valid for work.” For him it was a temporary residency attached to the Social Security number for work.

I went so angry to Immigration Services. It was called INS in that time. I went. It was on Industrial Road, I remember perfectly. I grab my kid, seven years old, “Hey, listen, this is ridiculous. I am granted the green card. Here’s my son. He is seven years old. It’s temporary and he is granted to work? What’s wrong with you? What’s wrong with your system? Where is his green card?”

“No, it’s because—”

“There’s no because. There is someone that misplaced his paperwork. Let’s do it again.” And they were stalling. “Let’s do it again.” Stalling. “Let’s do it again.”

Finally, I found out that his case went to Laguna Niguel. They were trying to solve problems with infants. It has nothing to do with my son. They never gave it to him, never, I mean never. Then we moved back to Mexico. I have to move back because unfortunately 1994 my sister, Amparo, was diagnosed by cancer, so I moved. That’s when I left United States. But I kept on writing INS and I went to the embassy, and no response, no response, no response. They never gave it to him.

We came back here again, to live again in Las Vegas because that’s where I have my friends and Olivia wanted to study here in Vegas, finish her school.

Then my son was in Mexico—well, he went to Dallas, Texas. He worked there seven years being a teacher, and he wasn't a teacher because they offer him that they were going to give him the green card, so he went and taught to Dallas Independent School District. He stayed there for seven years. After seven years he says, "Mom, I'm done teaching. This is not my profession." "I know, honey." "I quit." "Okay, quit." He went back to Mexico. He loves to write and he started looking for colleges for masters. I don't know, coincidence of life, he applied to five, he was selected in five, but here was accepted with a scholarship, and we were living here, my daughter and I.

***Living here in Las Vegas?***

Yes. He was in Mexico and he said, "What do I do?" "Are you asking me? Are you a fool or what? What do you do? Come over here. You don't have to pay house rent. They're going to give you scholarship. They're going to give you tuition free and they're going to give money. What do you expect? Yes, okay." That's where he met his wife.

***Here, back in Las Vegas?***

Yes. He finished his master's in screen writing.

***And then he was able to change his status...***

Well, he got married and then he change—it was a process because since he changed his name... The Social Security that they gave him is still the same; the number is still the same. Now he is not Javier Fernando. He is Javier Schroeder. But it is funny. Things go like this. I think there is a payback sometimes in life.

***Why did you want to come to the United States? What was that motivation?***

My in-laws were living in Austin, Texas. For different reasons we went there to visit and they need their son to stay because they want some property to be sold, so we can occupy the property until it be sold; that's why we stayed and then we continued.

**You chose to stay here rather than go back.**

Suddenly we were there and that's why we stayed.

***What was that adjustment like for you?***

As I told you at the beginning, I'm an adventurous person. The only thing that I regret is leaving my mom. But fortunately she traveled a lot and stayed with me six months or eight months, and that's when I also traveled, when I had the green card, and I went back and forth.

**When did you decide to move to Las Vegas? What year was that?**

Well, I didn't decide. We came from Austin to Las Vegas because they were all the properties that we have to take care.

**Were you traveling to and fro?**

No. Once we finish in Austin, Texas, we move to Las Vegas.

**What year was that?**

Nineteen eighty-five.

**What part of Las Vegas did you and your family move to? What area did you live in?**

Eighty-nine one-two-one. They learn the street. I made them learn the street, the telephone number .... They were like, "If something happens you know..." "Yes, Mom." And the phone number, they learn it by memory.

**What did that area of Las Vegas look like at the time?**

Oh, it was beautiful. It was nice. It's still nice.

**Was there a Latino population there? Did you have any Latino neighbors?**

At that time the population living in Vegas were five hundred thousand people. By that time there were almost no Latinos. The only Latinos were Cubans from the exile, but there were almost no Mexicans whatsoever. They haven't immigrated from L.A. or from other parts of Texas or whatever. I have a friend that she is from Ensenada, Mexico, but she was born in United States and she lives here that was my close friend, and another close friend is from Cuba. There were three different situations. At that time you couldn't see—for example, both my kids went to Las Vegas Day School. I like the school very much. It was similar to the one that I studied. I liked it because it had a lot of ethnicity in the groups, so you could find people from India, from China, from Mexico, of course United States. In one group you could find five different ethnicities, different ethnicities in one group, so that's what I like. I love it.

I thought that once I had my green card it was going to be easy to find a job. I reevaluated all my studies here at UNLV, so that I will have my degree, *blah, blah, blah*. I started looking for a job. Newspaper, of course. Then going and dropping the résumé. Then waiting for the call. *Blah, blah, blah*. I applied to three jobs, and one was asking for a personal administrator that speaks Spanish. That was my profession and I said, "Okay, I got it."

I went to the interview. They interviewed me. "Oh, you're good. Oh, yes." They interviewed me in Spanish and English. I thought, *yes, I have the job; I have the job*.

Unfortunately, there was certain kind of racism at that time, also.

**Even though they were seeking a Spanish speaker?**

Of course.

***Who got the job? How did you realize that?***

How? Because I knew someone there that said, "You know what? They decided not you because you were Mexican." Okay, thank you.

*They found a Spanish speaker who was not...*

And they hired someone that didn't speak Spanish.

**Really?**

When I took my kids to the doctor, on *race* I put *white*. Then the secretary said, "No. You're Hispanic." I said, "There is not such race of Hispanic. There's no such race as Hispanic, so it is white, please. I can lecture about history a little bit if you want to." "No, no, that's okay, miss, that's okay." "Okay."

**What about your kids, did they feel that they were discriminated in any sense or that they had to face any of those difficulties?**

No. Since they were kids, no. At school, no. No, I don't think so. It's different now. Vegas has grown so much, it's unbelievable. I was living in the east side of town and I took my kids to the west side of town and I took the only freeway. I drive it from Flamingo and drove until Jones and Desert Inn. It was a ten minutes' drive. Today I think it's more than ten minutes.

**When did you finally find a job here?**

When I decided, okay, if I'm not going to find this job, I'm going to try schools, private schools, kindergarten, and how to teach kids to speak Spanish. That's how I got my jobs.

**What was your first job?**

They were different. In kindergartens, I offer my services and they hired me by the hour.

**Were you a Spanish teacher?**

Yes, a Spanish teacher, you could say so.

**Was it more like—**

Spanish teacher. I have to speak with them in English, but I created songs that they could say *buenos dias*.

**You were teaching kids how to speak Spanish?**

Yes.

**But not teaching kids who knew Spanish how to speak English; it was not that.**

No. They were in kindergarten and first grade, and I taught them how to speak Spanish.

**What schools would solicit that kind of—**

There were many. I don't know if they even exist now.

**That's so unusual.**

Yes, because they were kindergarten mostly.

**What was that like working with a kindergarten class? You enjoyed it?**

I enjoyed them. I remember once I had to take one time Olivia with me to the class because she was alone at home and I'm not going to leave her alone, so she come with me. Oh, she was having so much fun. She was having so much fun and says, "Oh, Mom, you are great." I said, "Why don't you speak with them in Spanish?" "I don't know how to speak Spanish." "Why?" Then she started—well, she arrived speaking English, but the Spanish was hard even though we spoke Spanish at home. She could speak Spanish if she was asked exact, precise words. Now she speaks fluently Spanish and English. You cannot even notice the accent. We were having fun.

**How long did you have that job?**

I worked like that for five or six years, more or less. I didn't know I have to complete the ten years, but it doesn't matter. My sister was first and that's why I moved.

**Is that the only teaching position you had here?**

Yes, yes.

**Was that with private schools?**

Private schools, no public schools. Public schools were not allowed to teach Spanish, no.



**When did you see the Latino population begin to grow? When did it increase?**

I think it started to grow like in 1990 when casinos started growing more and they needed more help. The Strip was different; when I arrived there were no such casinos that we have now. They turned out many casinos. I remember the biggest casino ever besides the MGM, they built the Excalibur. That is horrible, right? But it had, I don't know, four thousand? I can't remember how many rooms they had, but they need people that will help, so that's when all the Latinos or Mexican people came to work on the casino area. Now mostly all of them are Hispanics or illegals or whatever you want to call them.

**Did you ever have family that came over to live here in Las Vegas?**

No.

**You're the only one in your family?**

Yes.

**Did you have anyone come visit?**

Oh, all the time. Unfortunately two of my sisters have died, so I only have one of my brothers, the youngest one; that is the only one that comes here. The other one is old and he—well, it's not that he's old. He didn't take good care of himself, so he can't fly. He can't come. I haven't seen him in a long time, seven years, more or less.

**What was it like for your kids going to school here? Did they enjoy the school they went to?**

Oh yes. Oh yes. I was involved with the PTA meetings. "Do you want to join how to make Halloween?" "Yes, of course." "And this party?" "Yes." I loved going to the PTA and I was involved, and making costumes for Halloween for most of the kids. Then my daughter started ballet classes and my son karate classes, so it was really fun.

**What schools did they go to when they were a little older?**

Las Vegas Day School.

**From kindergarten all the way until...Wow, they went to the same school. Okay, great.**

**When they graduated high school, what did they do afterwards?**

No. They graduated high school in Mexico. I moved in 1994.

**You moved back. Why did you—**

Because my sister got cancer.

**How long were you in Mexico then?**

A long time.

**You said your daughter wanted to move back here, right?**

She moved back here again in 2009 and she continued her studies at UNLV because she was studying at technology college in Mexico. She continued her studies, but she wanted to pursue ballet. But the School of Urban Affairs, I think it's called, they called her and said, "If you keep your pace, you can finish your communications studies that you started in Mexico this year and a minor in dance, and then you can continue with dance." She said, "Mom, what do I do?" I said, "Okay, what do you want to do? You have to decide. Have a degree at least and then you continue with the other one." She said, "Sure. Why not?" That's why she finished school in 2009, a minor in ballet.

Then she stayed here...yes, she stayed here. Then she continued with ballet and she had great opportunities dancing in Asia and Canada, here, from school. Then she continued on her own with classes. Right now I could say that she's an actress, a ballerina, and everything.

***She's lovely.***

Yes, lovely.

**She got her master's degree as well.**

Yes.

**Can you tell us about that?**

Okay. She was interested in getting a master's in theater; that's what she liked. She got it and then she started working. The thesis came with a problem, what were going to be called a thesis? This suggested that she will do something about nothing to do with us, to Mexicans. It was a show called Latin Fire that was on the Thunderbird Casino or whatever. My friends from Cuba that are my age knew three of the girls that were in the show. They put them in touch with Olivia, and she had a lot of research that included—I think that's when you met her.

*Yes, it is, yes.*

She recorded them and in all the communications they sent her photos of how it was created, and that's what finally got her this project on and she finally got her degree in May.

**Why did she choose to research the Latin Folies Dancers?**

She didn't want to do it from the Latin Fire. She wanted to do one of her favorite ballerinas, Pina Bausch. Pina Bausch was from Germany and she has a style that she loved. But unfortunately the teacher that was her advisor said, "No. It has nothing to do with..." And she said, "Yes, it has to do because it was a movement." They even made a play about Pina Bausch, one of her dances. She is not as aggressive as me. I would have told her, and I told her, "Not because you don't know about this; that doesn't mean that I have to do it your way." But she wasn't aggressive. Now she's learned. She finally agreed. When she saw that this teacher was stopping her, stopping her, stopping her, she asked for a change of chair, and that's when things came easier for her.

**Aside from being a researcher, was she in any of the theater productions here?**

Oh yes. Oh yes, as I told you, she was. Since 2009 she was here in UNLV was a great theater. They had a great theater. Something changed. I don't know why. I was here for *Music Man* and they brought people from New York. I don't know if you had the chance to see *Music Man*. ***Not here, but it's one of my favorites. I just listened to part of it this morning on the radio as I was driving.***

I saw it ten times.

***Oh, I love Music Man, too.***

I sit up front because my daughter was dancing there in 2009. I was like, *oh*. Something changed in theater here. I saw her perform here in dance. They took all these dances to Canada and South Korea and other places. Now, 2014, she was in *Grease*, but was not by UNLV. It was from another production. She was in *Grease*, great success. Then she went to make *Memphis* at Super Summer Theatre. Then she made *Scarlet Pimpernel* at Summerlin Library. What else? Ah, she was the choreographer of *Cabaret*, yes. What else? What other play? She was in another play; I can't remember the name, at the Super Summer Theatre. Then this year in February, the one that I told you, *A Doll's House*.

**That's amazing. What is she doing now?**

Now she is with an agency that casts whatever they need for television programs or commercials.

They call her and she goes and they pay here.

**That's good.**

Not for free now.

**Yes, I know. She deserves to get paid for all of that work.**

I remember when she was going to the Summerlin Library, there were three months of rehearsals. It was far away. Not even for the gas. Not even for water. Come on.

***What you do for love.***

What you do for love, yes, I know.

**When did she begin to be interested in dance and theater?**

Since she was three years old. She was a natural. I remember taking her back home and they have this video camera, the heavy one, the BETA that weighed like eight pounds, and we were in one of my brother's house. She was, of course, the \_\_\_\_\_ one because it was the eldest, the youngest, niece and siblings and everything. For my mother it was her adorable niece. So they ask her, because we speak in diminutives, "Olivita, show us how you dance." She was three or four years old. They said, "Okay, everybody move just like her. Everybody move. Tía," my sister, "You take me, not them, me." Then she started dancing with poses and everything. We still have the tapes. We made it into CD. It was so enjoyable that time. She was born to be an actress, I think so. I don't know.

**That's amazing. What about your son?**

Screenwriter.

**Also very artistic.**

Yes, yes. He loves books. He was in love with books all his life. When we went back to Mexico and we come here to United States, wherever, I said, "Javier, here is some money to buy clothes." He says, "No, drop me at Barnes and Noble." "And what time do I pick you up? Okay, when you finish." I was driving and shopping with my daughter or visiting friends, and I say, "Okay, let's go take a look at Javier, if he needs something." We didn't have cell phones at that time. I'm like, "Javier, are you still here?" He was sitting. "Yes. What do you need?" "Are you coming with us?" "No." "When you finish?" "Before they close." Okay, before they close. He traveled and what he bought was a luggage full of books, yes.

***What kind of screenwriting has he had any success with? That can be a competitive business.***

It is competitive. As a matter of fact, right now with his thesis that he finished two years ago, he keeps on writing. He works at home online for AT&T. It has nothing to do with what he is good for. He is good for computer. But his thesis right now is on the Austin festival that is going to be in October. I told him, "Do you want to go?" He says, "Mom, I'm short on money." "I'll pay for your trip." He says, "Oh wow. That would be nice." It's considered Luna Park; that was his thesis that he presented here.

***It's called Luna Park?***

Luna Park. It is like a fantasy book, but with reality. It takes place in New York, but in... where the games were, the merry-go-round.

***Central Park?***

Not Central Park, no, no. You have to go...It slipped my mind.

***That's okay. We can add that later.***

***It's in New York City?***

It will come. It slipped my mind. I don't know why. I never forget.

***Don't stress over it.***

***Also, did he go to UNLV as well?***

Yes, for the master's. He finished his school in Mexico at Tecnológico de Monterrey, communications studies, too.

***Everyone in your family is so artistic.***

Yes.

***Did they get it from you?***

My side of the family.

**In Mexico you mentioned that you guys loved going to museums, all these artistic places.**

Yes, yes.

**When they were growing, I imagine you encouraged a lot of it.**

Of course, of course, yes.

**What did your family like doing in Las Vegas when you guys had free time? What stuff did you guys like to do together?**

We used to go to the skating rink that was in Santa Fe. I don't know if it still exists. We went because I used to skate when I was fifteen years old and I thought I was the perfect ice skater. Of course not. But we have a good time and they learned how to skate. They had the bowling, but I didn't like that much, but that's where we had fun. We had fun in the summer at a friend's house who had a pool, so we went to the pool. We were involved in those kinds of things. Of course, Olivia's recitals in ballet classes every year.

**When you came to Las Vegas, what were your initial thoughts on the tourism industry here and all of the casinos?**

I hate it.

**You hated it?**

I hated it. I remember going to Smith's near the house, and I took my kids. After you pay, there were the machines. I covered their eyes, or say, "Look there." My son was the one who said, "Mom, what are those people doing? Can I go and play those machines?" "No, they are for old people. No, you can't. No." I hated all the...I was not like, oh my God. No, I was not a saint. But what I mean it was a shock because it was a thing that they were not accustomed to. After a couple of years going to the supermarket and then they started bringing some shows that they could see, that's when I put them in touch with the casino area. I took them to see Siegfried and

Roy. I took them to see Splash. I don't know if you remember Splash. It was great. The magicians. What else? The Tournament of Kings. There were some other shows that were available for kids.

**It became more family oriented.**

When they built the Excalibur that's what they wanted that people would bring their kids in, drop them down in the basement of Excalibur. Of course, I wouldn't do that, or the Circus Circus. I hated going to the Circus Circus. It was too much noise because at that time the machines give you the actual money. If you hit it was a noise—now you can't hear it, like, *bang, bang, bang, bang*, but not *pow, pow, pow, pow*.

***The coins hitting the coin bag, yes.***

No. I hate it. Now, of course, it's different because they have change things and now you can see artists or whatever you like. If you like rock and roll, you can go and see Paul McCartney, Elton John, Phil Collins. That's different, totally different. The shows that they couldn't afford, unfortunately could not afford, they couldn't see was the Folies Bergere. But unfortunately I think they should have kept it. I think they should have kept it.

***There's been a nostalgia for that, yes.***

Because it was how Las Vegas was. I know a little bit of the story of Las Vegas between the Mafia with the Cubans and with Spiegel and *blah, blah, blah*. But the essence was bringing what was in Paris and what was in Cuba because Cuba was called the Paris of America. In Cuba, they have, of course, great casinos, great shows, great food, and you dress elegant. Now you can go and see whoever you want. Who would you want to go and watch? What is your favorite artist?

**Oh, just me?**

Yes, you.



**I don't know. I would love to see Paul McCartney.**

You can go in shorts and tennis shoes. When I saw all this when I used to live here, how we dress, I remember my mother bringing the long dresses like we were going to a ball. Today you're going to show, okay, use your tennis shoes because they're going to step on you.

**You have to dress like a tourist instead.**

Yes.

**Are you saying that you really miss the times when you would—**

I think yes. It was a style and they should have preserved that.

**When did they begin to lose that, do you remember what time?**

They began to lose it when they opened more casinos and they start—

**Was this around the nineties?**

Yes. One thing it keeps with you, for me going to go to a certain—now I won't dress with a long dress or jewelry. Not anymore. But if I'm going to see Phil Collins, I want to feel nice myself, and I went to see it with my kids, and we were not dressed elegantly, but dressed well in order to enjoy the concert. I saw, very funny, people came from other parts—not from Las Vegas, from Canada and they were very well dressed and very polite. I said, "Oh really? The show is worth it."

**And now it's such a change.**

Yes, they changed. They have changed, yes.

**When you have family who visits, whoever comes to visit you from Mexico City, where do you usually take them?**

I don't take them. They love to stay at the casino.

**Oh, they do.**

I have to go and visit them. I said, “Okay, can we have breakfast somewhere else? Can we eat somewhere else? Can we go to a local place?” “No. Why don’t we meet at the Wynn?” Okay. They come here and I say, “Do you want me to take you shopping?” “No, we already have a car.” I have to go to the casino to have dinner with them. At least we have dinner and we can talk. But once dinner is over then you get out and there’s the casino. Then say, “Bye-bye, Brother. See you tomorrow.”

*As we wind up here a little bit, one of the reasons that you’re sitting here is because we have a mutual friend, right?*

Right.

*With Iris Torjman. You play canasta with her. I thought that was kind of fun when we were talking before we started the recording. Talk about the blending of the rules of the game of playing even canasta culturally.*

This is fun because the one who created the group is from Cuba, Gina White (Vervelli). She didn’t know how to play canasta. She didn’t know, but she looked it up on the internet. She knows Iris from the school district because they work at the school district, both of them. But Gina knows more Cubans, and there is a Cuban lady called Conchita that she plays canasta with her mother. What we call as canasta, uruguaya, because canasta was created in Uruguay and that’s how she played canasta, uruguaya, and I played canasta uruguaya, and the rules are the same. Iris have the rules from her friends from New York or from her mother probably. This was funny. Gina printed the rules like rummy and said, “Here are the rules for the canasta.” Then Conchita and I said, “No, Gina, these are not the rules from the canasta.” “No, no, no, no, no.” Then Iris, who has a strong character, she said, “No, we are going to play by my rules.” Conchita and I said, “Yes, sure. Why not? Teach us.” Then she started teaching us how to play. Her rules

for us was easy. For the rest of them, they learned according to Gina the wrong rules for canasta. We keep on playing and now Iris starts accepting the uruguay rules. It is very hard for her to accept to change the way of the rules. But it is fun. Last time they won and the other time we won. It is a fair game. In the meantime, we talk a lot. If we are more Hispanic or Spanish speaking people, she says, “Hey, *por favor, no hablar Español.*” “Yes, yes, Iris, we won’t, we won’t, we promise you.”

***That’s really great. This has been really wonderful. Do you have any other stories about living in Las Vegas or maybe in Mexico about your culture that you want to share with us that we didn’t get to today?***

What I really want to—proud. That is what I am really proud is about how my mother raised us in the Mexican culture. That doesn’t mean that everybody has it. I like my ancestors. I like my history. The history of Mexico is fascinating. It goes back to before Christ. Everything is related. How cultures have been disappeared, how the conquest of the Spaniards affected Mexico or how we gained something because we gained something. As a matter of fact, this month is dedicated to the Mexican because it’s Independence Month in Mexico; it was last Sunday. I am in the internet with good reads and they were celebrating all the Mexican writers either men or women, and we have.

Another thing here that I created with Spanish-speaking people, I created five years ago a book club only to read Spanish-written books. We have read many Latin American books, very, very much (1:38:57), whatever. We met every month and we work it out. Whoever picks the book has to expose the book and give opinion and then the structure of the book, like the plot, the setting, and talk about the author mostly and why did you like or why didn’t you like the

book. We spend three or four hours talking about the book. There are seven of us that we have this every month.

***That's great. Do you have a favorite author?***

Of course.

***Who is that?***

Isabel Allende.

**How did you meet the other members of the book club?**

I knew them here a long time ago. I told you I met one that is Ginita from Cuba in 1985 and my friend Anna Maria in 1985.

**These are the ladies that are also in the canasta club?**

The ladies are also in the canasta and they are also in the book club. From Gina, she has the Cuban friends and we have made a great circle. If there is a birthday, that's another thing that we do. If it's a birthday, we go to a friend's house and we play dominos. It's what they call Cuban dominos. I don't know how to play it, but we have fun. We celebrate the birthday and bring gifts and cakes and we post it on Facebook. One day it says, "Stop posting in Facebook the age that we..." Who cares? Enjoy life. Enjoy that we are alive and we are celebrating. Who cares?

**These women are also the ones that you knit for St. Jude's?**

No. The ones that I knit with, anyone of them knows how to knit, so, no. I talk with the owners, this Grouchy John's. They started here with a truck. They are local owners. We go to Maryland and Wigwam, the one that is near here, to play canasta, so I know the owners. One is JJ and the other one is John. They call it Grouchy John's because John is so nice, but—

***I met him when I did an interview of somebody else who hangs out there for a different project.***

John is so nice. His mother plays canasta, too, but not with us. I asked, “John, why are you being so nice?” They have a picture of the teacup with her face. It’s just for fun. It’s great. I know them. I have been working with them. I make the posters that said: “Knitters, bring your scrap yarns and let’s meet. Or if you want to make a square eighty-by-eight or ten-by-ten and bring it every Monday or drop it here with one dollar for St. Jude’s,” and then we pick it up and I sew them and make the blankets and give it to St. Jude’s.

***That’s really nice. How long have you been doing that?***

For three or four years. I started working also for free, but it made me very sad, with the seniors, retirement rooms, and they were privates. Nevertheless, it was sad. They were excited to learn something. They were old, but, nevertheless, were very, very excited and I started teaching them crochet because it’s easier because they are old. I was teaching one of them and suddenly I arrive to help her continue her shawl, and they told me that she had died the day before. I said, “Okay, no.” I was in shock. I didn’t even say *thank you* or *I’m gone*. I just turned and left. I said, “No.” I am very sensible. I won’t stand that another person will die, no.

***That’s hard.***

I tried hard, but it was very difficult for me.

***It’s good to know that about yourself.***

Yes.

**You’re continuing great work now with St. Jude’s.**

Yes, yes.

**It’s fulfilling.**

The thing is that my mother taught me how to knit and crochet. I saw her all the time knitting and crocheting. One day when I was sick, like fever or cold, my mother went to my room and

stayed with me, and I said, “Okay, Mom, since you are knitting, can you knit something for my doll?” “Yes, sure.” She started knitting a skirt or a sweater. Then one day, “Mom, can you teach me?” She said, “Sure. Why not?” Then she taught me. But the funny part is that she taught me how to knit continental style. People here know English style that is much more difficult and you go much, much slower. Continental style is faster and the stitch is the same. When I teach them, people say, “But it has to go the other way.” “I know, but if you go this way...” I was teaching also at Michael’s a long time ago. “If you go this way, you can go faster.” They say, “Really?” I say, “Okay, look at me.” “Oh no, you finished two -- in one second.” Yes. I finished two points in two seconds. Yes, I know. I taught them the continental style, and they were like, *oh*. I want that to be preserved, the legacy, for my mother. My daughter knows how to knit, but she is another story. At least a legacy will stay with whoever, boy or girl, in St. Jude’s that stays there.

*That’s wonderful.*

**That’s great. Thank you so much. Anything else?**

*No, this has been really good. Thank you very much.*

Did I bore you? Did I talk too much?

**No, no.**

*No, not at all. This was perfect.*

**Thank you again, Olivia.**

**[End of recorded interview]**

