

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

LUZ ALVAREZ MARTINEZ

Interviewed by

LORETTA J. ROSS

December 6 – 7, 2004
Oakland, CA

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Narrator

Luz Alvarez Martinez (b. 1943) grew up one of twelve children of Mexican immigrant parents in San Leandro, California, in the Bay Area. Her father was a carpenter, and the family spent summers in farmworker camps harvesting crops. Luz graduated from St. Elizabeth's (Catholic) High School in 1960. She married in 1964 and had four sons, combining childrearing with community support for farmworker organizing. She divorced in 1981.

In the late 1970s, Martinez began college study to become a nurse midwife. She became involved in the Berkeley Women's Health Collective, serving on the board and helping to establish its women of color clinic. Inspired by the health activism of African American women, especially the 1983 Spelman conference, Martinez co-founded the National Latina Health Organization in 1986, the first national organization by and for Latinas working on health issues and using the Self-Help framework pioneered by the National Black Women's Health Project. Martinez also came to incorporate indigenous dance and *mestiza* spirituality into her community organizing. Among women of color she championed lesbian issues, and within mainstream reproductive rights groups she advanced a broad health agenda; she served on the board of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL).

Martinez was active in early efforts to form and sustain multiracial coalitions among Latina, Native American, Asian Pacific American, and African American women in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, she played a key role in asserting the standing of women of color from the U.S. and other developed countries. She participated in the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995 as well. In 1997 she became a co-founder of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. In 2005, Martinez retired from the National Latina Health Organization. She is currently president of the Hispanic United Fund.

Martinez is placing her papers at the Sophia Smith Collection.

Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970–73. A leader in the anti-rape and antiracism movements in the 1970s and 1980s, she co-founded the International Council of African Women and served as Director of Women of Color Programs for the National Organization for Women and Program Director for the National Black Women's Health Project. After managing the research and program departments for the Center for Democratic Renewal, an anti-Klan organization, Ross established the National Center for Human Rights Education in 1996, which she directed through 2004. Also in 2004, she was the Co-Director of the March for Women's Lives. In 2005 she became national coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. The Loretta Ross papers are at the Sophia Smith Collection; the Voices of Feminism Project also includes an oral history with Ross.

Abstract

In this oral history, Martinez describes her childhood immersed in the Catholic culture of Mexican immigrants in California. She describes an emotionally difficult marriage. She traces her decades of political work and details current programs of the National Latina Health Organization. Martinez recounts moments of cooperation and tension between women of color

and mainstream women's groups as well as among women of color. Her story underscores the centrality of Self-Help to her life and work.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSF-ODX10. Six 60-minutes tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Luann Jette. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Revan Schendler, April 2005. Reviewed and approved by Luz Alvarez Martinez. 98pp.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Martinez, Luz Alvarez. Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, December 6 – 7, 2004. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Luz Alvarez Martinez, interview by Loretta Ross, video recording, December 6 – 7, 2004, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Luz Alvarez Martinez. Interview by Loretta Ross, Transcript of video recording, December 6 – 7, 2004. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Luz Alvarez Martinez, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, December 6 – 7, 2004, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, p. 23.

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Transcript of interview conducted DECEMBER 6 – 7, 2004, with:

LUZ ALVAREZ MARTINEZ
Oakland, CA

by: LORETTA ROSS

ROSS: Today is December 6, 2004. I'm sitting in the home of Luz Alvarez Martinez and I am taping her for the Voices of Feminism Project. This is tape one, the first day of shooting. Thank you, Luz, for agreeing to participate in this.

MARTINEZ: Thank you. This is exciting.

ROSS: Well, why don't we start telling the story of Luz: where does Luz come from. So, tell me about your mother, your father, your parenting, where you were born, what you know about their background.

MARTINEZ: Well, this is so timely, because my mother just died three weeks ago, and she died four days before her 96th birthday. And it's been a beautiful process, because she was so ready, and just a beautiful process and beautiful ceremonies. We've been having farewell ceremonies for her and so this is so timely. So, she would've been 96, my mama. She was born in [Guanajuato] Mexico.

ROSS: What's her name?

MARTINEZ: Her name is Felicia Alvarez Martinez, and so mine is almost like hers. I kept my original name and I love that I have her last names. At least we match there. So –

ROSS: Do you know her date of birth?

MARTINEZ: She was born November 20, 1908, in Mexico. And she came from a family of nine surviving — there were other children but not all of them survived. And in about 1920, '21, her family migrated to the United States. There were no borders then, that I know of. There was a lot of migration because of the civil war — the revolutionary war going on [in Mexico]. So, the family came up. And my father's family was actually from the same area. They knew each other. And I think it was his family

that migrated first and told my mom's family to come, you know. And where they went was this little tiny town that still exists. It's adjacent to Oxnard, California, called El Rio, and just really surprising that it hasn't been eaten up by Oxnard, but it's still its own little town, and I still have relatives, cousins, that live there. And it's just a few blocks. It's really not a big area. And that's where my mother's family and my father's family settled.

My father is Cirilo Palomino Martinez. That was his name. He was born the same year, but in February. February 12, I think it was that he was born, the same year as my mother. And he also came from a family of nine children, and there were other children who didn't survive. And so there were similarities in both of their families, and I just have memories of the little tiny house that my grandfather lived in, Salome Martinez, and I have really nice memories of him. I even have really nice pictures of him and we shared all of these recently. My mother's going away, her final going away to her other spiritual life now and leaving her physical life — and so, all these memories are so fresh because we, of course, talked about my mother and my father and all the family history, these last three weeks.

ROSS: So, tell me about their educational background and what do you know of it?

4:30

MARTINEZ: Well, I know that they only had grade school education. And because it was during the war in Mexico, schools weren't really operating the way they should have been. But in my mother's family, there was a teacher. There was a teacher that was there and she lived with my mama's family, and so that's how my mother learned how to read. It wasn't in school but it was through this teacher that lived with them for I don't know what period of time. It was during the time of Pancho Villa, you know, so there was a story that the rancho they were living at, Pancho Villa came through, and so they met. I don't know if she met Pancho Villa but she met a lot of the people that traveled with him. And so, that's part of her history.

I know more about my mother's history than my father's history. She's been around a whole lot longer. My father died in '51, I think, when he was only 42. I don't want to go there yet. I want to talk a little more about what my mother has been telling us about her life.

ROSS: Please do.

MARTINEZ: She was 20, not quite 21, when she married my father. And I just love the story of their courtship. And she told us this story when she was 84, 12 years ago. I invited all the family over and told them that we were going to have the chance, the opportunity, to ask our mother, or grandmother, you know, all the questions we wanted and we were going to videotape it. And so, I heard some of the stories, and that night she told lots of other stories. And at that time, she had one great grandson.

But her courtship was — they couldn't talk to each other. That's the way it was back then. And the way they communicated was, my father would leave notes for her under a plant in front of her house. And she would know that there would be a note there because he would leave a flower in the plant. Then she would go — and it was letters that he wrote — and then she would pick up the letter. So that's the way that they communicated with each other during the courtship.

And the first time they actually went out together — I don't think it was called dates back then — but the first time they actually were together was, his sister, one of his sisters, had invited my mother to go to the movies with her and her husband. So they went to the movies and they were sitting in the theater and before she knew it, my father was sitting next to her. It was just so sweet, you know, and she didn't know quite what to do with it. But that was their first personal encounter, I guess, their first date, whatever it was.

But that's how it had to continue, until my father asked for her hand in marriage. But even then, they couldn't be alone together. So that was their courtship until they got married.

ROSS: So, you have siblings?

MARTINEZ: I have so many siblings. My parents actually had 12 children, and my sister that was born just before me, she died in infancy. So, by the time I was born, she had already died, just before I was born. And my oldest sister, Juana, died about five years ago. She had a lot of health problems, so she's the first adult sibling. And so there are now ten of us. The sister before me, her name was Jessie. I know we had a picture of her at one time, but I think it's faded or lost. We looked for it. So there are ten of us surviving.

ROSS: But there were 12 in all?

MARTINEZ: There were 12 of us in total. And oh my, to me, it's amazing to think that my mother had 12 children. I think she also had one or two miscarriages. But just to think about that. I had two pregnancies. I have four children, but two pregnancies, and I'll explain that later, but just to think that she and so many women in her generation bore so many children.

ROSS: And why do you think that was?

MARTINEZ: That was the custom. That was the culture. And I know it's in great part due to the Catholic Church, because the Catholic Church, you know — having sexual relations was not about pleasure, it was about procreation. And so, that's what it's all about.

ROSS: Did your mother ever talk to you about whether she wanted to have those kids, or did she have options of birth control or whatever?

MARTINEZ: We did talk about those things after I got very much involved in reproductive health, so it was when she was in her eighties when we had those conversations. Yeah, I remember one thing she said. She was in the hospital one time, and she had told the nurse about all the children she had, and the nurse said, “Wow. That’s amazing.” And my mother responded, “Well, at that time, they didn’t have the pill, they didn’t have other things.” So, it really wasn’t a choice. It was just a way of life. It was just the way families did that.

ROSS: So, what was the male to female ratio amongst you and your siblings?

MARTINEZ: Well, there were five brothers and seven sisters. But growing up, there were six sisters and five brothers because Jessie had already died. So that’s how I grew up in a family of five brothers and six of us girls, and I’m seventh in line.

ROSS: Well, how would you describe your economic background?

MARTINEZ: My father worked. He was a carpenter, from what I remember. I know that there were other kinds of work that he did, but while I was growing up, he was a carpenter. And I guess he earned a pretty good living from that, was able to support this big family, and he bought a house for us in San Leandro. That’s where I grew up, which is just east of Oakland here.

And recently, we looked at what the costs were. We came across a letter that my mother had sent to the Air Force — my brother was in the Air Force when my father died — asking for an early discharge for him so he could come home and help with the family. I think he was 20, 21 at the time. But in the letter, it outlined all the expenses and what my father had earned before he died. And it was amazing. He earned \$92 a week. Yes, a week. And he was the sole provider at the time when he died.

My brother was in the Air Force, my oldest brother — Nemecio is his name, he changed it to Marty, he hated his name — he was in the Air Force, and I don’t know if we got, if my mother got, any money when he was in the Air Force or not. And everybody else was in school. My oldest sister, Juana, she’s the one who died about five years ago, she was in cosmetology school, so wasn’t in the workforce yet.

So, he [my father] was able to maintain a family, this huge family. But the home that we bought in San Leandro was only two bedrooms. And so it had a basement, a full basement, and the plan was always that my father would redo the basement so we could have the whole house. Well, he never had the opportunity to do that before he died. So we grew up in a two-bedroom house.

ROSS: How did he die?

13:30

MARTINEZ: He had heart problems. He was in the hospital before he died for it must have been months, because when he would come home for a family visit, it was so strange to have him there, like he had been gone such a long time. So he died of heart — I know he had a heart attack when, I guess — I don't know, I guess it was the same year that he died. I'm not sure. But he also used to smoke. He and his father, my grandfather, used to smoke. My father smoked Camels and my grandfather smoked Lucky Strikes. So they were smokers, the two of them, and it was unfiltered. I guess before they put all the additives in. Because my grandfather lived to be 78 or 80, I think, and he was healthy.

ROSS: Relatively speaking.

MARTINEZ: Relatively speaking. But he was active to the end, you know. He was active all the way to the end of his life, and I don't remember him being sick.

ROSS: Do you think that your family's economic circumstances changed once your father died?

MARTINEZ: Well, we had to have my brother come home and help. Our mortgage at the time was \$25 a month. Food was I think, like, \$102 a month, \$25 a week. Because the letter said — well, my brother Bill, he was also in school, he was 17 at the time when my father died, and in school. He quit school and started working, and he was earning \$67 a week, and my sister still was in cosmetology school, so she wasn't earning anything. So we needed my brother Marty to come home.

So it was harder. I didn't know it was harder at the time, but just knowing that once my father died, that once we finished school, we would go to work. But actually, what turned out was that all of my brothers quit school while they were in high school and went to work to help support the family. And all my sisters and I graduated high school and then went to work and helped support the family, until we got married and went on. That was the expectation and that's actually what happened.

ROSS: So, did your mother work in the workforce?

MARTINEZ: Not very consistently. She did work in the cannery, the seasonal stuff. I think a couple of times, but not really. So, my sister remembers that — before even the terminology was there, she would say, my mother was a single parent for all these years with all these children. And you know, it just never occurred to us until just recently, you know, she was a single mom. So, it was — I just remember all of us having to work. But it wasn't like it was a burden. It was just, OK, that's just what we do.

And you know, I remember going to work for the county. That was my first job out of high school. I did have a part-time job while I was in high school, at Kress's Department Store. It was like Woolworth's in

downtown Oakland — on the corner of East 14th and Broadway. I worked there some evenings, not every night, and the weekends, Saturday. I don't think they were open on Sundays back then in those days.

ROSS: So, tell me about Luz the little girl. What type of child were you and what were the things that had a major influence on how you saw the world?

18:55

MARTINEZ: I don't know. Let me see what comes out here, because I do remember being a very quiet child, not talking very much. And I know that I must have spoken Spanish, because we all did. But I don't remember — I don't have a memory of speaking Spanish at all as a child. And I know I must have, but I just don't have the memory.

ROSS: Well, when did you lose the ability to speak Spanish? What was going on for you?

MARTINEZ: I don't know. I don't have a memory of ever speaking it, and I'm thinking maybe it was because I was such a quiet child, didn't talk that much. Maybe that was it. And I always remember speaking English. I just don't have a memory of Spanish. And I know growing up, my father wanted us to speak Spanish, but the battle was with my mother, who wanted us to speak English so she could learn the language. Because really, there was no opportunity for her to interact with English-speaking people, because she was at home. And so, we were the ones that brought the English to her. So that's why she wanted it.

ROSS: You were telling me the story of Luz, the quiet little girl.

MARTINEZ: Yeah. I don't remember even talking that much in my family, at school. I only spoke if spoken to, but in my house, again, my mother wanted us to speak English, and she won, because I don't remember speaking Spanish at all. And I think I was the first one without that. My sister just older than me, Lupe, she does recall speaking Spanish, and she's married to a Mexicano who only spoke Spanish when she met him, so she's, I guess, the last one that had a real basis in Spanish.

ROSS: So, how does it feel not to be able to speak Spanish at that time?

MARTINEZ: Well, it was frust[rating]. At that time, you know, it didn't even impact me in any way. It was later, when I was a teenager, and wanting to speak Spanish and not being able to, and whenever I would try, my brothers would tease me, and so, nobody to really encourage me. My mother encouraged me, and I remember writing to my grandfather, my mother's father, in Mexico. I wrote him a few letters in Spanish and he responded, and that was nice, because I was trying. But whenever I

would say anything in Spanish, oh my brothers were ruthless. They would just tease me and laugh. So I didn't do it very much at home.

ROSS: Do you speak it now?

MARTINEZ: Well, I learned. You know, I kept having it in my mind and wanting it and finally, I took some classes as an adult, I think, when I was 21, was the first time I took it. And over the years, I've taken other classes. And I speak Spanish but I am not as fluent as I would like to be. I don't have the vocabulary that I should have, and the grammar is not very good sometimes. But I get by, and I have done lots of interviews in Spanish, and the interviewers are patient with me and help me a lot. But that's where I am now.

And of course, there was the shame of — you weren't supposed to speak Spanish. And I never internalized that, but it was out there. You were not supposed to speak Spanish and it wasn't cool to be Mexican, because we weren't Chicanos back then. We were Mexican, Mexicanos. And you just weren't supposed to — I just remember so many people denying it all and claiming to be Spanish and not Mexican. And when people would question me about that, [they'd say] Well, it's the same thing. I said, "No, it's not, I'm not European, I'm not from Spain. My family's from Mexico. That's very different." You know, it was just a time of shame to be who you were. I know I never internalized that, but it was all that —

ROSS: So, what about your family's indigenous background?

MARTINEZ: Well, my mother does not know which tribe she's from. They never talked about it. They never talked about it and when I asked the question, she couldn't tell me. And I haven't done a search to see, but I always claim I'm Aztec. My grandfather on my father's side looked Aztec. I'm Aztec. And on my mother's side, she looks very Mayan, and she has these very high cheekbones — and I'm talking about her in the present, still. And many of us look like her, you know. I have the same high cheekbones that she has, and there's a lot of similarities. One of my brothers looks just like her. My mother wore her hair very short and it was white and my brother has the white hair, and one time I looked at him and I thought my mother was there. Just momentarily. And so we all have indigenous features.

But even within my family, my mother was very light skinned, which I didn't really notice until I was an adult. And my father was very dark. And so, within my brothers and sisters, all my brothers are dark, like me, and I have two sisters that are — well, actually three sisters, that are lighter skinned. Not as light skinned as my mother, but light skinned. So it's all very interesting.

ROSS: So, tell me about Luz the student, and what were things that influenced you as a student, and what was education like for you?

24:05

MARTINEZ:

Well, I went to a public school in San Leandro. San Leandro at the time was like 99 percent white, Portuguese, or whatever. Not very many Mexicanos. I know that there were some Hawaiians living in the area of San Leandro, in a two or three block area, that's where all the Hawaiians lived. The term they used at that time — I know it was derogatory, Kanakas, that's what we called them. But other than that, I didn't know of any other people of color. I mean, in the block that I lived — I lived at 537 Esterbrook Street — the block that I lived in was between two railroad tracks, very close, so we got really used to the railroad, the train sounds. But in that block, there was a Filipino family, there was my family, and there was a Spanish family, the mother was actually from Spain, and the rest were Portuguese. The school that I went to, Lincoln School, I was aware of maybe three or four other families. There was the Lopez family, they had a big family like ours, and then there were, maybe, a handful of other Mexican students. And there was one Chinese boy in one of my classes, but that was San Leandro. And it was racist, of course, you know.

And I just remember an incident when I was maybe in the third grade. I was a very good student, and you know, would get A's, and I knew all the spelling and I did really well in school, and I remember, I guess it was the third grade, the teacher was going to do peer education, so that, you know, some students would help other students. She assigned this little girl named Peggy to be my peer educator. I was smarter than her. You know, she didn't know what I knew and they had assigned her to me. Like, what happened there? She didn't know how to spell as well as I did. I would get 100 in all my spelling tests, but she wouldn't. But here, she was assigned to help me. It was like, this isn't right. What is going on here? So there was this subtle racism because there were so few of us in the school.

And I think one time, I think it was in the first grade, there was another Mexican girl who couldn't speak English. She had a miserable time. I understood Spanish but I didn't speak it. And she was crying one time and I think she had wet her pants and she was crying. The teacher wanted me to talk to her, and I was just so shy, and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't say anything. I couldn't do anything. So she was sitting there crying and I couldn't do anything.

And I don't have that many memories. I remember I didn't have very many friends. You know, if someone chose me to be their friend, I was their friend, but I don't remember being very assertive or outgoing. So I didn't have that many friends. I remember this little girl, Carol, she wanted to be my friend. She even came to my home one time. And she was just, like, she just loved my home. But I didn't get really close to her.

ROSS:

So what year did you graduate?

28:50

MARTINEZ: Well, let me tell you what happened in grammar school, because I didn't continue in Lincoln School. When my father died, I was, like, nine years old, ten. I was nine when he died. I remember the priest coming to see my mother because that's what the priests do, after he died. And he saw all these children. And he said, "Why aren't they in the school?" I remember this so clearly. My mother said to him, "We've tried to get them in school but there's never been room for us." The priest was shocked. I remember his face, like, you know, that there wasn't room for us. And of course, that was more racism.

Actually, the reason we moved to San Leandro from this little place where we had lived, Decoto, was because my father wanted us to go to Catholic school. So there goes that myth about, you know, Mexicanos, Latinos, don't value education. And that's why we moved to San Leandro when I was little. I was maybe three or four when we moved to San Leandro. And so none of my older brothers and sisters were able to go to this grammar school, St. Leander's Grammar School.

And so, the priest said to my mom, "Well, let me see what I can do." And I got into that school, I was in seventh grade, so that was not right away, because you're in seventh grade what, you're 11 or 12, maybe. So it was two or three years before I got in, and I was the first one of the Martinez family to be allowed in St. Leander's School. So I was in the seventh grade.

And that's when things kind of changed for me, you know. I started having friends. I started being more outgoing and was more comfortable there. It was a good time for me. And so, my two best friends there were two Barbaras. They were both Barbara, Barbara Mendez and Barbara Souza, I think, both Portuguese girls. And so those were my friends during my two years there. And again, I did very well there, and the only other Mexicana girl was Marcela Gaiten. Her mother was my mother's best friend, and her mother was the laundress for the nuns in the convent, and that's why Marcela was there. And I went there because the pastor interceded for us. So I was the first one to go there, and then all my brothers and sisters after me went to the Catholic school through the eighth grade.

ROSS: And so what happened in terms of high school for you?

MARTINEZ: In high school, I went to St. Elizabeth's High School in Oakland. And to go to the high schools, the Catholic high schools, you have to qualify, you have to take a test. If you passed the test, then you get to go. And so I took the test to St. Elizabeth's. I'm not sure why I chose that one, because I chose it on my own. My mother, you know, was not really involved in my education, or anybody's education, again, because of the language. And I don't remember her ever going to meetings or anything like that. But just in talking to the other students and my friends, I decided to go to St. Elizabeth's because the alternative was a school called Bishop O'Dowd, that was supposed to be for the rich folks, so I chose St. Elizabeth's, that wasn't for the rich folks, you know, and took

the test and I passed it. And one of my Barbara friends took the O'Dowd test and she went to O'Dowd, and my other Barbara friend didn't pass the test, and so she went to a public school.

So I went there without knowing anybody. Actually, there were two boys in my class that passed — three boys that passed the test but I, you know, wasn't friends with the boys.

33:16

ROSS: So it was a coed school?

MARTINEZ: The grammar school was, and the high school was a coed school, but it was separate. The first floor was for the girls and the second floor was for the boys. And that was — I graduated in 1956 from the grammar school and graduated in 1960 from high school. I can't believe how many years ago that was. Forty-four years ago, is that right? It must be. I don't feel that old, but that's — I graduated from that high school in 1960. And because the school was in Oakland, I took the bus every day to Oakland. And I don't remember that there were that many Mexicanos in that school, but when I go back and see the pictures, there were more than I remember. What was interesting again, there was racism everywhere.

ROSS: Tell me about it.

MARTINEZ: All the Mexican students were in a different track, but I was the only Mexicana in the college track, or whatever they called it back then. So I was taking Latin with all the other students. I was the only one. There were a few African American students, a few. I think there were two in my class, and all of them were in the other track. I was the only student of color in my grade, anyway, that I remember, in the college track.

ROSS: So you felt the tracking itself was a racial hierarchy?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, and I wanted to be with the other students. I wanted to be with the other Mexican students. But Father Ronald, who was the principal there, said, "No, you're going to stay." He said, "You already know Spanish." I said, "I don't." He said, "I'm not going to switch you." So he made sure that I stayed in that track. But I didn't know anything about college. I didn't know anybody that had gone to college. No one in my family, you know, no one. So I wanted to be with the Mexican students, but they wouldn't allow me. So, OK, I stayed in that track. But I did have my friends there, Carmen, a Mexicana girl, Barbara Anunzio, she was an Italian girl. What was her name? Elaine Marie. She was Creole, as she explained herself. She was African, but she explained herself as Creole. Internalized oppression is really strong in so many folks.

ROSS: What do you mean by that?

MARTINEZ: She could not say she was African. She could not say she was black, whatever the term was back then. She was Creole. She wasn't French. She wasn't French. She was obviously African. She was lighter skinned. So, you know, just like all these Mexicanos, saying, I'm not Mexican, I'm Spanish. Just the way society was back then. Well, it still is. But I just remember her saying that. I said, "What?" She ended up marrying this really white, white guy, and she kept saying she was Creole, and this guy was a racist. I said, "Doesn't he know she's African?" And she's still married to him, the last time I went to a reunion, a few years ago. How can they do that? He's very racist and she's black.

ROSS: Now the impression we get of the 1960s is that it was a time of political change and unrest. How did the times we lived in affect your consciousness at that time?

MARTINEZ: Well, you know, the only black folks I knew were the few students in my high school. In San Leandro I remember there was one man living in this little tiny house set back from the street, and I can see him sitting in his rocker in front of his house. But I had no interaction with other people other than whites and Filipinos, a little bit, and Mexicans. You know, I thought everybody was Mexican back then. I didn't know there were Central Americans and South Americans and Puerto Ricans. I didn't know that. I thought everybody was Mexican and when they would say — occasionally I would meet somebody who wasn't Mexican and it's like, Oh, I didn't know. And I know I'm not the only one, because I exchange stories with other women and find out I wasn't the only one. So it was, like, wow. This is something new. I didn't know that we weren't all from Mexico.

ROSS: Now of course, you're here in Northern California, and there's the Berkeley movement coming and the antiwar movement.

MARTINEZ: But that was way before. I guess it started to happen, I guess when I was in high school, but I wasn't aware, and I wasn't aware of homosexual people. I remember reading an article when I was in high school about a homosexual, and I began to understand, Oh, there are other kinds of people. And I did begin to read about the civil rights movement.

I remember reading about the integration in Little Rock, and to me, that was amazing. Wow. That was so amazing, because again, I had no interaction with black folks, and to read in the newspapers and to see what they were going through and knowing how historical this was, and the National Guard, and wondering about those students. What's happening to them in there? You know, what's going on for them? I get emotional just thinking about it. That was, like, the beginning of my consciousness, to think how scared they must have been.

ROSS: We can take a minute. We don't have to rush through this, but I've been looking at signs and clues to –

40:50

MARTINEZ: The brutality, just the brutality of it all. People getting beat. People getting killed. Amazing to me, that this was going on. Because we're so sheltered, you know. Living in San Leandro and going to this Catholic school that was obviously racist. I don't think we even had the term racism back then. But there was a different treatment for different people, so, of course, for us, too. You know, just knowing how people looked at us differently, or dismissed us like we were invisible, just weren't there, and the way that people would talk to my mother as if she were a child, and — just awful.

ROSS: So for you, you've said many times that you grew up in a Catholic background. So, tell me about the development of your consciousness around sex and sexuality.

MARTINEZ: Well, you know, procreation was the only — I didn't even know about sex. Forget about that, you know, I didn't know about sex. I didn't know how babies were created. I didn't know about sex until I was out of high school. I must have been 18 when I really knew what the sexual act was all about. It's, like, whoa. I knew nothing. My mother didn't teach us anything about menstruation.

ROSS: So how did you handle periods?

MARTINEZ: Well, when my mother saw a spot on my pajamas, she sent my sister Lupe, who was three years older than me, into the bathroom with a Kotex belt — that's when we used belts, and I don't think it was a pad. I remember — we used old sheets cut up and folded over and over and over. That's Kotex pads. So I think that's what it was, was that my sister came into the bathroom with me. And I didn't even know I had started my periods. It was just a spot. And so, my sister didn't want to be there, didn't know what to tell me, and she said, "Here. Put it on." I said, "Put what on? What is it?" You know what the belts looked like, little elastic with little hooks on either end. It's like, What do I do with this? What is this? What are you talking about? And so she had to show me, like, wouldn't even look me in the eye, was so mad, just putting it together and said, "Now put it on." I didn't know what the hell this was all about. I didn't know I was bleeding. I hadn't really known. I saw something in my panties but I didn't know what that was. So that was my introduction.

ROSS: It must have felt pretty traumatic.

MARTINEZ: It was. But then, OK, OK. I just — my bleeding and using these rags, oh my god, because they were just so awful. We couldn't afford Kotex for six girls, I guess. And so that's what we did. My mother would wash them, and they would be washed and they would be reused. That's what we did. So at the Catholic Church, I mean, I was a very good Catholic

girl, you know, just believing it all and trying to be such a good Catholic girl and going to confession all the time and receiving communion and all that. And when I was in high school, there was, of course, a church right next to the high school, St. Elizabeth's, where my mother went until she died. I would go into church after school and pray for my brother. And just accepted it.

So in school, you really didn't learn about the world in high school. We would learn about history. Didn't know anything about Native Americans. Nothing. So my consciousness — I don't know. I guess I began in high school, being aware. But I know: the other thing was that I learned to speak up for myself.

45:40

ROSS: How did that come about?

MARTINEZ: I just did. I had this job, this after-school job, weekend job. And I remember asking the supervisor, this woman, I can't remember her name — white woman, of course — telling her that I wanted Good Friday off so that I could go to Good Friday services. And she said OK, OK. But when the time came, she said, "We really need you to work this day." And I said, "No. You told me I could have it off and I'm going to take it off." And I remember that, you know, speaking up. That's not right. And speaking up to the principal at school, you know, saying this is what I want, this is what I need. And he'd say, "No, I'm not going to give it to you." But I learned to ask for things. And maybe it was in seventh and eighth grade, hanging out with these Barbaras, my two Barbaras. Because they were pretty feisty girls, you know, and I think it was that.

ROSS: So, were there any significant events in your high school years or your junior high years that you could look back and say that's when my feminist consciousness started to peek out or develop?

MARTINEZ: Well, it was actually earlier than that, because this whole phenomenon about Mexicanos saying they were Spanish — I would speak up, when I was young, you know, maybe ten years old, because the family next door to us was actually Spanish, but they had, the younger brother, the youngest, and they were all light skinned, but the youngest, Sammy, was dark skinned — and I just thought they were buying into this, you know, they're Spanish, but they're really Mexican. Look at Sammy.

And I remember telling Sammy and he kept saying he was Spanish. I said, "No you're not. You're Mexican. You're Mexican." And he went home and told his sisters. And our porches, the stairs kind of were right next to each other, so I remember standing on the stairs of our house, and they're standing on their stairs, yelling across to me, saying, "We're Spanish." You know, the older sisters, and Sammy saying, and actually his father was a different father. His father was Filipino and that's why he was dark skinned. And his older sisters were saying to me, "No,

we're Spanish. Our mother's from Spain." And that's where I got the consciousness. I realized what was going on there.

But I would correct people, even at that age, nine or ten or ten or 11, whatever it was. No, you're not. You're Mexican. Like, what's the matter with being Mexican? I'm Mexican. And I know I got that from my father, because he was the one who kept saying — I don't know if he said the words, but just the way he was. So I was always Mexican. I never claimed to be Spanish. No way. And I'm sure, you know, we all have some Spanish back there. But I was raised Mexicana, and so I was speaking out, even back then.

But I never had conversations with family about this. I just knew, you know, there's something wrong here. Why aren't you saying you are Mexican when you are? You're not Spanish. So, you know, I'm sure it started before that, but it was — we were Mexican. We weren't nationalists. We were Mexican. We weren't Mexican American. We were Mexican. Mexican American came much later, and I still don't even say that. And now, I'm not only Mexican, I'm Chicana. I'm indigenous. I'm *mestiza*. I'm other things, because it's all part of me. I never went to Mexico while I was young. I was 21 on my first trip to Mexico.

ROSS:

What did that feel like?

50:10

MARTINEZ:

Well, I went, just because I wanted to go. I didn't go to visit my mother's family who was still there. I was 21, and just had this urge, this needing to go. So my plan, I went to Mexico City for three days, then I went to Merida, Yucatan, which is on the coast, the Gulf coast. And this was the first time I'd ever done a trip on my own.

I want to tell earlier things first, because in school, I finally did get myself out of the track. Well, I remember, this only happened one time, where they invited all the students to come in the evening with parents. I don't think my mother came. But we met with these advisors and they were supposed to — I guess we had taken some tests or something and they were supposed to advise us on the best career for us. And I don't know if this was even open for everybody. Maybe this was just the college track.

But I remember this white woman counselor saying to me, "secretarial track." And I knew, I knew, without knowing the term racism, this was racism. Because I was in the track, you know, to go to college. I recognized it, but I also knew I wasn't going to college, because I need to go to work to support my family. So I think it was in the last year, my senior year, I took myself out and Father Ronald was already gone, so whoever was there allowed me to do it. I told them, you know, "I need to have a skill, because I have to go to work when I graduate." So they allowed me.

So I started going to the typing classes. Back then — nobody knows today what stenography is, but I took that class to become a stenographer and typing and so I learned those skills. And sure enough,

when I graduated high school, I did start working and used those skills. So, I didn't — I knew that I wasn't going to go to college.

I think, actually, there was one person that we knew, a neighbor that lived behind us that went to college. And I just remember everybody saying, Who does he think he is? Again, it's part of the internalized oppression. Why does he think he can go? Like we weren't supposed to go, and that was the buy-in. So my mother was, like, Who does he think he is?

ROSS: Getting above his station to think he can go to college.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, exactly. So I guess that's why I always have thought that my father was the one that instilled these other things in me. You know, I think so. It feels like it. So –

ROSS: What other significant things happened then during your formative years that you can trace back consciousness to?

54:00

MARTINEZ: Maybe it will come later.

ROSS: Well, you don't have to answer the question and there isn't always an answer to that type of question.

MARTINEZ: Right. But I remember that once I graduated from high school and got my job, I started to work for the Alameda County Probation Department. I worked in the financial unit. Because I didn't realize that when your kid was in juvenile hall, you had to pay for them to be there. And that's the unit I worked in. If you could afford it, you had to pay something. So that's the unit I worked in. And I noticed, also, that there were very few people of color there. There was a Mexican probation officer. There was one black woman working in accounting, and one black woman worked in the stenography pool. And I think there was one African American probation officer. That was it. That was it. And I think in the upstairs, the receiving, I think there was maybe another African American. Actually, there were two African probation officers that I remember. Very few. And everyone else was white. And so I knew there was something going on there, you know. Very segregated. And it was very looked down upon.

ROSS: Tell me about that. Any particular incident?

MARTINEZ: Well, I started dating — no, actually, the first year out of high school, I was dating this guy, I think he was Portuguese. He was working and going to night school. And we were crossing the street one night, some place, I don't even know where it was. But he was just — he said, "You should go to school. You should go to school." And at that moment, this big light bulb went off. It's like, He's right, I can go. I have the choice. I can go. It's like something thunderstruck me or something. He's right. I

can do this. I can go. And at that moment, I decided I'm going to go to school. I didn't tell him, but at that moment, I decided, I can go to school. I'm going to go. So, that was amazing.

ROSS: So this guy just kind of appeared out of nowhere in this narrative. Was he your first boyfriend?

MARTINEZ: I guess I'd gone out with a few, a couple of other guys, but, you know, I saw him for a little while. Not that long, but for a little while. But that was, like, whoa. That was a gift. Just him saying that.

ROSS: Well, we're nearing the end. Maybe the last ten minutes of this tape, which is about your family life, situating who Luz is, and so, were there other significant developments in your personal life? When did you get married? All those kinds of things.

MARTINEZ: That's going to be the next tape, I think. (laughs) I started dating my ex-husband. He was a probation officer. Not of color.

ROSS: So you met him at this job?

MARTINEZ: I did. I did.

ROSS: OK. So, what was it like to date? I know we can talk about it more on the next tape, but –

MARTINEZ: That was very interesting. Because all this time, I was looking for a Mexicano, you know, and actually, the guys I dated that were Mexicano, the thing that kept being a crash was that they kept saying they were Spanish. I forgot that part. So I'm looking for nice Mexican boys, and they would always ask me, "Are you Spanish?" I'd say, "No, I'm Mexican." "Oh, same thing." "No, it's not the same thing." So that was always there. Three or four Mexicanos. None of them could say that they were Mexican, could be proud, could identify, wanted to identify. None of them. That was — whew, that made such an impact on me.

ROSS: The denial of their cultural heritage?

MARTINEZ: And I didn't even have the analysis back then. It's just, like, What's the matter with them? How come I'm the only one that can say this? And you know, I'm not sure, I need to check with my sisters to see if they were going through the same thing. I need to check with my sisters.

ROSS: So, what year was this happening?

59:25

MARTINEZ: Well, it was pretty soon after I got out of high school. You know, even — well, I was in school, yeah, dating wasn't allowed. I remember going

to my senior ball with Sammy, the boy next door, and going to a couple of other boys' either proms or something. But dating, no, I don't think so. You know, that was not allowed.

Oh, and this is really significant, too, because I saw my two older sisters going through so much heartache trying to date, because my mother would not allow it. My older sister, Juana, my sister Lupe had to go — she was dating the boy on the other side of next door, the Portuguese on the other side of us, and my sister Lupe had to go with them wherever they went. So she got to go to the movies, she got presents, she got popcorn and candy bars, you know.

ROSS: The formal chaperone.

MARTINEZ: Exactly. I don't think she enjoyed it very much because my sister hated her there. And that happened until — she was even engaged, I think, and my sister still had to go with her. And when my sister married — actually what number is she, fourth in line, three older, two older brothers, and then my sister Juana, and then Mary, she started dating. Oh my god, it was the same thing. My mother would just give her such a hard time.

And, I remember when Juana told my mother she was going to get married, oh, I just remember, my mother was distraught and crying and saying, "You're all leaving me." Because my father had just died not that long ago and she had all these children. So she was like, she didn't want anybody to leave. You know, she was feeling abandoned and probably desperate because how is she going to maintain this family, because Juana was bringing in money, but once she married, you know, that responsibility kind of left. So I saw them going through all this. And somewhere in my mind, I didn't know it at the time that it was happening, but I knew that was not going to be the way I was going to operate. Or this was not going to happen to me. And I don't understand how that happened. Because it wasn't until I started acting it out that I realized, Wow, I didn't know.

ROSS: You describe a fascinating, though, interesting developing consciousness around gender, around racialization, around heritage that seems to have been there all the time now.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, you know. I knew something was wrong at the time, but I didn't know how to explain it. Didn't know.

ROSS: All right. Well, thank you. We're coming to the end of tape one and this will be a great time to take a break. Thank you.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

ROSS: Now, we're going to get into the next phase of Luz's lovely life. You had just started dating this probation officer at your job. So tell me about Luz and her dating and married experiences.

MARTINEZ: That was a life (laughs), a long time ago. So, I was 18, I think, when I started working for the probation department, not even quite 19 when I started. I didn't start dating my ex-husband — and all this time, I'd been looking for a Mexicano, and my ex-husband is very white. He is German, English, Scottish, maybe a little French, I'm not sure, but very white. Blond. Just the complete opposite of what I was looking for. But he also happened to be one of the most sought-after bachelors in the probation department (laughs). And I didn't even have a clue, because he had actually left a note for a woman that worked in my department, an Italian-Portuguese girl — we were all girls, we were 19 — and she didn't respond. Then I think he came and talked with me and asked me out, and I said yes. I was a little shocked. I said yes.

And so we started dating. And you know, just again, the complete opposite of what I was looking for. He was, at the time — he's eight years older than I am — he was 27, and I was 19, not quite 19. He had just become 27. And so, much older, eight years older, and I'm still a teenager. But I'm a mature teenager because of my life situation and everything I had gone through. And so we started dating. And everyone was speculating, you know, but there's also racism there, oh my goodness.

He had a good friend, also a probation officer — this friend was always trying to set him up with this white woman probation officer all the time, even after we were dating, because I was a Mexican and not a professional person, and oh, there's so much racism going on. And what did he say to him? No, this was another friend. Oh my goodness. So, here we were, starting out dating. And that was so much fun.

Oh, I've got to tell you this other part, before we even started dating. This was really significant for me, because as I said a few minutes ago, watching my sisters begin their independent life, you know, forming relationships, I knew that I was not going to do that. I knew that I could not let my mother do that to me.

And again, it wasn't words, it was just something inside me because once I started working, I don't even know where the idea came from, I said to someone — I was in a ride group and I said in the car going to the office that I was going to move out of my mother's house. I don't even know where that came from, but I said it. It turns out that this woman, this Italian woman that my ex-husband first approached — we worked in the same office — she said, "Well, there are three of us looking for a fourth person to move into this apartment." I mean, within days that I said it, the opportunity was there.

And this is something that's happened over life for me. Once I put it out there, or once I start thinking about it, planning it, it begins to

happen. So to me, it was, like, wow, that was pretty amazing, you know. (laughs) And so, I agreed. And no one in my family had ever left home unless they were leaving to get married, not even my brothers. So this was like nothing that had ever happened in my family. But I knew I was going to take that step. And so these girls — all 19-year-old girls, we were all the same age — invited me to be a part of this group. And I said yes. And it was within weeks that we were going to move in.

Oh my, I know that I cannot tell my mother that I am leaving. I have to tell her the night before I move, because if I tell her now, it will be hell. And so I didn't tell her. I made all the arrangements. I didn't have to take too much. All I had was my clothes. And so, the night before, I told her. And just remembering the way, what she said to my sister when she told her she was going to get married: "Everybody's leaving. Everybody's abandoning me." And that's why I couldn't tell her. But I also had in my mind that I would continue to give her money. I was making like \$300 a month, and I had rent to pay and a few little expenses, I had a charge account. And so, my decision was to give her \$100 a month. So, I thought, OK, I'm taking care of business.

So the night before I left, I told her, "I'm leaving. I'm going to move in with these three other women, girls." Oh, as soon as I got it out of my mouth, she was screaming and yelling at me. I mean, she was in shock. I'm sure none of her daughters had ever done this to her before. And she told me, "If you leave this house, you're never coming back." And I was so angry that I couldn't say anything to her, but I was so angry that I knew, internally, she can't do that to me. She cannot do that to me. So I knew that I would be back, and she couldn't do that to me.

So I left. And I think within weeks all of us, the four of us, decided to invite our mothers to dinner. So I invited my mother to dinner and she came. I told you, you couldn't do that to me. Because how could she disown me? I was not going to allow that. So she accepted it, and I guess it was just a couple of weeks before, or the week before I moved into this apartment, that I started dating my ex-husband.

Oh, this is going to be fun, you know, because I wouldn't have my mother telling me, or you know, telling me anything, because that year, when I started working and contributing towards the household, I thought, OK, I have some independence now. Because before that, I had to do everything my mother said. If she said I couldn't go out, I couldn't go out. Mad as I could be, I couldn't go out. And I didn't. So I did everything she said until I started earning money and giving to the household. I took my independence. So I would just say, I'm going. And I would come back whenever I came back, because I knew she was not going to have that control that she had over my sisters. I was not going to tolerate that.

6:00

ROSS:

Do you think the external environment was having an impact, that this again was the early '60s and women were becoming more independent?

MARTINEZ: I wasn't even aware of what was going on out there, about feminism, about the women's movement. I wasn't aware. This was a family thing, a very personal thing. What I saw happening with my sisters — like, No, that's not going to happen to me. I knew it wasn't right. Well, it was right for our family, our culture, but I knew for me it wasn't right. I'm not going to tolerate that. I have to do what I need to do. So that was very significant that I left my mama's house at not quite 19 years old. I was not going out to get married. I was just going to go out and live with three other 19-year-old girls, and have an experience.

And I think I also remember that there was some young — I guess when I was getting ready to graduate, some of the students were planning to go to college or taking a trip to Europe, things like that, you know, that wasn't in my — I had no idea people could do that. So that might have had something to do — no, because this was an internal thing, just seeing my sisters. But it all kind of fed into it.

So I made that bold decision and left my mama's house and quietly invited her to come to dinner, not even referring to her disowning me or anything, and so she came. That was beautiful, that was great. And so, you know, I'd come back and forth. I had — that year was so much fun. That was a ball. Because here we were, four, young, attractive girls living in this apartment house with a pool and all these men in the apartment house. It was so much fun. And I'd just started dating my ex-husband, so all the guys were always in our apartment house, in our apartment, after swimming and all of that. It was just so fun, having this freedom, you know, not living with my mother.

Actually having a bed to myself, that was — I didn't have a room to myself because we shared, I shared the room with the woman I worked with. But I'd never had a bed to myself. My two sisters and I, one older and one younger, would share. We had twin beds and we put them together and we would share this, so we would sleep crossways because there was more room, and because I think I was the last one to get in, I would have to sleep in the middle. So this was a new experience, having a bed to myself, and beginning to date my ex-husband, and having so much fun.

ROSS: What was his name?

MARTINEZ: His name was Ken, Ken Elvin. Kenneth.

ROSS: So how did you decided to get married?

MARTINEZ: It took a while. It took a while. So we had this wonderful courtship. You know, you were single. He had just bought a Porsche. We went to the opera, we went to museums, we went to the symphony, we went to plays. We went to all the sports things. He liked sports: football, basketball, hockey, everything, everything, and we just had a ball. I never had this kind of experience. I never had the money to do this, and — just had never been to a live play before, the theater. So it was fun. It

was so much fun. So that year was great. And then, being in the apartment house with a swimming pool. There was all kinds of attention. I had never had so much attention, you know. It was great.

ROSS: So how did your relationship with Ken become more serious?

MARTINEZ: By that second year I'm thinking, something needs to happen. What is happening here? And after the end of that year, I went home, because all the other girls decided to go home, you know, for whatever reasons, and I was, like, disappointed, and even thought for a while, Maybe I'll get my own place, but I couldn't afford it. So I went home.

So the kind of little controls that just kept going on, because my ex-husband, at the time, was living with his family. He had been in the service, had gone to college, and I guess had recently been back to his family, lived with his family. And everybody kind of questioned that, you know, 28 years old, living with his family. It worked for him. So I would sometimes go spend the weekend at his parents' house. Oh, my mama didn't like that, you know, Mom, nothing's happening. She didn't believe it. So I would go with my little overnight bag. And even from the office, my friend Dee Reed would just laugh — you're so bold, whatever people — I didn't care what — I wasn't even thinking of what people would think, going into his car with my little overnight bag. I'm going to his parents' house. I didn't even care.

So we dated for almost two and a half years before we got married. And I had to push it. I had to push it. At one point, I guess it was in the first year, he said when he had met me, he was kind of ready to go to the Peace Corps and they had offered him, you know, they were ready to take him to the Peace Corps, and he told me he had decided not to go, and I said, "Why? Why aren't you going?" And he didn't really say it, but he referred to me. I said, "But why aren't you going?" and I wanted him to say something, and wondering why didn't he just go. Why didn't he go? Or say something to me, and he wouldn't say anything. So I had to let it go. I let it go.

And so, after a couple of years, there was no proposal, and I'm thinking, I still need to do something. I don't think I'm ready to get married. I want to get married, but I'm still not ready to get married. So I decided to go to Mexico. I didn't have any money, I just had a plan, you know, I'm going to go. And my sister said she was going to go with me: my sister Bea, who's two years younger than me, she was going to go with me. OK. Let's plan. And so I was planning and putting aside some money. And, I don't know, a couple of months later, she said, "Well, I decided not to go. I bought a stereo instead." I was, like, a stereo? And I just kind of felt at that time, I think she thinks I'm not going to go because she's not going, but I'm going. I'm going to go. I'm going to do this by myself.

And so I continued, and I went in November, and I was 21 the October before, the month before. I didn't have enough money to go, so I borrowed from my ex. Three or four hundred dollars I borrowed so I

could make this trip. And it was also to give him a push. No, it wasn't. Actually, no, it wasn't. I needed to do something and I know this is going to give him a push and that's good, that's OK, but I'm not doing it to give him a push. I just need to go and do something more by myself, because that year was not enough. And I never — I mean, this was an adventure for me and I wanted to do something more before I got married. So I planned these two weeks or three weeks.

It was such an adventure. I just loved it. You know, I just loved it. I was in Mexico City for two or three days by myself in this nice hotel. I'd never done anything like this. I never thought I could. And then I hooked up with a friend of my sister's who was working as a guide and photographer in Merida. I said, "Perfect. I'll come there and you can be my guide." And I had such wonderful adventures because I got to do things with his friends and things I would never have done by myself. It was wonderful, just wonderful.

ROSS: So when you got home, did Ken finally figure out that you all were supposed to be together, or what?

MARTINEZ: On the way home, I met this man in the airplane, we were on the same flight. He was from Switzerland, and actually, he said we had been on the same flight before. I didn't remember this, but he helped me with my luggage when we went through customs. And so we started this conversation all the way from Mexico to San Francisco and ended up planning to meet. And I thought, Oh, I'm not committed to — I can do this. So Ken came to meet me at the airport, and this guy — Alex, I think his name was — was carrying my bag. Uh, oh. And so that kind of started it, you know, I eventually told him I was going to see him, and he said, "But what about us?" And I said, "What about us? What's the plan?" And he said, "I have all these plans." "What are the plans? Why haven't you shared them with me? You haven't told me a thing." So I did go out with this guy, but eventually, within weeks, we decided — Ken and I decided — to get married. So he needed that push, you know, and I needed my trip. I needed to do this all by myself. So we got married in May, and it was —

ROSS: What year?

MARTINEZ: It was '64. And actually, when I was in Mexico, that's when Kennedy got assassinated. That was very interesting, to be there in Mexico, seeing how moved and how upset everybody was in Mexico and how sympathetic they were to me, once they knew I was an American. It was just an amazing time. So all this was going on. And so, we got married May 3, 1964. And I hadn't really thought about what being a mother would be like. It was just kind of, yeah, I'm going to have kids. And how many kids? I didn't know. And we didn't know how many kids we were going to have, but we knew we were going to have children. And I

immediately got pregnant with my two [twins, who were due] like, nine months and nine days from the time we got married.

But also the agreement that I had with him was that I would go to school. Because I had tried going before and it just didn't work out. I didn't have a car. Going at night, it didn't work out. So the agreement was that I would go to school, and so I resigned from my job and enrolled at Merritt College in the fall of '64. And that's, of course, where the Black Panthers had been. I thought, This is going to be exciting. They weren't active at that time, the way they had been, or were they? What's the sequence? I think there were still some things happening. It was in '64.

There were other things that happened at the probation department, and some things that really showed my ex up and I didn't do anything about it at the time. Someone had talked to him about interracial dating, I guess. Something about — I can't [remember] what it was they said. He told me that we weren't supposed to be seen together — sort of, what? You know, and there was this office party, and there was no way. I just decided to neglect it [the warning]. And at the time, I wondered how come he hadn't. So that was there.

ROSS: How long did you stay married?

MARTINEZ: Seventeen years. Oh, but there was something else that came along when I was working there. An African woman, Dee Reed, who worked in my same department, she befriended me. She came in, I guess, my second year that I was there. Just about the time we started to date, I think. Oh, she was great. She was so — she opened my eyes to a lot of things. She would talk very frankly. She had two growing children, one that was 12 and a younger — she was so open, this woman, and would say anything, not be held back. Oh, she was wonderful. You know, she's what I needed. And I remember — oh, she's the one who took me to see Malcolm X when he was in West Oakland, a church in West Oakland.

ROSS: My goodness.

24:56

MARTINEZ: Whoa. She exposed me to so much. I would go visit her at her apartment in San Francisco. She'd have all these people there. People that were so different from folks that I'd met. So, she just opened a whole lot of stuff to me, and, you know, seeing Malcolm X. Wow. This must have been '64, '65. No, it was earlier, maybe '63, '62 or '63.

ROSS: Because he was assassinated in '65.

MARTINEZ: So it was sometime before this. It was '62 or '63, something like that. And I had heard a little — I didn't really know him, but just to hear him talk about white devils, I said, Wow, that is so powerful, you know. I had never heard anybody say that about white folks before. And to me,

it was very exciting. Not having any history, not knowing that much about him, but just to hear him say those things was very exciting to me. Who else was going to tell me about this thing? Who else can I talk to about these things?

ROSS: So your consciousness around social justice politics was developing at that time.

MARTINEZ: Right. And then, you know, for someone to tell my ex we're not supposed to be seen together? What, just because I'm Mexican? Come on, you know. And so I knew that there were some other things happening. Oh, and my supervisor had a talk with me, because it was, you know, it was very visible that we were dating. And he called me into his office one time and asked me, Is this serious? What? In my head, I'm thinking, What business is it of yours? And I said, I don't know. I know I didn't give him a straight answer. And there was a couple, actually, that was dating, that was interracial, African American and a white woman [and my supervisor said] Well, do you know about so-and-so, and made this horrible face. I thought, Oh my god. So I was more open after that. No, you're not going to do this, you know. That's your problem. Just inside, like, no. I'm not going along with this. So, you know, this stuff is going on. Ai, ai, ai.

And my ex's [friend] Gus, the friend that was telling him, you know, he shouldn't be going with me — point blank, he shouldn't be going with me — and then he would get invited to these parties and he'd say, "Well, I want to bring Luz." "Oh, no, no. She can't come." It was, like, Whoa. What the hell is going on here? And so he wouldn't go to the parties. I think he went to one. So I told him, I said, "So why are you going? If I can't go, why are you going? If you want to take me and they're saying no, you shouldn't be going." So I had to tell him. So all this shit's going on.

ROSS: So what was 17 years of married life like with Ken?

MARTINEZ: Well, the first few months, I did go to school. I went to Merritt College, and that was wonderful. I was already pregnant. Like I said, I got pregnant immediately. So in September, I was very noticeably pregnant. So that was fun. That was different. I didn't see any other pregnant women there, you know. And that's where I found out I was smart. That's when I found out I was smart, you know. I was doing well in all my classes and the teachers were good. They were really good. And I got so much really wonderful encouragement. So it was good. I knew I was smart. That was big. That was very big.

ROSS: What did you major in?

MARTINEZ: Well, see, at the time, I think my plan originally was to be — I can't remember if it was a teacher or a social worker. It was one of those.

That was my plan. You know, I wasn't sure. But, so I would go. So I just went that one semester. And then I thought, Well, after the baby is born, I might have my mama take care of the baby and continue school.

So during Christmas vacation — because the semester didn't end until January — during Christmas vacation, I gave birth to twins. Very unexpectedly. I didn't know it was going to be twins, not at all. And I had been thinking I was going to have a girl. I knew I had a girl in me and I had even had a dream about her. I knew what she was going to look like and everything. Here I gave birth to two twin boys, identical twin boys. That was a shock.

And it was very early, because my due date was February 9th, I think it was — no, it was the 12th, something like that. But they were born December 30. They turn 40 in a couple of weeks. Whew, I can't believe they're going to be 40. I can't believe I am old enough to have 40-year-old children. So they were born. And I thought it was wonderful. It was wonderful. It was like walking on clouds. It was so wonderful to have twins. I mean, to have a baby was going to be so wonderful, but this is so special. I didn't know. The doctors couldn't tell me because that was before ultrasound, or sonograms, or whatever they use. And so, they didn't know.

And here, Eric and Max were born. Very light. They were bald and very light skinned. And I didn't understand what happened. I thought dark was dominant, the dark genes were dominant. And I was a little shocked. And then I had to remember, my mama has light skin. That's her genes coming through, too. It must be, because dark genes are dominant.

They were born very early, five or six weeks early. So they were very small. They were both under four pounds, so they had to stay in the hospital until they reached five pounds. And oh, it was such a horrible system back then, because as soon as they were born, they were put in incubators and — did I get to touch them? I don't think I even got to touch them, because they completely isolated them. That was the way they did it back then, and I could see them through the window. So they were in the hospital for three weeks and that's the way they did it. And I didn't think it too strange because I didn't know anything else.

So I was able to go back to school for the last couple of weeks of school before finals while they were in the hospital and everybody was so shocked. My family, me, we were all so shocked that I had twins, and so when we called my family, everybody was so excited. All my family was just so excited, because we've never had twins in my family. And to this day, they're the only twins. It turns out that on my mother's side, there were twins, but these were some of the children that didn't survive. And the belief is that it skips generations, so it was my generation.

ROSS: How did Ken's family accept you?

MARTINEZ: How did they accept me? OK. A little formal. OK. But I knew that they were racist. I knew his father was racist. He used to use derogatory terms and — but his mom was OK. But I knew that there was a distance there with his father. But I thought, Well, that's their problem. We're married. They get to deal with that.

ROSS: So did you develop your consciousness around gender during your marriage with Ken for 17 years?

MARTINEZ: Well, I think it was way before that. It was all the things that I did different from my older sisters. Leaving home and all that, because I knew my brothers got to do everything and nobody questioned them. My mama didn't push them. And this was without knowing anything about the women's movement. It was just something personal that I was doing for myself. I also knew, at that time, I'm not going to raise my children like my mama. They are not going to be raised like my brothers. They are going to know how to take care of themselves, that women are not going to wait on them, that they're the same. No special privileges for the boys. It turns out I had four boys. So I knew that.

But the other thing about not raising my children like my mama was because we didn't have a lot of personal contact. There was not any *carinos*, affection, that she showed. She did to the babies, but once they weren't babies anymore, and that's just the way it was. And I remember that my cousins came to stay, to visit us for the weekend or for a week or something, and their mama, my father's sister, I saw her tuck them into bed and kiss them goodnight. That was a shock to me. I didn't know mamas did that, you know. My mama never did that. So I knew that I was going to show affection and that I was going to spend time, I was going to be involved in my children's lives. I was going to know what they were doing and they were going to know what I was doing. So all of that was forming throughout my life.

ROSS: Now, you said you had two pregnancies and four kids?

MARTINEZ: Right. The first time it was twins. The second time, Jacob, and the fourth time, we adopted Benjamin. So four children, two pregnancies.

ROSS: Two pregnancies, four kids. So you were with Ken for 17 years. How did you break up?

37:03

MARTINEZ: Ooh, that is a long story. Or maybe not so long. But I immediately started to see things. Well, it wasn't even — it was before we got married. Things started to change a little bit just before we got married. Once we made the decision to get married, I sensed a difference in him. You know, he was very distracted and I don't know what was different. I even considered not marrying him momentarily and I said, No, I can't do that. There was a pressure, like, I couldn't go that far, to say no at the

time. And I'm not sure what that was about. It was pressure. But I just felt I had to go through with it.

And what turns out is that I think he was depressed. And over all the years, you know, looking back at all the years, I think I know what it was. Whenever a big decision had to be made, a life-changing decision, he went into depression. He totally acted out. I mean, he acted out anyway, but once big decisions — like the marriage, like new children being born, like buying the house, big decisions like that — oh, it was horrible, just horrible.

ROSS: Seems like we need to take a break. (pause in tape)

MARTINEZ: Well, that's such a painful story. And I'm already thinking in my head, OK, what am I going to edit out of this and what am I going to leave in. But it was a hard marriage. It was a very hard marriage, because the extent that he took to get married, this life-changing step, threw him into a depression. I know that's what it is now. I didn't know it at the time. And so, it was very hard, that first year. And here I was pregnant, but I was in school, so I had something to distract me.

And another interesting thing happened that year. He had a friend that — I don't know if he was schizophrenic or something, some psychological — he was being treated. He wasn't able to work. Wanted to take some time off. He had just gotten married and they had their baby. His wife went back home because — and so Ken was telling me that, you know, this whole situation with his friend. And I knew Jack. He also had the question of why Ken was marrying me, you know. But I knew him, and I thought — and to me, instinctively, naturally, because this is what my family would do, so why shouldn't he come and stay with us for a while, and my ex-husband was like [not sure] — but this is something that my family would do. I said, "It's only for a while, why don't you have him come stay with us?" So he came. And he stayed with us during that first year, for maybe three months, I'm not even sure. It wasn't supposed to be that long. So a lot of things were happening.

And then, we didn't continue the life we had started, like going out to the movies. We were doing all these things. He didn't want to do anything anymore. And I thought, Oh, that was a big letdown, you know. So this is what happens after getting married? And I didn't understand it. Now life is different and it's not as much fun. And it was also — I just lost my train of thought. But I don't know.

ROSS: You were talking about strains in your marriage that may have led up to your breakup.

41:21

MARTINEZ: Uh-hm. But it was him. He was not the man — I didn't really know him. And of course, after everything, I know that you're supposed to pay attention, you know, what your future spouse is like in his family —

that's very telling. I didn't know that. Because I would have really understood what he was going to be like for me.

ROSS: Well, what did you see in his family?

MARTINEZ: They were not very loving. They were not loving at all. They were very cold. And he said a couple of things. Oh, they didn't back each other up. His younger sister was living with his family and she had a son, and I would just see them fighting over — she would tell him to do something, the mother — the grandmother would say something else and then Ken would get in it. It's like, I didn't get it. They didn't back the mom up. And if something happened to the kid, and he was screaming and crying, instead of comforting him, they were arguing with each other about whose fault it was.

And I remember washing the dishes at their house one time and John-John wanted to help me wash the dishes. I said, "No, I'm going to do it by myself." He was really pretty young. And Ken said, "Oh, no, he can wash the dishes" — completely contradicting what I said. And I pointed this out to him later. But these are the things that I should have been paying attention to, that they didn't support each other. They didn't like each other, you know. And I didn't pay attention because he was so loving to me during that time, so I didn't pay attention.

ROSS: So how did you get into formal political work?

MARTINEZ: Formal political work. Well, there was a little consciousness-raising because during those first years of our marriage, also there's everything happening with the Black Panthers here in Oakland. I remember watching the news, live news on TV, of what they were doing and being, you know, under siege by the Oakland police, going to Sacramento with their guns. And I was just, like, Oh my god, how bold. Of course they need to be doing this. I was so — I just — it was amazing that this was happening a couple, a mile or two from us, that this was happening. Because I was in my apartment, you know, with my children, and watching all of this. I was just, like, blown away. Oh my god. And that started happening.

And then, of course, the Vietnam War. All of that was right during that same time. And being outraged and wanting to go on the protest marches. I remember telling my ex-husband, "We need to go to this march. I got it all planned out. My mama can watch the kids. We're going to go to this march." He said no-o-o. He wouldn't answer me. The next thing I knew, the plan was, he was going to the march with his friends. It was too dangerous for the kids to go. You stay with the kids. What? You know. What? I didn't let that happen again, did not let that happen again. The next time, he stayed with the kids, I went with my friends, and we went on this protest march. And I didn't let that happen again.

Also, the Farm Workers were organizing. We had meetings here in this house with the Farm Workers, invited the neighbors. And this neighborhood, we moved to this neighborhood when my oldest were two and a half years old. So that was their upbringing here in this neighborhood. And it is such a great neighborhood. It was so diverse, so integrated, and I was very clear with my ex-husband when we were looking for a house. We're not going to live in a white neighborhood. Our kids are not going to go to a white school. This is all part of who we are. They were mixed heritage. They are not going to grow up with white values in a white school, white neighborhood. So this neighborhood was so integrated: Chinese and Japanese, African American, Latinos, you know, and white folks. Wow. So we moved into, into this neighborhood, 574 Rosal Avenue, here in Oakland, and I love Oakland.

ROSS: Does it have a name, the neighborhood?

MARTINEZ: The Lake Shore area, I guess, the Lake Shore area. But this block in itself was so integrated. It was wonderful. The family across the street — I can't remember their name. Harry. Chinese man, soon after we were here, he would even tell me this story several times. His family was the one that integrated the neighborhood, maybe 15, 20 years before we moved in. He wanted to buy his house across the street. They wouldn't sell it to him. This was a white neighborhood. So he got a friend of his to buy the house for him. And that's how this neighborhood got integrated. Not that long before we got here, and now it's great. Now, you know, as people are moving out and dying, the white folks are buying up the homes, but it's still pretty well integrated. Some of us have been here longer than — I've been here about 37 years, and there are families that have been here longer. So, I hope it stays. It's a great neighborhood and my kids growing up, you know, this was the house that they all came to because we have a big yard. And I loved it.

I was a stay-at-home mom, and that was a very conscious decision. To stay home with my children while they were growing up — and again, the agreement with my ex-husband that when the youngest started school, I would start school, I would go back to school. And we didn't know when that was going to be because at the time, we didn't know how many children we were going to have. But that was the plan and that was the agreement we had.

ROSS: So, tell me about adopting Benjamin.

MARTINEZ: Well, after Eric and Max were born, I knew I wanted to be pregnant at least one more time. And the pregnancy with Eric and Max was great, was wonderful. I had morning sickness for maybe two months, but then it was wonderful. I was very healthy. Everything was great. The birth and everything was wonderful. And so I wanted one more pregnancy. I didn't even know if I'd decided one more pregnancy then. But I knew

49:22

that I wanted to get pregnant again, because it was such a wonderful experience.

And I also — I know I made a lot of the family decisions and presented them to my ex-husband and he would agree, OK, that we were going to space our children. Because all of my brothers and sisters were all two years apart. Yeah, all two years apart and I knew that was too close.

ROSS: Were you using birth control? How did you determine that?

MARTINEZ: Well, at the beginning, no, of course, because we wanted to get pregnant right away. So we were going to space the children, and I knew it was going to be more than two years. And I knew I wasn't going to have ten or 12 kids like my mama did. And so after Eric and Max were born, I just started using the birth control pill. I didn't know it was so new at the time, very new. So I started taking it and so before we were going to have another child, we were going to buy a house.

So we bought this house. I said, "Now I'm going to stop taking the pill." And my ex didn't want to. I said, "No, that was the agreement. I'm going to stop taking the pill." And so, Jacob was born three years, seven and a half months after Eric and Max were born.

And, uh, so, that pregnancy was not as comfortable as the other one. I gained a lot of weight and was not comfortable. And he was late. I guess the first time was because they were born early, so it was a short pregnancy. So the second one, there were not a whole lot of problems with him, no problems at all, it just was uncomfortable. And he wasn't born quite when he was supposed to, maybe a few days later, and it took longer.

With Eric and Max, it was like that. I didn't even know I was in labor. I called the doctor and said this is happening and he said, "Oh, come into emergency." Went into the emergency. This was happening all day long. My ex had stayed home from work that day. I was just feeling uncomfortable, like I had diarrhea. No, that I was constipated. I didn't know that was the beginning of labor. So when we called the hospital, it was 9 or 10 o'clock, maybe. And they said, "Come in. We'll check you out," because it was early. So we got to the hospital and I was in the exam room, and I could feel — I thought the baby was being born, because I could feel myself completely dilating and something coming out. And I was banging on the walls and they came in and said, "Oh my goodness. That is your water bag."

And so that first pregnancy was so easy. And twins, everybody thinks twins are a handful. And to me, they were so easy. The hardest part was just when they needed to be fed every two hours until they slept through the night, but that was, like, three or four months, and then they were wonderful. Wonderful. They were wonderful children. I knew their schedule and so my life was around their schedule. And so they were happy children.

Very well — they were not a problem at all, so I wanted to have more children. So we had Jacob. And I still felt like we needed another child, at least another child. Something was missing. It was not complete. But wasn't looking forward to being pregnant again because of that second pregnancy. This sounds really silly, but I was at the laundromat and picked up a magazine and there was just — you know, advertisements about some group, about children needing, in other countries, needing homes, needing money, whatever.

And at that moment — no, it wasn't even that moment, because I remember when I was a kid — do you remember, there was a program called, it was *Queen for a Day*, that's what it was — I remember *Queen for a Day*. One time there was a Mexican family on, and this Mexican family was being honored because they had foster children and adopted children. And I never knew about foster children or adopted children until I saw this Mexican family, and their story. And I know that's when I thought that I'd like — something made me think I would want to do that someday. And so, at the laundromat — and this was after Eric and Max were born, before Jacob was born — I saw this and it reminded me, there are children that need adoption. I want to adopt. And I didn't even tell my ex-husband until after Jake was born. I knew that that's what I wanted to do.

So after Jacob was born, you know, and I felt we needed another child, I told him about it and he went along with it. He went along with it. So when we were ready, that's what we did.

ROSS: I'm interested in asking why you didn't consider adopting a girl. You already had three boys.

MARTINEZ: Well, that was there, too. But I thought, one girl? There should be two girls. Not just one girl, you know. I don't know what that was. Well, I know what that was about: I wanted my sons to be well adjusted — and I know people would criticize me for this — I didn't want there to be one girl, for her to get all the attention, for her to have privilege, more. I wanted there to be — I wanted my sons to learn equality, and I was just afraid, I was afraid of inequality, you know, that because she was a girl, she would get so much attention and be treated differently. And I don't know how politically correct or anything, but that was it. I don't want just one more girl. If it's going to be, I would like two more girls, but do we want two more children? And I think I had pretty much decided that it should be four.

So we, you know, did all of our preparatory work with Children's Home Society here in Oakland and told — well, the questions from the social worker, and she was really a good social worker. I think she was Swedish. Very open-minded, very. Not only open-minded, just knew about justice, you know. And so some of the questions were, from her were, well, what about someone — oh, because we were an interracial couple within that questioning, yeah, we could adopt a child that is another race. We're different races right here. My children are

interracial children. So we agreed. And during that time, it probably still is happening, it was really hard for families or couples to adopt babies because there was a scarcity of babies. We were given special treatment because we already had children and because we were interracial. So, you know, we're a steady family. We knew what we were doing.

And so I remember getting — she called one time and said, "There are twin girls, Native American twin girls that need a home, babies." Girls! Two. That was exciting to me, and I didn't know much of anything about Native Americans at the time, but I told Ken and he was like, he went for a walk and came back and said, OK, Let's say yes. But it turned out that they found another family. That was like, Oh, I could have had two girls.

But I wanted — But Benjamin is interracial. His father was African American and his mother is white. I can't remember — oh, Norwegian. And they were a young couple, 16, I think. I know it wasn't the policy of the agency at the time, but Ingrid, I think her name was, the Swedish woman, she was going to give us all the information that she had, she was going to give it to us, so she gave all the information about Benjamin's background. We knew what his given name was, what his grandparents did, the hospital he was born in. She gave us all his background.

ROSS: How old was he when you adopted him?

MARTINEZ: He was a month old.

ROSS: Oh, so he was a baby.

MARTINEZ: Yeah. And I had told my children ahead. Before I told anybody out there what we were planning, I told my children. You know, Jacob was — I think when we had first started planning, he must have been two and a half or three, I don't know, and Eric and Max were five or six. So we told them what we were going to do. And then when the time came, and we got this phone call — the kids, they would tell everybody, "Oh, yeah, we're going to adopt," you know, not really knowing what it was about — and then when the day came, she called, and it was our tenth anniversary. Well, it was the tenth anniversary when we went to meet him to bring him home.

But she called and she said, "Well, we have your child. He is a month old. This is his background." And she said, "Come meet him and it's your choice." So, I just remember how exciting that was, and my kids were so excited. Jacob, he was three and a half by then, he went running down the hill, telling Mr. Wilson across the street, "Mr. Wilson, Mr. Wilson. We're gonna have a baby and he's coming home tomorrow." It was just very exciting. We were all really excited.

ROSS: So you parented and raised four boys and it seems like, in terms of the timing, seven years after you adopted your marriage with Ken broke up.

1:02:05

MARTINEZ: No, seven? He was nine. Benjamin was nine. Yeah. And um, you know, things were hard during those times, because my ex-husband had an explosive personality. And I know psychologically — I mean, I know for sure, now, but back then, it was really difficult. He was angry a lot. He was really hard on all of us, and he would separate himself little by little from us. But I had to have my children. I had to have my children.

ROSS: So how did you eventually become divorced?

MARTINEZ: I just knew I could not tolerate this anymore, not only for myself but for all the children. They cannot continue to think this is the way families should be, that me, their mother, tolerates this. That this is the way their future spouses should be or relationships should be. I cannot let them believe this.

ROSS: OK. We're coming up on the end of this tape. And so, we're going to switch to the political career on the next tape.

END TAPE 2

TAPE 3

ROSS: Luz, I'd like you to move now to telling me more about Luz the political activist and how that started, because you're known as an expert on Latina women's reproductive health activism. But where did that start for you?

MARTINEZ: I'm sure it started all through my life, but having made the decision to have as many children as I wanted, not as many as might happen, I did use birth control after the first pregnancy, and I just — I was still a good Catholic girl at the time, going to church every Sunday and just doing what I was supposed to. And being a good Catholic girl that I was, I knew that I had to talk to the priest about my using birth control, because that's illegal. You're not supposed to do birth control. And I had heard from friends that, you know, some priests are going to be OK with that.

So I was encouraged. And I thought this priest, because I knew him a little bit, he looks, he feels like he might be a little progressive, so I expected support. So I went into the confession — still went to confession back then — and I told him, "I just had twins. I'm doing birth control. I want to have more children but I want to space them." He told me, "You can't." You cannot use birth control and stay within the good graces of the Catholic Church. And I thought he didn't understand me. I do want more children. I'm going to space them, and — no, I couldn't do that.

I was so angry, because, just thinking, Who is he to tell me I can't do this? Who is this man who knows nothing about sex, family life, whatever, who is he to tell me? This is not right. I was so mad. I knew I just wanted to kick him. I was angry. Nobody's going to tell me what I can and cannot do, especially around children, about sex and sexuality.

And that was the beginning of my — you know, I had a lot of questions and a lot of criticisms of the Church before, but that was it. Forget it. That's over. And I know that decision was a great big part of who I was and what I needed to do as a woman. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to pay attention to this.

So pretty soon after that, I know by the time Jacob was born, I was not going to church regularly. I remember my mother coming, spending the night with us and it was Saturday night, so Sunday I had to take her to church, and took her to church just because it was her. I wasn't telling her. I wasn't telling anybody quite yet that I wasn't going to church anymore. Um, so that was, I can't remember when, '68 or something like that.

But you know, in my family, I was always the one being different, having a different perspective. Like, no, that's not — you know, around abortion. But this was after I was out of my — married, and an independent woman within a marriage, or whatever that was. So I would be able to speak this, about the Vietnam war, about the Black Panthers,

about don't eat grapes. My family wouldn't pay attention to me. I was just out there.

ROSS: Did you ever meet Cesar Chavez?

MARTINEZ: I did. I did a couple of times, actually. And that was — the first time, it was at St. Elizabeth's, right there where I had gone to high school. So it was, you know, having meetings here. One thing that's important is that I made a commitment to my family, my children, myself, that I was not going to get involved until they were, not grown, but until they were not babies anymore, until I knew they were safe in school, because I was committed to being an at-home mother to them and being here for everything. That was my commitment. And then after that, when the last kid started school and I started school, that's when I would be, do the things I needed to do, politically, for whatever.

But within the Farm Workers, I could do that with my family. They could be involved. I could have the meetings here. I could take my kids to the pickets, you know, and to the boycotts, so I could do that. So I was doing that. And I remember the first meeting, I invited some of the neighbors, and Mrs. Amereux up the hill, African American woman, she said, "I never thought this would happen in this neighborhood. Thank you," she said — that we would have a Farm Workers' meeting here. So that was the political stuff that I was doing at the time. And my ex-husband went along with that. He was good with that, all of it.

So, coming up time for me to go to school. But you know when my son started kindergarten — so that must have been, oh, when was that, I guess that's probably '78, '77 maybe, something like that — so it was time for me to start school. I always had it in my mind, OK, last kid. And I remember that year, and it hit me, it's like, this is the year. This is the time I'm going to go to school. Oh my god. It terrified me, because I had only been to Merritt College one semester. It was a good semester, but it was only one semester, and how many years had gone by? I was 34 by this time, I think, and I was 21 when I had last gone to school. And so it was terrifying, because I had this picture that I'm going to be in school with all these young folks right out of high school, and how am I going to be able to — you know, I'd been out of school so long — how am I going to be able to keep up? I was terrified, even to go and register. But, you know, I braced myself and went to register, and step by step, OK, I'm doing it. It's getting done.

And starting to get involved politically at school with friends that I made in school who were political women. The teachers were political. So this is wonderful. I was having a great time.

ROSS: So what school was this you're enrolled in?

MARTINEZ: It was Merritt College. Not the original Merritt College — they had by that time built one up in the hills, so that's where I went. And by that time the plan was, I was going to be a nurse midwife. First I was going

to be a teacher, then a social worker, but at the end, I was going to be a nurse midwife, so I was going to do all the preparatory classes at Merritt College. And that's what I did. And I had such a wonderful time. I'm so excited about school. It's like, I didn't have to worry about competing with these kids because I had so much life experience, that they had nothing, you know, they didn't have what I had.

And I got involved with the women's center, started going there and then I got hired to work there, and was planning all this stuff, you know, bringing Latina women to do poetry readings. Actually, one of the first women that I brought in, Lucia Corpi was at a party last night, and I hadn't seen her in years. And so, I started helping to bring these women in and women from the Berkeley Women's Health Collective to talk, and they talked about the development of Berkeley Women's Health Collective and the involvement of lesbian women. It's like, Oh, this is where I'm going to learn about lesbians. I know I'm going to have to get involved with the Women's Health Collective to learn this part. So there was so much going on.

There were Latinos and Native Americans running for office at the school, and I met Kevin Pina, and I think he is now the reporter, whatever he is, that's reporting on Haiti this past year, and he's lived there, been there, and does all the reporting on Haiti right now. He was running for student body president. So I went to some meetings and he asked me to support him and I agreed. And I remember a Native American guy coming in and saying, Kevin, forget him. You need to support us. I got involved in all of this and it was great, it was fun.

And I just remember, there was this black woman — I can't remember her name, I guess she was involved politically, too — for some reason, she asked me to go to a meeting with her. Some official at the school, or councilor or something. That woman was so out there and so powerful in telling them what they needed and what needed to happen. I was, like, I had never seen a woman do this before, you know.

So this was all part of my politicization, learning and going out there and being in things and speaking up and writing papers. Just learning — was it Chicanos Studies back there? I can't remember. But there was a Chicano teacher and I took his class and I took Spanish classes and I was just having a ball, having such a great time. I loved it. I knew I was smart and, you know, getting involved in all this stuff and coming home and trying to tell my ex-husband about it. He wouldn't tolerate it. He said, "I don't want to hear about it."

ROSS:

Why do you think that was?

11:40

MARTINEZ:

Oh, the same old shit, about men being afraid of — trying to hang on to their wives. Putting them down and, you know, trying to keep them in their place, and probably afraid of me leaving. I'm sure. What is all that about? It's not anything unique that happened in my marriage. They try to keep you in place. An abusive syndrome, an abusive relationship, and he was abusive with his words, emotionally. He was angry all the time.

His anger was supposed to keep us in place. Not only me but the kids. I never yelled back at him. I would talk to him. I would reason with him. And I had a short memory, because whenever I felt like something needs to happen, I need to leave — actually, I knew that something had to happen, like, the first year we were married, you know, because of the way his anger came out.

And this is important, because when the babies were needing to be fed every two or three hours during the night, he said he wanted to take his turn. He was working, and I said, “I can do it. I don’t have to get up in the morning.” But he insisted. But I remember, like, two or three in the morning when he was up changing their diapers and feeding them — the anger. I mean, he was swearing and angry and just the horrible things that were coming out of his mouth. I said, “I don’t want my children to hear that.” So, I kept telling him, “No, I’ll do it. You let me do it.” But he insisted.

And so at that time, I knew something’s got to change, and I might have to leave him to teach that, so that he can learn this. But I thought I was going to leave and teach him the lesson and come back. Well, that didn’t happen for a long time. So he was going to learn his lesson, you know, that he had to change if he was going to be in this family. But I would keep forgetting. Oh, he’s going to change, he’s going to change.

You know, it’s a syndrome. I knew that battered women go through this, thinking things are going to be different, or it’s not that bad, and for sure, I wasn’t getting physically abused, but it was the emotional stuff. I know, years later, I know that that was what was happening to me. So when he said that to me that one night — “I don’t want to hear about it. That’s all you ever talk about” — I knew I couldn’t talk to him any more. So I would talk to other people. And I couldn’t, I didn’t even do anything about school until my kids were in bed. I put them to bed, you know, they went to bed pretty early. So they were in bed, then I could do my work. And he was in bed, and so that’s how it worked.

So I knew, way back, that first year, that something was going to happen. That we couldn’t continue this way. But it took me years to tell him, “If you don’t do this, this might happen. We have to go to counseling.” And so nothing ever happened.

ROSS: So, I’ve heard you describe going to the founding conference of the National Black Women’s Health Project.

MARTINEZ: That was after.

ROSS: Right, after the marriage had broken up. But so from ’78 when you were getting involved with the Berkeley Women’s Center to ’83, what was happening to you both personally but also politically?

15:58

MARTINEZ: Again, the politicalization of just being involved and knowing what was going on, and then deciding to go to the Berkeley Women’s Health Collective to do their training. They were amazing back then. They’re

not like that anymore. But I knew I had to do that, so I signed up to [do their training]. And it was supposed to be, like, seven months. It went on for a year, and more, because they kept adding things to their training. So I was in school, going a couple of evenings a week to this, and just meeting all of these women, you know, some that had been there for a long time, some were just getting there. Again, politics, the politics of women, the politics of lesbian women. It was wonderful. I was just learning so much.

And then, the medical training they were giving us — because I was going to be a nurse midwife, I knew I had to go do that training. But it was also to learn about lesbians and women and, oh, the powerful role that Berkeley Women's Health Collective had in all of this work.

ROSS: So they were doing cervical self-exams?

MARTINEZ: Yes. And we were learning how to do that, and I had never seen my cervix or anybody else's cervix, so it was, oh, Jesus, and I was so — it was just amazing. I remember that night when we were going to learn by examining each other. This was going to be our first lesson. But so, looking at other people, and then having them look at me. And I thought, oh, this is exciting. What is this going to be like? And one thing that they didn't do was to prepare us. They didn't prepare us emotionally, intellectually [for] what's going to happen. And after all the work that I'd done, that needed to happen. But I was OK with it. I don't know what the other women were going through, but I was, like, wow, this was exciting.

The first cervix I saw, it's like, wow, this is somebody else's. It wasn't mine. It was, like, so amazing to look at somebody else's cervix, and to see what we look like inside. Wow. This is amazing. And then to have women look at me, and I was so OK with it. Because at first I was a little nervous, but then as soon as we started looking at each other, it's, like, wow, this is amazing. I just got into it, like, what a wonderful thing, you know, that we can look at each other and learn this way, and be so intimate with each other. Wow, that was great. And so, I got into it right away so that nervousness went away.

But I know they need to prepare you. You can't just do it. I mean, they did it, but where was that spiritual preparation, you know?

ROSS: Were there other women of color involved in the Berkeley —

MARTINEZ: A couple.

ROSS: Tell me, what was the politics of race like then?

MARTINEZ: They were very interesting. The woman that I first met, the first woman of color was Julianne Brown. And I still see her occasionally. Whew. That was some woman. She was powerful. She was strong. She was outspoken. She told white women what was what and she told

everybody what was what. She was powerful. And so, you know, I was learning from women of color, of course, how to be — like the women at Merritt and Julianne, and at that time, I guess from focus-group research or whatever, she said that we needed to open another clinic just for women of color, because women of color were not coming. So we had to open another one for women of color. And I was there.

I was learning so much about what to do, how to do everything. Oh, it was amazing. There was so much going on. And to get to know lesbian women, and them asking me questions and I answering them and they'd be OK with everything. Wow. I remember one of our classes was to learn about lesbians and the politics and all of that. And I remember one lesbian woman saying, "Well, would you be comfortable in having a lesbian take care of your children?" And I'm just learning, just meeting people, and I said to her, "I don't know. I don't know right now." And she said, "Well, thank you for your honesty. That's good. Thank you, Luz." So, it was just really good that way.

ROSS: Was there a period when you started questioning or interrogating your own sexuality?

21:10

MARTINEZ: A little bit after, later. But to me, it was just learning from these women. Some of them would say they were always lesbian. And some would say, politically they were lesbians — they became lesbians for political reasons. Like, whoa. This is something I never knew, that women could choose to be lesbians. I never knew. Well, I never knew anything. But to hear these women speak about becoming lesbians or always being lesbians — like, whoa, this is amazing.

So that was fun. That was a powerful time, all of that: being in school, working at the women's center, doing this training with the Berkeley Women's Health Collective. Whew. And no wonder my ex-husband was afraid. He saw me growing, you know. He saw me growing.

ROSS: So tell me about —

MARTINEZ: And I know he was afraid that I would become lesbian.

ROSS: They always are.

MARTINEZ: I know. It's so crazy.

ROSS: We should be so lucky. So tell me about the journey of consciousness that led you to the 1983 conference of the National Black Women's Health Project.

MARTINEZ: It was part of the Berkeley Women's Health Collective. That year that I was in the training was, you know, I had made the decision: I'm going to — it's going to end. He's got to go. Up until the time, I guess, when I

told him in February of 1981 that he had to leave — I want a divorce, you got to go — I was still in that training. So I dropped out of the training because there was so much going on. But Julianne asked me to be on the board. I can do that, OK, so I could do that. And so I stayed involved in the Berkeley Women's Health Collective and kept going to meetings and learning more and more and, you know, helping to establish the women of color clinic.

And so I separated and divorced in 1981. It was in 1983 when Byllye Avery came to town to the Berkeley Women's Health Collective to talk about this conference. Or maybe it was in 1980. I guess it was in 1982 that she came to tell us about this conference and why it was important. And I was still in school at the time. By that time, I was at Hayward State University, in their Bachelor of Science and Nursing program. That was going to be my first step before I became a nurse midwife.

And so Byllye Avery came. It was a small meeting. It was the board and a few other women from the collective. I didn't know anything. I just went to the meeting to support. I'm on the board, I need to go to this meeting. Oh, and Byllye Avery at that time did not dress the way she dresses now. She was wearing pants and this funky little sweater, you know, and so humble and unassuming.

And told us the story that so many of us have heard, of how, in the research that she did, had found out about what was happening to black women. And black women didn't know. And they needed to know. And she showed us some slides, I think. Half way into her presentation, I knew I was going to Atlanta. I knew I didn't have any money. I had never been to the East Coast. Somehow I was going to do this. And so, I went.

25:51

(gap in tape from 25:33 to 25:51)

And there's more to that before I went, because I borrowed money from another board member to go to this. I was in school, working part-time. I didn't know how I was going to pay it back but I just knew that I had to go. So, in preparation for going, there were some women from the Berkeley Women's Health Collective that were going to go, and so I was going to be part of that contingent. I think there were three or four of us. So we were going together, and at that time, I had recently met Felicia Ward, who, you know, in time, became a big part of the [California Black Women's Health Project]. I had met her at a training, an EST training. I had already done the weekend training and this was a workshop, I guess, a weekend workshop. And the weekend workshop happened to be, "All you ever wanted to know about sex." I had been looking for the workshop "All you ever wanted to know about relationships," but that was filled, so I took this one, and Felicia was in there.

And so, after I got the news about this conference happening in Atlanta, I told Felicia, "I think there's something you need to go to." I think that's what she remembers when she tells her story, that I told her,

“You need to go there.” And so, immediately, she says, “Yes, I want to go.” So we planned on going.

At the time, another woman that I’m sure you know, Zakia Somburu, we were here and stayed together and we were riding back and forth to school together. I had put up an ad asking for riders, and so she answered the ad, so I would drive her to school. And so I told her about this conference and she said, “I need to go, too.” And so it was Felicia, Zakia, me and then some women from the collective that went. Ah, it was so exciting. That was such an exciting time. I was trying to remember the sequence. OK. I was at Hayward State at the time.

And so we went to Atlanta together. Again, I’d never been to the East Coast, to the South. And Julianne Brown went. Julianne Brown — already I’d learned so much from her and she’d given me so much — just by watching her, by being in her presence, and seeing how she did things. And so I just learned so much. So that conference was so amazing, so amazing. The hundreds of women that were there, hundreds of women that were there. And every workshop was jam packed. Just the stories that came out, knowing that all of this had been done by women of color, by mostly African American women.

I’d never been involved in the Chicana movement. I didn’t know how much was happening here in the Bay Area. I don’t remember ever reading anything in the newspapers or seeing anything in the news about the Chicana movement, so I wasn’t involved. But coming to this conference and seeing all these women, generations of women, knowing they had done all this and seeing women do this, this amazing conference, another life-changing experience for me. And being with these African women and I always say that I probably was the only Latina woman there. I know I saw several other — several white women there. I think I saw an Asian woman there. But I think I might have been the only Latina woman there. And to me, it was such a privilege to know that I was there, that it was OK for me to be there. I just have all these pictures of the heat, of people being out in the sun, being in — I don’t think it was a church but it felt like a church.

ROSS: Sister’s Chapel.

MARTINEZ: It was a church. And the windows being open and people hanging in the windows. Oh my god. And Byllye Avery speaking and all these — I don’t even remember who these women were. All the experience. Hoo. Powerful, powerful. And knowing I was there for a reason. I got to be there. I got to be there. And I got to bring these two women that were friends of mine, or were acquaintances of mine, or whatever. And I got to bring them and then they became friends. And how important it was for all of us, every one of us that was there.

And after the conference was all over, being invited to Byllye’s house. Our group was invited to Byllye’s house. Oh my god, I get to meet everybody in their presence, you know. And they were so down home, all of them. And just so wonderful. And also, knowing that there

was this workshop that Lillie Allen did that was just for black women and it wasn't for me and I thought, oh, this is so powerful that they kept saying, this is just for us, and nobody else can be there. Wow. You can do that. You can do that. And they did it. And it was powerful. And I got to hear about it from Felicia and from Zakia. And I don't think Julianne went to that workshop.

ROSS: That was the first Black and Female workshop.

32:44

MARTINEZ: That was the first one. And just knowing how powerful it was, you know, just from Felicia and from Zakia. Just being a part of history. Just — I knew this was a part of history, because the stories that they told for the first time. They were expecting 400 women, and 1200 women came.

ROSS: Well, closer to 2000, actually. I think the official count was, like, 1700, sometimes we say.

MARTINEZ: The number keeps changing. But I thought at that time, it was 1200 that they — and from Alaska, from different places all around the country. I remember meeting the women from Alaska. I didn't know there were black women in Alaska, you know. So powerful. And meeting these midwives, these grandmothers that were midwives. I went to that workshop because I thought that was still my plan, to be a midwife. It was just powerful and amazing.

ROSS: So how did it have an impact on once you returned home and determined to do?

MARTINEZ: Again, it was — I wasn't sure. I knew that I was going to be a midwife. I wasn't sure how it was all going to work in. But one thing that happened was that Felicia talked with Lillie Allen. Lillie Allen, of course, was at this barbecue in Byllye Avery's yard. And Felicia talked with Lillie Allen about Self-Help, about the work that had happened in that workshop and how can we do it? How can we have it in Oakland? We all lived in Oakland. And so Lillie said, "Well, go to Mike White. He's doing some of this work. You will learn about the process from him." So Felicia was relentless, you know, she immediately came back home, looked up Mike White, started going to these classes. I don't know how long she had been going to these classes. She called me up and she said, "Luz, you need to come. I've checked this out. It's safe. Come." And so I went, and I liked the class. She was there, or was she there?

ROSS: Was Mike White a reevaluation counselor in training?

MARTINEZ: Yes. And Lillie Allen knew him. He was African American, and was well known in that circle. If Lillie Allen sent us to him, he must be OK. I don't think Felicia was there. I'd have to check with her. But the first

time I went, I can't remember if she was really there, but I know I was mad, because, yes, Mike White was African American, he was of color, but everyone else in the damn room was white. What is going on here? I was mad. I thought Felicia said it was safe. What is this? This is white folks. It's not safe. And I remember saying it, you know, being really mad and telling the group how I felt. So that was my first experience with the Self-Help process.

But then Felicia, you know, was there and Mike told me about Paulita Ortiz. She was at a weekend workshop. So she wasn't there. She was at another reevaluation counseling workshop. I didn't meet her that first time. And there were other people of color but they all weren't there. And I was so mad. Mike tells the story sometimes of how mad I was, and I was standing there with my hands on my hips, you know, upset.

So I stayed learning that process with Felicia, with Paulita and then, I guess Zakia and Felicia began planning to start a group here in the Bay Area and they were meeting about it and planning it and then they were going to have their first meeting. And Zakia invited me. It was going to be for black women and Zakia invited me. "Zakia, I'm not supposed to be there. This is for black women. I shouldn't be there. Other women won't understand it." And so I didn't go. And I know it was the right decision. So the group progressed here and became a very strong group, and Felicia became a very strong leader, beginning here, and did a lot of training with Lillie Allen. All of it. And I, you know, was not involved in the group but every time they did something that was open, I would go. Every time Lillie Allen came, or Byllye came, I would go, because that was — I could go to that, but I knew I shouldn't be in that small Self-Help group. So that was part of what I was doing.

ROSS: Describe your meeting with Paulita.

38:45

MARTINEZ: I'm trying to remember. I have a memory of her sitting back, like in the dark part of the room, and I kept trying to talk to her and engage her in conversation and she was not forthcoming. And I didn't understand that. Later, she told me that she was, I don't know, she was shy, I don't know what it was. I'm still very much involved with her. We talk regularly. I'm going to ask her, like, what was that. I think she said she was a little afraid that I was, I guess, assertive. You know, at some point, I did become — I was assertive when I needed to be, but I guess it became part of who I was. And I kept trying to make friends with her, and it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all to make friends with her, but eventually, we became the best — you know, through the work and through everything — we became such close friends. And eventually, she moved into the apartment that's attached to my home, when she was leaving an abusive relationship and was looking for a place to be. So I said, "I have this apartment. My tenant's leaving, if you want it." And I really wanted her to come because I wanted to get close to her, you

know. And so she came, and we developed a very wonderful, close relationship, and with the Self-Help, we just became so much closer.

ROSS: Well, what's your definition of Self-Help? Describe it.

MARTINEZ: It is self work. It is supporting each other in our personal, most intimate development, and learning how to be that support, learning how to be fearless. The fearless counselor, I think, is what Mike calls it. You can't back off, no matter what's happening with that person. You have to be stable, centered, and not let things trigger you. Do your work so that you can be stable, centered, and balanced. And it's been a long process for me to get to that point, because Paulita was always the one in charge doing that. That was her role. So, I was not a fearless counselor until just a few years ago, that I feel, but I learned so much. And, you know, being recently single, and all of that. I did great. I was so good, just really becoming the full-fledged woman that I had always been working towards, needed to be.

Because on my own, after that — it took a couple of years to really get over all the emotional scars of having lived for 17 years with this man and even though a lot of it was not good, just the mere living together is something you need to process and put it in place in your life. So it took me about two years that I could — I mean, I thought about dating, pushed myself, did social things, but I could never really go out with anyone until after those couple of years.

And the self-work that I did — the first work that I did, even before Self-Help, was EST, which to me so much resembles Self-Help except that it's not peer counseling, it's a counselor working with individuals and in that way, working with the group, but the same techniques, the same kinds of things to make you see, to have those realizations, to begin making new changes. And to me, that's where my work started, and that was before, actually, the divorce. That was one of the things I told my ex that we had to do. You don't do that, we might not be together. And when I told him that, and he said, "Well, I'm not going to do it unless you do it." I didn't think I needed to do it. I was OK. It was him. So I said, "OK, I'll do it." I got so much out of that [training], and that was really where I got the strength and everything. When I did that training, I could say, OK, by this time, I'm going to be out of this marriage. And so, that's what did it.

But then, when I started doing the Self-Help, it was so similar. The techniques might have been a little different. You were more confrontational, oh, but they worked so quickly. Things happen in seconds, you know. Very quickly, things happen. Because they knew how — they were fearless. They were absolutely fearless. They would get in your face. They were fearless.

But I saw things happen in that room, and things happened to me, you know, when I got the courage to put my hand up and they called on me, you know, and things happened. And I'm never comfortable in

saying anything in big groups. But my ex and I did the trainings separately, so, you know, the kids and all that.

And of course, I was the only Latina in the group. No, there was another Latina women. I had actually signed up for the black. I didn't want to be with all those white folks. And they let me go through until they finally asked the question, "Are you black?" "No." "I'm sorry, you can't be at that training."

ROSS: Oh my goodness.

MARTINEZ: So they actually gave me the rate for the black [training].

ROSS: Well, we're at the half-way mark on this tape, so I'd like to talk about moving Self-Help into the founding of the National Latina Health Organization. We're going to spend a lot of time on that in the subsequent tapes. So let's begin to set that story up and introduce it.

38:45

MARTINEZ: OK. But this was part of it, because when I started doing the Self-Help, I saw the similarities. I even told Mike about them. No one else had done that, except for Felicia. That's where we had met. And that was powerful work. Like I said, it's what moved me to finally get out of the marriage. So I was still in school at the time, and at the time my ex-husband left I had just started at Hayward State University. It was so challenging, because, you know, trying to emotionally adjust, not only emotionally but practically, because being a two-parent house is very different from being a one-parent house, especially when the money is not the same. Because he did things and I did. We had our roles in what we needed to do physically. But that adjustment was horrendous. And school suffered. I suffered. The kids suffered. Things changed.

And so, after two and a half years, what I did was, I guess, the second year, I dropped out of the clinical part of it, because it was just so difficult. I wasn't able to retain everything. I was not doing well. And so, I dropped the clinical part of it and did the general educational part of it. That was easy. I could do that, you know. I was doing well again. And then I went back into the clinical and couldn't do it. So I had to decide what I needed to do. And it was so stressful. I thought I was getting an ulcer. I was having heart palpitations, you know, things would happen and I didn't take them seriously. I forget what that psychological term is, but –

ROSS: Denial?

MARTINEZ: It was more than that. I was not functioning the way that I should be. And with these physical symptoms, I knew I had to do something, so I finally made the decision to drop out of school. Of course, the economic — woo. There was no money to do anything. There was money enough to keep my kids in private school. I don't know how I did that. What I was getting from my ex-husband was not enough. I was trying to be fair

and all of that, and I was not getting enough money. And oh, then that last year when my kids were in high school, the older ones, they were 18 their senior year and in the agreement, at 18, he would stop contributing for them. But when I realized they were still going to be in school, I said, "No, we have to change this." He said, "Don't worry, I'm not going to do that to you." But he did that to me. He stopped giving me money for them when they were 18.

And so that's about the time that I dropped out of school myself. And as soon as I dropped out — I was working part-time at IBM, so they had already asked me to work full time, so I knew they would take me on. I asked them first and so I was going to start working full time. It was over the Christmas break, and I dropped out of school.

And immediately, it was like, all of the symptoms disappeared. It was like being on vacation. I had a nine-to-five job and my job ended at five. I didn't have to go home and study. I didn't have to prepare papers. I didn't have to do all this reading. I was on vacation and I was making OK money at that time. So I was able to save money and take care of all the needs of my children, pay back loans that I had taken out from [my]family. Actually my mother told me I didn't have to pay back that loan. She helped me during that whole time. So I dropped out of school and I was on vacation.

Then I was able to look around and say, OK, what do I really want to do? What is my future? And I had already been to the conference in Atlanta. I even tried labor coaching through Highland Hospital, and the two or three births that I assisted in, I realized, I don't want to be in the delivery room. I don't want to be here. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I know I want to have more of an impact. Something. I didn't know. So that was during this whole time that the National Black Women's Health Project was developing here locally. It was 1986. No, it was 1985.

The International Conference was happening in Nairobi. I had money. I could go. There were women at the Collective that wanted to go. So we made plans. There were three or four of us that made plans to go together. So we were meeting and making plans and at one point, they decided they were not going to go, they can't go, they didn't have the money. I knew I needed to go, so when that fell through, I called Byllye Avery up, because I knew that she was taking a group. I said, "Byllye, can I go with your group? My plans fell through." She said, "Of course."

So that, again, was part of my path. You know, I'm doing everything I'm supposed to do, not knowing what I'm doing. But it was all part of my path. So I went with Byllye Avery and maybe 16 to 18 women. All African American women except two, I think. Two white women and I can't remember her name, took her husband. Felicia was a part of that group. So we went together from here to meet everybody in New York.

What a trip that was. Again, life changing. I knew I had to go. And I just, again, everything that happened at that conference in Nairobi, in Africa? There I was. It was mind blowing to me, that I could do all of

this, that I could travel everywhere. And actually, I had gone to — no, I went to Barbados later with them. So many things. I was in Africa with these black women, and we went to Abidjan, we went to Senegal, and then to Nairobi. When we were in Senegal, we went to Goree —

ROSS: Goree Island.

55:05

MARTINEZ: Goree Island. Going to the borders where the African people were kept before being taken in chains to America, being with these African women to share this experience. I knew it was a privilege to be with them, to be in the presence of these women coming home and experiencing — these women had never been to Africa either. Oh my god. I can just see the pictures of their reactions in my mind right now. Lillie Allen, of course, was part of the group. Oh my god. All of this was part of my path to this experience with these women.

When we were in Nairobi, and we shared rooms, when we were in Nairobi, oh, I can't remember her name right now, but the woman I shared a room with, I knew she didn't want to be with me. I knew she would rather be with an African woman than with me. I could feel it, though she never said it. And I just remember one morning, I — because we were going every day early and coming back late, and one morning, I was just exhausted and I didn't want to get up to go with everyone. I just was in my room just thinking, "Why am I here? Why am I having all these experiences with these women?" — you know, feeling bad that this woman didn't want to be with me. I said, "I don't know why this is all happening, but I know it has to happen. I know this is part of everything and I don't know what it all is, and I'm sorry but I'm here."

I had these amazing conversations with all these women. I can't remember their names right now and I know the names so well. But the women that I traveled with and then the women that we met there, and all of these — going to these collectives and being welcomed and just all these experiences that I had with everyone. I'm here for a reason. I'm here for a reason. I'm sorry you're having a problem with me being here, but I'm here for a reason.

ROSS: So when do you think you began to get an idea of what that reason was?

MARTINEZ: It was another year before it hit me. Another year before it hit me. It was International Women's Day in 1986, March 8. Still being involved in anything to do with women of color and health. A friend of mine helped me to see that. Barbara Lucia. We became friends. She's Italian, yeah, she's Italian. We became friends at Hayward State. When I dropped out of school, I don't know what's next. She said, "Well, what's important to you?" And I said, "Women of color and health." She said, "That's all you need to know right now." And she was right. That's all I needed to know. Just keep doing what I'm doing. And to me, even before that, I knew. I'm a very patient person. And I know, eventually things come

clear. I can make a decision and then the way will appear, you know. And so, I know. I didn't know how long I was going to take. I don't know what I'm going to do in the meantime, but I'm on my way.

ROSS: OK. When you say, "a way will appear," tell me more about being on your path and how that works for you and we'll close the tape with that.

100:16

MARTINEZ: I guess it's like all the decisions that I made [that have been] important. I don't know. It's like knowing I'm going to leave my mom's house before I got married. All I had to do was say it, and there it was. The opportunity was there. Just knowing, I'm going to have a different life than my sisters before me. Some things are going to be different. And, like, with my children. I didn't know how many children I'm going to have, but I'll know when it's time, and when it's time, I'm going to have a different life.

ROSS: So you have an ability to call forth from the universe that which you can envision?

MARTINEZ: Oh, that's the way it is, yes. Yeah. I can do that. And I know that my actions have reactions and reactions and reactions. What is that saying? A butterfly flaps its wings on the other side of the world. Things happen. And I know it has an impact on everyone around me. My children. Their children. My mother. My brothers and sisters. Their families. The work that I do. It has an impact. But I don't always know how much of an impact, and it's always a surprise to me, you know, it's always a surprise to me.

ROSS: That's an important power to be used responsibly, because you can also call forth negative and have to deal with that, so.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, there's something much more powerful than us human beings. We have our role, you know, we get here and we follow our path, and it's all been decided, you know. I just don't know what's been decided yet. So I'm figuring it out and letting it unfold and not fighting it.

ROSS: All right. Well, thank you, Luz. We're at the end of our third tape. We will resume taping tomorrow. Again, on behalf of Smith College Voices of Feminism Project, I want to thank you. We've actually done three full hours.

MARTINEZ: Wow. This has been a wonderful experience. Thank you.

ROSS: Thank you.

END TAPE 3

TAPE 4

ROSS: Today is December 7, 2004. This is tape four of the interview with Luz Alvarez Martinez in Oakland, California, as part of the Voices of Feminism project. My name is Loretta Ross. I'm doing the interview. Hi, Luz.

MARTINEZ: Good afternoon.

ROSS: Good to see you back. Part Two. Luz, we left off with your talking about the importance of spiritual practices and spirituality to you. So could you give us a little bit more detail and information about your spiritual beliefs?

MARTINEZ: Yes, and I did talk earlier about being Catholic, a good Catholic girl, and leaving the church in my early twenties. And since my early twenties, I looked for about 25 years for something to replace that and had never found anything. When I would talk with people from different religions, like, No, that's not what I need. I don't need another religion. I would try different things and nothing fit.

And it was in 1991 that I went to an all-night *relación* that Danza Xitlalli, an Aztec tradition, was putting on. And actually I had seen Aztec dancers in the parks and different events, and I thought, wow. I thought they were cultural, I thought, that's pretty bold that they're doing this. But I didn't really understand what it meant, what it was. And I had met Carlos Rios about seven years before, and he told me about Danza, what his experience was. And I kept thinking it was cultural, and didn't understand it. And every time I saw him over these seven years, he was, "When are you going to come? When are you going to come to an *ensayo*? And I was kind of, you know, "Oh, I'm too busy, can't do it."

And then I went to this all-night *relación* with some friends, and I wasn't intending to stay. We were going there, actually Dia de los Muertos is more for — the evening is on November 1 and goes through November 2. So this was the Halloween weekend. So we had gone to a couple of events. I thought they were Halloween events, but I guess they weren't. Dia de los Muertos was one of those events. And then we went to this all-night *relación* in San Francisco, an all-night vigil for the Dia de los Muertos. And as soon as I walked in the room, something came over me, just surrounded me, enveloped me. And my experience was seeing this beautiful altar, huge altar, with candles and flowers and pictures and objects and smelling the *copal*. I don't think it was sage. It was like the incense that comes off of the trees. It's the stuff —

ROSS: Sap.

MARTINEZ: The sap that comes off the trees, and it's used in these ceremonies, and it's burned. The smell is really strong, and it just got into me — the

smell got into my body. Just looking around and watching everything that was happening, experiencing it. I know that I immediately felt that something was very familiar, in my mind, except that I had never been here before. I've never done anything like this before. So everything was familiar: the smells, the sounds, the sights. And then the way that people were talking to each other. And this was being led by a woman, Macuil Xochitl, she was leading it. And all the little ceremonies that they did throughout the night were very balanced, men and women, always. And all night this was happening and they would call each other *compadrito*. It's the very personal, affectionate way of addressing a *compadre*. It was just so beautiful and so equal and so balanced.

Again, I had no intention of staying there but as soon as I walked in there, it was like, I was personally experiencing this, no one else was there. And the friends that I came with, one of them came up to me and knew before I knew that I was going to stay the night, and she was going to spend the night at my home. She said, "Why don't you give me the keys and I'll see you in the morning." And I looked at her and said, "Oh, yeah, OK." So then I knew that I would be staying all night. I made kind of a conscious decision.

And it was just so wonderful, the whole night long. The whole night long. Beautiful ceremonies, beautiful flowers, everything. I was oblivious to the people around me, but not to the ones that were performing the ceremonies. And when it came to be dawn, that's when the dancers were going to dance. Just before dawn, they all went to different parts of the room, as it was a big, auditorium-like room, with windows on two sides, and so they all kind of went to the edges and around the room to begin to put on their *trajes*, the outfits that they use to dance in. And just watching them prepare was like another ceremony — their *copilli*, their headdresses, the feathers — just watching everybody so carefully prepare that, and putting on their clothing, their special, beautiful clothing, it was like another ceremony.

ROSS: Well, off to the side of you is your headdress, your own *copilli*.

7:10

MARTINEZ: The *kopele* I use when I dance.

ROSS: If you don't mind, I'm going to attempt to catch a fuller shot of it. Of course, the camera's not really cooperating, but let me see if I can switch it for a moment. It's a beautiful headdress.

MARTINEZ: (buzz in tape) So at dawn, they begin to dance, and there may be, I don't know, 50 to 80, maybe a hundred dancers, I don't know how many. And the room wasn't that big. And they danced in a circle. And just when they were beginning to dance, the sun started to come up. And it was this golden, beautiful light coming through the windows, just like gold. And I just couldn't believe it. And I was experiencing that this golden light was coming in as they were dancing. And those of us that weren't dancing were sitting around the edges of the room. And there were so

many dancers that if they passed, sometimes their feathers brushed against us. It was such a beautiful, spiritual experience, all of it, all of it. And I remember looking out the window and seeing cars. It was beginning to be, like, 6 o'clock in the morning, and I'm just so excited, and all these people out there, they have no idea what was happening in this room. It was so amazing. It was my spiritual awakening. And then to realize that I had been looking for so many years, so far around, and this was my indigenous tradition. Waiting, looked so far, and it was within. It was within me, in my ancestors. Such an amazing awakening right there.

And I went home so happy, so elated. I finally went to bed, I went to sleep, and then I got a call from a good friend of mine who is a spiritual woman, and I began to tell her. I was just waking up and I began to tell her my experience from last night. Before I could even finish, she said, "Oh, I know what's happened to you," she said. "Your indigenous memory has awakened." That's what it was. My memory had been awakened. And of course, it was true because it all seemed so familiar. That was Angelina Borbon, a very good friend of mine, and she was a part of the Danza community from Mexico. And she knew exactly what happened. She said, "That's it. You're absolutely right."

And I do need to say that I was 49 when I had that experience, 49 or 50? Anyway, I began to dance at the age of 50. It was like — I couldn't — I'm a healthy woman, I'm an active woman, but to know that at 50 years old, I began to be an Aztec *danzante*. It's like, wow. Just amazing that at 50 I started to dance, and now I've been dancing for about 12 years, and I'm still a very strong dancer.

And it's a way of life. Because all the dances, they're all ceremonies, they're all prayers, and we dance to keep the world in balance — to keep, first of all, our individual selves in balance, our families and our communities, the world, and even to the outward cosmos. It's to keep everything in balance, and each dance is a prayer and is significant. And they all have their names and the steps that we do represent different things. And I'm just beginning to learn. I've been dancing for 12 years, but there's so much I don't know. So much I don't know.

So that became my spiritual balance. Because the work that I did — I had already been doing my political organizational work, but there was always something missing, and so that completed it. So now I have everything that I need to keep my life in balance.

ROSS:

Well, if you don't mind, I'd like to talk about how you've infused this understanding of spirituality into your feminist work and talk about the founding of the National Latina Health Organization and how you've balanced those two things.

12:35

MARTINEZ:

Yeah, and it's not separate. Everything is together. It's that body/mind/spirit balance. And there's nothing else that I absolutely need in my life right now. I've got Danza now. I have my work. I have

my family, and I'm bringing it to my family now. So I will talk about that later, how I'm bringing it to my children and my extended family.

But the founding of the organization of the National Latina Health Organization: it was founded on International Women's Day March 8, 1986. I did talk earlier about [how] I was looking where I was going to fit in — once I knew I was not going to be a nurse midwife, OK, so where do I fit in? — and had been involved with National Black Women's Health Project and all the women there. And I want to name some of the women that I absolutely remember and have been so supportive: Pam Freeman, Eleanor Hinton-Hoytt, Julia Scott, and of course, Byllye Avery and Lillie Allen. And there are other women, but those are the ones that I remember right now. And how open, embracing they were of me, a Latina woman, before I even knew that I was going to found an organization modeled after the project.

So it was after that conference in 1983, it was three years later, that the organization was founded. So, you know, it was all part of my path (unclear) re-evaluation counseling, and we did form a good, very strong friendship. We've had rocky times, but using the process of Self-Help, we got through it and we didn't walk away.

So, this day, International Women's Day, 1986, I had been involved in a women's conference that was held in the Women's Building in San Francisco. It was all very significant, where it was, when it was, all of it. And so I helped bring together a panel of women of color to talk about health issues for women of color: Native American, African American, Asian, and Latina issues. I don't even remember who spoke on behalf of Latinas on that panel, but it was a powerful panel.

Paulita was at this conference with me, and after that workshop, Alicia Bejarano, who I didn't know, I'd met her that day, came up to me and said, "That panel that happened there, that needs to happen in Spanish, you know, for Latina women." And it was at that moment that the whole big old light bulb went up in my head. All these things that I was doing with Black Women's Health Project, the travels that I did with them, going to the conferences, going to the talks, going to all of it, it all fell into place for me.

Other people, I think, saw it before I did, because I remember a woman telling me after coming back from the conference in Atlanta, "You should do that for Latina women." I remember when she said that to me, I looked at her and I thought, Who does this woman think I am? — and just forgot it, forgot all about it. It was years later that I remembered that she said that to me, Lisa Lemus said that to me. So, you know, other people knew that I should be doing this before it hit me in the face. Yeah, that's what this has been all about! And so at that moment, a light bulb went off when Alicia said that to me. And I turned to Paulita and I said, "She's right." And I had the model of the National Black Women's Health Project.

So I told them a little bit about it, because, you know, we didn't spend that much time together. We did have lunch together and I did tell

them my experiences with the Black Women's Health Project, and by that time, they had already been founded. Was it '85 –

ROSS:

Eighty-four was when they incorporated.

17:56

MARTINEZ:

They were already in place for a couple of years and so I told them about it, and they were interested. And something else that's very significant: the next day, I was leaving for Cuba for the first time. I was going with a group of women, mostly women of color, to visit, to see what the health system was like in this country. And like I said, everything had a purpose, everything had its place. I was moving, because just recently, before I made the decision, before I signed up to go on this trip to Cuba, I had read Alice Walker, an essay she had done on her experience in Cuba, and I never knew anything about the real story about Cuba. I just knew that it was a communist country and, you know, all the lies about Cuba.

So when I read this essay by Alice Walker, I thought, Oh, I need to go, I want to see what this is like. Because she talked about the revolution and what happened after the revolution and how health care came to everyone and 99 percent literacy. And the only thing that wasn't wonderful about it was their stance and attitude towards homosexuals. But everything else, like, wow, this is so wonderful. And so I said [to myself], One of these days, I need to go. Within two or three weeks, the opportunity came up. A friend told me about this meeting to plan this trip to go to Cuba and I thought, Oh my god, this is magic, you know, just put it out there and it happens. It's magic. And I had the money to go because I was now working full time at IBM. So I had the money to go so it was not a problem. So I had a plan to go on March 9. So it was all very significant, everything. Everything was in place.

And so I told Paulita and Elizabeth, "When I get back, we'll start meeting and planning." And of course, that trip to Cuba was so amazing, so amazing, because things I knew that we were going to be working towards for Latina women in the United States I could see were already in place in Cuba.

ROSS:

Such things as –

MARTINEZ:

Such things as women's equality. Women had a say. Women were listened to. They were in power. They had their own organizations or groups. We went to some of their meetings. We heard their stories. We met with the children's groups. We heard their stories. We saw things in action. We saw health care. We talked with medical students, women that were going to be doctors, and they talked about what it was all about. It wasn't just about medicine. It was also about them learning the arts, learning about philosophy. It was all part of the required curriculum. And if they had families and they were in school, their families were taken care of. And the education was all free. And they

had to institute an affirmative action program in the medical school because there were more women and they wanted to balance it with the men. Wow, this is so amazing.

And the way the health care system was, was set up in neighborhoods. So if folks didn't get to their appointments — not only was the clinic, the doctors and nurses, in their neighborhood, but there were also social workers that kept track. If they didn't show up to their appointment, the social worker would go and find out why. And sometimes they'd find out, well, no one to take care of the kids or something else was happening in the family. Then they would step in and help with that family issue.

And then they talked about how they were exporting their specialists, their doctors and health specialists, to other countries. And for those leaving the country to help other communities, their families were taken care of, so that they wouldn't need for anything while this family member was out doing the work. No crime rate. There was no crime at that time. This was 1986. Women were safe anywhere. Anywhere.

And at that time, they were just beginning to talk to Fidel Castro about men being in the birth room where their wives were having children. And just the stories the women were telling about how it was such a shock to him, but, you know, he had to think about it. But it was in process, you know, it would happen. To me, it was just amazing.

And I know they were working on the racial issues. They were beginning in the child care centers, the preschool child care centers, so that the children would get it immediately about inequality, in the songs that they sang, the dolls that they had, you know, the black dolls that they had. All of it. Oh, it was, like, what a wonderful place. We should all be so lucky.

ROSS: So how did that inform what you put in place to found NLHO? And how did you choose to name?

24:35

MARTINEZ: It's trying to create what we can in this really different crazy system that we have, this society that we have in the United States that is so anti-woman and so undemocratic. In Cuba, everybody had a vote, everyone would speak. There was a lot that I learned. And of course, it was just so clear that the politics of the country decide the status, the livelihood, of women. It was a collective, you know. Even the doctors had to work in the ditches or building sometimes. Everyone was equal. Everyone was paid the same. Everyone –

ROSS: So, how did that affect founding the National Latina Health Organization?

MARTINEZ: It was about trying to create that consciousness, and to change policies wherever we could. So within the organization, the group that founded, there were four of us: Elizabeth, Paulita Ortiz, Alicia Bejarano, the one

that came up to us. Elizabeth was the fourth one, including myself. And she's a woman I was going to, before I went to Cuba, to brush up on my Spanish, she was tutoring me in Spanish. So when I came back from Cuba and told her about the work that we were going to do for Latina women, she said, "I'm a part of that. I will be a part of that, too." And so the four of us began meeting and talking about our ideas and what we wanted to happen and I shared all the information and all the experience I had had with the National Black Women's Health Project and what they were doing and how they were doing it.

And we talked about, Well, if we're going to improve our health status as women, we need to include the men. And I said, "Yes, but not yet." So together we decided at some point we would include men, but first we needed to establish ourselves as a women's organization, a Latina women's organization. And there was a really nice balance, because I'm a first-born Mexicana in this country; Paulita is also Mexicana, but generations of her family have been here in the United States; Elizabeth Gastelumendi was from, I believe, Peru; and Alicia was from Ecuador — or it might be the reverse — and they emigrated here as adults. So we had a really good balance of experiences and countries represented.

And we met and I talked about the Self-Help, because I had already experienced it through Mike White and through Lillie Allen, and how that needed to be a part of it. Black women were doing it; we have to do it. The model is there. It's working. And Paulita had the expertise. I had the experience but she had the expertise, you know. So they accepted it, again, not knowing what they were accepting. And we started incorporating it into the way that we met.

ROSS: Could you stop and explain to me what does Self-Help have to do with women's health?

29:10

MARTINEZ: It's about body, mind, and spirit. It's about being healthy ourselves so we can do healthy work in the community. If we're not healthy and we are working out there, we can do a lot of harm. And there's a lot of harm being done out there with people providing services that are even unhealthy for the community with the way that it's done. You know, if they're not in a healthy place to provide the services, it comes out: they're rude to you, they don't give you all the options you need, all of it. If they're not balanced and healthy, they're not going to be balanced and healthy with you. That's a simple explanation, but the personal work is very difficult.

It's really facing your own barriers that you put up, your own judgment, the way you judge yourself and other folks, prejudices: you have to face all of that. You cannot hide. If you're doing your work well, you are exposing yourself to yourself, you know, just really going deep, deep — to all the places that you have been afraid to go to, don't want to admit about yourself. That was hard work, very hard work, especially working with other Latina women.

And as we started to bring other women to be the founding board, the founding members, you know, to develop everything, was a really good illustration of what happens to women when they're not valued and they're not appreciated, and they're in unhealthy working places, they're in unhealthy personal relationships. Because it would just come out. They would attack each other. They would try to keep those of us that wanted to take leadership in the group from doing it. It was a very hard time. I'm laughing but it wasn't funny.

It was difficult, because I did put out there that I would like to be the director. I would like to take that role. And even though the other women didn't want the role, they didn't want me to have it. They even suggested bringing somebody else in from the outside and I said that didn't make sense. And it's the way that they've experienced organizing in the Latina community, where that happens.

ROSS: What do you mean, the way they've experienced it?

32:44

MARTINEZ: Working — I think a lot of it — wasn't only working with — but working with men, how the decisiveness comes up and how the — it's like my mother used to say, Who does he think he is, going to college? Who does she think she is, trying to be the director? Because it's happened to them, I know it's happened to them. They are not supported to be the full person that they should be, and so they don't know how to support others. Instead, they try to break down, pull each other down. And so that was happening.

ROSS: And were you able to use the Self-Help process to address this?

MARTINEZ: We did try it. Paulita would lead the sessions, but then they would complain that she was giving me more attention or a different kind of attention, or the way you do the work with her is different than the way you do the work with us, you know. And I don't know, it could have been happening. But it wasn't done in a healthy way. Let's see how we can do this with more balance. You're not doing it right. You're favoring her, you know, and all this kind of thing. And remember, Paulita and I went to meet with Lillie Allen. We told her we need to come. We need some help here.

And so we met with her, I think, for a day or a day and a half, just the two of us, to talk about how can we begin to fix this up, how can we do this. And of course, the way we had to do it was — she worked with each one of us very deep, you know, so we got to do our personal work. Because it's always about us. Why were they scaring us? Why couldn't we stay balanced and strong in what we knew was right?

And she also worked with Paulita and me about our relationship to each other. And our relationship was — we were friends. But getting to know each other so deeply was scary, I guess. It was a little scary for both of us. Because there were things I didn't want people to know. No, you don't need to do all of that. And it was just about my weakness. But

you don't need to know those weaknesses, because they were very visible. Not to me. So it's about trying to keep it to yourself and not really dealing with that issue and why it's there. It's really going back far. So we worked hard.

ROSS: Lillie Allen has often said that Self-Help and leadership invokes a sense of accountability to yourself and to the dignity of the work. Could you speak about Self-Help and accountability for you?

MARTINEZ: Well, I know my process over the years and really working on my issues, and once I wasn't afraid of what people would find out, then I could be very centered and balanced. But it took a while. It took years, you know. It took a long time. OK. What more can I put out there. And it's about being a fearless client, as we call it, and fearless counselor. Not afraid — you might be afraid but you'll still go there. You'll still go to that deep place. And, you know, if you're the counselor, not being afraid of the anger, whatever emotions coming from that person that you're supporting. So it's being fearless, and I've learned to be fearless in doing this work. And oh my goodness, it's another world. It's another world. And of course, sometimes we get stuck and we have to do a little more work. So the work is never-ending.

ROSS: What do you mean by getting stuck?

MARTINEZ: Forgetting my weakness there. Oh, yeah, that's there, you know. And working on it, or other people's issues about me when I take them personally. Because it hits a spot. And it's just constantly reminding myself, That's not about me, that's about their feelings about me. And sometimes I get stuck in that. Most of the time, I can stay free of it, but sometimes I get stuck.

ROSS: This is wonderful. So what were the first things you did to establish the National Latina Health Organization?

38:35

MARTINEZ: Well, I need to tell you the wonderful support that we got from Byllye Avery, because in 1986 when we decided, OK, we're going to do this — it was May when we started meeting, no, earlier than that, April, when I got back from Cuba — so we started meeting and I let Byllye Avery know that we were meeting about this and we would like to model something after her project. So out of the blue, I think it was in the summer of that year, we got a call from this woman — what was her name? — from the Mott Foundation, Patricia something. She was so important. We got a call and she said, "Byllye Avery tells me that you are organizing Latinas on the West Coast to do this work. I would like to meet with you. I'm going to be in San Francisco. Can I meet with you?" I said, "Wow."

And so I shared it with the group and we were very excited about it. We were all going to meet with her. And we thought, But we have to

have something in writing, because up to that point, it was all just discussion and processing. So we put one or two pages together about why we wanted to do this, and our plan, kind of — it wasn't really a plan, it was just like a concept paper, I guess. So we shared it with this woman and she said, "Well, this sounds really good. Keep me posted on how you all develop." And we said, "OK." And so we went back to doing our plan, even bringing more women in. And we got another call from her in October. She said, "I'm going to be in San Francisco again. Can I meet with you?" So we met with her again and shared more of what we were doing. And she said, "I'd like to encourage you to submit a proposal for some seed money to help establish your organization." And she said, "Ask for \$20,000."

And none of us had ever, ever written a proposal before. So I got this book from the Northern California grantmakers, about three pages, on how to do a proposal, and that's what we used as our model on how to write this proposal. But we also had a couple of women that had either reviewed proposals or had been involved in writing proposals to meet with us to give us ideas. And so, it was Paulita, me, and Elizabeth that were the consistent ones but in the end, it was Paulita and me that stayed up all night a couple of nights to put this proposal together and talk about what we wanted to do, and we want \$20,000 to do this. So we submitted it. I think the deadline was November sometime. It had to be in at a certain date, so we were at Federal Express, mailing it at the last minute.

The other important thing is, we did this on an electric typewriter. We did not have a computer at the time. Paulita knew about computers because she used it in her work, and I worked at IBM, so I knew about computers but we didn't have one. So we used an electric typewriter lent to us by Bob Gomez, a Latino friend that I met in reevaluation counseling. So it didn't have any self-correct or anything. We used White-Out and all of that.

And so we did this proposal. Then, then Patricia came back and told us, I guess in December, she said, "Well, the review committee really liked your proposal, but they think you need to ask for more money. And we want a budget." And so we asked for \$40,000. I think it was at her suggestion to ask for that — I think it was \$45,000. And budget. Never done a budget before. And here, I'm being the bold one, trying to keep people positive about it. Oh, it couldn't be that hard, you know. I had no idea what it would be like. But, you know, I knew about money. I had raised four kids and had been working, so I knew about money. OK, so this is what we do, and we were taking guesses at what this would cost, so we're putting down all the costs for all the different things we would do, and we came up with a budget. (laughs) And we submitted that.

And the first part of January, I think it was, we got word back, You're funded: \$45,000. You are funded. And this is someone that Byllye Avery sent to us. That's the kind of support that we got. She sent a funder to us. And I know that's not something that's always — and it

is done in certain circles, but it's not always done, because there's such competition around it. So we immediately learned about the openness and supportiveness of women of color. And then, working with all these Latinas here, how everybody was helping everybody, was ready to do whatever, whatever, you know. It was great. It was wonderful. This is the way you're supposed to work. Everybody helping. Even if it's around money, you know.

And so we had this \$45,000. We all had our full-time jobs, so part of our plan was to put on a conference like the [National Black Women's Health] Project did. So, we all kept our jobs and the money was going to be — I'm trying to remember what the money was used for. We opened an office. Of course, you have to have an office. So we went into the Fruitvale community — that's where the Latino community is, mostly, in that area — and we rented an office, a 700-square-foot office in the Spanish-Speaking Unity Council, and so we started there.

We would volunteer our time, you know, Carmelita LaRoche was one of our founding members and she would come in and do the accounting. I can't remember the names of these women. Someone else would come in and on a discount do the purchasing. We needed equipment. I bought the computer through IBM (unclear). And we bought an electric typewriter that self-corrected, that had memory. (laughs)

So we started building our office and having our meetings there and doing work there when we had work to do, and we had an open house in that same year. We opened the office that same year, in 1987, and the community was so supportive. We had an open house to introduce ourselves and tell people what we were going to be doing. It was wonderful. We had it in the conference room there at the Unity Council, and people from all different backgrounds came.

One of the people that was there was Felix Elizalde, who was an acting dean at Merritt College. And we talked about the Self-Help and we wanted to do sessions, classes, on Latina health issues with the Self-Help incorporated into it. So we would do — we would invite a Latina in to present a health issue and then Paulita would conduct a Self-Help circle around that issue or around whatever came up for the women. So that was our model, and Felix said, "Well, when you're ready to do it, let me know. We might be able to collaborate with Merritt College and your group. And I know a woman, Josie Zertuche, who has done some conferences or workshops in the community on Latina health. She would love to help you."

So that's how it all started. So, Josie came, met with us, and we told her what we were doing, and she was a certified teacher that could teach in the community college system that Merritt was a part of. But she would just be like our mentor. She would guide us and her name would be the official name through Merritt College, and it worked so beautifully.

ROSS: Now tell me, was National Latina Health Organization the first Latina health organization of its kind in the state? Have you been able to find out any that predated you? It's certainly the first one I've ever heard of.

48:30

MARTINEZ: Well, I think it was the first one that was national and had its complete focus on Latina health. There were other organizations. There was the Comisión Feminil de Los Angeles, in Los Angeles. Their focus wasn't health, but they were very instrumental in changing the laws to protect women against sterilization abuse, along with Helen Rodriguez-Trias, who was working with other organizations on the East Coast and Puerto Rico to stop this. And it's so important to know that, because Latina women were working on health and reproductive health issues for many years before we came on the scene, but they weren't recognized or acknowledged by the mainstream because they weren't working on abortion rights, you know, reproductive abuses, they were working on — but it wasn't the mainstream definition of reproductive health. So they were doing this. Comisión Feminil didn't continue working on reproductive health issues, I think, after that. They were more working on educational issues and other things.

ROSS: I do happen to know that they endorsed the '86 March for Women's Lives that NOW did.

MARTINEZ: Well, we were in touch — (both voices)

ROSS: That's when I first heard of them.

MARTINEZ: And we got in touch with them soon after we knew who they were and so they did some work with us, and it was good, it was really good. And I think they're still operating. I'm not sure. But they, along with MALDEF — Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund — were the ones that brought that class-action suit against the UC Medical Center that had been sterilizing Latina women. I think there were 20 plaintiffs, 12 to 20 plaintiffs, and did excellent work. Because from that, there were certain rules that had to be followed when sterilizing women. You couldn't do it without their consent. The information should be in other languages, and there had to be waiting period — 48 or 72 hours — once you made the decision before you got the sterilization done. So the work was being done by other women, but it wasn't recognized.

But to our knowledge, we were the first organization that claimed to be national, that worked towards the national work, and our only focus was [Latina women's] health. And we defined it very broadly from the very beginning. And we did have the discussions around abortion, and there was one member that wasn't clear that it needed to be a part of it, Paulita Ortiz. But after a while, she did realize that she didn't need to endorse abortions or have an abortion, but to be pro-choice, she could support other women in their personal decisions. So everyone was on

board on reproductive rights from the beginning. And I think I was the one that pushed for that.

ROSS: So, what were some early programs that NLHO pioneered?

52:32

MARTINEZ: Well, the first one was the way that we did our health classes. We called it Latina Health Better Health Through Self-Empowerment. It was so successful. And we did collaborate with Merritt College and women were able to get credit for being a part of this. And it was on a Saturday morning, from 9 to 12, and we provided childcare and we provided food and all that. And all the speakers were Spanish-speaking or we provided interpretation, but they were all Latinas, for sure, they all had to be Latinas, because we had already known the excuse of the mainstream, saying, But we can't find Latinas. They're not there. We can't find them. And we knew that all you had to do was look. If you stopped looking, then you weren't going to find them.

And there was no problem in getting the experts, you know, on health issues, on violence, on AIDS, all of it. They were there. Oh, and we had this wonderful woman who was a *yerbera*. She was an herbalist, I guess. She didn't want to be called a *curandera*. Anyway, she was a good friend of my mother's. We were looking for someone that knew about herbs and healing, and I told my mama. I asked her if she knew any [and she said] — Martina, my best friend who lives next door, knows all of this. And so we invited Martina to come, Martina Amancio, to come and do a class. Ah, such a wonderful class. There were maybe 30 women in this class, and all from different countries. They were all Latinas, but all from different countries in Latin America. It was just so beautiful, you know, for Martina to present on the different healing powers of these *yervas*, these herbs, and the women recognizing them from their country, but it had a different name in their country. And most of the remedies were the same, or maybe a little different, but just to have that connection, because at that time, it wasn't so popular. But it was wonderful, wonderful.

ROSS: How did you recruit the women?

MARTINEZ: We also knew that some husbands would not allow their wives to go to certain classes if they were just for the women. So our approach was, this is about health for the family. I think, before the class, we actually went into the neighborhood with surveys and asked women questions about what's important and what would they like to see, before we had our first class. And so we had an idea. And so we framed it, This is about family health. Of course, it was about women's health, but who is the center of the family?

And that's how some women that might not have been able to get there were able to come. They were so excited to be in these classes and to do the Self-Help and to learn about all these, in their language, from another Latina like them, and in a very supportive way, respectful way.

It was wonderful. I loved it. That was our first experience in incorporating Self-Help into learning. And I think we might have been the first ones to do that. We were. And also, from the beginning, we knew we had to use the Self-Help process within the staff, the volunteers, the board, everyone. And it was hard, but we did it. So we were the model. It works. We're doing it. It's so hard, but we're doing it, you know. It's so hard to find out about ourselves and to face each other and to be direct and say, so we can move, and it was beautiful.

ROSS:

In subsequent years, other Latina women's health organizations developed. What was your relationship with these other organizations?

57:30

MARTINEZ:

It wasn't what it should have been. Because we were the model now for Latinas, and we were working on reproductive health and rights and no other Latina organization that I'm aware of had ever worked on abortion rights. That's one of the issues that we worked on. So we were out there. We were talking about it. I think one of the — I became full-time staff for about nine months. I was working at IBM. All these pieces, you know, have to go first before I tell some parts of the story.

But I was still at IBM working and doing the organizing evenings, weekends, whenever I could, with the other women. I knew of a social service program that IBM had, but it was for managers and I was not in management. I was entry level at IBM. And what they did was, they would lend their management staff to different nonprofit organizations for months or years to give back to the community. I thought that was very cool of IBM. So I thought, That's what I need to do: I need to get a social service leave of absence to do this work. And we were planning a conference. So I submitted a letter to my — no, I didn't even tell my supervisor I was doing this, who was a woman, and her supervisor was a woman. But I found out through my sister who was working at IBM who I should contact, this African American man. And so I submitted a letter of request for a social service leave of absence for a year so I could help establish the organization.

Damned if they didn't give it to me. (laughs) But by the time the decision was made, it was nine months that they gave me. So they paid my full salary and health benefits for the nine months that they let me go. But they did tell me very clearly this doesn't really happen. No, my sister's the one who said, "I've never seen this happen before." And because it was for managers, and no way was I a manager. But I know it was the head boss, the woman who was — she never admitted it but I knew she was lesbian and a feminist, you know, white woman, and my immediate supervisor was a white woman, but they backed me up and supported me, and I got nine months off to go do my work.

And it was such a gift. Wow. And they didn't require any report. I asked, "What do I need to do?" Nothing. Just go do your work. But I would submit monthly reports to them, like I owe them something, you know?

ROSS: Who knew that IBM helped found the National Latina Health Organization?

MARTINEZ: That's true. I had never thought of it that way, but that's true. They helped to found it, because of these women, this African American man supporting it. Wow, that was such a great story. I loved it. I don't tell it often anymore but I used to tell it all the time.

ROSS: So you became the first staff?

MARTINEZ: Yes, the first full-time staff. And I had, through some rocky times, we did have an election and I said, "I want to be the director." And I wasn't sure that they were going to vote me in, but they did. So OK, I had the go-ahead. So I was at the office every day, had a computer, and started meeting with people and doing outreach to help plan this. And of course, the other women were also helping, too, and so that started the planning of the conference. And somebody told me about this wonderful person that could coordinate the conference, [Sandra Soto]. The woman knew how to do everything. She knew how to do conferences. She was organized. She was a ball of fire.

ROSS: Well, we're at the end of this tape. So why don't we take a break. You go look up this woman's name so that we can put her into the history books. And again, thank you. We're going to continue with the story of the National Latina Health Organization when we get back. Thank you very much.

END TAPE 4

TAPE 5

- ROSS: OK, Luz. This is Luz Alvarez Martinez, December 7, 2004. We're interviewing Luz Alvarez Martinez, cofounder of the National Latina Health Organization, for the Voices of Feminism Project for Smith College. How are you doing, Luz?
- MARTINEZ: I'm OK. I'm doing well, thank you.
- ROSS: Thank you for enduring this interview.
- MARTINEZ: Not everybody gets to have someone listen to them for this long, so this is very different.
- ROSS: We might end up Self-Helping afterwards. But we had just, at the end of the tape previous to this one, begun talking about organizing your first national conference for the National Latina Health Organization. Could you continue telling us about that?
- MARTINEZ: Sure. I remember the woman's name: Sandra Soto. That woman really helped us focus and knew all the things that we needed to do and had these amazing ideas. She would come to talk to us and she talked really fast and had all these great ideas and we'd try to keep up with her. By the time she left, we were just, like, Oh, where does she get the energy? (laughs) But she was great. She was really good. She knew who to go after for money. She knew how to do everything. So we followed her advice and she became our coordinator, the conference coordinator. I just loved working with her. She was always so positive and so energetic.
- So we planned this conference, again, after the model of the National Black Women's Health Project. They were my heroes, you know. And we started deciding what the workshops were going to be, and I brought up the issue of lesbian issues. We needed to have something, and people were kind of like, OK, but they weren't excited about it.
- Oh, I have to tell this part. For the conference, we brought together a national advisory group to put the conference on, and that process in itself was fun and interesting. We got names from different people that suggested different women around the country.
- And one name, oh my god, I can't remember their names. Garcia, her last name was. There was an article about our organizing efforts in a women's newspaper. I can't remember the name of the newspaper. And this woman, [Iris] Garcia, had read the article and she wrote a letter to us saying how she had had this dream of an organization like the one that we were establishing, and when she read the article, she said she cried. And I thought, This woman has to be a part of us in some way. And so, when we started recruiting women to be a part of the organizing committee, I contacted her and said, "We'd like you to come and be a

part of this.” And she came. She was great, she was wonderful. She was in Boston. She was working with the Latina group there.

And Noemi Santana, a Puerto Rican woman, was in New York. Aida Giachello is a professor — was at the time and still is — at the University of Chicago, and continues to do excellent work around Latina women, research and organizing, all of it, excellent work. So it was the three of them and a woman from Texas. Somebody else had given me her name and her field was working with children. I can see the face very clearly but can’t remember her name. I should have prepared. So they came, and then we had our local group, and by that time we had a couple of other women on the board. Linda Castro was one of those. She was on our board early and then for years she stayed connected and wasn’t on the board, and now she’s on the board again. And she is a lawyer right now, she is in private practice. She represents children in the courtroom. So these women came together —

And of course, Natalia Delgado, who is, was, such a wonderful woman. I met her through reevaluation counseling. One of the few leaders at the time in reevaluation counseling. Amazing, gorgeous, beautiful woman that was so centered. She worked for the state and did wonderful things. I can’t remember which part of the state she worked for, transportation or something. But she did some wonderful things for women there because of her politics and because of who she was. And so, she also became one of our advisors. Those meetings were so great, coming together, getting to know each other, having a good time with each other, and planning this great conference that we were going to have.

ROSS: When did you actually have the conference?

MARTINEZ: I think it was in 1988. It’s been a little while. So we were planning this and I wanted to be sure that lesbian women issues were included, and as I said earlier, the group decided, yes. But there wasn’t too much excitement around it. (laughs)

6:45

I want to tell one story about Noemi, when I gave her a call in New York. And at that time, she was on the board of the NAPRW, the National Association of Puerto Rican Women. And when I told her the story of how we got established and how we got our money, and we wanted her to come be on the advisory committee for the conference, there was silence, and then she said, “How is it that you have just started organizing [and] you have \$45,000? We’ve been organizing for what, 10, 15 years with no money. How did that happen?” And it wasn’t like she was upset. She was just like, How did that happen? I told her, “I don’t know. It happened.” And of course, it happened because of the support from Byllye Avery sending us our first funder. But I love that story. And she came so enthusiastic, to help us do this. We met, I think, two times before the actual conference. Very exciting. It was very exciting.

ROSS: So you were getting ready to tell us the story of how they handled having a workshop on lesbian issues.

MARTINEZ: Almost the week before, or two weeks before, we started having — soon before the conference, they weren't sure. I said, "No, we have to. We have to." So I pushed it through, we pushed it through, and I think we had two workshops. It was lesbians and motherhood, something like that, and I can't remember the name of the other one, the other workshop. There were two. And Cherríe Moraga was there. Was Leadi Ano there? There was a group of lesbian women that put on these two workshops. And I went to both of them, I remember.

And during one of the convenings where everybody was together — I think it was the closing — everybody was in an auditorium together, and everything was going great, really great. Everyone was happy. And then a woman from Chicago, I think, a lesbian woman, way up at the top, got up and she had something to say. She wanted to know why lesbian women and issues were not incorporated into everything and how is it that there was no outreach to lesbian women. Because she heard about it from some place and knew she needed to be there but didn't feel there were that many lesbian women at the conference. And I'm thinking, Wow, this is great. She's speaking out. It's being addressed.

The other women, not all of them, but some of the other women started to get very nervous about this. One of the board members came over and said, "We have to stop her. We can't let them win, or we can't let them take the power." And I'm thinking, What? I didn't know. And Noemi comes, and Noemi's very charismatic, and she saw what was happening and she just started doing this — I don't know, physical spiral thing. She got everybody coming together and getting into a spiral or something and just kind of smooth it out, because I didn't understand this board member saying, "We got to cut it off. They can't take the power." And I'm just so excited that a lesbian woman said something here in this conference that needed to be said. So the conference ended but this note was there.

So I had a talk with — I can't remember the name — lesbian woman that was a councilor here in Oakland. I think she was on the panel on lesbian motherhood. I had a talk with her that this is happening. I want you to come do a workshop with the board, you know, so that we can work through this. So she came one evening to meet with the board, and she just said to them. She said, "I'm here. I'm a lesbian woman. I am a mother. You can ask me any question you want." It was great. It was so wonderful. Gloria Rodriguez, that's her name. So she sat there, so comfortable, so centered and calm. "Ask me anything you want."

And that just kind of broke it. So women started asking questions and started feeling comfortable in talking to Gloria, a woman just like them, you know. It wasn't threatening. She was very open. So that broke it. By the end of the meeting, Elizabeth Gastelumendi said, "I

12:05

think we're all lesbians." (laughs) So it was great. So that was our breakthrough. It was wonderful.

ROSS: That's a truly marvelous and wonderful story. So, in organizing the National Latina Health Organization, did you see yourself organizing in opposition to what the mainstream movement was not doing for your community?

MARTINEZ: Oh, it was so much about education. But another really important phase of the National Latina Health Organization in our first years, because from the beginning, the project, National Black Women's Health Project was supporting us. Very early, I met Charon Asetoyer, the founder and director of the Native American Women's Health and Education Center in South Dakota, and was very much impacted by her work which she was doing and — hoo, what a strong woman she was. She told anybody anything, didn't care who was there, and just like, I was just so impressed with her. So I met her.

I got to know Julia Scott, really got to know Pamela Freeman. She helped us organize, doing organizing in Boston. I had been invited — I think you were there, too — to a meeting with Byllye Avery and all the women from the Project, and the National Women's Health Network, when the break was happening to separate themselves from the network. That was such a powerful meeting. That's where, I think, I met Charon. To see them, not challenging the network, mostly white women, but just telling them very decisively, strongly, very beautifully, to me, We're leaving; it's time for us to be on our own. Lillie Allen — it was like music, it was like poetry, the way that they were doing this. And I was so impressed. I was, like, Is this really happening? I have never been around women like this.

So I was being included as part of the National Latina Health Organization, in everything. And I, you know, when I was able to, or when it was appropriate, the other women from the organization would come. So we started participating and meeting with African women, Native women, and at that time, I think, also, the Asian group — at that time, it was Asian, Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health. Mary Chung was the director there. We started meeting together and being included in everything. And started doing some amazing work together.

And I think that was about the time that the mainstream was kind of letting a few women of color in, one here, one there, sometimes — it was the beginning of their opening up. Sometimes I would be the only Latina there. At other times, I would be the only woman of color there. It was something. But what we would do was, if we were invited, if I was invited anyplace, I would ask, Well, which other women of color are going to be there, whether it's to participate in a conference or on a panel. And sometimes they would have other women of color, sometimes not, and I always had names to offer. These women should also be there.

18:00

And the other women of color were doing the same thing, so we were opening doors for each other, to make sure there would be representation. And it was working. It was working. And sometimes, the organizers would say, Well, at this time it's not the right time. But either way, if I was invited, and I wasn't able to bring other women with me, then at the event, I would make an issue of it, like, This is happening. Why aren't these other women here? These other women are also working in these issues.

I even got disinvited one time. But I didn't listen to them. It was this couple, this white couple. I think they still have these yearly or every other year, they have these gatherings of women working on reproductive health issues at their home in one of these little islands on the East Coast, Martha's Vineyard, I think. And so I asked the question when I got invited, "Well, are these women invited?" No, they're not. I said, "Well, I think these issues need to be addressed." And so, the person inviting me said, "Well, maybe this isn't the conference for you. I said, "No. I will be there." They tried to disinvite me. And Byllye Avery was at that meeting, and I think, what's her name?

ROSS: Marion Wright Edelman? Children's Defense Fund?

MARTINEZ: I got to meet her there. And the first — one of the first, I guess the first African American doctor that had been arrested for performing abortions —

ROSS: Kenneth Edelin?

MARTINEZ: Kenneth Edelin, he was there. And there was a Latina there but she wasn't involved in reproductive health. But I also, you know, I had to speak my piece anyway. There should be all these other women here. So this was exciting to begin meeting the folks involved in this work, and being able to challenge them. You know, something else needs to change here, and why don't we address this, or why don't we address that? It was good. It was exciting.

ROSS: So did you feel that there were times when they tried to use you as a token?

21:24

MARTINEZ: Oh, absolutely. But I was also trying to use them to make sure that it was more inclusive and that their agenda opened up. And it's not just about abortion. It is not just about abortion. What about the abuses? What about the access? What about the cultural access? What about the language? What about that we don't even get information? We're invisible. They do their organizing and don't even know or think, care to think, about our issues. So it was a challenge with them, but I thought I could make a difference. I should have prepared to have all the names of these women that I wanted to include.

ROSS: That's quite all right. You keep saying that and human memory being human memory, you don't have to apologize for it.

MARTINEZ: I remember the things they did. I know their faces.

ROSS: When you write your biography, you'll have a chance to do all of that research.

MARTINEZ: You're right. OK A white woman that was a strong factor as an ally wanted to nominate me to the NARAL [National Abortion Rights Action League] board, and I didn't know NARAL, I didn't know the organization. But she said, "There are very few women of color." I think there were a couple and she wanted to try and change that. So, I said, "Sure. Let's try to do something." Because I also was interested in mainstream diversifying and broadening their agenda and I'll do the work I can. So, thinking I could make a change, and this woman who worked in communications, African American woman –

ROSS: Emily Tynes?

MARTINEZ: Emily Tynes. I love that woman. She is great, and she had actually arranged the training for women of color working in reproductive health, media training. It was excellent. I told her about getting on the board and this is what I'm going to do and it's going to happen. It felt like she was patting me on the head — OK, you can go try that — because she knew NARAL. She had worked with NARAL before.

So I think I was on the board five years and kept bringing up these — oh, there's an African American pediatrician from here in Oakland [Melanie Tervalon] that was on that board and a Latina woman from New York. Oh, no, there was an African woman as well who was a librarian. I think that was it, that was the extent of people of color, and I heard that the Latina, you know, don't count on her for anything, and they were in a meeting and I said, "No, they're wrong. I'm going to count on this woman."

So for months, years, the time that I was there, I would keep pushing. My first meeting, I thought the pediatrician would be there. I met with her. She was going to support me, but for family reasons, she wasn't at this first meeting that I was at. And I looked around the room and something came up and I thought, Oh, shit, she's not here and I guess I have to bring it up. They were talking about some media thing that they were working on, or some research they were doing, and I didn't see where they were including women of color. So I had to speak up. So I talked about that, the importance of it, and having women of color interviewed as well, and bringing all the different issues in. I know they didn't pay attention to me but I said it. But that was the beginning.

And there were other white women on that board that were also wanting to make some changes. So everybody speaking out, everybody speaking up. And I remember the meeting where the board finally made

the change. Not the commitment but the change. Charlotte — I can't remember her last name, white woman — but we were all there, three or four women of color, and all these white women. There might have been a couple of men, too.

But the issue came up. We need to do something about diversifying the board. We need to put something in the bylaws about this. Oh my god, that discussion was crazy. People were crying and screaming and the board chair said, "If you do that, that will be the worst thing that can happen to NARAL." Wow. And that's when Mae, this Latina woman from New York — oh, she was great. She just lit into everybody. I don't think she had ever done this before, and I knew I could count on her. And she came through strong. Everybody's crying, and this and that, and she just laid it out. Where's the commitment? You know, we have to do this. Oh, that meeting was dynamite. It was great. And in the end, it was voted that board members, a minimum of 50 percent had to be people of color.

ROSS: Was that implemented?

MARTINEZ: It was implemented, for a few years.

27:53

ROSS: I was going to say, because NARAL today is one of the whitest organizations in the pro-choice movement.

MARTINEZ: Oh, and people were mad at me, too. So when the people of color came in, most of them had the same politics as the white folks. Damn! Even the Latinas, damn it! It was really hard. Because I would have everybody to my room, my hotel room, to caucus and get to know each other, the people of color, gave them the history, all this, that, and the other. And OK, people were interested, they were excited. But then when they would hear from NARAL and the importance of doing this this way for this reason, they would all go to that side. Oh, it was horrible. It was really horrible.

ROSS: Well, moving on from the sad and sorry story of NARAL, which I'm sure someone will write a book on one of these days, yes — I do remember that you had some strong and influential work that happened in the international arena, dealing with the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo and the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 in Beijing, China. So tell me about how you entered that work and what you achieved.

MARTINEZ: It was so exciting. This was — when the women of color were strong, we were doing really good work together, and we wanted to get — we had asked Ford Foundation for some funding to do some more serious cohesive organizing. Ford Foundation said, Oh, OK. First, we'd like you to go to — where did we go first? I guess it was Cairo — first, we'd like you to go to Cairo and then we will talk about funding your group to do

some work here. I said, OK. I don't know how much money they gave us, but they gave us enough money to bring together maybe 12 women, 12 to 16 women from around the country to begin planning our strategies for Cairo. And so we tried to have real diverse backgrounds from all the different groups, so that we can bring all of that to our strategizing and organizing.

And I guess the way that you start to impact, or we were told to impact the international politics, is you take the draft of the document to be presented — and this was the Population and Development Conference — and you start to make recommendations on those changes. And I know, I looked at that and thought, We're not there. What is this document? It doesn't even talk about women of color in the U.S. It only talked about women in developing countries. So what is this about, you know, what kind of organizing is this if we're not included? And of course, other women that we were bringing together were having the same experience. And I remember asking a white woman that did international work and saying, "Well, what about women of color in the U.S.?" And she said, "Oh, no, no. This is about women in developing countries." And I couldn't understand why.

So when all of us came together, the 12 or 16 of us came together, we all had the same opinion: we can't work with this document; there's nothing there for us. So we decided to develop our own document, "Documenting Poverty and" — I can't remember the name of it, but we decided to develop our own document. Forget that draft. There's nothing we can do with it. And so, in it we talked about the racism, about everything that happens to women in the U.S. and other developed countries, women of color, and how disenfranchised we are, how invisible we are, how no one takes us seriously or includes us in anything. So we were very clear. It was powerful. It is still a very powerful document. And so we decided to work with that document when going to Cairo.

But things started to happen in the different groups. And we did try to do some cultural appreciation so that we can stay strong together. And I'm not sure if some of the women did not have experience in working with other groups. I'm not sure what happened, but things started to get very sticky and confrontational. It was hard. And we were going to some preparatory meetings, UN preparatory meetings in New York. And I just remember having to intervene, trying to use the Self-Help skills that I have in easing things out, because the clashes with African women, with Asian women, with Native women — it's like, what the hell's going on here?

We were at dinner one time. All this stuff started happening. And I just said, "Stop, we can't do this. We need to go do some Self-Help in our room." And three or four women came up, not willingly, but they came up and tried to do this work. And they participated to a certain extent. But the issues kept coming up and coming up. And it happened in an open area. It was a meeting room where women can come and have tables to sit at and have meetings. So our women of color group

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was sitting at a table and things started to happen. Voices started to rise, and I just said to them, “Women, everybody is looking and listening to us.” But they didn’t stop. They would kind of quiet down but then they would continue, and I thought, This is not — what’s happening here? It was horrible. But we still went to Cairo, united, I guess.

ROSS: Well, certainly, by 1994, the character of the National Black Women’s Health Project had changed quite a bit in that they were not still actively practicing the Self-Help process that you were using. So did that have an impact?

MARTINEZ: An absolute impact, because the director at that time was Cynthia Newbille. She did not have a background in Self-Help. And the other women did not. Mary Chung did not. So it was really difficult. It was very difficult. When we were in Cairo, oh my goodness, everybody — you know, people were putting each other down, not respecting each other, and there started to be factions. And I tried — I did not choose factions, but people would always lump me in with Charon because I was friends with her — Charon Asetoyer, a Native woman — and I kept trying to use the Self-Help and thinking, We can’t have come this far to let it all go. And I knew that there had been other attempts with women of color that had not stayed, that had not continued. So this was like, this was the opportunity to do this.

We had done some really, really good work, had met with the FDA, had met with the Health Secretary, had met with a lot of people. And they were taking us seriously, they were listening to us. They had never met with women of color before. So they were listening to us. And we were doing really good work around Norplant and Depo-Provera — completely united, had the same message, saying how dangerous it was. We were presenting at the APHA [American Public Health Association], we were presenting at all kinds of conferences together, separately, all of it. We were strong. We were doing such good work and then everything beginning to fall apart in Cairo.

ROSS: Do you think it was competition for resources or prestige or –

37:40

MARTINEZ: I think there was a lot going on. I think there was a classism going on, elitism, people being rude to each other, not listening to each other, yelling at each other. It’s like, oh no. And I’m trying to say, Self-Help, Self-Help. And just — they weren’t committed. They weren’t serious about trying to work these issues out. And to me, it seems like, because no one had really figured out how to work together — what do you do when things get this hard? You get angry at each other and you walk away. That’s what had happened up until that time, and it was going to happen again.

I was so upset. I just remember in somebody’s hotel room, it was very tight quarters, very warm in there. It was late at night, maybe midnight, after. We were in that room until 2 or 3 in the morning, I

think, trying to get women to see the importance. We can't fall apart. We have to continue this work. We have to continue working together. There was just too much going on. And I just remember falling on my knees in front of somebody and saying, "We can't. We have to go on. This is too important." And they just kind of all stopped and looked at me. I think I was crying. And they just kind of all looked at me, didn't understand why this was so important to me. It's not about me. It's about everything, and all the organizing. So it began to fall apart there and by the time we got home, it just was gone.

ROSS: So (both voices) there was no opportunity to do the work once you got there?

MARTINEZ: But — the work was so important. We used that document. We took it to all of the delegates, especially the American delegates, and we had excellent support from some of the delegates, the American delegates. Helen Rodriguez-Trias was a delegate. Eleanor Hinton Hoytt was a delegate. A couple of other women of color. They would come and say, What do you want? What should we ask for? What should we push? What do you want introduced? They were great. They were wonderful. So, what we said to them — because everybody else was taking care of abortion, all kinds of stuff was going on — we said to them, We want the inclusion of women of color in developed countries. They took that on, even a couple of white women that supported us and what we were doing, so they took it and pushed it through and we got it. One phrase — but that was the first time, historically, that women in developed countries, women of color in developed countries, had been included — the phrase, I think, said something about women in developing countries and disenfranchised women of color in developed countries. Simple. Simple. But that was historical. That was finally, after I don't know how many years — you know, in 1975, women hadn't even been mentioned in the Population and Development Conference, or included. Come to 1994, not only women, but women of color in developed countries. That was such a victory. Wow.

ROSS: Well, did this enable the group who had gone to the ICPD in Cairo to come back home and continue to work together? Because a year later, Beijing was happening.

MARTINEZ: Well, I think things had fallen apart by then, because that was after Cairo that the group said that they didn't want to work together any more. And I kept pushing, Charon and I kept pushing: we need facilitation; we can't let this go. But the rest of the group decided, no, it's over. They walked away. Everybody walked away.

ROSS: But there was an effort, and I know I've jumped ahead of time –

MARTINEZ: Actually, I probably have my sequence wrong, because I think it did happen after Beijing, because we did go to Beijing. But they didn't give us the funding that they had. That's right, because after Cairo, we went back to Ford Foundation and said, OK, we've gone to Cairo, we've done good work. Now we'd like to get funded to do our work here in the United States. And they said, Well, why don't we send you to Beijing. First we'd like you to go there.

So we went to Beijing to do the work. And it wasn't the same work that we had done together in Cairo. But we did good work still. There were women's caucuses, women of color caucuses, and we decided to ask for inclusion of women of color to address the delegates. And so I asked to be considered to be a delegate for the Latina group. I think it's still four they were going to choose, from each group, and so I asked to be considered, to be the Latina delegate, and I was accepted.

So I was able to go in there and talk about issues that affected Latinas in the United States. But I just wasn't as enthusiastic or excited as I was at the Cairo conference. That was amazing. That was a great conference. Just because of the change that happened. And one thing that's also significant is that for the Beijing conference, that was the first time that the document would include women from developed countries, women of color, but nobody knew that we had ever been excluded. They just took it for granted that we were always included and will always be included. So women didn't know that. So I know how important it is to tell that story, what happened in 1994. We made a historical change, and I was included.

ROSS: And generations of women of color will benefit from that change.

45:05

MARTINEZ: And I tell it at every opportunity I get.

ROSS: Yes, of course we get "invisible-ized," to be made invisible. So, all of this is seeming to set the stage for your recent work among women of color beyond NLHO. Could you tell me about how you became involved in the founding of SisterSong and what that was about?

MARTINEZ: I need to jump back.

ROSS: That's all right. We can go back and forward.

MARTINEZ: Because while we were doing this work, the women of color, we gave ourselves a name. Women of Color — oh, it was a really funny acronym — Women of Color for Health and Reproductive Rights. I think it was longer than that. But we gave ourselves a name. We were still an informal group, because we never got fund[ing] — I think we got \$20,000 one time. That caused a lot of problems, too. But one piece of really good work that we did was for that first conference, that first march in Washington. It was called March for Women's Choice.

ROSS: The '92 march, I think, which is actually the third march.

MARTINEZ: Right, because I hadn't been to the one in '89, and then in 1992, we were organized enough that we, our group, knew what we wanted. We knew what happened in marches before: if there were women of color, they were not very prominent there. We wrote this document saying that we were going to send to NOW, one of the organizers, that we want to be part of the organizing, we want to be part of the decision making. We want to be involved every step of the way, and we want women of color at the podium, and we want to select them. And we don't want them at the end, we want them on the main stage, because there were other stages, and we want them up front. We don't want to go through this again. So we put that out there.

There were other women of color in Washington that were supporting the march and heard about our concerns, and so they wanted to back us. There's a young Latina woman at Religious Coalition for Reproductive Health Rights, and she said, "Oh, I think it's just a communication issue. They're not really hearing you." I said, "I don't think so." She said, "Well, why don't I arrange the meeting with Patricia Ireland from NOW?" and I said, "OK, but it's not a communication issue." But we went along with it. You know, let's see what happens.

So there was a meeting in Washington with women of color. Patricia Ireland was invited. I'm not sure who else. I wasn't in Washington and neither was Charon Asetoyer. We were on conference call. And this young Latina woman wanted her director to facilitate the meeting, and I said, "No, she's not a woman of color. Why would we have a white woman facilitate this meeting?" So there was this little thing going on between us. So anyway, the meeting was held. The first thing that happened was everybody went around introducing themselves and saying something about themselves. So Patricia Ireland had come with someone, a Latina woman from the board.

ROSS: Olga Vivas?

MARTINEZ: Yes. Olga Vivas, who died a few years ago.

ROSS: No, Olga's still vice president of NOW.

MARTINEZ: It wasn't Olga, then.

ROSS: Ginny Montez?

MARTINEZ: Ginny Montez. She died a few years ago of breast cancer, I think. Thank you for the correction.

ROSS: I'm sorry to keep adding the names to the narrative. I know a few of them.

MARTINEZ: It's a big help, if we want to get it straight. So Ginny Montez was there with her. So after everybody went around the table, Patricia Ireland introduced herself, we all introduced ourselves. And then we wanted to talk about the issues. I think Charon asked a question that we wanted Patricia Ireland to answer.

Well, it turns out, Patricia Ireland had left right after she introduced herself, and left Ginny there. It was unbelievable to us. The miscommunication to be corrected, let's invite Patricia Ireland in. The woman didn't want to communicate with us. And somehow, Charon and I got cut off from what was happening there. So we were talking to each other and we kept saying, "What is going on? How could she leave when she's the one we want to talk to?" So we were having our own personal conversation and then we got back into the call. And Ginny Montez was just saying what they wanted to do about women of color, but really not addressing what we wanted her to address, and she wasn't the director.

So we made a decision of what we were going to do. We had our meeting and we said, "OK. We're not going to ask women to boycott the march, but if they go, we want them to wear green armbands in support of the issues that we are putting out there." And so we sent this document out of what we wanted, and if you're going to the march, wear a green armband. And if you're not going to the march, let people know that you're boycotting it.

I was so angry that Patricia Ireland didn't even stay, I decided not to go. I was excited to go, but then, forget it, I'm not going. So the document was out there. I watched the march on TV.

ROSS: I believe that story made the *New York Times*. I have a copy of the article.

52:05

MARTINEZ: The whole thing? Well, I know it made some other smaller newspapers. Really? Did it? I didn't know that about our issues.

ROSS: I wasn't engaged in that march. If you recall, I was doing other work, but I do remember hearing the controversy, so once it made the article –

MARTINEZ: Oh, it was a huge controversy. So, I'm watching it on TV. Ginny Montez in on the stage wearing a green armband. And I said, "Oh, she's supportive." Then she started doing her presentation. She said, "I am wearing this green armband because I support women of color and their issues." And I thought, What? I got so angry that she was co-opting our issues and what we had tried to do. Ginny Montez, a Latina woman, what the hell is she doing? That was, like, horrible, horrible. And I thought they don't deserve anything. I just — forget it. I don't need to work with them ever, ever. That was my decision. And then, you know, the news stories started to get out. The network put out a story. *Z Magazine* did a story. Betita Martinez did a story. Betita kept telling me, "Luz, you need to tell that story. You need to write it." I said, "I can't

do it. You need to write it.” And so she did. And so she interviewed us all and wrote this great piece. Caramba! Our Anglo Sisters Still Don’t Get It, was the theme of the article. It was great, and I still give it out to people, because the issues have not changed. No, they are changing, they are changing, but the fight — oh my goodness. So, I mean, the issues continued.

So after the breakup of the Women of Color Coalition for Reproductive Health and Rights — that was the name of it — after that breakup, you know, I would still work with women of color here and there, but there was no organization, there was no formal group anymore.

So then, I got invited to this meeting in New York, by Luz Rodriguez, and I can’t remember where I met her, but I respected this woman, and she called and invited me to this meeting. It’s about women’s issues, it’s about reproductive health. I was really not really clear what the focus was, but I thought, I know Luz, I respect her, I’m going. So I went to this meeting. It was kind of a strange meeting. Reena Marcelo from the Ford Foundation was there. There were a couple of other women who worked in government. There was this whole collection of women that, you know, some had worked in Self-Help and Self-Help in the sense of self-examination, that work that was going on. And we had a discussion, and then we actually went next door in this building where we had a demonstration of a pelvic exam. So some woman was on the table and a lay medic worker was doing the exam and so we got to see everything. And I knew that work. I had done it at the Berkeley Women’s Health Collective.

And I can’t remember what the question was, but Reena Marcelo asked a question about the Ford Foundation, and I said, “Well, I have lots of things to say about the Ford Foundation but I think I might ask you to turn off that tape” — because they were taping everything. And then I decided, I guess Reena said, “Well, maybe they need to hear it.” I said, “OK, you can leave the tape on.” So I told the story about asking for funding [for] the women of color coalition, asking for funding to do domestic work. No, we’ll send you to Cairo. Asking again. No, we’ll send you to Beijing. And then finally, we got home, and they gave us \$20,000 to do our work. They said, Well, we can give your coalition money, or we can give the individual organizations money. It’s like, that’s not the way you do it to the white women, to the white organizations. And that money caused more problems than anything. So I told that story, you know. And they ended up not funding us, other than that \$20,000. So then, that meeting ended and we came home.

Then I got another call from Luz. I think there’s going to be a meeting in Savannah on reproductive health and this and that and the other thing, but never a clear description of what was going to happen. Charon had been invited to the first meeting and hadn’t gone, and so I called Charon, and I said, “Charon, you need to come to this meeting. I think it’s going to be important. I don’t know what’s going to happen but you should come.” She didn’t go to that meeting, either, but there

57:00

were maybe, I don't know how many women were there, young women, older women like me. And what came out of that meeting was that Reena told us what her plan was, that she was going to use her entire budget to fund women of color, to work on STDs because this is something she knew needed work on in the United States, and wanted to bring women of color into the board funding cycle, because we really had not been there before. Different ones of us had applied but never gotten funded.

And when the realization came, I thought, "Oh, this is like Christmas." And we're going to choose 16 organizations and if you agree, you will be funded for three years. What? I couldn't believe it. Christmas! And you don't need to write a proposal, just a concept paper. What? What could be easier? But then I remembered the experience with Women of Color Coalition and the painful, really painful, breakup that we had.

And so I told them the story, and I said I would not do organizing with women of color again unless we agreed to have a process that we use. So when things get hard, we use the process and we don't walk away. And it was Self-Help that I was talking about. So women started asking, Well, what is it? What are you talking about? What is that? So I explained to them as best I could what Self-Help was. And the little bit that they knew, the women agreed. They didn't know what they were quite agreeing to. There was another woman in the room that knew what Self-Help was, Haydee Morales, who at the time was the director of Casa Atabex Aché. So she knew what it was. And there was a woman from the California Black Women's Health Project.

ROSS: And Dazon [Dixon]?

MARTINEZ: Was she in the room? She might have been in the room. I can't remember. Most of the women did not know what it is we knew and understood, but they agreed, OK, I'm in. I am in. And so, the whole unfolding of that for the three years that we were promised funding for three years, four organizations got big bucks. We got \$50,000 a year to do whatever work we wanted to do around women and STDs. Wonderful. Of course, the process got a little more complicated than they had promised, but it was still guaranteed money, you know. So that was fine with me. OK, we have to write a little bit more. We're going to write a proposal, OK. But that was an amazing, an amazing experience. Some of it was very hard, because not everybody was working with Self-Help.

ROSS: When did the decision to form a collective emerge?

MARTINEZ: Within SisterSong.

ROSS: Where did the name SisterSong come from?

MARTINEZ: We came up with that. The group came up with that. Well, the way it was set up, it was to benefit all the 16 groups, and [we were] promised and given technical support, all kinds of different trainings that we needed done: research and evaluation, lots of different issues, and technology. So we had excellent support. And we got to do an amazing project that I had wanted to do and I'll talk about that in a minute. But just the coming together with all these different women. And the groups had all been preselected, so the Latina group was us[NLHO], Casa Atabex, the Puerto Rican Group –

ROSS: Grupo Pro Derechos [Reproductivos] –

MARTINEZ: Grupo Reproductivos, meaning —

ROSS: Reproductive rights group.

MARTINEZ: And then there was a brand new group that didn't even have the 501C3 with Josie Salinas –

ROSS: The Women's House of Learning.

MARTINEZ: The Women's House of Learning. And so, this whole range of how many years we've been working. But we did excellent work, our Latina group. We were awesome.

ROSS: All right. Well, we're at the end of this tape. I'm going to pick up the next tape with SisterSong and then we'll talk about the more recent history of Luz Alvarez Martinez and the National Latina Health Organization. Thank you.

MARTINEZ: Thank you.

1:03:40

END TAPE 5

TAPE 6

ROSS: (buzz in tape) This is tape six of the interview with Luz Alvarez Martinez, December 7, 2004, in Oakland, California. My name is Loretta Ross, interviewer. Luz, when we left off at the last tape, we had started to talk about SisterSong, and how it became a collective, and your role in SisterSong. So, could you continue talking about that?

MARTINEZ: (loud buzz in tape). Because we really integrated the Self-Help. Just the way I had wanted it to be at that meeting in Savannah, and it was excellent. We did have a hard time with each other, and interpersonally sometimes things would happen. But someone would always remember the process. So we would get in a circle and everybody would be able to process everything and in the end, it had been worked out, so we moved on and that's exactly what I had talked about. And I know the African group that your group was part of, you guys did well, too. The Native American women, I know there were a lot of issues in that mini-community, and also the Asian community, because they didn't have a background of Self-Help.

I remember Byllye Avery, a year or two ago, talking to me and saying, "I just don't know what happened with the Asian and then Native group and how come the Latinas and the African women did so well." And I thought she knew. I said, "Byllye, it's because we have a background in Self-Help. The other groups don't, and that's why, and we incorporated it. We know how to use it. That's simple."

And I was just really surprised she hadn't seen that. But that's the magic, and that's why I continue to be committed to having the Self-Help in the National Latina Health Organization, and we do incorporate into all our programs, and with each other. And we have some really hard times, sometimes. I mean, the hard times can last a while, but if I persist, and keep moving with it, something changes. And it might be somebody does leave or, you know, something happens, but it's within this construct. And to me, that's much healthier than just walking out mad and carrying the anger with you.

ROSS: So you're saying there's really no way to avoid the conflict –

MARTINEZ: Absolutely not.

ROSS: – but you can avoid walking away from each other when the conflict happens.

MARTINEZ: But it has to start with a commitment to each other. If people are not serious about the commitment they made to each other, then they sometimes just walk. They might say, OK, I'll use the Self-Help, I'm committed, but in the end, won't use it and just walk. So the commitment is not there. And I know we're jumping around, but I remember when the National Black Women's Health Project stopped

3:02

using it, when Lillie Allen left. I just could not believe that that separation, that rift within the organization, happened. Paulita and I just were — couldn't believe that it happened, and I remember saying to each other, Well, if black women can't do it, who can? What happened? Why didn't they use the process? But we committed to using the process no matter what, that we were going to continue and it would be different, and we continue to this day. And we will be 19 years old in a few months.

ROSS: Wow. This isn't the time to tell the story of the Black Women's Health Project, but I was on its staff at the time and made the decision not to use the Self-Help process, and it was not a good decision. And it did, in many ways, cripple the organization and it has never recovered from that. So if there's anything to be learned from that —

MARTINEZ: I know, I know, because it was never the same, never the same.

ROSS: Absolutely, and I think it's telling, interestingly enough, that Byllye didn't recognize what the lack of Self-Help had done to the other two groups. And I'll just leave it at that. (laughs) This is your story, not mine.

MARTINEZ: But it's good that you're here and you're doing the interview. I like this.

ROSS: So, you were in the Latina mini-community, called Cancion Latina. How did you choose that name?

MARTINEZ: Well, SisterSong was chosen — was it Dazon Dixon that suggested it, I think so, because her group was SisterLove — and SisterSong. So we were playing on “song,” so we're Cancion Latina, which means Latina Song. So that was our course, I guess. It was kind of cute, and it's good. It just fit. We did some very, very good work together and really demonstrated to the other groups that worked within how powerful this process was. I remember the Puerto Rican group, Isabel —

ROSS: Grupo Reproductivos.

MARTINEZ: Yes, Isabel from that group. The first meeting that she came to, we put it into operation immediately. There were four of us, I guess, Latinas, and we were breaking up into groups, and I guess she was an associate to Reena Marcelo, a white woman. She was, I think, looking for a group to join, and she came over to our group, and I don't know if she even asked. She said, “Oh, is it OK to be in this group?” I looked at her and I said, “No, we have some work to do here.” And she just got up and left. It was uncomfortable for her, and Isabel was just like, wow, she didn't know you could do that.

ROSS: I believe that.

MARTINEZ: Say no to people.

ROSS: I believe her name was Rachel, or Raquel.

MARTINEZ: A woman from Ford, yes. But that was the beginning of the women understanding what it meant. It wasn't just — I mean it was having boundaries. No, I'm sorry you can't be in the group right now. We have work to do with each other and we don't need a white woman that's not part of the group to be here.

And actually, I had had an incident with Rachel, Raquel, at the Savannah meeting. And it's important to tell this as well. We again broke up into groups at that Savannah meeting to begin to plan out what each group would be working on and how we would work together, and Raquel came to our group, and I thought, OK, but as we started to do the work, someone was scribing and the rest of us were giving ideas.

She grabbed a pad and said, "I think this is the way you should do it." And I looked around the group — it was the first time I understood what raising the hackles of your back meant — and I looked around the group, and no one would look at me. No one would. Everyone was looking down or looking away, knowing that I was looking at them, the other Latina women. And I said to her, I said, "Raquel, what is your role here? Are you an observer?" And she said, "Yes. That's my role." I said, "Well, you need to stay in that role, because we know how to do our work. And it might not look the way that you do it, but this is the way we do it. You need to stay in your role and let us do our work." Ooh.

And the uncomfortable part of that was that the other Latina women didn't say a word, not a word, to support, whatever, or anything to me or to Raquel, and Raquel was just quiet after that. But I mean, that has been the case in so many situations. White women come in and think they know how to do it better than us and try to take over. No, that's not going to happen. That's not going to happen.

ROSS: And what was probably so interesting for her is that in her own mind, she was being supportive.

MARTINEZ: Yes, yes. But that's the privilege of racism, isn't it?

10:14

ROSS: There's that, too. So, what are the current programs and activities of the National Latina Health Organization and the current activities of Luz Alvarez Martinez?

MARTINEZ: Well, SisterSong is a big part of it because after those three, I think we had another year, extended year of funding, SisterSong continued to meet, as you know. We continued to meet to do the work, even though we didn't have the money, because we had a commitment. Each one of us had a commitment because of our life experience, and our experience

in organizing and doing the work, women's reproductive health work. So we knew it was important. We started something, and to me that was an extension of what we had committed to. Yes, we were not going to walk away. We're committed. So, not everybody stayed, of course, but those of us that stayed were very committed. Well, some came questioning, but in the end they stayed for the long haul, because to me, again, this organizing was going to work, because we did have the Self-Help. It was that commitment to it, even though some people, they resisted along the way, but it was in place, even though folks resisted it. Laura Jimenez, who used to work with us, and such a strong supporter, she was so committed in Self-Help. She was an excellent counselor. With her persistence and my support, it continued within SisterSong after Ford funding.

And I need to tell this story, too. Because of the resistance, people were saying, But we have too much work to do. We have to do the policy. We don't have time for Self-Help. Oh, do we have to do it. So that continued for a while. And so they would give in and we would do the Self-Help and I knew Laura would get discouraged, and I said, "Well, we're doing it, in whatever form it is, we're doing it."

But the turning point was when we invited the new groups to come in that Ford was funding, and they were a lot of young women coming in, all these women of color. And they came in angry and questioning and who do we think we are? And why do we have to do it this way and this and that and the other thing, and when I saw them come in that way, I said, "Oh, this is how it all begins." I wasn't upset. I just knew that this is how it begins.

And the Self-Help was planned, I think, for the next day and I was going to conduct it. And so, I was fine, because I knew, once we did the Self-Help, that things would change. But I knew everybody else was a little nervous. Oh no, they're so angry. We have to do Self-Help today. And I said, oh, OK. So we did it that same day after lunch, I think. And as soon as we got in the circle, and the women got the attention that they had been needing, and got to express whatever anger they had — it wasn't about SisterSong, of course, it was about their personal lives or the work, and how frustrating the work was for them because they didn't have the resources or the support — and that's all that they needed, someone to pay attention, to listen, to understand what was going on. And the magic happened. And the anger dissipated. And then we could see each other. They could see each other for the women that they were.

And so, the openness started. It was magical. But I know it's always like magic. Once you have the opportunity to do the work — and someone's always ready, you just have to look around and see which one's the most ready, which one needs it, which one will really work — and then the magic happens and then the whole group buys into it and will support it. And so, after that, we had true believers all through SisterSong, and real supporters, like Laura would laugh to hear Latonya, who was the most skeptical, I think — Latonya Slack — get up on the

14:30

stage and just talk about, Now we're going to be doing Self-Help. And it's so funny. And it was just great. It was wonderful. Laura said, "I can't believe this." It was wonderful.

And that's why I know that SisterSong is going to stay together and work. And we're committed, not only to each other but to all women of color. And using Self-Help, there's no way someone is going to go away mad, because we won't let that happen. They might go away, but they're not going to go away mad. They're going to process first, and get rid of all that anger. Then they can walk if they want. That's my commitment to women and to the movement, because this is the movement that is really going to stick, and things are going to change. They've got to.

ROSS: I certainly remember the support you offered at the time we were thinking of dissolving SisterSong because of the lack of funding and I remember looking at you and Charon and basically saying, OK, we can quit now but in five years, the three of us are going to be looking at each other again, and saying, When are we going to organize women of color nationally? Because we had been there so many times.

MARTINEZ: Yes, we have. Different groups, maybe, but still trying to do the work.

ROSS: So, what are some of the other current projects that you're working on with the NLHO?

MARTINEZ: We've always done really, really good work with youth in schools. We serve two to three hundred youths a year. We go into the schools. We have a curriculum. It is called Nahui Olin, and it means, "essence of the four directions." We have created a curriculum, a very broad curriculum, for them.

The first funding came for pregnancy prevention, and we never do any program with just one focus, because you can't just do one focus. You have to be very inclusive. It's body, mind, and spirit. You can't separate anything. So the pregnancy prevention, well, we have to first teach the young folks about themselves, who they are, their history, talk about racism — because often youth don't understand what it is, don't understand what's happening, why they're feeling the way they do. And so we have to break it down. This is racism. This is what it looks like. This is what it feels like. And when somebody says something, does this: that's racism. And it is just pointing it out to them, because they know something's wrong, they just can't put the words to it. And I know that's how it was for me. I had a gut feeling something was wrong, and then I was able to put language to it, and that's what we're helping with these kids.

And these are mostly the Latino kids, because we are in the Fruitvale, East Oakland area. It's a low-income area, lots of immigrant families, and some of the students are Spanish speaking, don't speak English. So all of our programs are bilingual.

But these youth learn so much. They also learn about the media and how it works and how it manipulates. They learn about body image and what the media does to shape their perspectives. They really get politicized — how to really look at the world and how to break it down and understand. And once their eyes are opened, they change completely.

And even students that aren't doing well, they can become engaged in their school work. One group last year of 59 girls, 100 percent of them improved their grades. And we know that that's a byproduct of politicizing them and informing them and letting them know what it's all about. And then we also do it within the Self-Help framework. So, they're getting the information, they're getting to express themselves, they're getting to know themselves, they're learning how to trust, how to support each other, because sometimes they don't know how to do that. So they're getting everything.

And there's a lot of gang stuff going on in that area. We have an excellent program director who really understands the gang culture. She was in it when she was young. She's only 27. So she was in it and she understands it, and she understands that it's not always a negative thing. She says that's where she became, started to be, political, and learning about racism and what was going on. So she has turned it around and never, never puts down anyone because they're in gangs. Always giving alternatives, giving information, seeing that there's lots of other options and how much healthier it might be for them to try this other option.

It's just opening doors, and so we've been very successful working with these young women. Some of them have come to work as interns, and once we're in the schools and the teachers and principals see what's going on, they'll completely support everything we do. In most of the schools, we are part of the curriculum, somewhere in after-school programs, but when they see what's happening, they'll put us in as part of the curriculum. And so we then have a captive audience, everyone is there. We get to serve the entire population. Powerful work. Very excellent work.

And then, we also work with parents, to inform them. We're also teaching kids about sex and sexuality, birth control, everything, so that they have the options. We have never taken abstinence-only money, because it's so restrictive. So we won't take any of that, and so we're not getting as much money as we should. So we're teaching them everything that they need to know to make the best decisions for themselves.

And we started working with parents, which was the next step, because they need to have information. They need to know how to support their children and understand the development of their children and what's happening with them. And often the parents don't have that information, either. That's why they can't provide it to their children.

ROSS:

Did you ever start the program that you alluded to earlier, about working with men? You said, not men, not right now.

23:32

MARTINEZ: Oh, we have, slowly, over the years, we have been including men. The first time, I think, was, we had these two really wonderful successful conferences, one at UC Berkeley, here in California, and another one at Hunter College in New York. Oh, I have to tell about that program, too. But we had these conferences, Intergenerational Communication on Reproductive Health. And they truly were intergenerational. We had families come. We had youth and people of all ages, grandmothers and grandparents and parents. It was amazing. And we, of course, incorporated the Self-Help.

So, in preparing for that conference, we wanted to train men and women in the Self-Help so that they could be in the workshops and conduct those Self-Help circles. So we actually recruited three young men to be a part of that. And they stayed in the training — there was like a 12-week training — they stayed in it for a little while and then they dropped out. One actually almost made it through the whole training, but he did not help at the conference. And I think we tried to include men another time, just to come to trainings, you know, come and participate in Self-Help groups. And again, we had a few men and then they just kind of dropped out.

ROSS: Have you explored why the men drop out?

25:18

MARTINEZ: Oh, I know why. Mike White helped us with the training, so I told Mike, “Next time we work with men, we’re going to pay them, because if they’re just coming as volunteers, they’re not going to stay. So next time we’re going to pay them and they’ll stay.” And so, last year, we did this really wonderful community program called Gathering Against Violence. It was all about violence against women, not only domestic violence but violence in all its forms against women.

And so, my plan was to invite a group of community people, men and women, to be the organizers. And that they would first learn the Self-Help, so that when we did our conferences in the community and incorporated the Self-Help, everyone would have had an opportunity to work through their issues around violence: how they had perpetrated, or how they had prevented, or how they had been impacted by violence. So if they worked through that, then they would be present and more able to support the community in the work. And so we paid them an honorarium — nothing big, you know, three or four hundred dollars — to work with us for the nine months. They stayed.

We had three young men, with I think it was six women, and it was women of all ages. We had a high school student — I think there were two high school students — and, you know, women in their twenties, thirties and forties, and three young men in their early — maybe one was 19 at that time, and early twenties. Powerful, beautiful young men that worked in the community, you know, did work in the community or did political work with youth. So, you know, we were careful. We selected from —(knocking). This is my grandson.

So working with these three young men, paying them, they did stay, but they were also beautiful young men, committed to their community, you know, and they're doing youth organizing and so they know a lot, but they don't know about the Self-Help. So it's just wonderful to hear them talking about male privilege and even how they've been raised to do that. They understand that. And for us to be able to support them. And Mike White did the training because we had men, so that they would feel more comfortable, but also Mike, of course, brings the male influence, and that was really necessary for these young men, I felt.

So it was beautiful. The training was beautifully worked. They really did the Self-Help. They were able to really process and got to some good deep places. And just to see how they did this work. One young man, we had put a folder together that had lots of information in Spanish and English about women and violence. And there was a poem, probably you're familiar with it. "One day, he brought me roses" or something like that, and so the poem goes, he talks about he abused her and then "he brought me roses," and it goes on. And one day, he brought roses to her grave — you know, he had finally killed her. So, this young man said that he took the folder home and shared it with his mother and his sisters, and one of the sisters was in an abusive relationship, but just the sensitivity of this young man sharing this with the women in his family, and what an impact that had on them and on him. It was very powerful, very powerful. So now they have that. We still see each other because they're doing the organizing and they use our office space to do some of the organizing. But I'm just so pleased with them and their fearlessness of going there, of really doing the work and getting to a different place.

ROSS:

All right. So tell me now, what's in the future for Luz Alvarez Martinez?

30:00

MARTINEZ:

What's in the future? Well, I'm one of the cofounders, of course, and it is almost 19 years. And in October, I was 62 years old, and I wasn't thinking beyond the organization for a long time, but two or three years ago, Byllye Avery and I were at the same meeting, and Byllye started talking about all the work she's done, and she said, "I give this work five more years. I'm going to be 70, and then I'm going to leave it to the younger folks." I'm sure she's not going to stop being involved, but she's going to stop doing the organizing, or whatever she meant. And at that moment, I thought, Oh, I need to think about after the organization. What am I going to do? I hadn't taken time to think about that. So at that time, I began to make plans of it. At which point will I step out of the organization? And having been with it from the beginning, that's a long time.

So, I made the decision that within the next three to five years, I will be leaving the organization and leaving it to the younger women that are coming through. And so, I am looking forward to staying involved in the work, but not the way that I am now. The administrative work gets

me down. Gets me down. The fundraising gets me down, because I don't think the funders — I know the funders don't really appreciate the work that National Latina Health Organization, that other women of color organizations do. Otherwise, they'd be funding us the way they fund the mainstream. So that part I'm very tired of.

So, what I see in my future, what I'm making plans to do, is something that I actually had even in my mind before I helped to found the organization, and that is to have my own foundation. That's what I want to do. I want to create, develop a friendlier, more respectful, more supportive way of funding that doesn't put the organizations in such a turmoil every time a proposal has to be written. I want to teach the mainstream foundations a different way to do it — and being able to control that. And of course, my first choice would be National Latina Health Organization. I want to be able to endow the organization, to have regular money coming through every year, so they don't have to worry about it, the way I, all these 19 years, struggled and worried about keeping funding coming through, to keep the organization moving and the work moving.

So, that is my future career after I leave the organization, and I am working on a plan right now on how to raise that money. I'm not going to go to other foundations to ask for the money, I'm going to raise the money. I had never thought that I would like to have a lot of money until I started thinking seriously about a foundation.

So, I am beginning to do property investment, have been paying attention to all of these men that are teaching this process and making lots of money doing their investment but also teaching this. So I want to be a part of a Latina group that does the same thing. I'm already meeting with a few women, so we're going to bring a few more women together so we have eight to ten women, begin to support each other in doing our personal property investment and then come together as a group to do group investment, so that we can build a money-making enterprise. And so, the group that I'm meeting with now is also interested in doing foundation and contributing towards the community.

So that's what I'm working on right now. I'm very excited about it, and had actually made the commitment to start doing property investment at the beginning of this year but hadn't had time to do anything until October of this year, just a few weeks ago. And now, it's on the move. It's on the move. So I see myself having a foundation within the next five to ten years. That's my next move.

ROSS: OK. Now one question I didn't explore too thoroughly with you yet is the "F" word. When did you, if you ever did –

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MARTINEZ: The big "F" word.

ROSS: The big "F" word.

MARTINEZ: Feminism.

ROSS: Right. When did you, if you ever did, start using the word feminist and applying it to yourself?

MARTINEZ: I don't think I ever did. I don't think I ever applied it to myself. Because feminism, the way I understand it, and the way I've seen it work, does not include social justice, human rights, working against racism. I haven't seen it. So I believe that women need to be supported, that need to be able to do whatever any man can do. And it's not about men and women. It's about women need to have the options. They need to be supported as individual women, and as a whole group. So, I really have never called myself a feminist.

ROSS: Have others called you a feminist?

MARTINEZ: What's that?

ROSS: Have other people called you a feminist?

MARTINEZ: They'll refer to it and I'll just say to them, But these are the other things that need to be included. And right now, feminism doesn't include those issues that I can see. Because if these so-called feminist organizations included all of these other things, they wouldn't be white organizations, would they? So I have never really referred to myself as a feminist. I believe in women's rights and human rights and social justice. So it's more inclusive than feminism.

ROSS: OK. Feminism by any other name (laughter) still is that. So how would you describe your politics, then? Is there a word that comes to mind, or a group of words?

MARTINEZ: I don't think there's a word, but I know it includes spirituality. It includes all of it, because I bring my whole self to the work. I bring my whole self to whatever I do. I can't separate, compartmentalize myself. I bring my intellect, my experience, my commitment, my spirituality, my respect, and integrity, I have integrity, and my principles, with me. To me, the Self-Help is spiritual work, because it's self work. It's emotional, spiritual, and it even impacts you physically. So it's all a package. It's everything. And that's what I bring to the work.

And wherever I go, I try to incorporate pieces of whatever I can of the Self-Help. I just recently became the president of the Hispanic United Fund. So the first meeting that I chaired as the new president, I had everybody check in. And some people were a little uncomfortable and didn't understand it, so I had to explain it to them. But that's a piece of it. How do we work with each other, not only at an intellectual administrative level, but personally, as people? So it's not just a superficial level. To me, you'd have to bring your whole self.

39:00

ROSS: Well, since we've got perhaps another half hour of this interview left, I'd actually like us to move from the political Luz to the holistic Luz. Update us on what's happening with your family, with important relationships in your life, so that we've seen Luz from a baby, we've seen Luz as a mother, a divorcee, a political activist, now a grandmother. So tell us what's going on in your current life beyond politics.

MARTINEZ: I first want to tell another important piece of our work. There are a lot of pieces. So when I write the book, it'll include everything. But this piece is really important. It's the work that we do in the universities, and the project that we did with the Ford funding, that is the project. The money that we got from Ford, we went into the university. It's such a wonderful, all-encompassing program. It's very similar to the work we do in the middle and high schools, but this is at the university level.

We have collaborated with UC Berkeley. We began this collaboration in 1998. Through the Ethnic Studies Department, we developed a class called "Redefining Latina Health Body, Mind, and Spirit" and worked with graduate Latina students from UC Berkeley, and with our staff. Together, we developed this amazing political/spiritual curriculum that is used in the classroom. And the two instructors, the two graduate students, are taught the Self-Help so that they go into the classroom, teach all of this within the construct of Self-Help. Powerful, powerful work. Because they introduce the check-ins, how to listen to each other, the Self-Help, and so much. But because they are grounded in it, they can do this.

And it's a completely different experience for the student, completely different. They do not know how to bring their whole self into their academic work, because they have never been taught that. They've always been taught, your brain, your intellect, that's what's important, your analysis, that's what we need. Nobody cares about your personal life. So we turned it around and said, We care about this person. You need to bring that with you. You need to share. When you're analyzing, you're looking at things. We want you to see, How does that person impact you, your family, your community. And how do you write about that? And it was really hard for some of the students to do that because they had never done it before.

But the experience of bringing in the spiritual part, the Self-Help, all of it was an amazing, beautiful process for these students. And we had it at Berkeley for 1998 and 1999, and then in the year 2000 we took it to Hunter College in New York. All of our programs are successful, but this one just incorporates everything. It's bringing the Self-Help to the university.

And what happens is once the instructors know it, have used it, then they take it to their future work, whatever it is. Irene Lara, one of the first instructors at UC Berkeley, is now teaching at San Diego State University. Oh, she is doing such wonderful work there. Because she brings it into the classroom, she brings it into the academic level with

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other teachers, with the administration. She is bringing it all and I have seen her do this. I have gone to visit and present at her class and I just see that the big vision was there. I knew that it was going to happen but I didn't know all the different steps, and she's taking it everywhere. And that's exactly what we knew would happen.

And actually, one of the first students at UC Berkeley, Erica Jimenez, came to work with us, and after she graduated did excellent work within the organization. So it's taking it to all the different levels. And so we want to continue doing that at—

ROSS: Well, I wish you much luck in your future in doing that.

MARTINEZ: — other universities, not only those two. So, personally, what is going on. Um, I have four sons. My oldest sons, the twins, Eric and Max, are going to be 40 in a couple of weeks. I can't believe that I am old enough to have 40-year-old children. And to me, I'm going to celebrate their birthday, but I'm going to celebrate my being a mother by choice, over this length of time, so it'll be a double celebration. I've been a mother this long. I can't believe it. You know, there are just so many phases to my life, and that phase of being a mother was wonderful. I loved it. And then I loved when I went to school. Then I loved when I started working and helped to establish this organization, and so the next steps are to prepare for — I don't know how many more years. I want to be able also to afford not to work, to rest, sometimes, to do things for fun, to go on trips without it being a conference. Just to have a good time.

ROSS: Do you have grandchildren?

MARTINEZ: I have three grandchildren. Jakey is the youngest, he's nine. Monica is nine, a few months older than he is. And Gabriel is 12. I can't believe he's that old. I don't see Monica and Gabriel too often, they're my older ones, because my son and their mother divorced a few years ago, so, he doesn't have them all the time, so I only see them occasionally when they are with their father and we can work it out.

But Jakey I see all the time. He grew up — from the time he was born, he was very close. He lives right next door to me. The first few months of his life, he actually lived in my home with his parents and then they moved into the attached apartment. So he and I have a very, very close relationship, because all of his life, we've been physically close as well as emotionally close. And so, we have learned so much from each other, and I've been able to teach him a lot about spirituality and Mother Earth and the creator, and he responds. So, I'm going to continue being in his life a lot, and I wish I were in my other grandchildren's life more, and I don't know how that's going to happen. You know, I'm going to keep trying. And if I didn't have to work every day, I would have time to do that. I want to have time to do that.

ROSS: You have not spoken of any other romantic relationships in your life beyond your husband.

MARTINEZ: Well, I have had romantic relationships, but I don't have one at this time. Nineteen ninety-two was an important year for me in lots of ways, because that marked the five hundred years after colonization started. I knew it was going to be a very important year, important in many ways. My first grandchild was born. One of my sons got married. I fell in love. It wasn't the first time since my divorce, but that was an amazing year. It was also the beginning of my spiritual development. Rigoberta Menchu got the [Nobel] Peace Prize, the first indigenous woman. All these things are connected, you know. All of these all connected. So, I don't know if I will ever — I don't think I will ever be married again, but I look forward to new relationships. And I have a wonderful group of women friends, and I work with such wonderful women in my work, like you and so many other women, so committed and such wonderful women. I see my life expanding, just learning new things and continuing to dance until I'm 90, at least — doing the Danza.

ROSS: So what legacy would you like to leave behind? What lessons learned would you like to pass on to the next generation?

52:28

MARTINEZ: The struggle is important. It is part of your personal development, spiritual development. And it's so important to have that balance. You can't just have the work. You must work towards balance. That's the legacy I want to leave. Balance of body, mind, and spirit. Do not work yourself to death. You have to have something outside of the work, the political work. A spiritual balance.

I know there was a little while there, a few years, when I was working all the time, all the time. It was exciting but at the cost of not having balance, not having the close connection with my family that I need. And my mother just dying three weeks ago, and spending so much time with my family, my children and my brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews, and everything, everyone during that time was so powerful and so special, that I know I want to have free — the time to do more of that, how important those relationships are with my brothers and sisters and their children and with my children and grandchildren. I want to pay more attention to that. And to develop romantic relationships.

ROSS: OK. Are there any final thoughts that you'd like to share or questions I didn't ask that you'd like to answer?

MARTINEZ: Well, right now, in the year 2004, just having had an election and we have George W. Bush for another four years, it's so easy to become depressed and discouraged about our lives here in the United States and about the world, because our government and our politics impact the entire world. And I know it feels like a very dark time to me personally,

and I know it's impacting so many of us. It's a very dark time. And because of the Republican politics of the United States and of California where I live, there's a lot to be discouraged about. People are losing their jobs. People aren't prepared to take care of themselves. So something is really wrong.

There has to be some change in this government so that people are valued, so that we're taken care of. We have resources to help us take care of ourselves. All these people losing their jobs, how are they going — and I know women that are not doing the work they want to do, but taking jobs for the money because they need to support themselves, but are suffering so much emotionally, physically. So it's a dark time right now but we need to continue struggling because if we don't, it'll stay dark. So we have to do something about bringing light —

ROSS: To this grim world we share.

MARTINEZ: Yes.

ROSS: So, how do you keep your spirits up?

MARTINEZ: Work towards balancing everything. Do my Danza. Dance in ceremonies. Dance in public. I danced for my mother's funeral, her funeral mass. It was so beautiful. My group came to dance for it. It was just so beautiful. I'm so at peace with my mother being gone. So this year is so important, too, this whole process of my mother finally able to leave her physical body and world. She was tired and she was uncomfortable and she was not well, especially these last couple of months, and just having all these beautiful farewell ceremonies for her. And actually, it's still moving, because tonight, I'm going to the last rosary at my sister's home where she lived, of a nine-day novena, where family and friends gather together and say the rosary for my mother.

57:00

And another thing that's very important in these last two months is that I have been able to bring my spirituality through Danza Azteca and everything that I've learned to my family, to bring the ceremony, to bring the spirituality to them. And my family is all different religions. There are only three — no, just two — real Catholics left in my family. There are Christians, there are Jehovah's Witnesses, I don't know what else there is, but lots of different practices, and there's me, that practices and strives to learn more about our indigenous spirituality through Danza Azteca.

So for my mother, actually before my mother died, I was able to do the ceremony with 25 or 30 family members, a Dia de los Muertos ceremony, Day of the Dead ceremony, at the cemetery where my father is buried. He died in 1951. This was the first time we had ever done anything like this as a family. I brought it to my family. So we went to the cemetery and this was in between two hospital stays of my mother before she died, and she was so happy and so emotional that we were doing this. So we went to the cemetery. I had a ceremony at his

gravestone, his grave site, and then we built an altar on the lawn near his grave, to him and to all the other family and friends that we've lost in all of these years. It was beautiful. So I brought that to my family and my mother was telling everyone that when she dies, she would be buried there with her husband that she lost so many years, over 50 years ago. And so her timing was right. She died about two weeks later. And it was good. It was her time to go.

And then I brought Danza to her funeral mass and that was so beautiful. And my family, whole extended family, had never — most of them had never been exposed to this, were so appreciative. Just bringing that to everyone. And my mother was actually cremated after the mass, a few days after. We buried her ashes the day after Thanksgiving, and I again brought ceremony to that, with the priest, with his encouragement. So I used the sage smoke to help send her on her final journey. And my family accepted it again. So I see that as happening more like my family, because now they're all ready for next Dia de los Muertos where we honor both my mother and father.

ROSS: Oh, that's a wonderful story, and it's a wonderful place to end. We have about two minutes left on this video, and if you don't mind, I'm going to pause and ask you to pick up some of those family photos so that we can use our last few minutes shooting those.

1:01:50

MARTINEZ: [my mother] when she was interviewed on, it was, August 26, the anniversary of women getting the vote, so she was 95, this was just a couple of months ago. And so she came out and talked about why she votes, and she began voting at age 88 when she became a citizen.

So this is the family photo when there were just eight of us children, and then over here, I must have been about three years old, and so there were more children to come.

ROSS: Could you name the people in the photo?

MARTINEZ: Sure. Here's my mother sitting down, and my sister Bea was the baby and my father. That's my brother Bill, my oldest sister Juana, my sister Lupe, my sister Mary, and my brother Joe.

ROSS: And that man next to your father?

MARTINEZ: Oh, that's Marty. I forgot to name him.

ROSS: And the baby in the lap?

MARTINEZ: That's Bea, my sister Bea.

ROSS: All right, thank you. Tell me what this photo is.

MARTINEZ: Now this is some members of my family when we were probably in Santa Rosa. During summers, my father would take us all to either Santa Rosa or Gilroy to pick prunes. So for three months, we would stay in these camps and pick prunes. So this was part of how — and we did this several summers. We didn't travel with the crops, because my father was a carpenter, but for the summers, we would all be together doing this.

ROSS: All right, then, thank you.

MARTINEZ: So this picture, I believe, was in 1991. All of my sons are here and two wives. This is my son Jacob, my son Benjamin, that's me, and this is Max and Laura, and my son Eric and his wife, Tammy.

ROSS: All right, then. Thank you

1:04:16

END TAPE 6

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