

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH MARISA RODRIGUEZ**

An Oral History Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

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

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

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



Marisa Rodriguez was twelve years old when her family moved to Las Vegas. Though she was born in Chicago (b, 1970), she had spent the previous ten years in a rural community in Durango, Mexico. In Mexico, she was a high functioning student and quickly adapted to her new environment. She was enrolled in Von Tobel Middle School, took ESL classes, and never looked back.

While still in high school, she began a career in banking. Then it struck her that she truly was destined to become an attorney. So at the age of thirty, she adjusted her focus, got accepted in UNLV's William S. Boyd School of Law and received her juris doctorate cum laude in 2013.

At the time of this oral history, Marisa Rodriguez was with the law firm of Weinberg, Wheeler, Hudgins, Gunn and Dial. She recalls her youth and her dreams, including an elongated visit to Spain before the decision to become an attorney.

In February 2020, Marisa became the Senior Deputy City Attorney at City of North Las Vegas and became a Member of the Board of Governors for the State Bar of Nevada,

In 2022, she added adjunct professor for the William S. Boyd School of Law to her duties. She remains active in Hispanic law organizations; Huellas a mentoring program for aspiring lawyers; Las Voz; and continues to be an avid runner.

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July 26, 2019  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

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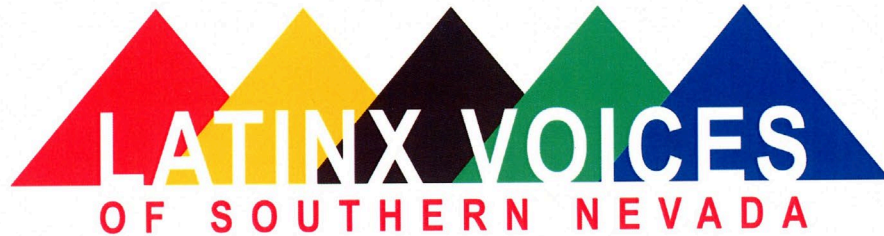
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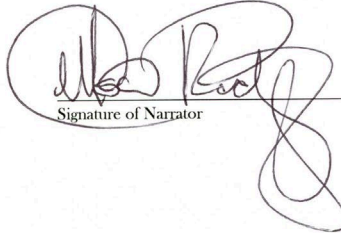
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7/26/2019  
Date

Maribel Estrada Calderon 7/26/19  
Signature of Interviewer Date

**Today is July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. My name is Maribel Estrada Calderón. I am at the law offices of Weinberg, Wheeler, Hudgins, Gunn and Dial, and with me are...**

***Monserrath Hernández.***

***And Claytee White.***

And Marisa Rodriguez.

**Marisa, can you please spell out your name for us?**

Sure. It's M-A-R-I-S-A. Last name R-O-D-R-I-G-U-E-Z.

**How do you identify?**

Latina.

**Why is that?**

I don't know when I began to use that term. I think I have used Hispanic, Latina, Mexican-American interchangeably throughout my life ever since I came to the United States. When I was growing up in Mexico, I don't think that I ever thought about identifying as an ethnic group or anything else. I honestly don't know when or how I started using *Latina*. I think it's the term that I have heard used the most recently.

**Let's begin with your childhood. You want to tell me where you were born?**

Sure. I was born in Chicago. When I was two years old, my parents went to Mexico. They're both from a small town in Durango. I think they were there on vacation and my dad was in a car accident and he couldn't walk for a few years, so we ended up staying there for a very long time. We were there until 1992, so nine to ten years.

**Do you know what brought your parents to the United States?**

My dad came to the United States when he was a teenager to seek employment opportunities. He had a lot of extended family in the United States. He originally moved to—I don't if originally—

it was Chicago, but he was in Chicago when he married my mom. After they got married, she moved to Chicago with him.

**What did he do there in Chicago?**

We haven't really talked about that part of his past recently. I think he used to work at various restaurants.

**Do you know why your mom came to the United States?**

After they got married. She was really happy in Mexico and I don't think she was really thrilled about the drastic change. But that's the reason that she moved.

**Do you want to tell me some growing-up stories of the time that you spent in Mexico?**

In relation to anything in particular?

**Yes.**

One of my first memories was in the town where my mom was originally from. It is funny that you were asking me how I identify myself because now I remember. It was a town of probably a hundred people. The population was very, very small. I remember—I used to think he was an older man; he probably was not—an old man used to call me Chicana and I didn't understand why and I thought it was because I was born in Chicago and I didn't like it. Those are some of my very first memories. It made me feel that I was a little bit different. Later on I came to learn that that's not why he was calling me Chicana.

**Tell me about your education in Mexico.**

Right when I was getting ready to start elementary school my parents moved to another town that was maybe fifteen, twenty minutes away. The population there was a little bit bigger, maybe five hundred people, and they had an elementary school. The school only went from first grade through sixth grade and that's it; they didn't have any other school in either town. They also had



a classroom for kindergarten. I remember that we moved to the town and I didn't know anyone. My mom told me to go to the school and tell the teacher that I needed to be registered. I was five, so I was really embarrassed. I remember walking by the classroom and I made eye contact with the teacher who was teaching, I don't know, maybe ten students; it wasn't very many kindergarten students. I didn't go in. I just went to the house and I think I lied to my mom. I said, "No, the teacher said that I can't." I was just too shy. I was really scared that she would find out that I had not been truthful. Fortunately her response was, "It's okay. The year is almost over and I'll try to get you into first grade next year." And that's what she did. I was five when after the summer she enrolled me, and so I started first grade there.

Like I said, the school was so small that we only had originally three teachers for the entire school. In my classroom they had first and second grade. The first graders would sit on one of the room and then the second graders on the other side of the room, and the same for third and fourth, and fifth and sixth. Then the teacher would give us an assignment, have the students complete the work, and then go to the other group of students and give them their assignment. Eventually, after a few years a couple of teachers left, and so then they consolidated first, second and third. At the end, when I graduated sixth grade, we may have had only one teacher for the entire school.

**I know in Mexico it's a tradition for students to dress up as revolutionaries to celebrate Mexican Independence Day. Was that something that occurred in your school?**

It's been a long time. I'm almost forty. I'll be forty. You're asking me to go and retrieve information, which I'm enjoying this process, but I don't remember doing that. I do remember putting up a performance for the parents and the entire town really came, but I don't remember

dressing up. Maybe a parade. Yes, I do remember that; the students just walking through the entire town with a band.

**Do you remember celebrating *El Día Del Niño*?**

Yes.

**What was that like?**

I think they simply gave us candy. We were not—especially my household because my dad wasn't working, we didn't have a lot of means, so we were not able to get an allowance on a regular basis. That was a time we got an extra special sweet. I don't know if money was involved, but for sure candy.

**Do you know where that tradition comes from, *El Día Del Niño* or what it means to certain people?**

I don't.

**Did you grow up with any siblings?**

Yes. I'm the oldest. My younger sister, Nancy, was born three years later and she was born in Mexico. That's also one of my first memories. My mom had to go to a third town where they had a doctor because we didn't have a doctor in either of the first two towns. The first town that I mentioned is El Corazón. The second one where I went to school is Los Bagres. When my sister was born, they took my mom to San José, and I stayed behind with an aunt. Eventually she took me the following day to see my sister. I remember all these grownups talking and looking at the baby that I couldn't see because I was only three. They were saying how pretty she was. Finally my aunt lifted me so that I could see her. I remember thinking how ugly she was. *What are they talking about?* I tell her. That's one of my very first memories. We're very close now.

Two years later, when I was five and a half, my brother, Diego, was born. He was actually born—by then a doctor, I believe in Mexico they're required to do some type of community service, so there was a doctor that was there temporarily in the town. My mom was able to give birth in the town in the house. I remember vividly a lot of people coming in and the doctor going into the bedroom. My brother was born there.

Those are my two siblings from Mexico. After we came to the U.S. many years later, my mom thought she was done having kids. The three of us had moved out of the house. She thought she was going through menopause and then she found out she was pregnant. My youngest sister, Isabelle, was born when I was twenty-five, so she could be my daughter. There is a total of four of us, but technically she...The relationship between her and I is more like a parent-daughter than siblings.

**MONSERRATH:** *How old was your mom when she had her?*

She was forty-six. She had me when she was twenty.

**Can you describe the house that you grew up in, in Mexico?**

Sure. I remember when we first moved in, it was only me and my little sister. Like I mentioned before, the town is really small. Most of the houses at that time were made with adobe and then they were painted, like covered with some type of cement and painted. The house that we got is in what we considered the downtown part of the town, which is really a small intersection with four houses. The house across from us was a small store, like a convenient store. They sold over-the-counter snacks, soap, just things that people needed to get by during the week. Once a week most of the residents of the town went to another town to get their groceries and whatever they needed.

Our house originally was very small. We had the kitchen, the dining room, and one bedroom. Slowly they expanded and I don't know if you know, but typically in Mexico construction—at least back then; I don't know if things have changed—took a long time. I remember slowly they were adding another room because we were sleeping in one bedroom, all of us; we had two beds. Right before we came to the U.S. is when they finally finished expanding the house. I got to enjoy it for a few months and then we came to Las Vegas.

***What brought your family to Las Vegas?***

My dad was always going to come back. It only took him that long because he couldn't walk. The surgeon who originally performed the operation that he needed didn't do it correctly, so he couldn't walk. For years he was just in bed all the time. Finally they went to see another doctor who redid the surgery and within a month he was working. By then it had been nine, ten years. I really don't know how he came up with the decision of coming to Las Vegas as opposed to Chicago, but I know that we had a lot of extended family here. He had uncles working in the casino industry. It was really easy for him to come to Vegas. He stayed with a cousin who helped him get a job at Jerry's Nugget in North Las Vegas. A couple of months later he saved enough money to buy a house. As soon as he bought his house, he brought us.

***Was your mom working when she was in Mexico?***

No. It's a small town. There is no employment there other than some people own fields, and so they can raise cattle or corn. We didn't own any land. Before my dad moved he did work for, I think, six months where he entered into a partnership with someone who owned land and he did all the work and then they split the profit fifty-fifty. I take that back. He did clean a couple of houses to get extra money. But there was no official employment in that town.

**You were twelve when you moved to Las Vegas. Do you have any memories about crossing over to the United States?**

I do. I do because I was a U.S. citizen. My dad—was he a citizen already or he had his resident alien card? He had petitioned my mom and my siblings, but I think the process was taking a long time. He must have been a resident alien and that's why it was taking longer. Had he been a citizen, it would have been much faster. I remember we drove from Durango to Las Vegas. It was a very long trip. I remember he first brought me through El Paso and then left me in this motel and then he went and figured out how to get the rest of the family across. I remember being terrified because coming from a very small town to a city, but it worked out.

**Were you by yourself?**

My grandfather stayed with me first. He came with us. But there were some type of complications, I don't remember exactly, why they had to leave. I was by myself for a few hours. It seemed like a long time. I don't recall exactly. Then eventually the whole family was reunited and we drove to Las Vegas.

***What did your dad tell you when he left you or of the trip in general?***

My parents had been very open about everything. I don't have any children, but I see how other parents raise their children and try to protect them from certain information when it comes to a lot of different topics; they didn't. They shared all the information with us. I knew we were moving to Las Vegas and I was really excited because I wanted to continue studying and I knew that in Mexico there was only—in that town we could only go to sixth grade. No one else from that town continued—not no one else—most of the people there that's as high as they would go. Two of my cousins and I went to another town where we went to middle school for a few months, and that's when I came. I knew that the family was moving to Las Vegas. I knew that I

would have no problems because I was a U.S. citizen. All the information that I'm giving you now, I learned it then. I don't think that we talked about it much after that.

**With some of the narrators that we've previously interviewed, they've mentioned that they didn't have the opportunity to bring their things over to the United States, or some only brought a certain amount of things. Do you remember if your family was very protective of bringing some things over?**

No. Because we still had the house—I only went there once when I was sixteen, but my mom, eventually after they were able to get their green card, they would go every summer, so they still had a place. Eventually my mom sold the house. No, I just remember packing my clothes and being really excited. I remember my dad did give me money to go to that little store and I bought a lot of candy. I was really happy. I had enough to last through the trip.

**Once you were reunited with your family, tell me about that trip to Las Vegas.**

I don't remember much other than that we stopped at a McDonald's. I remember this because it was very embarrassing. I didn't know how to read English and I didn't know if it said *pull* or *push* and I just couldn't figure out how to open the door. I remember thinking, *I hope no one is looking at me*. Finally someone came and was exiting and so I was able to go inside. That's the only thing I remember.

Then I remember driving to the house he had bought here in North Las Vegas. I remember the address; it was 3601 Carey Avenue. I don't know if you're familiar with that side of town; it's Lake Mead and Pecos.

**Can you tell me about the first time you set foot on an American school?**

It was in January either twelfth or seventeenth. I was going to be in seventh grade, so I was the only one going to the middle school. I went to Von Tobel Middle School, which was half a block

from the house. My sister was in fifth grade, or fourth, and my brother was in first grade, so they went to Fay Herron, which was also half a block on Carey and...I don't remember the other street. Anyhow, I remember my dad taking me to the school and he had to process all the paperwork that he needed to. I remember not understanding anything.

In Mexico I was always a straight-A student because my mom was very, very strict. I had to have—not A's. The grading system there, ten was the highest, nine, eight, seven, six, and then five and under is an F. I had to have tens. One time I remember in third grade they gave us an exam and I got an eight, but everyone else got a six or under; they failed. Even then I didn't tell my mom because it wasn't a ten. Anyway, she was very, very strict.

I remember coming to the U.S. and I already had the discipline and I liked going to school, but I remember going to class. They gave me six classes, PE and math, but the math class that they gave me was basic math. It was very easy for me because it was numbers and I was able to do whatever work they were giving me. But the other four classes were ESL classes. I don't think they're called ESL anymore.

**MONSERRATH:** *They're called ELL.*

So, English for...?

***English language learners.***

Back then it was ESL. I was in a classroom, again, with sixth, seventh and eighth graders, like it was in Mexico, who are learning. We had social science...I can't remember. But that's where we took the rest of the classes. I remember that it was very difficult because I wanted to continue to do well. However, unlike in Mexico where my mom was very strict, she knew exactly when all the grades were coming out and I was always really nervous, making sure that I had all tens, here she had no idea, so she didn't know if I didn't do well or if I did great. I don't think she knew

how to go to the school and find out. Fortunately for me I came already with that discipline; otherwise, I think it would have been very easy for me to not be a good student.

**Were the majority of the students in the ELL classes Latinos?**

All of them except for one; there was one who was from Korea, Kenneth was his name, I remember. I remember that he was very cute. Everyone else was Hispanic, mostly Mexican at the time. I had a few friends, classmates, from El Salvador and that's it.

***What kind of exercises would you guys do to learn English or to practice English?***

I don't remember exactly. I really don't remember. I don't think that we used a reference language. I think that they would just give us the work in English. I really don't remember. Even though most of us spoke Spanish, our ESL teachers, most of them, didn't speak Spanish, which I think it was good because it forced us to practice.

**Can you describe the neighborhood where your new home was at and the school was located?**

I thought it was beautiful because we had the front yard with grass, not very good for the desert. All the houses were single stories, not very big. I think on the block where we lived we were the first Hispanic family to move in. we were not the only Hispanic family in the entire neighborhood because the middle school had two classrooms with ESL students, but they came from a larger neighborhood. Maybe on each block you had one or two Hispanic families. I think that by the time I moved out, which was when I was eighteen, it was mostly Hispanic.

**What were your neighbors like?**

To the left we had a Caucasian man who was retired. He had served in the military. He was very nice, but I don't remember much. My brother used to like to go and talk to him. I didn't spend as much time with him as my brother. Then he moved and I don't remember who moved next to us.



My aunt, my mom's sister, lived in Chicago at the time, and when we moved to Las Vegas, eventually she moved to Las Vegas as well and she bought the house to the right. My dad even built a door that connected both houses. I spent a lot of time in that house.

**Did she have children that you could play with?**

She had a son who was my brother's age. When I was sixteen she gave birth to her second child, Jennifer, and she was like our little sister. I actually was in the room when my aunt gave birth, not planned. We had taken her to UMC. It was a Sunday, I believe. They sent her home, telling her that she wasn't ready. A few hours later or the next day we went again and they said, "Yes, you're not ready. You need to go home." And she said, "Well, it's been a long time." Because I think by then her son was ten or eleven. "But I think...I don't want to go home." My mom and her husband went to get something to eat. I decided to stay with her and the doctor told her to walk and that that would help, and so we did. Then a new doctor came in and checked her and said, "Oh no, no. You're ready to give birth." She gave birth within probably fifteen minutes, so they didn't have time to get my mom and her husband, so I was there. That was the best control that you can give a teenager because I said, "I don't want to go through this." Anyway, that was my Aunt Soccoro. She was our neighbor until we moved.

**Did you have any other family members in town?**

Yes. My entire family lives in Las Vegas. If I tell you about all the family that I have in Las Vegas, we'll go on for days. My mom's brother, he lived in L.A. and when we moved here they also came here because of the casino industry. It paid very well compared to similar jobs in other cities. And housing was very inexpensive. I think my dad probably paid fifty to seventy thousand dollars for the house at that time. Granted, it was back in '91, '92, but still, compared to housing in other cities, it was very, very reasonable. My uncle came and my dad helped him get a job

where he was working. Eventually they also got a house. Then eventually another of my mom's brothers came. My dad, all his siblings, many of them are here.

**Do most of them work in the hospitality industry?**

I think by now most of the older generation my parents' age, many of them are retired. Their children, some of them do, but not all of them. I'm trying to think. For example, my sister Nancy, she was always very studious. She has a PhD in math and she's teaching now at CU Boulder. My brother did not go to college and works for a pest control company. I have a cousin who is an electrical engineer. She went to UNLV and works for Nevada Energy. I think her sister is a manager at an apartment complex; she was at least a couple of years ago. I don't stay in touch with them as much as I should. I feel bad. What else are my cousins doing? Those are the ones that come to mind.

**MONSERRATH: *Where did you go to high school?***

Vo-Tech. It's not called that anymore.

***Is it SCTA?***

I think so. It's on Mountain View.

***Is it on the east side, or where is it located?***

It's close to Henderson. It was the first vocational school in Vegas.

***SCTA, right? They changed it.***

They did change it. I don't know what the new name is.

***The one on the mountain?***

Yes.

***Yes, okay, I think that's SCTA if I'm not mistaken.***

**CLAYTEE: *Once all the family got here, what kind of family dinners did you have?***

My dad had to work two jobs. I remember he was working a lot. He was working at the Jerry's Nugget and then at the Palace Station, so we never had dinners with him. Well, except on Sundays. We would go to church, to St. Christopher's on Civic Center and Lake Mead, and then we would go to Peter Piper Pizza, which was really close to it, and we loved it. Again, we didn't get a big allowance; it was probably a dollar each. The games were a quarter, so we used it very wisely. But that was my highlight of the week.

**How old were you in the ESL classes?**

They had two levels; they had the beginners and then the advanced. I was only a year and a half at Von Tobel. I know that they transferred me to the other one. When I went to high school, I didn't want to have any ESL classes. I told the counselor, "I just don't want them. I think it's better if I don't take them." Maybe I needed to a little bit more because I struggled and my grades were not very good the first two years in high school. So, a year and a half.

**Can you tell me about some of your favorite subjects?**

I love reading and writing.

**Why is it?**

I think just because the stories that you can learn about. I love to travel, and so that was a way to be able to travel to places from the comfort of your own home and if you didn't have the means.

I didn't like math; I left the math thing to my sister Nancy.

**What were some of your favorite books?**

Growing up?

**Yes.**

Nancy was in fifth grade when she came here, and so she went to regular—I think she was in ESL maybe for a year and then when she went to middle school, she didn't have ESL classes

anymore, so she was able to read books that I didn't. I remember reading her books. I remember, let me see, *The Giver*, was one of the books that she read, but then I borrowed it and I liked that book. I'm trying to remember what other books I read back then. *One*; that was the title of the book.

**Can you tell me what it was like to be bilingual when you were in high school; what did that mean to your family and to you?**

I think as many children who are first generation Americans, they have to be sort of an advocate for their parents because my parents didn't speak English—my dad did, but not very well, and my mom didn't. It was sort of a necessity; I had to learn it because I had to be able to help them communicate with the rest of society. I don't know that I thought about its meaning back then, but it was just something that we had to do.

**Did you have to translate for them frequently?**

Yes, for them and for my aunt, and so I think it forced me to be very independent at an early age.

**Do you remember any special or specific circumstances that you had to translate?**

I remember going to—yes. Well, this is not for my parents, but for my uncle who is my mom's brother, going to the DMV and he didn't understand the concept. Remember I told you he probably only went to fourth grade, so his reading comprehension is not very good in Spanish. He wanted to take the test to get the permit. I had to translate for him and then explain how to take an exam on the Scantron so that he can fill in the letter. He just didn't understand. He went into the exam, and, of course, I couldn't go with him. He came back and he had circled the answers. I just remember trying to translate not only from English to Spanish, but also trying to teach him how to take an exam, or a test. That's one of the memories that stands out.

**MONSERRATH: *What did you go to Vo-Tech for; what was the program?***

I took more than one vocation. I took more classes than I had to. I don't know how I was able to—oh, I know. I took evening classes. I didn't know it at the time, but there was a school for kids that hadn't completed high school that could go and make up classes. When I was a sophomore, I went to night school to get ahead so that I could take more than one vocation. I don't think I knew that that's what the high school was for, but somehow I learned that I could get more credits. I was a little bit of an overachiever, or maybe I was too indecisive and I didn't want to choose only one vocation. I had computer information systems, which is when I learned how to type. This was in 1995, so the Internet was only becoming available at school. No one had a computer. We didn't have a computer for a couple of years after that. I also had programming and accounting.

**You mentioned Peter Piper Pizza. Can you tell me about other restaurants or stores that you would visit when you were growing up?**

Yes. We would go buy our groceries at Lucky's, was the name of the grocery store on Lake Mead and McDaniel, I think. It's close to St. Christopher's. It changed, I don't know what. At one point it became...

**Albertson's.**

I think so.

**And now it's El Super.**

Oh, so it's even more Mexican. That's where we would go and that's one of the few things that we do as a family because my dad was working two jobs, and so on Sundays we would go to mass, Peter Piper Pizza, and the grocery store; that's it.

Then sometimes...Eventually my mom got a job as a housekeeper before she was able to get a work permit; she was working at a motel close to El Cortez. They would give them comped

breakfasts, so we would go to El Cortez and have a dollar breakfast, and I loved that. I was just telling my boyfriend the other day when we were driving by El Cortez, I said, “Oh my God, I used to love coming here.” This is over twenty years ago.

**What did they serve?**

I remember we would order either bacon and eggs with your hash browns, or pancakes; those were the two options with the dollar menu. Sometimes I remember I would have spaghetti or something else, but those were the two main things that we used to order.

**How long did your mom work at that motel?**

It wasn't very long because she was able to fix her immigration status and then she got a job working...I don't remember where she worked after that, but she began working at the Venetian from when they opened. I don't remember how long ago that was, but it's been a long time.

**Can you tell me about your dad and the Jerry's Nugget?**

I think he was working in the kitchen, not cooking, just probably cleaning. He was there for a few years, but where he worked most of his life was at the Palace Station; he was a food server at the buffet.

**Do you remember your first time going to a buffet?**

Oh yes. I think it was there. I just couldn't believe it that you could eat so much. *All you can eat?*

I remember getting sick. Then when the Rio first opened, remember that buffet was...?

**CLAYTEE:** *The best food in the world.*

Around the World, I think it was called.

*Yes, yes.*

I remember I went there twice or three times. It was more expensive compared to—I think the Palace Station must have been six ninety-nine, seven ninety-nine. And the Rio was eleven

ninety-nine. Not a big difference now, but back then, especially to us, it seemed like it was very extravagant. They had Italian food; I think now most buffets...I haven't gone to one in a long time because I don't have self-control. They had Italian food, steaks, Mexican, a variety, and so it was great.

**If you're talking about eating inside of the home, can you tell me about some of the dishes that your mom might have prepared?**

She used to make enchiladas, cheese enchiladas.

**MONSERRATH: (Spanish/42:27)**

*Roja, yes, roja. And chile rellenos.* She had a couple of more. She was not your traditional mom that I know that a lot of my friends' moms were always feeding them. My aunts were like that, but not my mom. She would make enough for us to have to eat, but there was not a lot of variety.

**Do you have a favorite Mexican dish?**

I love beans and avocado. I know that's not a dish, but I don't eat—oh yes, I love *pulpo a la diablo*. I love octopus. I only eat seafood; I don't eat meat, red meat or chicken. Typically you get shrimp with the spicy sauce, but I always ask them to make it with octopus, and so that's my favorite.

***A la diablo* is just like a really spicy...**

Red sauce, yes.

**All right. We talked about the vocations that you chose in high school. How did that lead to where you are now?**

I always wanted to go to law school because I think after playing that role for my parents and everything that they needed to get accomplished, I felt that I had...I think that was one of the reasons. Also, I remember when my uncle moved to Las Vegas, they lived at our house for a few

months, and I remember sometimes my mom and my aunt would have arguments, and so my uncle would try to mediate. He would have a family meeting and they would try to explain their side. I remember they would argue and they were sometimes not very rational. I remember being thirteen, fourteen, and trying to get whatever they were saying and try to help them understand why it was not logical. I don't know why I thought that attorneys somehow needed to have that skill, which I think they do.

I wanted to go to law school, but I didn't know how. I think the second cousins who had lived in the U.S. when I moved here graduated high school, but they didn't go to college, so I didn't know how to navigate the process. I knew I was going to go to college because my dad would always tell us, since I was little, how important it was to get a higher education. I first went to Community College of Southern Nevada, which I think now it's called College of Southern Nevada. I was working full-time. Then I transferred to UNLV and graduated. My working career, I think that's a separate topic, but if you don't mind I'll jump just because they're like parallel stories.

**Yes.**

When I was at Vo-Tech, Wells Fargo bought First Interstate Bank. You probably don't remember those banks because it was in 1996. Wells Fargo came with the model of hiring part-time tellers. I think it was so that they wouldn't have to pay benefits. They came to recruit high school students. I remember that they came and went to the career services representative at the high school and they said, "We're going to give out an exam to the students." It was typically the ones from accounting or computer, in that vocation that were interested. I remember going to take this exam and like forty of us took the test. The recruiter told us, "It's impossible for you to finish the exam; it's just too many questions. But we will only grade what you answer." I think



no one listened to that, because when she said that I said, “Okay, they’re only going to grade what I answer,” so I was very strategic and I only answered the questions that I knew. It was some arithmetic and I don’t remember the questions. And so she said, “Only because if you pass the test, it does not mean that you get a job because we only have so many.” She called me the next day and she said, “Only two of you passed.” I don’t think that my classmates were not smart enough; I think that they didn’t listen to that little instruction and I think they were trying to finish the whole thing and it was impossible. She said, “So, the two of you will get a job.” She said, “There are six branches.”

I went to interview to a couple of them and I had a job. It was at the Wells Fargo on Charleston close to Lamb, which is now, I think, a church. I think it’s a church. But anyway, I was a teller; that was my first job. I didn’t even know what the difference was between a checking and a savings account. It was a great job. I remember it paid nine dollars an hour.

**How old were you?**

In ’96, so a long time ago.

**MONSERRATH: *That’s way past the minimum.***

Yes. But I was working ten, twelve hours a week, which was great because I was only sixteen. Then when I graduated high school, they offered me a job as a personal banker that was a full-time job from nine to five. I knew that I was going to go to college; that was never optional. I took classes at community college and Wells Fargo paid for it. I would pay for it at the beginning of the semester, but if I had a C or better, they would reimburse me. Then I transferred to UNLV. But because I was taking night classes, it took me six years to finish.

When I was twenty-two Citibank recruited me. It was a better position, doing almost the same thing, but they paid more. When I graduated college I was twenty-three and I became a

branch manager. I remember being twenty-four and all the employees working there were older than me. I really enjoyed it, but I loved traveling and I wanted to go to Europe for longer than two weeks, so I left that job after two years. I put in my resignation and the area manager tried to get me to stay. He said, "Do you need more money?" I don't know how much more money he would have been able to give me because it's a big organization. But I said, "No, I'm leaving to make no money. I'm going to write a book." I never wrote it.

But anyway, then I came back two years later. When I came back I was really happy. I enjoyed the banking industry. It had been really good to me. They paid for my college. I had no student loans. But I felt that I wanted to be challenged, and so I...I didn't know how to go to law school. I was really scared. One of my coworkers at Citibank, her daughter had gone to UNLV Law School when she was thirty, and I remember that I met her, because she was finishing her master's in Spanish and she wanted me to review it. It was perfect. It was better than I could have written. We became friends and then she told me that she was planning on applying to law school. Then a year later she told me step by step how to do it. I remember thinking, *I really need to do this; this is what I've always wanted to do*. I just didn't know how. Someone is basically giving me a road map. Of course, it was very scary because I had been working since I was sixteen. My parents didn't have to give me anything, so I was very independent since a young age. Also, because I was in the banking industry, I started saving for my retirement since I was eighteen, so I had money saved. I used a lot of it when I was in Spain for two years. But anyway, I still had some saved, but it wasn't enough to last three years and pay for law school. Eventually I realized that. I don't know where I heard that whenever you have to make an important decision you have to think of yourself as being seventy years old and say, okay, when

I'm seventy years old, if I look back, what decision am I going to regret? I was twenty-eight at the time and I said, "If I don't go now..."

Going back. When I moved to Spain, I was there and it was a great two years. Then I realized it's time to go back and be an adult. I emailed the manager at Citibank and I said, "I'm ready to go back. Will you hire me?" He said, "Yes. We have three openings." I came back as a business banker at Citibank on Sahara and Durango. There is a big credit card center, but there is a smaller branch and that's where I was and that's where I met this friend, mentor, who told me how to go to law school. I don't know where I was going with this story.

Anyway, I said, "If I fail, if I go to law school and it doesn't work out, I can always come back to banking. It's been here for me and they took me back and I'm not leaving on bad terms." So I did it and I got accepted. I studied for the LSAT. I took out student loans. Because of that, being in law school was the first time that I was a full-time student. I worked really, really hard. I did everything from Law Review to the moot court team. I just really enjoyed the experience. I was older, so I didn't have a need to go to the bar reviews; it's what they call when they go to bars. It's not studying for the bar exam. Every Thursday, I think it was, different student organizations would plan an outing. I didn't go. I was just really focused in law school. I don't know if you're familiar, but in law school you don't know how you're doing until—you only take one exam at the end of the semester. You go to class and you try to prepare well, but you don't know if you're retaining the information or if you're processing it correctly, and then you take an exam, so that was very scary. It was even more of a reason to take it very seriously.

**MONSERRATH:** *What year did you start law school?*

In 2010. I was thirty.

**What did the class look like?**

The classrooms are the same right now. I don't know if you've ever been to the law school here. When you're a first-year law student, they put you in sections, Section 1, Section 2. I think I was in Section 1. I think it's different now, a little bit different. But back then they gave us the classes; we didn't have an option. We took contracts, property law, legal writing, and what were the other classes? But the main—tort in contracts. We were with the same classmates during the entire year with the same section. Most of your friends are from your section, and then the second year you can choose your schedule and the classes can be smaller. The first year they have two or three big rooms. I don't know how many students fit there, but more than sixty, probably a hundred, and so very different than my college experience. But I loved it. It was great. It was a great experience.

**Were there other Latinas with you?**

There was Melissa Corale. She was in the night part-time program. Funny enough, we've had parallel lives. She was also born in Chicago. She also was raised in Mexico in a town like an hour from where I was raised. She also came to Las Vegas when she was a teenager. We met in law school. She was in the part-time program.

Then someone who somehow is related to me. His cousin and my cousin are married. He was Omar Cessaro. He now works for AT&T in government affairs. Edgar Flores, an assemblyman, he was a year ahead of me.

What other Hispanics were there? There was a handful. I believe that now the number of Hispanic law students is larger than when I was there. But I wasn't the only one by any means. For sure, the representation for African Americans is not there; we only had one or two and it's not representative of the population.

**Can you tell me about some of the hardships that you encountered while in law school?**

I think it was really difficult for me because, one, I didn't have a traditional college experience, and because of the break that I took, it took me a little bit to get used to being a student, learning all the legal terms, reading cases. You have to read cases before you come to class. They tell you what topics they're going to be talking about. Just understanding what I was looking for when I was reading the cases. Then research. There are two companies that most law firms use, WestlawNext and LexisNexis, and so it's basically a way to search for case law related to whatever topic you're looking for. That was so difficult for me. I remember struggling, one, because you're still trying to understand how everything works, and then it's not as intuitive as it would be if you're Googling something; you have to use some terms and connectors. Those were the two most challenging things.

**What did your family think about having an *abogada* in the family?**

Everyone is very proud. At least that knew what it was that I was doing; that I was going to school to be an attorney. They understand what that is. When my sister was going to school, because she's a mathematician—my sister didn't take a break. She also went to Vo-Tech and then she went to USC and went to UCLA and got her PhD there and then did a post-doctorate at Stanford. My parents were wondering, *how much math do you need to learn?* It was harder for them to understand. With me, they were very excited.

**Can you tell me about your two years in Spain? Where you lived? What you did?**

My plan was to travel to different places and I wanted to write a book. I did start several books, but I was really enjoying my experience in Spain. I started in Barcelona. I took a class because I wanted to supplement my savings. I had my 401(k). I was twenty-six when I moved there. I took a one-month course on how to teach English. There I met people from other parts of the U.S., from Scotland, from England. It was a group of twelve to fifteen of us and we became really

close friends. Then I was teaching not in a classroom setting, but I had my students who were professionals, like banker, doctors. Doctors, I think this is how they got paid. I was working for a company, so I didn't make the arrangement for the payment, but I think pharmaceutical companies couldn't compensate them. I think that the laws were strict, and so they could give them classes. I think some of the doctors were taking these free classes that were being paid, I think, by pharmaceutical companies. It was one-on-one classes and it was really interesting. For example, one of them was Kraft's quality control manager and he needed to talk to his counterpart in Germany, and so they communicated in English. I would talk to him about what he was doing. I was working part-time and traveling throughout Spain and into other parts of Europe. I was only going to be there for six months, but two years later is when I said, "Okay, I need to go back because I'm getting old and I need to be an adult."

**Can you describe some of your favorite locations in Spain?**

Oh, Spain is really interesting because they have seventeen autonomies; that's how they break their regions. Even though they're very small, they're very diverse. They even have different dialects or languages. I really like southern Spain, like Andalucia. They're very happy. I think what people associate with Spain is mostly from Andalucia; that's where they have the flamenco dresses, the bullfighting, which I don't approve of now, but I did go to one; that's from southern Spain; that's where they have the oldest bullring. The food was really good in southern Spain. I don't know if you've heard about *El Camino de Santiago*, St. James Way. Pablo Coelho, the author, he wrote a book, *The Pilgrimage*, he called the book. That's based on this pilgrimage that goes from southern Spain.

**CLAYTEE:** *You walk it, yes.*

Yes, you walk it. You walk it from southern France and you go all through northern Spain and you end in Galicia, which is in the Atlantic Ocean. If you walk the entire way, it takes approximately a month. I did the first quarter one week and then I went back to Barcelona and then I did the last quarter, so I need to go back and do the entire pilgrimage. That experience was very special because most people do it by themselves. Some people do it with a friend or a significant other, but most people are there by themselves. You get a passport from the church. You don't have to be Catholic, but it started, I think, in the eleventh century and it was a form of penance. You go and confess your sins, and they say, "Okay, go walk the Camino de Santiago." People who had money, it's my understanding, would then pay other people to walk.

***There is a film. That's the major focus of a film that I saw about five or six years ago and I don't remember the name of it.***

Yes. I think it's based on the book from Pablo Coelho.

***Yes, yes.***

I haven't watched it because I knew that it would make me want to go back and it's really difficult with my current profession to be gone for a whole month. I couldn't do it. But you meet people from everywhere. You get your passport that indicates you're a pilgrim and then if you have that passport, you can stay at the different hostels that they have for the pilgrims for a dollar, euros one to three, very inexpensive. Those places where you stay used to be some type of religious building, convent or something that now they turn into a place where you can stay. All they have is a bed, like the mattress, and you bring your own sleeping bag. They recommend to pack very light, no more than ten percent of your weight. You carry a change of clothes so when you get to that place, you wash your clothes. Just a wonderful experience. It was one of my favorite things from Spain.

I became very close friends with someone from Italy who moved to Barcelona also to write a book. She finished it, she did. We both wanted to live in the Gothic Quarter, so it was my favorite part of Barcelona. That's where I met her; we both went to look at the same flat. Neither of us ended up getting it. I took Italian classes, and so I told her, "I'll teach you Spanish," because she didn't know Spanish that well, "And I would like to practice my Italian." We became really, really close friends. To this day I go and visit her in Italy. She went back. She's come to Las Vegas a couple of times. When I lived in Barcelona, we went back to Italy a few times and I got to spend time with her, with her parents, with her grandmother.

**Why did you choose Spain?**

The first trip that I ever took out of the U.S. or Mexico was when I was twenty years old and I was at community college. They had a program called EF Tours, Education First. One of the professors there—and I think they still have it—they recruit students to travel, and I think they get five or six students to go. The professor goes free; her expenses are paid. The first one that I took was to Spain because I felt comfortable because they speak Spanish. Then I took another one the following year that went to other places. But when I went to Spain, I fell in love with the Gothic Quarter. To me it was just beautiful. That's why I chose Barcelona; I wanted to live there. I just fell in love with the city. I figured instead of moving to another place, which was what I wanted to do, I used that as a base and then traveled whenever I could. Most of my 401(k) savings...But I enjoyed it, an early retirement.

**As long as you had fun.**

Yes.



**Tell me about finishing law school and where you went from there.**

At the beginning of your second year of law school, during the summer after you finish your first year, you apply for summer jobs, and then you interview during your second year of law school, and then between your second and third year you work. You can do it also during your first and second year of law school, but the official program called OCI, on-campus interviews, is that one. I got a job here at this firm. This would have been back in 2011. They offered me a job to come and be a summer associate. I worked here for six weeks and this was in 2011. Many times they offer you a job, they say, “Okay, go back, finish law school, and then join us afterwards.” They didn’t have an opening, and so they said, “We don’t have an opening. We would like to hire you, but we’ve heard that you also would like to do a clerkship, so why don’t you do that and then revisit that?” And that’s what I did.

After I graduated law school, I clerked for Judge [Susan] Scann. She was—she passed away a couple of years ago—in state court. I loved it. Then I didn’t have a commitment to come here and I was working in business court, which allowed me to see some of the best law firms appear in front of her. I had a wish list of all the law firms that I wanted to work for, but this one was still one of my top choices. Four months before my clerkship ended they had an opening and I accepted. I have been here ever since then, so five years.

**What were some of your duties as a clerk?**

The judge will get motions filed by one side, and many times the other side will file in opposition, and then there is a hearing, typically, where the judge will hear oral argument from both sides and rule on the motion. My role was to brief. Basically I would read the motion that was filed. I would read the opposition. There is typically a reply that answers whatever arguments are raised in the opposition. You summarize that and then you do an analysis and then

you tell her, “Okay, based on the briefing this is how I would rule.” I would go with her. This is really cool because sometimes judges talk to their law clerks, if they’re not a hundred percent sure as to how they want to rule, to brainstorm because they’re not allowed to talk to anyone else about their cases; it’s their decision and the law clerk is someone that they can really discuss the cases with. We would talk about her decisions. Then when we had hearings—did she have hearings every day? It was first thing in the morning. I would go with her and sit next to her. It was really interesting because I already knew which way she was leaning, and sometimes when the parties would make arguments, I would write her a note and hand it to her so that she could ask the questions. It was really good because we had really excellent attorneys appear in front of her. We had other motions that didn’t have hearings that she decided in chambers, and so I would help draft the orders that she needed to. That’s pretty much what a law clerk does.

**Tell me about your position now.**

I practice civil litigation. It’s a very broad area, commercial litigation. For example, one of our clients is a healthcare insurance carrier. They had a dispute with a hospital, not in Las Vegas. It was in a different city where the hospital has an agreement to see the members under the plan. The hospital was threatening to terminate an agreement, mostly Medicare/Medicaid patients. We filed a motion to file a TRO to ask the court to issue an order preventing the hospital from terminating the contract so that the members would not be without a provider. That’s one of the cases. That’s one example.

We do a lot of high exposure catastrophic injuries. I’m licensed in California and in Nevada, so I have cases that have been... We recently closed a case, or we’re in the process of wrapping it up where the incident happened at the oil refinery, El Segundo, at the Chevron

refinery. Every case that we get, because of the type of cases that we get, it's a little bit different, which allows me to learn about different industries.

In addition to that I always try to take a pro bono case in a different area of law. When I went to law school, I wanted to practice immigration law and I was a student attorney in the immigration clinic. I really enjoyed it. It's a very difficult area for a number of reasons. One, it's very specialized. Most of the attorneys have to get used to losing most of the time. There are two different types of immigration law that you can practice. You can help people who are seeking a visa, asylum, or you can do the business immigration law where you're helping companies apply for visas to bring foreign workers, and that's different and we don't have that so much in Las Vegas. The clients that we had at the clinic were people who didn't have the means to pay for an attorney, but they needed an attorney. They typically came to us after having paid someone who really didn't specialize in immigration law, took two thousand dollars, which to them is a lot of money. Then we would ask for the file and they hadn't done much. We had a lot of cases like that. It was emotionally draining. It was very satisfying, but emotionally draining. I had worked here already and I had my student loans that I told you I had to take, and I said, "Okay, I need to pay my student loans, and what I can do to compromise and feel good with myself is take this job that will help me pay off my student loans and take pro bono cases." I have made it my personal commitment to always have a pro bono case.

**CLAYTEE:** *Fantastic.*

I took three asylum cases when I first started, and two of them were unaccompanied minors and two of them were granted. The one who was not a minor was denied because it's harder when you appear in front of the immigration judge. When you're a minor, there is a different process when you go through USCIS. But anyhow, it was great, a great feeling.

After that I decided I shouldn't take any more immigration cases because a couple of years had passed and the law changes very fast and I don't practice that on a day-to-day basis, and so I didn't want to not be able to do the best job that I could. After that I said, "Okay, let me take a family law case." My most recent case was a CAB case; it was a child in the foster care system, also a very tragic story, but it had a really good ending; she was adopted by the foster parents that she had. I just closed that case, so now I'm looking for the next case, probably family law or estate planning.

**When you worked at UNLV for the immigration clinic, was the children's immigration clinic already in place?**

Yes. What do they call it, something court, right, where they train children who need to testify? Is that the one that you're...?

**We have the Ed Bernstein's Children's Immigration Clinic.**

No, they didn't. That was established after I graduated. When I was there we had two immigration professors, amazing. One of them is still there, Professor Kagan, and Professor Marouf. Professor Marouf at that time was my supervising attorney when I was in the clinic. The cases were all handled by the students. We had four students in our clinic. She had the biggest heart, could not say no to any case that came through the door, which meant I had eleven clients, which is a lot. I didn't know, but I was working a lot. We were all working a lot, the four students in the clinic. I think a couple of years later, especially when the number of unaccompanied minors increased and there was a lot of need, I think that's when Ed Bernstein donated, I think, a quarter million dollars to establish the clinic and pay two full-time, if I'm not mistaken, attorneys.

**Who do you work with here? Who are your colleagues?**

When I started here as an associate, I was the only female. I'm very fortunate I work with wonderful people. The area of law that we practice can be very challenging, so I admire my colleagues. I work with brilliant partners, good trial attorneys. When I started, though, I was the only female. I never felt excluded, but I remember telling one of the decision makers, "If you ever have two applicants and they're equally qualified, I'm not telling you to make an exception, and one is a female and one is a male, can you please hire the female because I'm lonely?" I told him and he did. We've expanded. I recently got promoted to member. Last year we had eight associates including myself. Four of us were female and four males. They listened. Seven out of those eight graduated from Boyd.

**CLAYTEE:** *Wow. Fabulous.*

Which goes to show—two of them graduated the same year that I did, but they went to other places and when we needed to hire, they said, "Who do you know that you would recommend?" Our law school is really amazing. It's small and the tools that they provide really do help. It allowed me to see what colleagues I...because we were in Law Review together, I was able to recommend them and I knew their work ethic and so forth. Those are my colleagues. I work with the best secretary. She is originally from Hawaii. I seriously would not—I know a lot of my friends who work at other places regularly complain that it's difficult to find qualified people or that people don't have a strong work ethic. I am so lucky and I let her know all the time because if she left I don't know what I would do.

**MONSERRATH:** *Can you tell me a little bit of the time you were at the law review?*

It's a little bit more boring, so it could be a very long story. Law review, let's put it this way, it's good; you need to do law review because it teaches you how to properly cite to your legal authority. The way that you get in at UNLV is through a writing competition. I believe that 40

percent of the students get into law review, so many employers use that depending on what you want to do. If you know that you don't want to go work at a law firm and do civil litigation that may not be important to you and then you don't participate. But if you want to compete for all those OCI jobs that I was telling you that may be an artificial barrier that they say, "Okay, if you're in law review, we will consider you; if not..." But not always. But because they don't know, when they have so many applicants, they need to come up with some type of criteria, and so you have to do it and then you end up reading a lot of notes because we publish. I was in the Gaming Law Journal, so we published gaming related articles. Authors submit articles for publication and there is a process where you have editors that edit. The junior staffers, when you're a second-year law student, you have to make sure that the citations are correct and you go and actually read the legal authority that they're citing to and make sure that it really does say what they state or what they claim on the paper.

**CLAYTEE:** *You interrogate every note?*

Yes. It's very tedious. You get one credit, one law school credit, and it's not graded so it's not going to affect your GPA. It's sort of something that must be done. I guess a couple of people like it; others just do it because we have to.

The moot court; that was really fun. The moot court team here at the law school, they're called the Society of Advocates. I don't know if you know, but our law school has the number-one writing program in the nation. I'm very proud. I think it was number three when I was there, but it has now moved up to number one, and that's because we have the lawyering process classes, the legal writing; they have three mandatory. I think some law schools don't have any of them. When you're in your second semester, from each writing class the professors select two students to be in SOA, the Society of Advocates. Then your second year, the first semester you

take a class together; these are with all the people in SOA, and you get to participate in a moot court competition in a different city. You get into a team of two or three students and we traveled to New York and you do oral argument. You first write a brief. They give you a problem. You're not allowed to get help from anyone. You draft the brief. It's an appellate brief, so it was a motion to the Supreme Court. It's a fictitious jurisdiction. Or you have to do the response. You submit the writing. Then when you go to the competition, you're in front of a panel of three judges; it could be attorneys or judges from whatever jurisdiction. You go through rounds. It's fun.

### **Can you tell me about the Las Vegas Latino Bar Association?**

Yes. I joined the Las Vegas Latino Bar Association because—let me go back. In law school I joined La Voz; that's the Hispanic law student organization. They are so active. They were not as active when I was in law school. They are an incredible group of students that are doing great things in the community, even now. Even though they're going to law school, they find time to do community service and try to help with the pipeline. I think that's why we have more Hispanic law students now at the law school because of this program; it's called *Huellas*, footprints in Spanish. They have an attorney, a law student, and a college student who wants to go to law school, and a high school student who wants to go to Las Vegas; they put you in a group of four. The idea is that you meet once a month to mentor each other and help each other.

I started participating when I was a first-year law student. My first mentor was Charlie Cano; he's a special public defender. He's an amazing guy. I was not a very good mentee because I was so focused in law school that when he would try to meet, I was like, "I can't." He makes fun of me now. I took it more serious, but I had more to lose; I was thirty. Anyway, we stayed in touch. When I was in my second year here at the firm, like five years ago, he called me

and he said, “I am nominating you for the VP of communications.” I was really trying to establish myself here and work really hard and I told him I couldn’t. He said, “No, you have to do it. It’s not a lot of commitment.” I did it.

It’s a great organization because it’s for Hispanic attorneys. You don’t have to be Hispanic to be a member. That’s where a lot of people come when they move from other places to Las Vegas where they start to build their network. We have really grown in the past few years. Attorneys are required to have continuing legal education. We have put on really, I think, cool CLEs—it’s the abbreviation or initials—on how to become a judge, so that we can help. We invited judges with a diverse background from the federal court to state court who talk about their path to the bench. We put a panel on women in the law and we invited Senator Cortez Masto and a couple of other judges, so we had women. We opened it up to the entire bar, not only the Latino Bar Association, and we had room for fifty people. Within twenty-four hours people already RSVPed. We have encouraged more of our members to be mentors for *Huellas*. We have established a really good connection with La Voz where now their board has an LVA liaison, and so she comes to our monthly meetings. I think it’s good because then for law students—again, when I went to law school, I didn’t know the very many different areas of law. It was intimidating when I went to apply for a clerkship. I interviewed with several judges and the first one I was so...She’s a judge. I went into her chambers. I screwed up. I typically do well in interviews. I knew. I left that interview saying, “I wouldn’t hire myself.” We have judges who come to our events. For law students to meet them in a more casual setting, it helps them when they go to apply.

What I am the most proud of this year we had never—and we were inspired by the La Voz students because two or three years ago they started a scholarship fundraiser. People donate



and they have raised money and then give it to the Huellas' participants for bar prep courses and...I don't know exactly. I told our board that we're like the grownup version of Huellas; we should be the ones giving out scholarships. This year we are raising money for a scholarship. I love running and we're doing it through a 5K. It's called the Andale 5K. We're doing it on September 21<sup>st</sup>. We got sponsors because it costs money to put on a race. We were hoping to raise enough sponsorships to cover the cost of the race, and then if we had, I calculated, three hundred participants, we could give out ten thousand in scholarships. We've raised thirty thousand in sponsorships. It's been incredible, the support that we've had. We've asked law firms and other non-legal, like we have a physical therapist, William Hill, sponsored; Nevada Energy also made a sponsorship. Now we're in the process of calling UNLV, Nevada State College, College of Southern Nevada, UNR, and telling them, "Hey, we're probably going to give out..."

The scholarship is for LSAT prep courses, which is fourteen hundred dollars to take it. The LSAT, after you add everything that they charge for, it's close to two thousand dollars. For someone who wants to go to law school and who doesn't know if they can get a good LSAT score, and taking that prep course really makes a difference, that could be the reason that they don't go to law school. I didn't come up with this idea myself. I met with the dean of admissions. He used to be the dean of admissions; I don't remember his current title at the law school. He told me, "Marisa, if you want the money to really make a meaningful difference, this is where you need to spend it." We're hoping to give out at least ten, if not fifteen, scholarships. If you know of any junior or senior Hispanic college student who wants to go to law school, let them know.

**MONSERRATH: *I do know a master's student.***

**CLAYTEE:** *We might have one here.*

Yes. I'm really excited. We keep getting all these sponsorships. I told the board, "Now I'm worried that we won't find enough applicants." Really, going to law school, I'm so grateful that I made that decision. I want to make sure that other students have the opportunity. Please help me. The application, it's almost finished. I had a board meeting this Tuesday and some of the other board members are making revisions. The plan is to start handing it out August first. The deadline will be September 21<sup>st</sup>. We have three members of the board who are reviewing all the applications. The date is not confirmed, but we think it will be October 30<sup>th</sup> where we'll have a dinner and the recipients, so I'm hoping. I'm hoping yourself, anyone that you know, because we have the money.

**CLAYTEE:** *Good. I think we can probably find several students.*

Good, good.

**That's great. What are these running clubs that you are a part of?**

When I came back from Spain because that was almost ten years ago—no, more than ten years ago, I started to learn about going to law school, started working out. Then a friend invited me to do a 10K. I had no concept of what that was. I was so scared, and so I said yes.

**MONSERRATH:** *Six point two miles.*

Yes, yes, six point two miles. Because I was so scared, I followed the training schedule to the tee. Then when I did the race I loved it. If you train, the adrenaline kicks in the race day. And so, I got hooked and I started doing half marathons and then full marathons. Because I can't travel internationally—I mean, I can and I do, but it's for a week and you have to be connected because in litigation something is happening always. My colleagues will take care of it, but you know your case more. I have a goal of doing fifty in fifty by fifty, so run fifty marathons in fifty states

before I turn fifty. To me running is such a great way to—it's an outlet. When I was studying for the LSAT, when I was writing my personal statement, I would go for a long run and that's when you can think. It's good for you physically, emotionally, psychologically. That's how the idea came; many, many years ago I said, "Oh, it would be great to do a 5K and raise money for a scholarship," because also education, right? It's so important. I think education is what allows—it allowed my family, my generation to have a much, much better socioeconomic lifestyle than we did before, and it was all because of education. To me those two things, being healthy and having the opportunity to go to school, I'm very passionate about those. This is perfect and I'm just really, really excited about it. That's how I started running.

Honestly I love running by myself, but I'm recruiting runners—maybe we don't want to put this in the interview. We started working on the 5K months ago, but now the final focus is getting enough participants, and so I have been going to different running clubs to recruit people.

**MONSERRATH: *Do you want to run? We both run.***

Yes, you should, please.

**We wanted to go to a 5K. We were talking about it.**

You have to. It's called the Andale 5K. You're going to love the logo when you go. One of our law students from La Voz created the logo. It's *Andale* and it has two professionals with suitcases running. It's *Andale*, like run, but also go to law school.

***I had just started training again two months ago because I take periods of time and you don't really want to run. I don't know if you have that, but for me it's whenever the semester ends it gets really hard for me to run because I'm busy doing all these things. Now that the semester ended I had time to start training again.***

**CLAYTEE: *You're not going to stop this time.***

*This time hopefully not.*

Do you have a race that you're signed up for?

*Not yet. Last year I did the Four Elements 5K and that was the first 5K I did. But then, because I don't have a running buddy, if no one is motivating me or with me, I kind of get like, oh well, my knee hurts, or this, this and that. Now that I started running again, I'm actually looking for a race to do, once it's not as hot.*

Yes. It helps to have a race because then you're not just running to run. You have to do it because you need to be ready for that. Unfortunately, September 21<sup>st</sup> it might still be a little bit hot, but we wanted to do it during Hispanic Heritage Month.

*That will be perfect.*

**Do you need volunteers? It's because I'm the vice president of the History Honor Society at UNLV, and so we do volunteer events.**

We contacted the three high schools that have pre-law programs. I called the community service coordinator, and they said, "How many volunteers do you want? We can have all of them." I thought it was really cool for the pre-law students because they'll come in promoting it with a lot of law firms. There is a couple of judges. One of our LVA board members was just appointed to the bench, so we even have a judge who is on the LVA board and she's going to be the emcee for the 5K, so it's good for the high school students to meet.

**CLAYTEE: Good. Who is she?**

Cristina Silva.

*Oh. Don't we know her?*

She's originally from El Paso. She was an assistant U.S. attorney up until two months ago when she was appointed to the bench by Governor Sisolak.

*If we don't have her...*

**MONSERRATH:** *I don't think we do.*

Oh yes, you'll love her. She is amazing.

*Laurents scheduled your interview. He actually runs SOL at Mojave. If you need more high school kids, I'll let him know.*

Thank you. We need someone to sing the National Anthem. That's one thing that just occurred to me. If you have someone, like a high school student or...

**Have you thought about contacting a mariachi program, high school?**

It just occurred to me the other day when I was going through the list because there's a lot of things that you have to do to plan a 5K. It occurred to me that we didn't have that. That might be a good idea, yes.

**CLAYTEE:** *My last question is: When you're preparing motions now, does it put you ahead of the curve because you were a law clerk?*

After having been practicing for five years, I think everyone, more or less, has the same experience, but when I started it certainly did. I remember the first case that I got. We have a partner here who I admire. He's just a really good trial attorney. I started and he came in. it was probably my first week. He gave me a complaint. He just gave it to me; he didn't tell me what to do. You're supposed to think, *okay, do I file an answer? Do I file a motion to dismiss that complaint?* He didn't sit down and walk the whole process with me; he just gave it to me. He's like, "Oh, here. Will you help me with this case?" I was like, "Sure." Because I had clerked and I had seen a lot of different motions filed, I knew that one of the actions—you learn this in law school, but it's just theory than when you actually see it.

I read the complaint and I said, “Do we have a practice of filing motions to dismiss?” He said, “If there is a basis for it.” I was a little bit timid. I was like, “Yes, I think we can win because...” Blah, blah, blah. He’s like, “Go for it. Draft it.” I drafted my motion, sent it to him, and I think I was more nervous waiting to hear from him than I was waiting to hear from the bar results when I took it because I was like, *what if he hates it? He’s so smart.* He made revisions. Even now we always revise each other’s work. But the substance of the legal argument, he left it and we won.

Then the judge gave the other side leave to file an amended complaint, so tried to file another complaint fixing everything that made the complaint have no merit, and so they filed the motion and then we filed this time a motion to dismiss. Because discovery had already happened—they were trying to bring us in later on in the case—we filed another motion that you can file later in the case where it’s a motion for summary judgment. Basically you tell the court, look, even considering all the evidence, there is nothing to take to trial. The jury decides the questions of fact. There’s no evidence, so we should win even if everything they allege based on the evidence, we win as a matter of law. We filed that motion and we won.

I wouldn’t have been able to go through that thought process had I not been a law clerk. I tell everyone—because I participate in the Huellas program every year—I always tell them, “Be a law clerk. Yes, you make less money. Depending on where you work, it could be half or less than what you make once you work for a law firm. But it’s more than what you were making in law school. In law school you’re negative, right?” To me it’s just a very valuable experience. It was fun.

**My last question: What is your favorite thing about practicing here in Las Vegas?**

Since you asked a very specific question, here in Las Vegas, I think that because our law school is now twenty years old, it will be twenty-one this year, I could be mistaken, but I think 30 percent or a third of the practicing attorneys currently are or soon will be Boyd alum.

Everywhere you go you see a familiar face. There is a connection, right? We try to welcome out-of-states attorneys as well, but it's really nice when you go to court and you see a law clerk, just to see that familiar face. If you need something we can send an email to the alumni list and you see emails on a variety of topics. That's my favorite thing about practicing in Las Vegas in particular.

**MONSERRATH:** *Going back to where you grew up, did you go to the Swap Meet?*

It's so funny because you're asking me questions that I hadn't thought about for a long time, and recently I did. I know I keep stressing that we had no money, but we didn't. Our entertainment with my mom, because my dad was working, on Saturdays was walking from our house. It was one block to go to the Swap Meet. It was a dollar to get in, but if you were under eleven I think it was free. I had to pay, but my brother and my sister didn't. We would walk and go to the Swap Meet and then walk all the aisles—we didn't buy anything; it was just to see it—and then walk home. That was our Saturday entertainment. I haven't gone in years. It's probably been since I was, I don't know, sixteen years old. I'm thirty-nine, so that's over twenty years. I've heard that it's changed so much, so I need to go back.

*You need to go back. They have la banda and sometimes mariachi, so you have to go. It's great. That's awesome.*

Yes. It's on my list of things to do. I had lunch with another board member yesterday. She works for the City of North Las Vegas. She is a city attorney. She loves her job. I didn't realize the City of North Las Vegas has four hundred thousand people. She says, "This is where we do a lot of

meaningful work.” This is working class. She was just really passionate about her work. You can interview all these people. They’re amazing. Her name is Claudia Aduado. If you want to. Of course, you only have a hundred and fifty interviews. But she was telling me about the Swap Meet and everything else.

**CLAYTEE:** *We probably need to interview someone at the Swap Meet. I’m talking about someone who has had a booth at the Swap Meet for years and years and years. That person probably needs to be interviewed.*

**Claytee, you need to go to the Swap Meet.**

*I’ve been to the Swap Meet. Thank you.*

**Barbara is the one who hasn’t been there.**

*This is wonderful.*

Thank you.

*Thank you so much.*

**Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.**

**MONSERRATH:** *Any last comments or thoughts on the project, on the Latino community here in Vegas, anything?*

**Advice for future law students?**

**CLAYTEE:** *Yes, advice for a future law student.*

Do it. Do it. I think practicing law can be challenging for a number of reasons, but every time that I’m struggling, when you’re doing research or you’re trying to think of an argument, I always think—and I heard this from one of our professors who helped prepare for the bar exam—you don’t have to take the bar exam; you get to take the bar exam. It’s so difficult to get here, so realize that this is an opportunity that not many people have. I think about that. It’s like,



okay, I don't have to be here; I get to be here. My advice is if you're thinking about it, do it because you can do so many things with your law degree. You don't have to work doing civil litigation or immigration law or criminal. You can do all of those things. You can also be in-house counsel for a company or like my cousin who is now working for AT&T, he works in government affairs. You can do so many things with your degree.

**CLAYTEE:** *You can be a senator.*

Yes, or you can do nothing law related, but just going through the process, I think it's worth it.

That's my advice.

**Thank you.**

My pleasure.

**[End of recorded interview]**

