

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

GRACIELA SÁNCHEZ

Interviewed by

LORETTA ROSS

February 22-23, 2005

San Antonio, Texas

This interview was made possible
with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

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Narrator

Graciela Sánchez was born April 24, 1960, in San Antonio, Texas, the fifth of six children of Enrique and Isabel Sánchez. She was influenced by her parents' involvement in the Chicano pride movement that began in San Antonio in the late 1960s. After graduating from Yale University in 1982, Sánchez returned to her childhood neighborhood on the near west side of San Antonio, where she remains a dedicated community organizer.

In the 1980s, Sánchez worked with the Southwest Voter Registration Project, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and Chicana Health Policy Development. She participated in Central American solidarity work and studied filmmaking at the Escuela Internacionale de Cine y Television in Cuba. She has produced several films, including *Testimonios de Nicaragua* on the Sandinista Revolution and *No porque lo dice Fidel Castro* on lesbian and gay politics in Cuba. As an organizer in the queer community, she became a founding board member of the San Antonio Lesbian Gay assembly, the San Antonio Lesbian/Gay Media Project, and ELLAS, a state and local Latina lesbian organization.

In 1987 Sánchez joined other women in founding the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, which she still directs. A cultural arts and education center, Esperanza is led by lesbians of color committed to bringing grassroots and internationalist Chicana, gender, and working class perspectives together in social justice activism. The Center nurtures the arts as cultural activism and supports MujerArtes, a clay collective that has reestablished pottery-making among low-income Mexican American women as an expression of culturally-grounded empowerment. Esperanza also integrates the collecting of Chicana history into its popular education programs and serves as a repository of artifacts and resources on Mexican American women's history, including the works of Sandra Cisneros and Gloria Anzaldúa. Esperanza regularly publishes *La Voz de Esperanza*, which celebrates the achievements of the Chicano community with an emphasis on women. Sánchez received the Stonewall Award in 1992 in national recognition of her work in promoting lesbian rights.

Note: The SSC holds a full run of *La Voz de Esperanza* in its periodicals collection.

Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970–73. A leader in the antirape 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, Sánchez describes her childhood in a close-knit extended, egalitarian working-class family, noting especially her mother's influence on her core values. She recounts her political development and activity at Yale, the difficulty of her coming out process, and her involvement in Chicano organizing projects and filmmaking. Sánchez details the development of the Esperanza Center, including the political and funding challenges of sustaining a multi-issue organization led by lesbians of color. She offers a vivid account of Esperanza's grassroots "Todos Somos Esperanza" campaign against right-wing attacks, including the Center's successful lawsuit against the city's efforts to defund it in the late 1990s. Her account of the centrality of the arts and community history to Esperanza's goals and organizing strategies is especially strong.

Restrictions

Portions (pages 52-54) restricted until Sept 1, 2015

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Six 63-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Luann Jette. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Revan Schendler. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Graciela Sanchez and Loretta Ross.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Sanchez, Graciela. Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, July 21 and 22, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Graciela Sanchez interview by Loretta Ross, video recording, February 22-23, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 3.

Transcript

Bibliography: Sanchez, Graciela. Interview by Loretta Ross. Transcript of video recording, July 21 and 22, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Graciela Sanchez, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, February 22-23, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 43.

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Transcript of interview conducted FEBRUARY 22, 2005, with:

GRACIELA SÁNCHEZ
San Antonio, Texas

by: LORETTA ROSS

ROSS: Today is February 22nd, and I'm in San Antonio, Texas. My name is Loretta Ross and I'm interviewing Graciela Sánchez –

SÁNCHEZ: That would be me.

ROSS: – founder of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center here in San Antonio, Texas. Thank you, Graciela, for agreeing to do this Voices of Feminism Oral History interview on behalf of Smith College and the Sophia Smith Collection. How are you doing today?

SÁNCHEZ: Fine, and thank you, Loretta for including me on your list of women of color to highlight — activists, yeah.

ROSS: It's my honor, it's my privilege. I want to first start understanding about your personal life. Where does Graciela come from? So, could you tell me where you were born, when you were born, a little bit about your siblings and your family?

SÁNCHEZ: Sure. We're currently at the Casa de Cuentos, which is about half a mile north of where I grew up. [I was born] in this neighborhood on April 24, 1960, in San Antonio, Texas. I'm a homegirl from this city as well as this neighborhood. I was born the fifth child of six children. My parents are Enrique Sánchez and Isabel Sánchez. And, historically, both of my parents also have roots in this same neighborhood. My grandfather on my dad's side went to school catty corner to where we're now at, and we have a picture of him circa 1907, going to this school. He probably only went to the third or fourth grade, but there he was as a seven-year-old in 1907. And on my mom's side, we also know, at least since 1920s — because they used to live downtown and there was a flood, the big 1921 flood of San Antonio, and so she was in the downtown area and people moved and so she moved into this area in the 1920s.

And what's interesting is not only are we from this neighborhood, we're also from that same little block. So, Santiago and Vera Cruz off of Sabinas Street is where my family still lives, and I'm trying to get back

into this neighborhood. Unfortunately, there aren't too many homes that are available for people just to come back into the neighborhood. One of my wishes is, if everything goes well, as I grow older, I get to come back home.

ROSS: Well, who would you consider major influences on the person that's Graciela now?

2:45

SÁNCHEZ: Um, I mean, I have to credit my parents, definitely — both of them. I mean, I tend to want to say “we” — I come from a matriarchy, so that my mother and her mother and her mother — so, up to my great-grandmother — my mom always told the stories and shared those stories and basically taught, you know, ways of being good people and taking care of people in the community and taking care of family. And what we call social justice, you know, they were doing as just regular folks, caring for one another. So I think on that level, the women in my family are the people who helped to create and to help me think of who I am and what I do today.

But I also have to give credit to my father, because I do know that he could have been the typical man and just kind of kept his wife and his daughters subjugated to his rule, and he was raised by women, so. And kind of gathering his story is knowing that he was able to respect and learn and basically be bossed around also by his grandmother and older sister and being told that he had to respect the women in his life. And he's five years younger than my mother, and so they met when, I guess, he was 19 and she was 24, and they married when he was 21 and she was 26. And so, an older woman was kind of (laughs) — I mean, it allowed her, I think, to be just that more knowledgeable and strong and opinionated about how she was and what she wanted. So him being much younger maybe allowed for that. They had more of an equal partnership as partnerships can go during the 1940s to the present.

They've now been married 55 years, 55 and a half years as of yesterday, because I went by the house yesterday and my mom said that they were celebrating their 55-and-a-half-year anniversary, because they married on August 21 and yesterday was February 21. So they are people that still love each other, which I think is rare also, but they were lucky to have found each other.

My mom's a dark-skinned Latina woman and my father is a light-skinned Latino man but he was born in Mexico. But I learned about racial differences right from the beginning because as a little girl, you know, I was very, very white and my mom very, very dark, so people assumed that she was my caretaker. And so, they always asked her, Whose child is she? And it's like, She's mine. And they were always surprised and saying, of course, she can't be. She's too pretty and you're brown and ugly. And my mom's always been a beautiful woman to me. That's, of course, my first love. One is always attracted to their mom.

And through her stories, I always heard the hurt within [her], you know, being castigated, being set aside, being treated differently because

6:00

she was dark-skinned, being put down, being called “black,” being told not to wear red because black people wear red and she doesn’t want to — you know, and all those things that were about — also being *india*, you know, being black or being *india*, indigenous Native American culture, which is what she is.

But, you know, fortunately, she didn’t just push away from that and assimilate and try to be very white. Instead, she just kind of dealt with the pain. And I think now, as an 81-year-old woman, she probably talks more about the hurting of that racism in a more profound way, and, I guess because she has children that she can speak to as her equals, whereas when we were kids growing up, she — it was just little stories and little snippets.

Half of my siblings are dark-skinned and half of us are lighter-skinned, and I think because I have an office job, I tend to have the least amount of sun on my body, so I’m the lightest one of all. And half of us have curly hair and half of us have very straight hair. Some of the dark-skinned people have the curly hair as well. Anyway, so I got to get a sense of those differences, because my younger sister — there are four brothers and myself and my sister, so she and I basically did all the playing and you know, conniving, and you know, playing around this neighborhood as children and so we were always together. So I saw, again, how people treated her in a way. And I always — to this day, [I am] challenged whenever I sit on panels or I’m sitting in a group of people who say, you know, Most of the Latinos of Mexican descent that I know are dark-skinned. So why aren’t we representing our indigenous dark-skinned sisters and brothers, you know, when we come together? And so I speak to my white-skin privilege and challenge people about that. And I don’t hear too many people talk about that. I know within the black community, I’ve heard a lot more, I guess, discussion about it. I think within the Latino community, they try to quiet that down.

But anyway, so part of what my parents taught me was being grounded in our Mexican culture, knowing how to speak Spanish, because they knew we would learn English. My father taught us many songs, taught us how to dance salsa and meringues and everything he grew up with. He’s from the eastern coast of Mexico, from Tampico. My paternal grandmother is from Veracruz, so that’s the Caribbean coast, so what we know of Mexico — again, it’s as diverse as the United States is diverse, as any country is, but that was a clash growing up here, because a lot of the kids grew up and came from the northern part of Mexico. So, coming from the east coast and having those differences, I was able to see the complexities, even within Mexican culture.

9:00

But my father did a lot of the singing, which again, culture usually gets passed down through women and in this case, I was able to have both parents — because my mom was able to teach me the northern Mexico music, dance, and stories, [and] my father was able to do the same. And together, you know, they both thought it was important to do that sort of teaching and to say, This neighborhood is a poor neighborhood, but it

doesn't mean that poor people don't have their own self-respect, that poor people aren't good people.

We are very good people, because a lot of the people in this community — like, I guess, in more communities in this country, world, you make it a little bit better, you flee your home base. And they were saying, Why? That means that you have *verguenza*, or shame, and there should be no shame for living here because we're respectable people and so are your neighbors and so are the family members that you grew up with, and so — because all my uncles and aunts moved north, you know, and we were the only ones that stayed. And we also stayed because my grandmother, my momma's momma, and her father, lived next door, and so my mom and our family basically also became the caretakers, which is really good because then we had the extended family still around. And so, if mom wasn't just around, we'd go to school and come back and go to my grandma and my grandfather's house and hang around and watch TV and eat food, and then go back and forth. My grandparents had the television. We didn't have a television. My father didn't like television. He didn't like the phone, and so my grandmother also had the phone. And the same telephone number is still being used by my parents that my grandmother had, so this is an old telephone number.

So, again, it's this kind of getting a sense of the people, however poor one is, you know, you can see that they're struggling, that they're hard workers and they're just trying to make a good living, and being of Mexican descent or of any color doesn't matter as long as you're just trying to do good for your family and the rest of your community. And I think that sense of the extended family or extended community also comes from, I think, many communities of color.

And so, my parents — again, my mom being almost 82 and my father being five years younger than that, 77 — are still taking care of the elders, right? I'm like, But you're old. But they are of good health, so my father still drives people who are maybe younger than him but who are diabetic or who have had heart problems or some other sort of surgery that doesn't allow them — so, my mom says, “Okay, this lady needs a ride over here, so let's go and give 'em a ride.” And so they take them around all over. They'll take them to vote. They'll take them just wherever, to buy groceries or to go to the doctors a lot.

And that's what I've seen my mother do always. It was my grandmother when I was young that she was taking care of, who was arthritic and just unhealthy, but then it became the next-door neighbor, and then it became the woman five blocks away, and then it became the woman that moved in to live across the street. Right now, there's a 30-something-year-old young woman who has some disabilities and a next-door neighbor on the other side who is mute — and all of them come to my family's home, because they're very loving people.

And so, I think those were the examples that I had. So it's no surprise, again, of what I do now. You might ask another question.

ROSS: You're doing great. In my research on you, the value of returning to the community comes up over and over again for you. So, what does it mean that you had so many choices in life and that you chose to return and do your political work in San Antonio?

13:09

SÁNCHEZ: Well, in the '70s and the '80s, obviously, affirmative action was probably at its peak — that whole ten years of, you know, from '68 to '82 or something like that, it seemed like it was up and running, and then it just kind of died. But what happened was — again, I have older brothers, and so all of their friends ended up going away to school, and what my parents noticed was that they weren't coming back home. And so they kind of, in their indirect or very direct way, said, It's really good for people to come back, because they have to come back home and they have to do things for this neighborhood and for this community.

And so I guess it registered at some place, and yes, I went away to college and I went away to film school in Cuba and I mean, I think, especially when I was in Cuba — and by that time, I was very much a gay activist. People say, Well, why didn't you stay there and why didn't you start organizing the gay community? But it wasn't my community, and I have to be — I mean, what I was recognizing is, again, there's homophobia in Cuba, but it wasn't any different than the homophobia happening in San Antonio. What we know though, is that, under a U.S. imperialist understanding, Cuba must be the worst homophobic dictatorship in the world, but I was feeling the same sort of homophobia in San Antonio, a very much U.S.-based, democratic — so-called democratic — society. So why was I going to organize people over there when I had to do it at home?

So it was those moments that, you know, something has to happen here. I was in an abusive relationship in my 20s and there was nothing here as a lesbian for me to go to, some community service agency to be able to reach out to them so that they could help me. I mean, I had to go back to New Haven to visit with friends to escape the horrible relationship here and then recognize and say, Well, why don't we have what they have over here in New Haven, 2000 miles away? That should be happening in San Antonio. So again, how do I come back and create it for other people in San Antonio?

So it was always — going away allowed me to have just a larger, national and international perspective of the world and how it works. I was reading theoretically, finally, in college, but to be able to see it in practice was the ability to move away. But, you know, it's important for me, I think, to come back home and to — I mean, this is where I feel like I can challenge everybody and they might say, Well, go back home. And it's like, This is home.

And so much of my life, especially these last few years, is people don't believe I'm from here. They don't, definitely, believe I'm from San Antonio, much less from the West Side of San Antonio, because they have a stereotype of what someone from the West Side is supposed to be.

ROSS: What is that stereotype?

16:40

SÁNCHEZ: Well, again, this neighborhood is one of the poorest census blocks in the country, I think. San Antonio, and Detroit, D.C., those sorts of communities are very, very poor. They've done a lot of renovations and urban renewal has come in and torn down a lot of homes, but the poverty and the bad education, the bad health care and all the needs for this community have been neglected, and in other parts of San Antonio as well. But I think historically, the near West Side was where they put the Mexicans, as they did for the East Side for the black community — a very segregated society. So all the schools that I went to, being public schools, were 99.9 percent of Mexican descent, but you know, again, not too many teachers wanted to come and teach in this neighborhood. Poverty just brings on all the problems that it brings in. So you have, nowadays, a lot of people that are transients, and this whole neighborhood is very transient.

The largest housing projects in the city are right in here, the Alazan Apache Courts. They were built in the 1940s when Eleanor Roosevelt came, and so they talk about them being the first housing projects in the country. I think there were other things that were going on in New York and elsewhere, but the way they developed them here was unique and of that moment. And that was — the projects, as big as they were — was an improvement in the lives of people. So, everybody wanted to live in the projects, because they were pretty and they were new.

And if you look at images in the 1920s and '30s by Alan Lomax and other people who were doing oral histories of San Antonio during that time period, you see a lot of shacks, wooden structures with a lot of aluminum — very small structures, no floor, just a dirt floor. And so that just begets other — just lack of education, kids didn't — there were a lot of migrants, students just coming and going.

I was lucky enough that my father worked as an auto painter, so his job was just painting and we didn't move around, and he and my mom made a pact that she would stay at home and raise the kids. But again, in his work and his ability, he allowed her to be an activist and an organizer and so she was — to this day, again, she is still raising moneys to give scholarships to the kids in the local high school.

But, growing up, they advocated for their children, but what I saw was really their children meant the larger context, because most of the parents — like, I grew up and I knew that what I had that was different than all my schoolmates was that I had two parents. Many of them had lost their parents, either through disease — like I had my friend Fidencia, whose daddy died of diabetes and so she only knew her mother; and Ricky, whose mother died also of some other health ailment; Amelia and her family, they were — the father was an alcoholic, and so they were struggling a lot. So those friends of mine used to come to my family to

find the structure that they needed and having a second family. So, again, their inability to hold enough of a job to make ends meet.

My father wasn't — you know, he was a working-class man, I mean, had money, but I know that when I finally started working right out of college, I started making \$16,000, in 1982, and I think I was making more money than my father was at that time. And he was kicked out of his job a few years later because of early retirement, just pushed out, but I think he might have been making \$12,000 or \$13,000 in 1982. So he never made a lot of money even for — just thinking of having to raise six kids and then every body else in the extended family — but it was enough. My parents learned how to just maintain enough food on the table.

My father was a starving child in Mexico, so he always wanted to have good meals and he made sure that we all came home at five o'clock to have dinner and so that all the children would come in and we would share stories of what had gone on and, you know, we would talk about the struggles we were having at school or with friends and they would offer us suggestions of how to resolve the problem and document it if there were any problems, and then be able to go back to the principal or whoever. So, you know, we were learning our strategies that way. But it was a good way of just kind of connecting us together.

But then again, my friends would join us. What I saw there was just the differences that most of the kids that surrounded me didn't have a lot of what, you know, some of what I would have taken for granted. And again, because my mom wanted to make sure that we accepted all the kids.

22:15

I know my good friend in junior high school was Amelia and she cursed like crazy and I was raised not to curse and I was raised to be a good little Christian, you know, so you don't cuss, you don't think bad thoughts or fight. And that was Amelia. She was the bully, she cursed, but because she was a bad student, like a D and F student, I was in the classroom with her in math and so they kept on sending her to my little table so she would — you know, we sat at tables and so she was always shoved over to me. And so, before I knew it, she had to be my friend. She would follow me home and I didn't want to be around her and my mom said, "You are going to be her friend and you invite her over." And so what happened was the development of a good friendship that lasts to this day. And she became my protector because they wanted to beat me up because I probably came across as a little snotty kid because I liked school and I wasn't supposed to like school. You don't like school if you come to these schools. You're not supposed to make like you like school, and so they used to call me *maestra*, which means teacher.

And so it seems — like in seventh grade, I was in gym and they have a game where they put a parachute and they put the lightweights, or they put different people in the middle of the parachute and it's a game to teach group activity, you know, working together as a group, so the PE teacher would teach us how to pull together and pull that person from the middle of the parachute up to the top, you know, going up 30 feet up into sky and then to bring that person back down very carefully. So other people got to

go. When they put me in there, the eighth grade girls let go of their side so I came slamming onto the concrete PE floor. And come to find out, the eighth grade girls wanted to beat me up and didn't like who I was. And so, from that point on, I think Amelia understood that they meant to really hurt me. And that was it.

I just remember in junior high school, kids would have lots of — there was a lot of fighting going on in Cooper Junior High School. And so there was a certain way you had to be and you had to just resent school and not like it. It's not that there's a culture of it. I think there's just a small group of people who probably had that. But there was some pressure. I mean, I feel like my vocabulary was limited because I was, you know, because of those pressures. So, I probably stopped myself from articulating and using those words, even though the teachers might have said, Here's vocabulary words, but I didn't want to get beat up anymore, so I kind of resisted putting that out there. So I learned to accommodate to their needs while still doing the stuff that I wanted to do, growing up here.

ROSS: Like an underground scholar?

SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, I guess so.

25:00

ROSS: Tell me about your siblings.

SÁNCHEZ: OK. My oldest brother is Xavier Sánchez, and he is eight years older than I am, so — I am 44 so he is 52 — and he has seven children and he works at the local HEB grocery store. I guess he's been doing that since he was in high school and he just kind of — he went on to St. Mary's University for a couple of years, but left that to raise his family and has had a steady job with HEB. He's just a very loving man. I think of my older brother and my youngest brother as the ones who kind of have the sweetest and most loving hearts, you know. I strive to be like them and my mother. I tend to be harsher.

My second oldest brother is named Bernard Sánchez, and he currently works for a courier service, and he's been doing that for a while. He just moved himself out to another courier because they were competing for him, so he was basically second in command in the other place and just got moved over. What's been exciting for me is — and he's six years older than I am — but of the siblings that currently live in San Antonio, he's the one that's been most involved with the Esperanza in the last two or three years.

He's also a gay man, and I think we both found out about each other probably when I was in college, and I came out to my family before he did. Both of us, I believe, were in abusive relationships, too, so when he left his abusive relationship about five or six years ago, that's probably when he freed himself up in a way that we were able to see him a little bit more. And within that timeframe, he's just gotten more involved with the Esperanza, and so, he's part of the Casa de Cuentos Oral History Project.

And it's interesting to see him get excited and to, on his own, participate as another *buena gente*, not as my brother but as someone who's just interested in that. Before working there, he also used to run an antique clothing store, which was a really cool place everybody used to go to, and he just kind of got tired after about ten years with that.

I have a third brother, Fernando Sánchez, and he's the only one that doesn't live in San Antonio. He lives in Denver, Colorado, right now, and he's the one I used to fight with growing up. I always wanted to be able to keep up with him and do everything he did, and he didn't want no girl — although he was really connected to my sister as my sister's protector, he kind of always shoved me to the side. And so, of course, that just made me want to do things more. If he was playing with little toy soldiers, then I wanted to play soldiers with him, but he's like, no, you know. If he was playing with — war — and it's interesting the type of games he played and I wanted to join in — you know, it was just kind of pushing me to the side.

And what's interesting is, both he and I ended up going to Yale, and when I went to school there, he said, "Well, you're just following me." No, I made the decision on my own to go there. You had nothing to do with it. I mean, we now have a different relationship, you know. He's one of my — very progressive mindset. He ended up going to Yale, then to graduate school at Cornell and studied archeology, and his wife is at the University — she works at the museum in Denver, Colorado, so that's why they're there, and he's kind of half house-father and also helping to do a lot of research on the side.

28:30

And then, my brother Gustavo, who lives at home, who has, I guess — we finally figured out that he has probably, what's it called? — obsessive-compulsive behavior, that wasn't diagnosed until probably his 30s. And so, he went to school up till high school, probably eleventh grade, where he was beaten up when he was in the ROTC program and almost gang raped, I would say, and from that point on, really just became very secluded and scared of living in the world. But he's been part of — lives with my parents still. And you know, by the time, really, they figured out what he had, he was too old to then get any sort of free healthcare treatment. And so they kept on putting him in all these different programs.

So, a good man, he just turned 47 on the 19th of this month and knowing that he's a historian, he's a history buff, I went and took him to see the movie *The Aviator* on Sunday, because it was about Howard Hughes, and he liked all that sort of story. And so, he lives at home and he helps around the house. Again, he, like my older brother, just has a good spirit and a good sense of who they are.

And then, my younger sister, Leticia, works at the junior college, one of the junior colleges here called Palo Alto, and it's predominantly Latinos in the South Side. It was built probably in the early '80s or mid '80s, because they didn't have anything in the South Side of San Antonio. She also went to the University of Pennsylvania, so the fourth child — no, the third child, the fifth child, and the sixth child went up to the East Coast for

school. And so, when she came back, again, looking for different things to do, and so she just kind of has helped within the admissions department and also develop projects for the junior college kids, [who] were accepted into a four-year program in Wisconsin, and things like that. So, she's very much been involved in higher ed for the last 15 years.

She's married and her husband lives in Houston right now, so she's been doing a lot of commuting. And so that's always difficult because, again, she was like my little twin — looks totally opposite of me but because we didn't look alike, she used to be my little spy as a kid growing up. So they'd be talking about me and she'd be listening in and she'd come back and say — just kind of filling me in.

So I have seven nephews and nieces from my older brother and then from the brother that lives in Denver, Colorado, there are two nieces there. And then, the rest of us don't have children.

ROSS:

Were you aware of any gender differences growing up in how you were raised? Did the men have privileges that the women didn't have?

32:10

SÁNCHEZ:

I think those are the fights that I — I mean, it was there, but it probably wasn't as bad as in other families. My mom had a brother who she hung with all the time and probably was a little tom girl growing up and just tried to keep up with her brother as well, and so I think she wanted to have her daughters have this much reign of the streets and the neighborhood as much as the boys, but we didn't. And of course, my older brothers had been raised before, so they might have even been tougher on the boys in terms of discipline, and so by the time that the younger three came through, they were more flexible in allowing it. I know that I climbed trees. I know I played football and baseball with the neighborhood boys. I was allowed to be out.

My mom didn't want her girls to go and be like the rest of the girls, you know, having to go home at three o'clock to start setting out and making the food. She wanted all her children to be able to be well educated, and so school came before everything else, and play also — they wanted us to enjoy our childhood. But I know that as we grew older, I didn't have access to the streets like my brothers did. So yes, we were allowed to be in the neighborhood, but really it was just two blocks in any direction. If we went beyond a certain street, it wasn't a good thing. We were probably punished when we told them we had stepped over certain areas in the neighborhood. Because, again, the projects being tough that they were, they didn't want us to go past San Jacinto Street, because that's where the projects started. And so, they just didn't know that. So there were definitely limitations.

I know that I didn't get to drive a car like my brothers got to drive, you know, [they] were taught by my father to drive cars. And so for me, I was always, again, trying to keep up with my brothers. And I think I was allowed, on so many levels, to do that.

And I think my biggest struggle with patriarchy and sexism has been as I've grown older, because I expect to be treated by men in a more equal way, with respect as a human being, and I find myself blown away because they're not used to doing that with women, because that's not the way they treated their sisters or their daughters or whatever. And so, it's like, Wait a minute, this is how my father raised us. This is how my brothers treated me. Again, even though there was struggle, there was still more than I expected, and the way I talk to men is the way I talk to my brothers, and they hate the way I am with them. So it's as an adult that I've seen the wrath and the hatred that has come to me in a real profound way, because I didn't expect it.

So there were differences but I don't think in the way that I saw, again, a lot of the girls growing up around me who, you know, we would play baseball or football and at a certain hour, they all disappeared and my sister and I were the only ones that stuck around until it got dark or until Daddy came and then we went home.

Dad was the disciplinarian, but again, Mom was in charge of the money. So he brought the money, but she made decisions. And I know in so many other households, they bring the money and they spend the money and they give their wife and the kids whatever's left over. In this case, their partnership was pretty equal. And again, I wonder if they had been different ages, would that have been different, or if my father had been raised by men, not by women. So –

ROSS:

What was their educational background?

36:19

SÁNCHEZ:

My father only went up to the seventh grade, because when he came from Mexico, they pretty much put him, as a seventh grader, a 13-year-old, they brought him to second grade, you know, and so he was there with little kids going to elementary school. And then he just kept on moving up, but it wasn't fast enough for him and he was 17 and it was 1944, '45, I think, and so he wanted to join the war effort, and so he signed himself up as a 17-year-old and joined the Navy and so, I think, you know, he got to get to know the rest of the world. Again, Tampico is a port town in Mexico, so his family being Navy boys, or children of the sea, and travelers, adventurers, you know, so he was very much about running off and doing that and getting to see the world that way.

And he's always — but he's self-taught a lot. So, if he didn't know — and the people in the neighborhood will call him El Professor, because they just think he's well educated, but it's all been self-taught. You always see him with a book in his hand, and especially around music, you know, I'll see him side to side with anybody that has a Ph.D. in music at any moment, but most people don't think of my parents as people who know much more. And so, a lot of what I want people to do is just — here's an expert in this genre of music, you know, talk to him. He knows more than anyone. But they wouldn't expect that. But the people in the community do.

My mom finished high school in 1942. I wear my mom's graduation ring, made by her brother, who was an apprentice jeweler and who didn't get to finish school because I guess, at that time, people just moved on and were apprentices for different jobs. But my mom finished at Lanier High School which, again, we just drove by and that was when it was a very small school and probably didn't graduate more than 20 or 30 kids a year or something like that, but she was one of those. And then she worked at Kelly Air Force Base during the wartime period, from '42 to '45, I guess, or even beyond that, and again, just what she's learned is what she's taught herself as well. But it was good that she was one of the few that finished high school. So many people of my generation are the first generation of people graduating from high school. And actually, as time goes on, there are less and less of us graduating from high school now.

ROSS:

I'm intrigued by your parents' decision that your mother would be a stay-at-home mother, a housewife. That had to be fairly unusual given the economic pressures of the day. Do you know about how that decision came about?

39:04

SÁNCHEZ:

No, I don't. I don't know, but I know that they just — I mean, they always talk about those conversations. I guess both of them came from being poor, not having too much, and so, just learning how to live on a budget and just kind of — all I know is that, you're right, there was just the one parent, but I don't remember, like, going shopping to buy clothes. My mom made clothes. My mom made the food, and we just didn't spend a lot of money. And there was a lot of conversation about materialism and how bad that was, and consumerism, and how having money was not necessarily a good thing. So I know that money was saved just to live on a day-to-day basis, but there wasn't this desire to have a lot more money.

I know one of my partners, her family is similar in terms of working class, and her father worked as an auto-body man but the mother did work and they also had six children. So for me, just having the second [parent] — the mother working definitely made a difference and they were able to move to a different part of town, just to get away from the struggles they were having in East Austin. But in our case, I guess, I don't know. Again, it was just their understanding that they needed somebody just to be constantly at home and just to be there to be protectors of the family or whatever. But again, it was just a matter of my mom, you know — again, I grew up seeing my mom, you know, writing checks and putting away money, and all the children would go once or twice with my mom to the bank, so we saw how she banked and we saw her balance her checkbook, all that sort of stuff. Just, you know, there was never money just to spend. And so, I think they just learned to do with what they had.

When the urban renewal knocked down our home, we had the opportunity to move to another side of town, or as we were looking to buy a new house, they gave us, I think, \$20,000 for our old house, so my sister and I, of course, were like, We want a house that looks like that one! We

want a house that looks — we didn't have a sense of money and so they finally narrowed it down to a couple of homes and then my sister and I were like, Well, this one has more room. Let's buy that house. And my parents said, No, we have \$20,000. We can get this house for \$25,000. We will be in debt for \$5,000, and that's all we're going to go because this other house will cost 10,000 or 15,000 [more]. And so their sense of not wanting to be in debt was a constant. They knew that it would take them X number of years to pay off those \$5,000, rather than taking on more. So –

ROSS:

So those values must come from somewhere. So tell me what you know about your grandparents, and we'll make this the last question before we take a break.

42:25

SÁNCHEZ:

OK. The ones that I know the best are the ones that I grew up with, and those are my mom's parents. And my grandfather was actually step-grandfather. My grandmother, Francisca Gonzalez — or what we know as Panchita, which is short for Francisca, or Francisco — she had three husbands. And she married at age 15, and I think that, according to the story, that was her true love but at some point, he gave her some sort of ultimatum of some decision and she — that was a big conflict, so she said goodbye. And then — or maybe he was — I'm not really sure what happened there. But then, there was a second one that she met while having to look for a job, and she found herself in Oklahoma and this man fell in love with her and said, "I'm going to marry you. You are going to marry me." And she went, yeah, yeah, yeah. But she said yes, so when the time came, he came all the way from Oklahoma to San Antonio to ask for her hand and my grandma did not want to marry him but ended having to marry him.

And so my mom comes from that second husband, Martinez, from Oklahoma, whom my mom describes as a very tall dark man. And so I wonder again how much he was a Martinez and how much he was a Native American from Oklahoma, and I still don't know. He owned a small little restaurant, I think, in Oklahoma. And so, it seemed like, for my mother, her father would have had money, because she just remembers that there were cans in the restaurant and they were overflowing with pennies and nickels and whatever. But that relationship probably lasted no more than five or six years and my grandmother left him also, just came back to San Antonio. Left him in Oklahoma.

And then the third one, I guess by that time, she had five children, so this man, the step-grandfather that I know well, whom we nicknamed our Tata, he fell in love with her and just kind of courted her and took on — he was a jack of all trades, you know, he just did every sort of odd job. He was a laborer, so he — I know that he helped to do the WPA program. He was able to get some jobs in construction building the San Antonio River, so I can say my grandfather helped to build that through the WPA. Or the downtown post office, apparently he helped to do that. I know he also

44:25

picked cotton. I know he also picked watermelons. I know he would jump on trains and go and catch jobs.

I know he broke his back, because by the time I knew him, he was hunched over and that was what we called *jorobado*, which is hunch[back]. Not super, but enough that you saw it, so by the time I remember him, my only memories are of a very kind man but just hunched. So he was a casualty. He also got burned in one of his jobs, you know. There was a big explosion, probably. He would just get a job outside, like in Floresville or wherever there were jobs and one of those cases there was some explosion and he burned himself and — amongst other people. So it was — but always having a job and always being busy. So, even though, again, I knew him as probably a 60- and 70-year-old man, he was always working, always working away. And yet, when we were growing up, he was probably taking care of the children as much as he was — so, he was sawing and building and yet watching over the kids. He's the one that would make us our cereal and stuff, because my grandmother was arthritic so it was harder for her to move around.

And my grandmother, again, Panchita, seemed to be a very smart woman. Only third-grade educated, which is more than my grandfather. He seemed to always — I remember him signing exes when he had to sign, when she at least could sign her name. She was born in Mexico and she was orphaned, and so my great-grandmother couldn't bear children, and so one of her husbands, I guess, in a visit to Monterrey, saw a little girl that was about a year old and she was just kind of neglected and so he went to the door and said, Do you want that child, because I'm willing to take her on. And they just gave away the child. When it was easier, I guess, to adopt kids that way at that time. So she moved from Monterrey to San Antonio, and basically was raised by my great-grandmother. And I think maybe it was — I mean, if there were other children, I don't remember hearing about them, so it might have been the only child that my great-grandmother raised.

And my great-grandmother was a business woman. It seems like, again, she was — if you've read any of this stuff, it's like she was a chile queen, which were women who created little *puestecitos*, little stalls, and sold Mexican foods, tacos and enchiladas — I guess tacos weren't the big thing, but enchiladas and chile con carne and other foods to the business people there. And she also rented a home, rented a space and apparently she sublet spaces and I guess that was allowed at that time, so she made a little extra money that way until, again, the big flood came and then she moved over here to this part of town. But then she started buying a house and she lost it apparently during the Depression. Whereas my grandmother was also buying her house at the same time and didn't lose it during the Depression. And so, according to my mother, when people came to look for their pay, my grandmother was struggling, they would threaten to kick her out and she would kick them out of the house, you know, and so she never fell for it. She just kind of struggled a lot with it, and saved the

house. So, I knew that house that my grandmother helped to buy and build.

And [what] I know from my mom's stories is that my grandmother would go knocking door to door when there was no water and electricity in the neighborhood and so she was having people sign a petition or something to say that they needed water, they needed electricity, they needed these sorts of needs for the neighborhood, just to set it up. And so it was going door to door, knocking to ask other people to sign on so that they could get those facilities into this neighborhood. So, there are other stories.

ROSS:

That's a really good understanding of where your roots are and also where your parents' values come from, that long history. And I think what's so amazing is that you know that history. And I think being in embedded in your community affords that for you. We're going to take a break now, OK?

SÁNCHEZ: OK.

49:45

END DVD 1

DVD 2

ROSS: So, Graciela, tell me about other significant or influential adults or relatives in your life.

SÁNCHEZ: Gosh, I mean, I think, for the most part, the significance was that the close-knit family was definitely there, and so, as I started talking a little bit more about my grandparents or even the stories of my great-grandparents, I think those were major influences. I think teachers probably then played another role. My parents, again, being people who were invested in education for their kids, believed in public school education, maybe because although raised Catholic — and we would go to Catholic mass every Sunday and I went to catechism up until I guess I was 12, so did some learning that way — my parents, my mom, I guess, also saw the kind of looking down of kids that went to Catholic school, to private schools, onto kids that went to public schools, and she didn't like the attitude people had, and the kind of elitism that was taking place by people who went to those schools and by their parents who sent their kids that way. And so she wanted her kids to go to public schools. So, I know many people talk about also being six to eight family members and all their kids going to private schools and how their parents struggled, but my parents just didn't want some sort of phoo-phoo attitude coming out of their children.

So, again, although grounded in Catholic teachings, you know, they really — the influence was, I can't say that the priests or the nuns were part of my influence, although, you know, there was the one priest when I was 12, 13, 14 that was a good old radical, Father Bill Davis, who is still part of my parent's family, although he's — because he was such a little radical, and he's a white Irish guy but he spoke Spanish and got really involved in —

ROSS: Liberation [theology] —

2:30

SÁNCHEZ: Liberation, yeah. He got kicked out of San Antonio after a while, at least that neighborhood, and I know he was pushed out to Houston and then was pushed out to some country in Africa, just to get him away. He ultimately, when we were looking to find a place for the Esperanza, he told us about this building that ended up being our first space of the old Esperanza that we got for a dollar a year from the Oblate, because he is an Oblate priest. And I know when I went to Cuba and places like that, and Nicaragua, just to travel on my own, just to travel on my own and to learn and to run my activism, my mom would go to him and say, Is this OK? Do you think she's safe? And he would always say, Don't worry.

So, he, again, influenced my parents more and just tried to help them around a little bit, but he was somebody that was a fun priest to kind of listen to, who taught me even about the hypocrisy within our community,

people who go to church all the time and therefore think they are better than everybody else. And so I would start, as I got older, I would challenge my mom and say, “Why do I have to go to church? They’re a whole bunch of hypocrites. I don’t have to go to Mass and do this when, you know, I’m going to try to be a good person afterwards.” Or seeing other people that kind of claimed it and turned around and were abusive to their children or to their wives. So I kind of offered a lot of criticism as a kid growing up and my mom remembers that and kind of thinks that.

I know my sister and my brother and I, the three youngest, we would always play Mass and I was always the priest. I didn’t want to play any other — I always was concerned, again, how young girls couldn’t be the altar girls but it was always altar boys, and I saw the sexism without having a name for it within that hierarchy of that church. I didn’t like it much.

Whereas school, I think, teachers were just offering a lot of books, books they were going to throw away, they would offer them to parents in the neighborhood and they always looked to my parents and my parents definitely took books, and so we read through them. And I hung out at school as much as I could, rather than coming home and just watching TV, I would just stay as long as I could along with my friends and my sister and just, you know, be engaged or be more involved in extracurricular activities. So, was influenced, I think, by some of those teachers, especially as I got older, in junior high and high school, and got involved in band and got involved with theater and just anything, you know, so I wouldn’t be bored to death. And so, some of those teachers were really good.

A lot of them were white because, even to this day, most of those teachers that teach in these schools are still white. I mean, it’s unfortunate that black and Latino, Latina men and women still aren’t at the schools. I think what happens is people like myself, like yourself, you know, we get to go to high school, we go and maybe get some college or whatever, and then we have to decide where we’re going to be. And so many of the most educated and well educated kids end up being doctors and lawyers, and teaching isn’t an option, because it’s less paid and you tend to go in those directions. So the cream of the crop isn’t teaching.

5:30

And there are very few of us that get to finish college, or just even go to college, much less finish. I think in my high school, it’s still the top ten kids that go on to college, but no one’s to say that they’re going to finish up. Maybe, maybe, with 40 years, you know, 30 of them might finish two years, or even four years. But for the most part, they’re not finishing up. So, there are very few to go on to [teach in] schools.

And so, a lot of my teachers were white, and fortunately, they were teachers who wanted to teach in the neighborhood and really loved the kids in the neighborhood, so at least for someone like myself who loved school, they probably enjoyed teaching kids that wanted to [learn] and enjoyed school. So, I mean, some of those people influenced me.

Um, I'm to think of other people, just in the neighborhood. I can't, off the top –

ROSS: Were there national figures that you were aware of as you were growing up –

7:20

SÁNCHEZ: That's a good question.

ROSS: – that had influence on you?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, it's interesting, I just saw the film *Chisholm '72: Unbought and Unbossed* [dir. Shola Lynch, 2004] — in '72 I was 12 and then I know that was the same year Nixon got elected and I know that was also when Sissy Farenthold ran for governor of the state of Texas. And those three people, somehow, I had something to do with their — at the local level, in the seventh grade class, you know, I had to be in a debate and nobody wanted to represent Nixon and so I had to be the person that got stuck having to debate on behalf of Nixon. And so, to this day, my father makes fun of me and says, “Oh, Nixon,” and trying to claim me as a Republican. And I said, “No, no, no.”

Because what was good about that memory, was like, Chisholm — I remember being excited that she was running for office. I don't remember, like, her specific platform, I don't remember — I mean, I had to see this film to kind of really put everything in context, because no one teaches her history at all. But I just remember saying, I like her. I would vote for her. And the same thing with Sissy Farenthold. It was another — but she was a white woman running for governor and I thought, you know, this is a good thing.

So, kind of looking to women and seeing this, you know, late '60s, early '70s, as an eight, nine, ten, 12-year-old, on my own, just kind of looking for women role models of some sort, and so those kind of pop up. But again, it's not like I knew much more, but on my own just knew that that was something that was good for women, or good for me — to know about them or to support them.

I know that there was the Chicano/a *movimiento* was happening here and I didn't — I knew that kids were walking out of schools at Lanier during the '70s and my brothers were kind of involved, but I didn't really know about it much and there were no names associated with it. I knew there were theater groups doing stuff, like, Joske's and — like, what's happening at Joske's? — and it was theatre from the Chicano/a movement at Joske's and it was like, OK, that's street theater and I just thought that was cool. But again, no names associated, just kind of Raza Unida, those names, those organizations, those institutions that were kind of creating alternatives, were stuff that I heard about.

I knew about the riots going on in Chicago. I had a cousin that lived in Chicago that came and visited and told us about it and I was excited about

what was going on, but, you know, I don't have names that were associated at that point.

I know growing up, from elementary, especially elementary and early junior high, I read biographies. I read biographies all the time and I always looked for women, again, on my own. And what was very frustrating was that there were not many women in those biographies, but I read every single one of them, and I looked for women of color, again, on my own. And I don't think I ever found a Latino woman but I did find black women, maybe one or two. So I was just kind of always searching for that within the context of my own personal desires.

ROSS:

What would you say that came from — because obviously you had a different kick in your gallop.

10:55

SÁNCHEZ:

Yeah, I don't know. And then, again, maybe it's the stories of my mom telling me about the women in her family. It must be something like that, because — as I was going to say, another story I didn't tell was about my great-grandmother who, again, this businesswoman but who ends up, you know, not living with much more than just, you know, living with her daughter, living and growing blind also, so I wonder if she was diabetic or something like that.

But she — my mom talks about where my grandmother Panchita was walking towards a job, I guess, downtown, and was walking through the red-light district, because, you know, a few blocks away from here was a red light district on Frio Street, which is now where the university, downtown university is, and so my grandmother came home and told my great-grandmother, Teresita, there's this little girl that I'm running into and she's calling out for help and she's crying and she seems very sickly and we need to do something, and I want to do something for her. And my great-grandmother said, Don't go back there, just leave her alone. And my grandmother would still defy her and go back and probably try to give her something to eat. But on [her] own, my great-grandmother packed, you know, a basket and filled it with a lot of food and filled it up with just things and went to that little girl's home and went there over and over until what she found out was the little girl died. But my great-grandmother, even though she told my grandmother to stop, was still taking care of her.

So somehow that story gets told to me, you know, when I'm a little girl growing up. So, I think there's this sense of, you do good and you do for them. So those are my role models, I guess, profoundly. I can't really think of too many other people. I guess when I was older, I had to look to the Cesar Chavezes and the Martin Luther Kings, but they weren't as profound to me, I think, as these women are.

And to this day, you know, when they say, Well, what is the theory behind Esperanza? It's like, it's in those mothers and those grandmothers, you know. So, I don't know. But I think — I want to honor my mom for just telling the stories and who continues to tell stories.

ROSS: Have you ever thought about doing an oral history with your mom?

13:40

SÁNCHEZ: I've been actually grabbing a camera — I just try to — and I was, even earlier in the month, I was just saying, What if I just spent every Thursday morning with my mom, just to grab a little bit more? But, you know, job changes, and I can't get there on a Thursday or I sometimes go home on a Sunday and take a camera with me and see what I can catch. But it's just hard for both of us to kind of do that, and she likes, you know — so we're capturing a little few hours here and there. So I'm trying. Thank you, though.

ROSS: I strongly recommend it, because I tried to do so with my mom a few months ago and I waited too late, because of the Alzheimer's.

SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, no, I appreciate it, thank you.

ROSS: I urge you to do that. Now, back to education. You were a good student. You were apparently on the debate team. Wasn't it still a little bit easier to give in to those pressures not to be a good student, to kind of melt into —

SÁNCHEZ: I was a good student, but I was a defiant student, too. I mean, I did well in class. And my first six years of schooling were the best six years, also. It was a smaller school and it was a block away from home and everybody knew everybody and we were just very engaged. As I went on to junior high, I realized that I was having to relearn — basically, it was repetitive for me, I wasn't learning any more and that made me angry. And I challenged my teachers. It's like, I'm bored. Why aren't you teaching me more? Why aren't you teaching us more? You need to challenge us. You're not challenging us enough. I was complaining to the principal, you know.

I found myself — we didn't like the school food. We started criticizing, you know, how could we get better food for the kids? Because, fortunately, again, I would come home for lunch because I lived close enough and I would rather eat my mom's food, but a lot of kids were on free lunch and they were complaining, they said the food was bad. So, I mean, we had — I helped to organize lunch fights and we were sent to the principal's office where we were able to complain, because we didn't know how to get the attention, even though we were complaining. So as we had this school fight, we were able to say — Why are you doing this? You all are good students — well, it's like, You're all giving us bad food so you need to make it better. And so, I don't know if there was much of an improvement, but we at least had access to the principal.

Bad band directors, things like that, we would challenge them and we were at the principal's office. Not just myself. I would always organize other people. I can claim probably that I helped to organize the students

and they looked to me to kind of take them along, but they weren't just going to watch me do it by myself. They were joining in with me.

By high school, you know, we had a really great high school principal and we were excited that we were going to have him for my senior year. The year before I graduated, the high school graduating class had — I can't remember any more, but millions of dollars, because he got his counselors to get kids into schools and get lots of scholarships for them. I remember him going from classroom to classroom and saying, "I want you all to learn. I'm opening up a class in Russian so I need all you kids to take that class. I'm going to open up a class in calculus. I need you all to take calculus." So he was — you know, he'd go from class [to class]. He was a small little man but very excited about school, and so everybody loved Mr. Mendez.

And so, when we became seniors, they pulled him out, and it was all a political maneuvering going on between the school board and the principals, so a lot of people got switched off. And so we created a protest and went before school board and went and spoke at the school board meetings. I remember reading my own speech and people saying, Who wrote it for her? I'm like, What do you think, we can't write our own stuff? And my parents supported it but we were the ones doing the organizing, and they also spoke on their own but it was a lot of students kind of complaining.

Again, a good student but not satisfied with the education — I remember going in 1976 or '77 with my mom, because I was complaining, I guess, so she said, Well, let's meet with Henry Cisneros, who was then city councilman, and we met with him and he basically said, Well, I can't do anything about it. I'm a city council member. We have nothing to do with school boards. We have nothing to do with education. So, I'm sorry. And that was it.

And being very frustrated, because nowadays, all these city council people are concerned about the education of their people. And so, politically, they cannot demand of the school board to do anything but they could influence policies around the city about the type of schools they want and the types of projects they want. And so, in this case, my first connection with Henry Cisneros was not a good one, and it's never been.

ROSS: For the record, he's a former mayor.

19:18

SÁNCHEZ: For the record, he's a former mayor.

ROSS: The first Latino mayor —

SÁNCHEZ: Is he?

ROSS: — of the city of San Antonio.

SÁNCHEZ: Of the city of San Antonio. Well, they say that there was one back in the 1800s but nobody remembers him, and so of the contemporary time, in the last, you know, since 1900, yeah, he's been the only one. He was the first one. But again, he would not be a role model of mine, and so I was in my teens when I first got to know of him, and that was a clash. And politically, he has always been quite the opposite of my political vision and my desires and has been a challenge because, again, so many of the businesspeople look to him as the good Latino that also came from poverty and got to go to the good schools and became the mayor and now this very important person, the millionaire now, you know, and so we want everybody to be like him.

It's like, No, he's not at all — the way I was raised, he's not at all what I think of as a good advocate, leader, for poor communities and communities of color. I mean, again, it's just a big clash that we've had politically and morally and ethically on every thing that he represents, because he represents the powers that be, and I think many Latinos in this city have found themselves in positions of power ultimately to support the status quo, support the 17 white men that run the city. I mean, this is like our version of South Africa, the white men run the city even though it's a city with communities of color. You know, there's apartheid here (laughs), in its way. It's totally different, but you know, you can see. I guess people are trying to say, Well, is there an oligarchy or, I mean — because it's a town that's been colonized.

ROSS: Still a colonized town, yeah. Forgive me for interjecting some subjectivity here, but I also grew up in San Antonio, and I seem to recall that the Chicano revolution began in this town, that the whole struggle against the apartheid-like conditions of the Mexicans — because I was too young to grow up with “blacks only” signs or “colored only” signs, but I remember “no Mexicans allowed” signs in San Antonio. So tell me about how maybe that political context bubbling up had an impact on you. 21:55

SÁNCHEZ: Sure. Again, I don't know specific [names] either, but I compare San Antonio to Atlanta in terms of, you know, when people think of the South, and Atlanta, and organizing around — I mean, not that it was just Atlanta, but it's a big city and a lot of action and activity and people, like, get elected and a lot of organizations in the nonprofit world come out of Atlanta. San Antonio was the same sort of, yeah, bustling from the 1920s, with LULAC — the League of United Latin American Citizens kind of started in Corpus but really, really blossoming in San Antonio with a more middle-class Mexican, Mexican-American, or Spanish-American community, more assimilationist, but still also wanting to maintain their Mexican roots — to the 1950s, where there was *Brown v. Board of Education*, over here it was *Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District*.

And also talking about just, again, the conditions of the schools and that the *Rodriguez* case won and then later on, there was this whole thing about how money's being spent — to this day we're still struggling with that in terms of neighborhoods, you know, I mean, there are what, 17 school districts in the city of San Antonio. And again, what's that history about. You have New York and they have one big school district and they have San Antonio that that's much smaller, with 17 school districts. Because San Antonio was good as long as it was white and then, as it continued to be multiple colors, then you created Alamo Heights and the City of Alamo Heights, so that all the white kids would go there and you have Balcones and you have East Central, you just have — Edgewood. You just have so many different school districts, and the poor ones are where the brown and the black people are, and so, I think, you know, they tax the brown and the black school districts at higher levels than they do Alamo Heights. So the people who live in Alamo Heights get thousands and thousands of dollars worth of taxes for each child compared to the brown and black neighborhoods. And so, I mean, they've been struggling around that legally, through organizations like MALDEF, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, which finds — was headquartered here in 1968.

So again, from the '50s, you move on to a lot of organizations in the '60s. And they were seen as a radical organization, as communist. Henry B. Gonzalez called them radicals and communists and, in the end, he ends up liking them, but in their initial stages, he thinks that they're too radical. The Raza Unida Party also starts out here in San Antonio, and many people, you know, who are now in their late 50s and 60s and older who have also deceased, you know, had a lot to do with creating that organization.

24:00

Again, that's why I only know of the demonstrations and the student walkouts when I was in elementary or early junior high, but those were the movements that were kind of helping the kids do the walkouts. And they had started a Chicano University in the neighborhood, so it was a university without being at the university, where they were teaching kids in the neighborhood about their history as Chicanas. So, the Raza Unida, Southwest Voter Registration Education Project that was run by Willie Velasquez, who ends up being my first boss, who, politically, I thought, was still too centrist for my interests by the time he got in that position — but all these institutions also were created in San Antonio.

And the Esperanza becomes, you know, part of that history. And the next generation, looking at women leadership, women-of-color leadership, queer leadership, feminist leadership — because I worked at Willie Velasquez's place, I worked at MALDEF, and I saw how men were in charge and how men didn't pay attention to women and how, you know, there were all these problems. There were civil rights activists, but they had also, by the '80s, conformed and were much part of the, just — it's

like, Well, we've done it. We've reached the highest that we can reach and so this is where it is.

Where I was, How do you organize around international issues? I was concerned about the wars in Central America, and it was our taxpayer dollars going to kill people that looked like us, sounded like us, acted like us, and we were even sending our soldiers that were brown and spoke the language to support the CIA. And so instead of taxpayer dollars being used for education and health care and culture and all these things, we were using it to kill people. And yet I couldn't seem to organize anybody, as a 20-something-year-old, to be involved and interested in the struggles and the wars in Central America or what was going on in South Africa. And you know, politically, I was totally engaged in all of those struggles as my struggles and saw the connections, and none of the leadership who had come out of the '60s and '70s was engaged or interested. It was all domestic issues and they were very conformist by the time I was in my 20s.

So, the Esperanza comes out of having to say, Well, we've got to do something better. And we've learned. It's not to say that they didn't bring us here. We honor what they gave us but we also say, What can we learn from and improve on?

ROSS:

We're going to get to that story of Esperanza, because [now] I really want to talk about how was it to be a young Chicana coming from San Antonio, going to an Ivy League school like Yale. First, how did you choose Yale, or how did Yale choose you, and what was that like?

28:10

SÁNCHEZ:

Well, I think that those biographies that I read when I was a little girl influenced me more. Because, I mean, how do kids even find out about colleges and universities — one, to go, and then to which one, right? So the only types of names of the schools that I knew were those that I had read about as a kid. If you read about presidents and important historical male white men, dead white men, they all went to certain schools, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and those places. So I must have read those names. So I knew them somehow. I didn't know much about them but I knew. The only other ones I knew were the ones that were the football teams, so Notre Dame, Tulane, Purdue, those names that — I didn't know the difference.

And when I applied, I essentially applied to those sorts of entities, from the Ivy League schools to those big-name universities that were connected to the football teams. And I applied everywhere. I mean, I applied to probably 20 schools. I was interested in going to Yale for whatever reason. And my brother was there but again, I did not want to have anything to say or do with him and he was four years older, so I was basically going to miss him when I went through. But, I think, again, it was just kind of knowing of those schools that I applied. And I applied to the University of Texas here in Austin, just in case I didn't get accepted

anywhere else, but just to be away. I also applied to Trinity, but didn't want to stay in San Antonio, and I don't think I applied to anywhere else in San Antonio.

And I didn't apply in California, because that was the only place my mom kind of said she didn't want me to go, because she just had heard stories about California, maybe through my dad's stories of being a Navy boy in California, so she didn't like it.

And actually, one thing I didn't talk about, as we were kids growing up, the way we were educated through my parents was in the travels. So we traveled to Mexico as a little girl — when my dad and my mom had a little bit of money to, my dad would take two weeks off and he would take us to Mexico, because he wanted us to get to know his side of the family, so my great-grandmother, his grandmother, while she was still alive. So, up till the age of — probably it's not more than four or five years, but, like, from age six to age ten, we went to Mexico and we traveled to different parts, but always to Tampico.

And then, when my brother, the third one, he actually got to go to a prep school, because there was a program that came out in the '70s here, where some Chicano students got to be tested and then they got selected to go to summer program at Choate, and so my brother was one of those. And I had an opportunity to go that way in high school and I decided I didn't want to do that in high school. But, anyway, there was that whole connection. So when I was 12, we went to pick him up.

So instead of Mexico we went north and we went east, so my mom got to see New York and those places, so she felt comfortable in letting — so when it was time for me to go to college, she felt safe for me to apply to those schools and to let me go to those schools. And in her opinion, if any of her children went to school, even for one week, and dared to take the adventure, the risk, to go away for one week, then we would've — and come back after one week because we couldn't deal with it — for her, that would have been a success, because we dared to just take the challenge to get out there. So there was no pressure for us to do well, to survive. It was just a matter of, you know, just getting out and exploring.

And so, I'm sure she was scared for her kids to go and I'm sure she was scared for her daughters to go as well, but unlike a lot of other parents, when I was growing up — the top ten kids, you know, most of those were young girls, most of us, most of them didn't go, right? — I was the one that went up there and stayed there. And the girl that was ranked third and fifth or whatever, they all came back after one semester or two semesters. But again, my mom would've said that's a success story, because at least they got out there.

And again, why I went there. I think I liked the school name, but that was before they actually would send kids off over there and we could see the campus. And so I had no sense of the campus at all. I didn't understand about small schools versus large schools, so again, I was applying to the University of Texas in Austin, which has, you know,

31:45

thousands of people, and ended up going not to a super-small school but a small school per se. And so I think that was really — I was just lucky. When I compared it to Harvard and how much bigger it is and how much more of a graduate school it is than an undergraduate school, and Yale was more of an undergraduate school, I was just lucky to have picked it.

I also applied to some women's schools. I think I applied to Vassar and I think I would have gone to Vassar if I hadn't gotten into Yale. There was just this pull to go to a women's school. Again, nobody told me. But in the end, you know, I guess probably I had heard more about Yale than I had about Vassar, so I ended up selecting that one over, but I got into that school, to several of them. And I know that Princeton and Harvard gave me, you know, the worst type of entries(?).

Yale actually had a Chicana woman interview me. I actually went to two interviews, but one of them was just — actually, a cousin of Henry Cisneros was at Yale so she ended up — she was a teacher, teaching at Burbank High School, so that's what she did from Yale, she went and taught at Burbank. And so she gave me a second interview.

Because the first interview, it was a man, a Chicano man that came unannounced, and he was interviewing me and a couple of other young women from Lanier and I was in slacks and they were all dressed up and he said, "Well, how come you're not dressed up like the rest of the young women?" and I'm like, Well, first of all, [it] shouldn't be about what one looks like, you know, it's how we think and what we — you know. And so I challenged his question. And maybe, as I understand later on, maybe he was just kind of trying to see how I would respond, and I responded in the way he liked, so he actually felt that the interview went well. For me, I thought I had, you know, I was being limited, you know, to being the perfect little dressed-up girl and, you know, I didn't even wear dresses anyway, because I had skinny legs and by the time — in seventh grade, people, little boys were making fun of my skinny legs, so by high school, I was probably just wearing a lot of slacks anyway. So, um, so anyway, she interviewed me and I liked it and so I wanted to go there.

Going there: fortunately they had the prep program, which is where the people of color, the kids of color got to go up two or three weeks ahead of time to kind of ground them and teach us, like, where things were and to get to know each other. So it was — what was fabulous about that was it wasn't just for Latinos. It was for people of color, so I immediately got connected to people of color, immediately started being engaged in that community-of-color community at Yale, and the East Coast. And I just got to know so much about other communities of color and just kind of — I knew they were my allies, but it was in a profound way. I mean, just being with *puertorriqueños* and other Latinos of the U.S. — because once the Latin Americans, you know, those were upper class who we didn't necessarily associate with at all, because they were just class-wise so different and their experiencing living as minorities in the United States

were different than growing up and being grounded in your own community. So, having that grounding was really important.

And again, these were programs that were set up by other kids of color, you know, who were there ten years before me. I don't even know if those programs still exist but I know that that was really important. So, by the time that all the white kids came in, we were the good old — we knew everything. We knew where everything was and that just helped me a lot.

But it was — again, it was scary. From flying by myself — you know, my parents did not take me. I just took two big pieces of luggage but with probably just really limited clothing and then bought all my winter clothes there, although I didn't really know — I mean, I remember buying a down jacket that was bigger than I should have probably bought it, but I just knew I had to cover all parts of me. And I remember everything my mom ever taught me about making sure not to get sick. So, cover your head, cover your feet, those are really important. So, while other people kind of slacked off and were getting sick and getting mono and all of these other things, I never got sick.

I couldn't run the risk of being sick because I had to catch up, because, even though I was a smart kind in this neighborhood, I wasn't prepared to go against kids who had been going to private prep schools all their lives, you know. And for them, going to Yale or any of the other Ivy Leagues was almost things that they had already learned in high school, things they had been learning in seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. They had traveled around the world. They had learned to write 20- and 30-page papers and take all these top-notch classes. They were the ones that had perfect scores on their SATs, you know. Obviously, we were affirmative-action kids who, at least at the admissions level, there were finally people of color who understood that we didn't have to just be scored by our test scores alone.

ROSS:

Well, I heard in an oral history that I did with Lillie Allen of the Black Women's Health Project, that as the child of migrant [farmworker] parents, her parents didn't know how to send a child to college, because there had been no history of that in her family. So how did your parents know how to send you to college?

38:48

SÁNCHEZ:

They didn't know any of that sort of stuff. I think, again, even to apply, they didn't help in the application of the grants. I mean, what I was lucky was that when I was a junior in high school, I hung out with seniors, just a couple of them, and I saw them applying and I saw who the counselors were that they were talking to and I saw another nonprofit within the community that they also reached out to that was helping to pay for tests so that we wouldn't have to [pay to] take tests, so I knew of them. Then again there was that principal I told you that got kicked out. So we didn't have the same support system that the kids just before me who had graduated [had], but I had learned at least, just in that interaction with

these people — and I had them because I took band and because I was in theater and debate and stuff like that, so that's why I had a chance to be with upper classmen — so at least I learned how to ask for the applications. And then the applications came in and then, it's like, I mean, I laugh now because I would have done everything differently, because I wrote everything in pen, I printed everything. I mean, people would have probably typed up an application, and you're supposed to write about what you're going to be, and nobody read through — I didn't have any high school teachers read over my application. I didn't have my parents. I think I was embarrassed to have anybody see what I was probably going to write, but I just answered the questions and I guess they probably could see that somebody was trying to, you know, who was doing well in school and probably with very limited support, just did it.

So I got through that part. I think my parents just knew that they would just help pay for the trip over there and that was it, the trip to school and one back. And everything in between, you know — I didn't know about how to study, how much to study. I knew I had to take to work — it was the first time I was really going to work — how to balance work and study and play, and I know the first semester I got Bs and Cs. I had never gotten Cs in my life, and that traumatized me.

But again, I could see that all the privilege of every single one of my roommates, there was just so much more privilege, and all of them had either — Nina's parents who were both professors at Haverford College and wherever, and the other one whose parents lived on Park Avenue in New York and so they were wealthy people. And another one whose parents, you know, the father worked in the Johnson Administration, and mine were working-class parents with one high school degree and one seventh-grade degree.

So it was scary to kind of keep up, and again, my parents just trusted that we knew, just reading the applications or reading the paperwork, but I never saw them picking up the books and reading and saying, You should do this, or You should do that. I'm sure if I had had a cousin or some sort of relative, they would've said, Why don't you go and talk to them? but I didn't have that, either.

And the older brother that did go, Fernando, he had left home when he was 14 and so, at that time, I was ten, so he didn't — he went to the prep schools, he applied from the prep-school level. And he didn't share that experience with me or my sister. I think my sister had me, on some level, to guide her a little bit more. And my parents just, like — I guess the other person, it's like they just don't hold you back on some level or even if they hold you back — I think some people were definitely held back, but in my case, I wasn't held back but it was just like, Well, it's the way you've survived the first 12 years. Because they didn't take algebra and they didn't take all these other classes, and we just had to kind of learn it on our own and go wherever we needed for help. So in the same way, going on to

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college was — they would be there as supporters but they couldn't help much more than that.

And I think that was also, again, helpful, because all my roommates in college were being pressured by their parents to take the right type of classes and why weren't they taking economics and they wanted to take a class in Afro-American studies but they were white. How dare they waste their time doing that? And my parents let me take whatever I wanted, and to do whatever I wanted to do during that time period. So I didn't feel that pressure that a lot of my roommates' parents — I mean, my roommates had to struggle with their parents because they were given full fledge, but on the other hand, didn't have that sort of support.

So by the second semester, I had learned to say, OK, I can't work that much. I figured I should work more so that way I could help my parents. I was working many hours, but then it's like, well, I wasn't spending enough time studying. And again, I had to catch up. I had to catch up because all these other students — again, I was having to study eight hours for their one hour's worth of class, because for them it might have just been repetitive stuff that they had learned or just knew, but they had the skills. They knew how to write papers in a way that I had only practiced once or twice as a junior or senior, to write a 20-page report. For them, they had been doing it all along.

I stayed up later. I barely slept throughout my whole college career. People make fun of the fact that I learned — that they would see me sleeping on these chairs. You know, I would put three chairs [together] and be very uncomfortable, but it allowed me to sleep one hour or two hours and then wake up and continue to study.

ROSS: During your time at Yale, did you experience anything you would describe as racism or sexism or homophobia or any of the -isms? Did they have an impact on your education at Yale?

45:11

SÁNCHEZ: Um, it's interesting. I think around gender and sexuality, an understanding of the international struggle, all those things were things that I learned. Because I think I was there when queer activism was just beginning. So, even though I wasn't out, even though I wasn't having any relationships with men or women, I knew that when — the first gay/lesbian days at Yale were, like, the first in the nation, is what I understand, in, like, 1982 or '81 — I knew that I had to be a supporter of gay rights, because I was, after all, a supporter of all struggles that I had been growing up with. I remember as a high school senior fighting, when I had heard about Anita Bryant, and sitting there as a French horn player, you know, fighting my Baptist French horn player who was damning of the gay community, I said, "No, it's about being oppressed. It's about discrimination." So I was having that struggle but I didn't have language, really.

When I was at Yale, people were starting to come out and so I was there supporting that, but I wasn't a lesbian. I wasn't declared, but I

starting having friends that were lesbian and gay, so I saw how they were closeted and had to live very much a closeted life. On the other hand, it was more open than anything else I had seen up to that point.

I knew they had a lot of extracurricular activities for, you know, feminist women. There was a small women's studies program. I didn't go to any classes. It was very white, so I just didn't want to do it, because it was white, you know, they were white women, and I guess it's a challenge that I have to do because the people-of-color organizations are very male centered, too, so — and I feel very frustrated.

Like, when *This Bridge Called My Back* came out, they came to Yale in 1981, so that's how I met Gloria Anzaldúa in 1981. But I remember the pressure of having to choose between going to hear these women read from this book or going to hear — gosh, what's the name of the black activist who then became a conservative? I can't think of his name right now. Anyway, it was one of those guys who was very involved —

ROSS: Shelby

Steele?

SÁNCHEZ:

No. I'll remember and I'll tell you tomorrow. But, you know, and all the people of color were going to go and hear him and all the white women were going to catch the women of color read *This Bridge Called My Back*, and so I went with where all the people of color was going, and then I was — but that pushing and pulling, that tug, and feeling very frustrated that I ended up going because then he was conservative. It was like, Why did I come here? How come I got pushed to come to hear this man who I don't even agree with? Unfortunately, with good fortune, they had had this moment where Anzaldúa got to hang out with a small group of Latina women afterwards, you know, at breakfast the next day, so I got to meet her in a small group of ten women, so, but, you know, how profound that moment was for me to have met her, to have met that book just as I was almost going to graduate, because that book became my bible for a long time.

So again, those opportunities to see more of how sexism played out — I think I was just having to learn a lot about it. I think, again, I had been sheltered in this home life, too, and so, again, I think there was shame that was probably going through me more than anything else, rather than seeing the racism at me, or towards the community of — me, me, personally. I don't think I was wanting to deal with anything coming towards me. It was more about my fear to put out that I was a Chicana from the West Side and all that sort of stuff. It took me four years to kind of get that strength to do it, and at least within the white community, I didn't come out and deal with them.

It's like, I went to the community of color and that's where I felt strong. And with them I exchange, but that's not how they knew me as a little 18- and 19-year-old. When they met me again as a 22-year-old, when I didn't live with them anymore and they were like, What happened to

49:21

you? That's not the little — you know, that's not who we met as a freshman roommate. It's like, Well, yeah, because I've grown up and you have yet to learn about who I am. And how come you didn't learn about who I am and what I've done? And I don't hang out with any of those white roommates, nor most of the people at Yale, because we all got kind of spread out, but if I did have relationships, it is with the people of color that went to school at Yale.

And, I mean, yes, there was racism. I remember struggling with — going before the president and taking over the president's office and — as a sophomore or junior, and, again, concerned about how they were spending, or not spending, money towards black studies, Chicano studies. There was Afro-American studies with a house and all that sort of stuff and they were trying to support the rest of the communities of color to get their own houses, where we could at least be connected that way. And of course they wouldn't give us that and they didn't have any of these programs. So we fought and challenged and got a little bit of something and then would lose other things. So, we struggled in that direction more institutionally than, I think, one on one.

Again, since I was a work-study person, I got to hang out with — and I worked within the cafeterias and the residential colleges so I had a job that was a union job — and so I hung out with all the people from the black and Puerto Rican communities of New Haven and got to know them and when they went on strike, we were there on strike with them. So I again tended to hang with that community and tried to, especially as a freshman or sophomore, kind of connect with the white roommates, who were nice people, but you know, I mean, if I ran into them now, they'd be the people I'd probably be challenging. Good liberals, but just not antiracist, you know, and not getting the white supremacy part of them. But they were good people and they opened up their doors. They just probably just haven't moved on, and I would be struggling with them. I run into them all the time nowadays.

ROSS:

Well, one of the things that strikes me in hearing your narrative, as we close, is that beginning with your encounter at an early age with Henry Cisneros and taking on the president's office at Yale, that you were not intimidated by powerful people or powerful institutions when it comes to standing up for your rights. Does that sound a fair assessment of you? Because I'm impressed, if that's what I seem to be hearing.

52:45

SÁNCHEZ:

Well, actually, when we went before the president, whose name is [Bart] Giamatti, and he died already, and I just happened to — you know, long table and the heads of the table, and there was room only at the head of the table, so I sat there and then he came over and he's like, That's my chair. I said, "No it's not." (laughs) So, you're right. Sometimes I think I don't know I'm supposed to be scared of or not do certain things. Maybe again, it's like most of those people — I mean, Henry or the president — they're

all men and again, I expect them to respect me in the way my father respected me as a woman or my brothers respected me and so, they are powerful people but I guess I expect, you know, that somehow we were more equal. I don't know.

And I think, ultimately, again, it's this little brown woman that's my mother, and I saw her doing that. She's small and she's very soft, but she knows what's right and what's wrong, and I just heard her consistently look up to someone and call them on their behavior, and hold me as accountable, too, if I'm acting up or being silly or whatever. It's like, No, you can't do that. So, she's just consistent. So I think I saw her doing that all my life and I still see her doing that, and I never saw her be afraid, and I never — I mean, I think I tell people I'm scared, and I guess I've gotten more and more scared. I've been demonized a lot and I think that hurts a lot nowadays, but I'm glad I didn't have a sense of going there and saying, I'm going to be demonized, therefore I shouldn't — it's just knowing that it's the right thing to do, knowing that you have to do it.

Because it's not for me. It's always about thinking about the rest of the community, so I go there, again, on behalf of the larger community, on behalf of the people who came before me, and just to keep the struggle moving forward. And so, maybe it's with my ancestors. They're the ones pushing me there.

ROSS: Well, thank you and this will conclude part two of the interview.

SÁNCHEZ: Great.

55:32

END DVD 2

DVD 3

ROSS: We're rolling. It's February 23, 2005. I'm in San Antonio, Texas. My name is Loretta Ross. I'm interviewing Graciela Sánchez, the cofounder and director of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. How are you doing?

SÁNCHEZ: Fine.

ROSS: Well, when we left off yesterday, you were talking about your experiences going to Yale and your experiences in college. But I didn't ask you, what did you major in in college?

SÁNCHEZ: I ended up studying what was interesting to me, so I took a lot of classes in sociology and history. That's where I think I was interested, and so the combination of those two is what I majored in. Again, where could I read and learn about the theories that explain to me the haves and the have-nots? Poverty, where that kind of comes from and how — you know, the economic understanding, so rather than taking an economics class, which sounded very boring to me and pretty much was the capitalist form of economics, you know, throughout the classes in sociology, I was able to kind of get a better understanding of what socioeconomic status means and, you know, how people are placed in that position and how they survive.

History — there was a Chicano history class taught by a Cuban woman, but it gave me that sense [of] labor history to understand, again, what had been happening in the U.S. for a long time. So, Latin American history and things like that. It was, again, before women's history was very strong, although there was women's history, but I didn't take it because I think there was just a couple of classes and they were very white-centered women's studies classes. None of my allies took those classes, so I guess I steered away from them.

I think a lot of my formation also — well, there were classes, like, in education, where again, I took that. I ended up studying to be certified to teach, and I just kind of made the decision my junior year, so that meant by my senior year, I was having to take extra classes that I shouldn't have done as a senior but I wanted to be certified to come back, and I wanted to be able to teach in San Antonio — which never happened, but I was certified to teach.

And I know yesterday you asked about places of racism at Yale and I wasn't clear, but kind of thinking about it, it was within the classroom also where you don't have — when I compare students that are Chicano students going to classes here and at the university where, you know, a generation later, there are a whole bunch of professors that are Chicanos in San Antonio who are very much allies to their students and helping to guide them. And I think, for myself, and for many other students of color

at Yale 25 years ago, there were very few professors who were black, brown, Asian, you know, and so we didn't have support there in many, many ways. We were just on our own. And so, I think the lack of sensitivity on the professors' part was damaging.

3:48

I mean, I know that I came back from college not feeling I was a writer anymore. I had left as an 18-year-old to go to college thinking that one of my skills was to be able to write, and I came back feeling I couldn't write. And it took me many years and a lot of support from people around me, especially my partners, who said, You can write. You know how to write. You're a great writer. But to this day, I don't feel like I'm the little 18-year-old who had more confidence, and so, what was that process? That's the racism within the institution, again, but the lack also of any of those professors or graduate students or other allies to be able to support that, and it was pretty severe. I mean, thank goodness I have had the opportunity to write lots of grants and speeches that people, when they read them, they say, You can write.

But that's kind of been a struggle, just how four years within that institution helped to cause a lot of pain. And I've seen that in other young people who have gone to some of those schools, have come back and tried to intern with me, and they won't even write a couple of sentences for me. They're that traumatized by that experience. Again, it's the institution. It's also comparing yourself to young people who had all the privileges in the world to go to the best schools as high school students, you know, from elementary to high school, private schools, that were expensive, but it's their legacy to send their kids to those types of schools and they just do well. So while I struggled and stayed up till two and three and four in the morning with very little sleep, you know, they were partying and having lots of fun and enjoying other elements of college experience. And I couldn't.

When I think that I was having to work as work study and most of my roommates weren't having to work, because they had that all paid for by their parents, you know, that was not only a stigma, but it just limited the time that I had to continue to keep up with my studies, where they just, again, they got to be in intramural sports or they got to be in theater and all the things that I had done prior to that time, where I just kind of stuck to the studies and had to do that work.

Again, by the time I'm an older student is when I'm doing MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], the Chicano organizing and working with people-of-color organizing, and it's also a moment where intellectually and politically I'm more defined, so that when I start getting Bs and Cs as a senior, it's on purpose. Politically, I've learned from some of the professors and I understand theory and my left-wing thinking starts popping up, based on some books that I'm reading and other stimulating factors. And as I write those papers now, my grades aren't based on the quality of writing as much as what I'm writing about.

So, then I'm politically putting out my what would have been liberal progressive voice then, and knowing consciously that I might get a bad grade from the professor because they didn't necessarily support my point of view. And knowing that, still saying, OK, I don't care what my grade is any more, it's important what I say. So you could see my scores went from Bs and Cs to As and Bs and then back down to a couple of Bs and Cs again as a senior. It didn't affect me at all. I came back to San Antonio and nobody even cared about what — you know, just going to that school opened up doors, obviously.

ROSS:

It's pretty remarkable that you did go straight through and did all four years, pretty much straight, and that is pretty exceptional for students of color lacking the support that you talked about. What do you think was in your character, in your stubbornness, that made you stick the course, and were there moments when you were discouraged?

7:57

SÁNCHEZ:

I think I didn't know any better. I think that's what I just knew I was supposed to do. I mean, I didn't know about taking time off just to reflect. I didn't think about traveling abroad. I thought that I was supposed to just do that. And I know that as I've worked with younger with students coming through, I ask them to kind of reflect a lot more, that they become better students by being able to do that.

But there was, I guess, a pressure maybe within the university also, that you just finish up in four years. And I know that there was — one of my roommates had took a year off and people were pretty traumatized by her leaving and that she wasn't going to finish up with the rest of us. And then, we just lost touch with her because, you know, you're a year behind and you're not doing the same thing. And so, it was just that sort of pressure just to do that. Again, the pressure was to be able to finish up. I mean, we're talking about five or six 20-page papers, in addition to five or six ten-page papers, all within a semester, and for each class, having to read six, seven, eight books, times four or five classes — it's just a lot of work and a lot of catching up. So, there was just that pressure.

Again, I didn't know any better and I didn't know who to seek out for help. I think, compared to all the other Ivy League schools, Yale had more of a support system there. I mean, there was a dean for Chicanos and I think each, you know, the people of color had representation in some sort of person with a master's degree who was called a dean for their respective people-of-color identity or ethnic racial identity. But that person was just there for hundreds of — you know, to support everybody that was there, so it wasn't like I had somebody one on one that I could go to. Again, I just feared asking more questions, because you're supposed to just know, and so that's where I kind of just went forward without really knowing any better, I think.

ROSS: I think you're being incredibly modest, because what you describe is a situation that would've daunted many other people. How did your interest in film develop, and when? 10:50

SÁNCHEZ: Um, when I came back. While I was in college, again, there was a lot of organizing around Central America and South Africa. And so, they were basically asking at that time of the university to divest themselves of all — you know, they had investments in South Africa, so I know that you would walk up and down the mall area at the school and you saw students just kind of taking over and creating small little cities and acting out what it would be like to live in South Africa and —

ROSS: The shanty towns.

SÁNCHEZ: — the shanty towns, exactly. And so, I kind of hung out and read and learned about that, and took over, supported any organizing around that. And then around Latin America, the same thing — what was happening in Central America, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador specifically, and a lot of Latin American students — even though, initially, I hadn't been connected to Latin American students because of their class differences, around Central America organizing, kind of learned a little bit more. I wasn't as involved with it as other students, but definitely learned a lot. Again, because it's Yale University, everybody that wants to speak wants to speak at one of these Ivy League schools, so we had so many people from all over, nationally and internationally, really important speakers, writers, activists that came through the university, so I got to hear the stories of a lot of the activists coming in from Central America or listen to music [of people] that were musicians dealing with struggles in the world.

And so, I learned a lot and I, again, took some history classes about what was going on, and I learned language like oligarchies and colonialism and all those sorts of things that helped ground me and make me understand how the world really works. And so, again, even though it's supposed to be a university that doesn't teach any sort of radicalism or whatever, I think the ability to have enough thinking going on and questioning — that helped me develop that sort of process.

So, when I come back to San Antonio — I mean, this is 1982, it's in the midst of the wars in Central America, the Sandinistas have suddenly triumphed in 1979 and so, there was just a lot of commotion. And a lot of people in San Antonio who were organizing around Central America were white, and I was one of the very few Latinas in this town that was interested in struggles in Central America and I thought that that was very odd, because, you know, they're our people essentially and so why weren't more people conscious about that.

And so as I tried to get more Chicanos involved in Central America activism, it made me kind of think of how to organize, you know, what are tools that I will need to get more people interested. Because it seemed, 14:15

again, that a lot of people who were in their 40s and their 50s who had been in the struggle of the Chicano movement in the '60s and '70s weren't interested in this piece of, this discussion around Central America. They were, again, as I mentioned before, very much connected to the domestic issues at hand, and how the Reagan Administration was undermining the working-class people of color all over. And even of all classes, you know, just the total tearing down of affirmative action and such. But it was, for me, important to make the local-global connection at that point.

So one of the things that I noticed was that a lot of the activists, these white activists, were coming back with slide shows of, you know, Well, here's Maria in Nicaragua and here's José in El Salvador and this is what they're telling me. So, I was hearing the stories from the point of view of an interpreter who had been there, a white middle-class person interpreting the story of the people of Central America. And I thought to myself, I'm bored of this way to see it, so if I have a chance, I want to be able to travel to Central America. I want to be able to go. But there's this new technology called video and if I can just stay at work and raise enough money to buy myself a ticket to go to Nicaragua and to buy myself a camera, that's what I'm going to do.

And so, within the two years of my first job, I was able to save up enough money, and at the end of my two-year stint at the Southwest Voter Registration Project, I ended up saying goodbye, and hello, Nicaragua, and I went on a tour with some people. It was a national group that just went and somebody was traveling around trying to solicit people that might be interested. And so, it was a majority women's group that was going to travel for the fifth anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution in 1984. Most of those women were women of color, and so I just jumped on that trip and was there with them for — I guess they were there for one week only, or ten days, but then I stayed on with my partner at that time for another five or six weeks.

Again, with camera in tow, just started interviewing a lot of people about what it meant, with the idea that that video I made would be used as an organizing tool to talk to people in San Antonio, principally. What happened was, when I came back, I didn't know anything about what it meant to make a film, and so many people who had made videos before said, Well, the reason you were able to make that film was because you didn't know you couldn't make a film. So, I just had the drive to use whatever, this documentary. And so, it took me a year to finish it up.

ROSS: What was its title?

SÁNCHEZ: *Testimonios de Nicaragua, Testimonies from Nicaragua.* And it was kind of a group effort. I mean, I went and I taped but then in the editing component, the people I was organizing with, these Chicanos Against Intervention in Central America, IAC, I think, we decided we needed this

video, and so they helped me sit down and transcribe the work and they typed stuff up.

I was showing excerpts of it around and people from El Paso heard about it and then they told me about — you know, this was when I made contact with the Funding Exchange, which I never knew about. But there was a state-wide group that funded in Texas and they don't exist any more and they haven't existed since 1992, but in 1984, '85, they were around in Texas, so I was able to go to them and get \$5,000 to help me edit the video. And you know, found friends, again, it was just talking a lot about the project, so people in Houston found out and they helped find an editor who, over two days, just sat with me and edited really quickly and got paid that money to do that work.

18:00

And then, from that point on, then other friends who I knew started saying, Well, come to El Paso and show this video. Come to South Texas and show this video. Come to East Texas and show the video. And so I started just taking the video around all over the place. And we showed it right here about two blocks away at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, as its premiere. And so people locally saw it and there was one person who was working at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and he said, "Look, you're interested in video. There's this new film school opening up in Cuba and it's called the Escuela Internacionale del Cine y Television." So it was an international film school that was supposed to be for the Americas, for Africa, and for Asia, and it was opening up in 1987. And so it was interesting, because the ability, the opportunity to go to the film school came at the same time as we were organizing the Esperanza.

And so I went to Nicaragua in '84 and '85, I finished up the film, but I was doing organizing around Central America, you know, started doing organizing around — I had a job, the third job in 1985 I got kicked out, because we were organizing at the work place and they didn't like that, so they fired like nine of us from that job.

I had been in an abusive relationship with that partner that went with me to Nicaragua, so I was going through all this battering going on in that place. I had also split up and kind of was trying to figure out how to organize within the queer community and looking for something, so I was helping to organize that.

And so, all of my interests — you know, my identities as a Chicana, as an internationalist organizer, as a woman, as somebody growing up in a working-class background — all these things started formulating. And so the interest to create an Esperanza, which still didn't — but those were the — '86 was a lot of the moments that I was working and talking to a lot of other women in San Antonio about creating this organization. Why were the men who were older than us — they had created all these institutions in the '60s and the '70s — why couldn't we just take the plunge and do it and create this other organization that would bring in peace, you know, social justice activists?

And so, while I was helping to think through the Esperanza, then this opportunity to go to film school happened, all at that the same time. So we found the building for the Esperanza in this fall of '86, but I was also taking an exam to apply to this film school. And then I got accepted to the film school, so I had to make a decision in December, essentially either go to the film school or stay home and help start the Esperanza.

And I ultimately decided, Well, there wasn't going to be another moment to be able to just go away to Cuba, so I said, OK, goodbye Esperanza. There are other people that can help move it along, I figured, and then I would just take time off to follow through some ideas around film and see where that took me. Again, I think it was just the excitement of also being in this formulation of this new school with new ideas, and that was a lot more exciting, so I'm glad I did it.

ROSS: You made a film while you were in Cuba.

22:27

SÁNCHEZ: I made a couple of films, yeah.

ROSS: Tell me about those.

SÁNCHEZ: Um, well, I directed a couple of pieces as part of the project, and then I also participated in everybody else's films as a film editor, as a sound person, as a producer. So in total, I might have done ten films, you know, but two that I personally — they were my ideas.

The first one was a three-minute video called *Esperanza*, which was excerpts from the book *The House on Mango Street*, written by Sandra Cisneros, and it was done in 16-millimeter, so it was in film. And the idea of the piece was that it could only be three minutes, so every student only had three minutes. And we had nine minutes of film to tape, to record, and then it had to be brought down to three minutes. And what was exciting about that is that we collaborated, you know, we were put together. We had to create little groups of crews of five people, and the crew that I was in, we self-selected, were all women. And so, there was a woman from India, there was a woman from Mozambique, there was a woman from El Salvador, there was a woman from Columbia, and there was myself, the Chicana. So we also embraced all Latin America, Africa, and the U.S. There were no, unfortunately, Vietnamese at that time, because they had only selected students from Vietnam at that point, but they were still going through the process of learning the language. So, where the woman from Mozambique at least spoke Portuguese and so the Spanish-Portuguese was close enough.

What was exciting was, you know, I ended up having to — I was an older student, too. I was 26 when I went, and most of the other students were in their early twenties or even in their teens, like 19 or 20, 18, 19. And so, as an older student, I had more experience and I guess I was more of the feminist there. I mean, these young women were also interested in it

and I saw just the change when they worked with the men, the male students, they were definitely not as strong and assertive, and what was good about working with this group of women is, Come on, we can pick up these cameras. Come on, you know how to do this.

And ultimately, what we realized was, OK, we're the only group in this whole school that's all women, so why don't we make films about the women in our communities in three minutes. So, I kind of thought about it and that's where I kind of said, Well, there's this nice story called *The House on Mango Street* and let me excerpt some things. So it just talks about being a Chicana growing up in the U.S. and it talks about racism and, but it's all poetic, so all I had to do was, I screen wrote the piece of — I adapted some work and did that.

And so that was the first six months. The program was — you could take the program in six months and finish up, and the idea was that there were people going back to revolutions in El Salvador or in Africa or wherever, so in six months they could teach you enough for people to go back home in six months to do the basic sort of stuff. So, I could have finished up the program in six months and come back home, or I could go back for another year or another two years or another three years. I ultimately just did the first year-and-a-half program. So the first six months was to come up with a three-minute video and then work on everybody else's piece.

Then the second year, you had to do a 15-minute piece and that's when I did the one on gays in Cuba called *No porque lo dice Fidel Castro*. It's a line from one of the people I interviewed, who was a Cuban of African descent also, and [I asked her,] Is there homophobia in Cuba, and her answer was, "Well, yeah, but it's not because Fidel Castro says so, it's the culture. It's been like this for many, many years and it's based on the Catholicism, it's based on just all these other sorts of concerns."

26:30

And so, it was interesting for me to select that issue. But part of it, again, was my own identity and trying to figure out what I was feeling and doing, and the struggles that I was having in San Antonio with the homophobia in San Antonio and, again, living in a relationship where I was being a battered lesbian and, again, no support and in San Antonio. To this day, twenty years later, I'm still probably the most outwardly open lesbian in the city doing the organizing that I do and so, the homophobia's still here. There's never been an elected official, you know, at the city, county, state level coming out of San Antonio and there's not much respect for it within that community.

So, I think that's what I was feeling back in 1986 and '87 and when I made the film, that was kind of interest[ing]. There was also a film done by Néstor Almendros, who was anti-Castro and he had — and I can't remember the name of the piece right now, and I hadn't seen it as a protest in 1986 when it first came out because it was basically just to tear down the Cuban revolution, in my opinion. So when I was in Cuba, I thought, let's see how truthful that piece is, and so then I had to search all over

Cuba to find that film, to be able to watch it and then to say, OK, let me see if I can do a counter to that, because Néstor Almendros was responding to stuff he had struggled with, or stories that he heard of his friends who had stayed and lived in Cuba. And it's not to say –

ROSS: He was gay?

SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and he was actually a filmmaker. He actually won an Academy Award as a cinematographer when he was living in the U.S. His was maybe a 30-minute or an hour-long documentary that he did on his own in the early to mid-80s, so my piece was trying to say, Well, here's what I can tell you circa present-day Cuba in 1988, and this is what I'm seeing and feeling and reflecting on.

29:00

And they let me do it. I didn't get stopped by the film school. I didn't get stopped by the Cuban government to do that piece, and I think people were talking about [it] within the Cuban circles. I found out that from the very high level, officials in the film industry of Cuba to lots of filmmakers and just people in positions of power were, you know, were gay people in the community. Again, there was no one organizing within the gay community, but there wasn't anybody in San Antonio as far as I could see. So I got to meet a lot of people, got to talk, you know — people did get nervous, so a lot of interviews that I was hoping to have gotten done kind of fell apart at the last minute. But I'm not sure that was the phobia you were talking about.

I remember going to the film school in Cuba, wearing my little pink triangle, and people from like Peru saying, Take — what's that? Well, I said, It's a pink triangle. I was doing that to kind of come out without having to publicly come out but figuring that if people might recognize, that they would come and approach me. And so, sure enough — I mean, like this woman from Peru, [was] like, You don't understand, in Latin America, that's just — just drop talking about it, don't do it. I'm a lesbian, this is what they do in Peru. They beat you up. And then she would tell me her stories. And just other people. I found young students from Nicaragua and other places as well who became really good allies of mine during that next year of the film schooling. So there was a lot of interest in supporting what I was trying to do.

One interesting story is that each year, in December, the biggest Latin American film festival happens in Cuba. It's the Havana Film Festival or something like that. It's connected to that whole — I mean, the film school started off — again, because in Latin America, there aren't any film schools and also the Latin American filmmakers who had made films in the '60s and '70s all got kidnapped and murdered because they were putting out a progressive radical point of view and so, those people that took those risks ultimately also lost their lives or were always in fear of their lives.

And so, it was Fidel Castro working with all these Latin American filmmakers who were interested in trying to build a cadre of many other filmmakers to be able to go back. And so, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, the writer, was the president of the board of directors of the film school and because he is good friends with Fidel Castro, he was able to talk to Fidel and say, Look, can you offer up something within your island. And so, Fidel basically took a high school that had been closed down and just reconverted it and made it into a film school. And then, again, because it had such international prominence, people like Robert Redford and Francis Ford Coppola and people like that who, I guess, were liberal enough, heard about the school and gave material goods and gave sound equipment and went and visited the film school.

People — again, it felt like another Ivy League within the Ivy League, only six representatives from each country were accepted into the film school, so six people from Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, and places like that, and even six students from Africa, but only one person from the U.S. came, and that was me, that first year. And then the next year, only one other, and it was a Chicana student, because they figure the Puerto Ricans would come from Puerto Rico, which was problematic, but that's how they selected them.

So, going back to that film festival in December, what I saw was, you know, hundreds of films, and I was disappointed by many of the films I was seeing, because what I was seeing was the reproduction of, in my opinion, racist, sexist, and homophobic images by a group of people that talked about revolution, you know, for all people. And it was called El Nuevo Cine Latino Americana, the New Latin American Cinema, so there was a two-week film festival, and I kept on being frustrated and I found myself allying with — there were people that came in from New York that were these progressive filmmakers, also in their late 20s, maybe early 30s, and somehow we became good friends during those two weeks and I kept on saying, I'm really frustrated with the films they're making and I have to do critique. And while showing the films during the days, they were also having all these big panels, you know, in very much a sort of United Nations forum, with two thousand people sitting down and lots of people translating, there were discussions on films.

33:48

And finally, almost towards the end of the two weeks, I finally raised my hand and kind of said, I'm very disappointed with the films I've been seeing. I challenge us — we talk about being the New Latin American Films, so why are we reproducing racist, sexist, homophobic films? I understand that the film that's going to be the best film of the year from Latin America, *La Pelicula del Rey*, *The Film of the King*, is going to win and it's from Argentina, and I find it real problematic because it is racist, sexist, homophobic.

And so I spoke for about ten minutes, and I came out as a lesbian to two thousand people, you know, and again, I got very positive support from many people there and a lot of people who didn't talk to me for a

long time after that, including film students who said, How dare you come out? How dare you challenge the — you know, you were in a position to, I mean, you're representing the film school, you shouldn't have done that.

But then, all of a sudden, again, many more people — I mean, like, that became my fame, that I came out, that I challenged, and so when new students came in, they kind of all searched for me. They were young queer men and women and just kind of talked about that moment, even though they hadn't been there, they had heard about it, and that was the same year I ended up doing the film on gays in Cuba.

ROSS: You pack so much in.

SÁNCHEZ: I know. I'm sorry.

36:44

ROSS: No, no, that's very good. It's very tempting to go back and look at some of your previous answers and unpack stuff, so I think I'm going to switch gears for a minute, because — how did you develop your sexual identity? It's so interwoven into your narrative that it feels seamless, not like an event, but more like a process. So tell me about the developing of your sexuality. How did that come about?

SÁNCHEZ: I think all throughout my history as a young girl, again, my parents talked about education, and so they pushed my sister and I and maybe even my brothers away from, not necessarily having boyfriends or girlfriends or such, and so, you know, that's what they highlighted. They didn't think it was good for girls to wear makeup because, you know, the beauty was within one's self. And so I think they saw around this neighborhood that a lot of — especially when we were growing up was the first time, in the '70s, that we were starting to have young teen girls, pregnant girls. Right now, in the last ten years, San Antonio has claimed to the highest teen pregnancy rate for 13-year-old girls and younger in the country, right? So, and you know, where they were getting pregnant was at my junior high school and at my high school.

So I think they [my parents] understood that there was this possibility, so it was just kind of like, push them away and let them study and let them get focused that way. Which is a good thing, because then I didn't have the pressure to have a boyfriend, but I realized that I — and I was very happy about that because I think in the back of my head, I was like, Well, I'm not interested in any boyfriend. And again, only until high school when I had to — if I was going to go to the junior-senior prom, it became an issue because I had to have somebody go with me to the prom and it had to be a boy and that was just a hard thing, because I didn't have boyfriends.

And I think on some level, I mean, the high school friends that I had, we all hung out together and we all turned out to be gay. All my high school friends turned out to be gay. We didn't talk about it, but what we

did allow ourselves to talk to each other about was the crushes that we had, and we tended to have crushes on women or — I mean, there were, like, five young women and a couple of young male friends. And Ricky, who was really short, you know, we all thought he was gay, but we didn't really put any pressure on him, but people made fun of him for being gay and he could hang out with us and we would never make fun of him.

On the other hand, Fidencia had a locker and if you opened it up, you know, all the pictures on the locker were all movie stars that were women, you know, from the *Charlie's Angels* women, they were all her — you know, she was idolizing them, and we didn't make fun. We didn't say that it was something strange or wrong, you know, we just thought that was cool and we all had crushes on high school teachers and we didn't make fun of each other. We just thought, Yeah, of course, and we found ourselves giving flowers and things like that.

And so, I think there was — at least we were allowing ourselves to say yes to same sex-crushes and not be critical of it, and so we just kind of hung together. My father also, since we were children, had said, "Being different is good. Be different. That's OK. You have to be different. Don't be like the sheep. Don't be like everybody else." So this was kind of challenging those notions, just hanging out together.

That group of people that I hung with also weren't the top students. Again, it was my friend Amelia, who I told you was a bad kid who had improved her grades because of her relationship with me and I kind of worked with her. So, from being a flunky in the seventh grade, by the ninth grade, she was doing really well. In high school, she started struggling a little bit again. I again later found out that it was problems at home.

Again, the connection was the sexuality or the identity, but we never talked about it directly. I mean, my friend Amelia was also on the basketball team so she talked about the lesbians in the basketball team, but kind of joked about it nervously and kind of made fun of them and we would giggle, but we didn't go out of our way to antagonize her, do something like that. And as I mentioned, you know, this was also the time when Anita Bryant was up and loud and strong and so I know that I spoke out against her pontificating of a very hateful rhetoric. So that was kind of where I was when I went off to college, you know, I was kind of going in that direction of at least being understanding of any oppressed communities, so even though I wasn't identifying, I knew I supported, or was against, any anti-gay rhetoric.

41:14

In college, I ended up having to room with a lesbian in my junior year. And it was funny, because she was a Chicana and she was a person I was closest to as a friend. I was going to live off-campus, and I had actually — the reason I was going to live off-campus was I had actually applied to be a resident counselor, something like that, in my junior year but didn't get selected, and one of the questions that I apparently didn't do well in was the question around, What would you do if you had a lesbian or gay

student, how would you respond? And so, I probably responded in a very liberal way, you know, but without any good formulation, and the woman that won, that ultimately got the position, was a lesbian, but none of us knew that she was a Chicana lesbian. And so she got the position and I was really traumatized because I thought, Well, I didn't answer it that badly, but I guess it was just the lack of experience, or this young woman might have said, Well, I'm a lesbian, so I would know how to deal with young queer kids. Whereas I just kind of gave a good, general positive answer.

What happened then was I ended up living off-campus, and then I approached the friend Teresa and I said, "Can I live with you?" and she kind of hemmed and hawed and wanted to and finally she said, "Well, the reason I'm struggling is because I'm a lesbian and I need you to know that, and was that going to be cool?" And I'm like, Of course, that's not going to be a problem. And she was in a relationship with a woman from Argentina and they're still together 25 years later.

But I think that kind of then brought me that much closer to knowing the lesbians in the world. Up to that point, they were at a distance and so she was able to kind of — there was a whole community within Yale of kids of color who were queer but very closeted and part of that was their fear to come out and be damned by the straight Chicano, the straight people-of-color communities and they were probably not out.

So, what that made me at least do is think about, What does that mean, sexuality? And then I kind of started questioning, you know, OK, what's desire? It's like, Well, that's right, in the first grade I had a crush on a girl. Well, I had a crush on a boy, too. Well, in fourth grade, I had a crush on a boy but, you know — so I'm kind of saying, Well, I've had crushes with both genders, but I never kind of thought about it much more. And then, as a senior, I had a major crush on one of the students and she had a major crush on me as well but we never acted on it and as a matter of fact, when, you know, she was a couple of years younger than me but she hung with me the entire time, so anybody, again, my friends said, Well, this is your partner. I'm like, No she's not. We never acted on it. And when this younger woman, you know, kind of went to that place, she got scared and slept with, like, 20 men in two weeks or something like that and kind of proved her straightness and kind of made sure she knew that I knew that she was sleeping around. And so, it was disappointing because, again, I wasn't going to act and put — but on the other hand, it was like, Why did she run away? She and I probably really did like and maybe love each other. We're still friends. We've never actually talked about that bonding that happened between us, and it was really good friendship, you know, but I think, again, it was a little more than that and she just kind of ran away from it.

So I graduated and then came back and said, OK, I had to finish school. I couldn't get sidetracked by a love interest, so I'm going to finish that up and come over here. But when I came here, it's like, OK, now I

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can deal and start figuring out what those crushes were all about. And then, coming home, that's when I found out that all my high school friends were gay and had been going to the bars all this time so they knew everything. And so, as I was taking on my first job and working there, I found myself going to the gay bars with all my high school friends. You know, just dancing away, not involved with anybody. But again, feeling much [more] comfortable, where I had been nervous and anxious in college and then feeling comfortable about it.

Again, in college, I went to my first lesbian dance and freaked out. I was real nervous because I was, you know, I'm not one, I'm not one. And again, maybe because a lot of them were white when I went to that dance, and it's like, well, I wasn't feeling close to any of them. But then, you know, ended up going to gay bars in New Haven and just dancing away.

But graduating, coming here, you know, I was just able to explore. Again, just talking to my friends but not being able to talk to my family much about it or anything like that, and going to the bars. My mom started questioning, like, Where are you going? What are you doing? How come you come home so late? Mom, I'm already an adult. I was still living at home, though.

And then I ran into — at some point, I came into contact with my first lesbian relationship, who's a woman a couple of years younger than myself and very charismatic young woman, very smart, Chicana, but what I had not ever had — not only had I not been in a lesbian relationship, I had never been in a relationship with anybody, besides, you know, my relationships with family and friends, but not an intimate relationship. So I had no skills, no experience being with anybody, so when I was in the relationship with her, I had no clue to read what was obviously going to be an abusive relationship. And that's what ultimately happened. In hindsight, I would've been able to say, Oh, she's very jealous, she's just all these different things. I only learned about the happy, charismatic, wonderful, intelligent person and then there was the monster side that I later met, once I had been pressured to move out of my house, once I had been pressured to find an apartment for both of us to live in, and once I had, you know — and then I was in that relationship for about a year and a half, from '84 to '85, midway through '85.

ROSS: She went to Nicaragua?

49:19

SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and I was actually hoping to actually get away by myself. It was for me, like, OK, I'm going to go and I'm not going to go with her. This will be a good way to just kind of do something on my own. And so she wasn't planning to go but at the last — and she was a student of ROTC, she was a nursing school student, but she was getting her scholarships through being an ROTC student, so everything was being paid by the government. So I thought politically she wouldn't want to go because this is the Communist Nicaragua, but somehow she negotiated and worked it out.

Again, I was working and she was a student at Incarnate Word, and so I put up my savings to go ahead and bring her along because she really wanted to, but while we were in Nicaragua, as well as living in San Antonio, even in Nicaragua, I was being battered in those six weeks that we were there together. She ultimately helped do a lot of the videotaping of that film that I first made and where I did a lot of the interviews, so she was there for that support, and in those moments that we were all good and happy, just kind of worked really well. But unfortunately, there was always the anxiety, the hate, the fears that she had that always caused the beatings, and the, you know, psychological and mental abuse that went on.

And that relationship finally ended because of my friendship with another woman who I was helping to organize around to create the Esperanza. Again, another relationship, really strong, but she's a straight woman. Of course she, I think, again, loved me, but we never acted on that relationship. I didn't want to be in love with someone who had a husband and two children, or one coming up or whatever. So, I just decided that wasn't the thing to do.

But what it did allow me to do was to say, "OK, look, I love somebody really here and this is somebody that I" — whereas my first partner was somebody I kind of met through friends and through the bars and there were definitely — you know, I don't know that I fell in love with her or anything like that. It was just, like, well, friendship that then blossomed to be a lovers' relationship, where this other person, you know, we just fell in love politically, intellectually and all that sort of stuff, but I just didn't act on that. But that allowed me to move on and she actually helped me escape that destructive, abusive relationship.

ROSS: Were there services then or now for lesbians who were experiencing battering?

52:10

SÁNCHEZ: There weren't any then. We looked around. This friend of mine, you know, checked with people she knew. I checked with some other folks and looked through the gay press to see what there was. I ended up having to — I went and visited with a gay male counselor who then ultimately said, "I don't have any idea. You need to see a woman." And he finally connected me with a lesbian who, at least, as a woman, was working with abusive relationships, mainly within the straight women's community where they were male-female abusive relationships, so at least she had enough information to kind of share with me, and we became friends.

But I know that somebody else sent me to, I think, St. Mary's University, where they have a counseling service and, you know, I met with a *puertorriqueña* who challenged why I was even a lesbian and maybe I should be with men, and all that sort of stuff. So, you know, that was not a good experience there, either. So there was nothing. Again, when I went away to New Haven and went to a counseling service there, they were definitely — there was something there for lesbians in abusive

relationships. Again, that was two thousand miles away, so there was nothing here, and [that] kind of, again, gave me reason to figure out how to organize within the queer community in San Antonio.

ROSS:

When you came out, what was your parents' reaction, and how did you come out to your parents, and how did you make the decision to?

53:40

SÁNCHEZ:

Well, it was through pressure by my lesbian lover that I had to come out to my mom. And so, she positioned it in such a way that we were driving somewhere and my mom was in the car with me and so was my partner at that time, and I guess there was just a conversation that started to occur about, again, late nights or a night I just went out, you know. My parents have always taught me to be honest and truthful and so there was the pressure from the girlfriend to come out and there was pressure from my mom to say what's happening here. So, I think it happened — if I could've done it again, I would have done it differently. I would have been one on one with my mother. I would have been in her house or I would have been just somewhere where I was facing her, but instead, it was my girlfriend, my mom in the front seats, and I was in the back seat and we were having a conversation with my mom having her back to me. And I was just trying to explain what the situation was like, and then my mom — you know, so then I came out to her. The car stopped. My mom started crying and again — but it wasn't my decision or my time. It was just kind of, you have to do it and I knew being honest to my mom, I had to do it, but I could've done it in a different way.

So my mom was pretty traumatized. And I thought of the two parents that telling my mom would be easier, just because she was my mom and my dad might be a little more homophobic or something like that. And so, ultimately, at the end of that interaction, which was not good, my mom said, "Do not tell your father. Do not tell your father. This would hurt him a lot. Just don't tell him." So it caused some rift between me and my mom, you know, it was just hard. And in the meantime, I was being abused by this person, so it was hard for me to then ever even consider telling my mom that I was being battered. So that totally became a secret between me and my mom and the rest of the family.

It hurt — Oh, my sister, I had come out to my sister before. My sister and I, you know, because she was also on the East Coast, we would kind of run into each other and I remember coming back maybe from one of the summers in college, you know — we went to New York together. We went to see a film. It was a film by John Sayles, called *Lianna*. It was about a lesbian. This was 1983, so in 1983 I was coming out — well, she was still in college, I was visiting her, and so I just came out to her. My sister's like, That's fine, I knew that. So I — you knew that? So when she found out about being in the lesbian relationship, that was a battering relationship, she was very disappointed that I hadn't told her and that I couldn't have come to her for comfort and support and what was that

about and why didn't I do that? So she was disappointed and that was good to know, that she was concerned but disappointed in me.

And then, my gay brother also participated in helping me get out of that battering relationship. When I ran away and left the relationship, I mean, literally, I had to figure out the plan, you know, where I was taken to another house and then somehow, when I went — you know, I was living with this other friend of mine for about a week, and then another week I went to New Haven to escape. But when I came back, I wanted to pick up stuff from the house.

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And so, because also my film from Nicaragua, all my video cameras and stuff like that were still in the house, I wanted to get all of that and so, what happened was, you know, this ex-partner of mine kind of hid herself. She parked her car in the back and she hid, so when I walked into the house, thinking she wasn't there, she was there. And so, the abuse I had, you know, physically, happened after I had officially left the relationship, and so I got slammed around enough, you know, between probably trying to run off — and found myself in a doorway and got slammed against the door and I couldn't hear for many weeks, and just, you know — and she forced me to go with her because she was going to take an exam so she forced me to go to the university and wait for her outside as she took the exam and it was at that moment that, you know, while she was taking the exam and I was out in the hallway that I raced out and said, OK, I don't have to wait here for an hour. And so I raced into Earl Abel's — the restaurant on Hildebrand and Broadway and then from there called my friends and my brother and they all kind of helped me escape another time.

So, all of that was happening, and I had come out to my mom. So, again, no support there. It wasn't until years later that I — you know, working at the Esperanza in 1988, '89, '90, all that work that I was doing at the Esperanza three years later, supporting queer causes and doing all that sort of stuff, I basically came out to the world, you know, that way, including my parents. And so, I didn't officially do that again. But in 1992, I was given this award, this Stonewall Award, and so I figured, OK, this is another opportunity that I can do it my way, the right way. And this is — are you running out of tape?

ROSS: Yes, it is. Thank you.

SÁNCHEZ: I saw a blinking.

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END DVD 3

DVD 4

ROSS: As we were leaving the last tape, you started talking about the Stonewall Award that you received. Tell me about that.

SÁNCHEZ: The Stonewall Award is given, or was given — I think it's still being given — to two or three individuals within the LGBT community in recognition for the work that they are doing to promote a positive portrayal of the LGBT community. And so, it's an anonymous sort of decision-making. I don't know who nominated me and what the process was to get selected, but that honor was given to me in 1992. And it came with money, so it was \$25,000. And you can do whatever you want with that money, so I just put it away and ultimately, with some savings that came along with it, was able to put a down payment on the house that I currently live in and still have a little bit left over, because I didn't spend it all.

But it was at that moment that, since I knew they were trying to be as public [as possible] with the award, they also wanted us to participate in trying to help promote ourselves in this award. And so I wanted to make sure, since I hadn't come out publicly and formally to my father, that I would take this opportunity to sit him down. So I sat both him and my mother and my partner at that time, at a breakfast one day (laughs) before this happened. And it was just a wonderful little breakfast conversation.

By that time, I guess the Esperanza had been around — I had been working with the Esperanza for about four years and so, again, even if it wasn't direct, indirectly my father knew the work that we were doing at the Esperanza and I had probably come out in many of those interviews on TV or in the newspaper. But this was just kind of, you know, Mom and Dad, I have this opportunity. I'm getting this award. Oh, great, congratulations. And this is why, and I want you to know. It was just the greatest exchange that happened between both my parents and myself and my partner at that time.

And you know, my dad started telling stories of the lesbians from where he used to work and who they were and how great they were and — see, my father was definitely more worldly than my mother, so even though my mom was a little nervous that he would have responded negatively, he was quite the opposite. And so, again, I was really surprised that, again, [given] what I had expected from both of them, the way they both responded.

And years later, or maybe within the next year or two, I know I received an award locally from the local HRC, the Human Rights Campaign fund. And I politically have always had problems with them, but since they wanted to honor me, I ended up going away and leaving my parents to receive the award on my behalf. And they had agreed to do it and I thought it would be my father who would get up and speak, but

apparently, he spoke for a little bit and my mom shoved him to the side and then started telling her story. And when I came back from being out of town that weekend, everybody talked about my mother and how great she was. Unfortunately, nobody taped the moment, because I just assumed that it would be taped, so I never have had any footage of that. But it didn't surprise me.

4:00

That was the mother that I thought, you know, would have been responsive that way. In many moments, she's kind of had to do that over and over again. Not in something as public as that moment was, but in smaller settings or in challenging homophobic conversations with her friends. And I've seen her do it, just two or three weeks ago, amongst a bunch of 80-year-old women who found out about somebody being gay and kind of giggle-giggle and my mom said, "And what's wrong with that?" Oh, no, nothing's wrong with that. It's like, OK. My mom's biggest concern, I think, about me being a lesbian has been not that I'm a lesbian as much as how people could hurt me with that information or could just — because she knows the viciousness and the hatred towards LGBT people, and so, that's always been her concern.

I've been disappointed more with, like, the extended family knowing who I am but not really ever asking me or, you know, just respecting my partners in the way that would be more appropriate if I were married and had a man at my side and children and such. So, their relationship to me is just more — you know, they're friendly, they're cousins, they're aunts and uncles, but they don't ask much more, and I'm always surprised. It's like, I live here. Don't you know what work I do? Sometimes they'll just respond by not going to the Esperanza. My parents work real hard to figure out ways to get them to the Esperanza. We have some program that they think they're going to like, you know, they'll try to get them over there. And that's not everybody, that's not everybody, that's just a few of them. But that's the disappointment there.

ROSS: Have you heard your mother ever say, "Oh, I was planning a wedding for you?" or "I wanted you to have grandchildren?"

SÁNCHEZ: No, never, never.

ROSS: Some of my lesbian friends have said their parents — or, their mothers — had the disappointed rite conversation and then got over it.

SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. No, fortunately for me, again, my parents never put any sort of pressure on us to do anything, from going to college or — I mean, education was important but my parents just figured, you know, if you're decent people, if your job is collecting trash, as long as you're decent people, it doesn't matter what sort of — they would love us and adore us and respect us for whatever it was. And so, again, that's — and their sense of being honest and truthful and doing your work at home. Essentially,

when I came out to my mom, it's like, You said to be honest. You said to be truthful. You want me to come back home, so you need to be — I'm going to be an out-lesbian in San Antonio and I'm going to need your support and I'm going to need you and the rest of the family to just know it and not be traumatized or shamed by it. This is who I am, so I'm here because you've taught me that it's important to do your work at home. So, rather than coming out and living somewhere else, I'm going to do it and I'm going to need your support.

And they've been there. They've definitely — if I had come out the way I think should have been the more appropriate way, probably she would have been less traumatized. She would have been maybe nervous and maybe cried a little bit, but she would've — again, maybe I wouldn't have done it one on one with her, I would've brought my father into the picture also. But throughout the 18 years I've been working with the Esperanza, they're present.

I know a few years ago when we were doing the lesbian-gay film festival, we'd do it off and on, but we were doing it here at the Guadalupe Theater, she came in with, like, ten dozen tamales that she had made, homemade tamales, and she dropped them off. And I said, "Aren't you staying?" She goes, "Oh no. I don't like those lesbian films because there's always somebody that dies at the end, so I don't want to see that. But here's what we're giving you." So, we made \$110, you know, a dollar a tamale. And of course, to this day, everybody looks for those tamales, but that's the way she kind of supports us.

Again, once upon a time, they might have supported the Esperanza because their daughter was the director of the Esperanza, but since they know more about the Esperanza, what it does and who it represents, they feel that they are members and supporters of, you know, just because it's an organization that they believe in as well and as much. So, they're there with other straight allies they — now they talk comfortably about lesbians or gay men around and they talk about partners and they treat all the people they know pretty respectfully and stuff.

ROSS:

Who's your present partner?

8:52

SÁNCHEZ:

Her name's [NAME WITHHELD] and we've been together for about six years, and I hope for the rest of my life. I think I realize, or I recognize, that this was the person that I fell in love with and it was, again, a relationship that started as working relationship and her relationship with the Esperanza as well. And she ended up being the attorney for the lawsuit that we had, the case against the city of San Antonio, and I think we ended up just doing a lot of work together and I think we found out how very connected we were.

She's a white woman, which is a surprise for me because all my other partners have been women of color. And yet, I think of all the people that I've known, she's the person that sees me the most and can reflect. And

it's been interesting because I know more of her story in terms of the abuse that she had growing up as a little girl [SECTION WITHHELD] and the trauma and the struggle that she had to — she struggled with drugs, she struggled with alcohol, she struggled with all those things.

And she's been able to overcome that after many years — many, many years. And, I think I met her at that moment when she had really gotten beyond that. It's not to say she doesn't wake up with nightmares and I'm not — again, having been raised in a family that had no violence, you know, from my first battering relationship, and seeing how violence works in the home, and again, being surprised by that. Because I was just really protected, and I just thank the ancestors or whoever who — for me, I was just lucky enough. I've had to deal with the abuse as an adult — and, you know, that's bad, too — but I think it's different to have it as a child and to survive it. And so, I think — but those things, you know.

And she escaped as a young girl and was a homeless girl. She ran away from home in New York City and was on the streets of New York City and got picked up and taken care of by a *puertorriqueña* who she fell in love with but never — they never acted on that. It was an older Puerto Rican woman. But always found herself from that moment on within communities of color. So, she went to Chicago. She dropped out of school, came back, went back, and all that stuff. Ultimately, was one of the first women accepted into the University of Chicago Law School and worked within the black community of Chicago, and that was who her allies were. So, she was there in the '60s. So she's more your age. She's ten years older than I am. But was part of SDS and just kind of was formed politically that way, and then learned about antiracism as a — against white supremacy, and has written a lot of documents and taught law in relationship with her understanding of white supremacy.

And [she] went to the University of Hawaii when it was opening up its law school, because she was married. She was married before she basically ran into me and — but she went with her husband at that time to Hawaii [when] they [were starting] up this law school. So she ended up helping and was there with the Asian community and the Hawaiian community, and was there for ten or eleven years until she basically found that what she was teaching and the students that she was working with were then being scapegoated, because, you know, she was working with — there was a lawsuit against that Hawaiian woman and the law school filed against the University of Hawaii. And my partner, [NAME WITHHELD] ended up being one of the main witnesses, and the discussion was about how race and gender affected this woman.

I don't know the specifics, but Amy's testimony helped make it a little more complicated because the Hawaiian — the Asian men were saying, Well, no, look. We've been able to raise, move up the system at the University because we're Hawa[iian] — because we're Asian. And then

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the women were saying, Well, we've been able to succeed because we're women. And the case said, Well, but no, you're talking about white women and Asian men. You're not talking about a woman of color in this position and so, it's a different thing. And so that was a great case, and I think it was very traumatic for the plaintiff, and she ended up having also to leave from Hawaii. But [SHE] did a lot of work there and then, again, all her students were being targeted, so she figured that on an island, you can't stick around, so she came to San Antonio because they were looking for — and they had heard about her, and so she came here.

I think she's been able to see, again, how colonization works in a state like Hawaii and kind of see the similarities in Texas and San Antonio. Again, very military towns, also a lot of tourism and, you know, all the lost lands of the Hawaiian natives there. So she worked a lot with the sovereignty movement in Hawaii as well, she'd made all those connections, and coming here was just politically someone that way that had worked within communities of color, women of color in particular. So

ROSS: She sounds like a brilliant critical race theorist — that intersectionality approach that you need to renovate the legal system in America that is based on white supremacist kind of stuff.

SÁNCHEZ: Right, exactly.

15:00

ROSS: OK. Now, I want to talk to you about your professional Graciela.

SÁNCHEZ: My professional Graciela.

ROSS: And we're going to lead into discussions of Esperanza. But I noticed that you said you came from Yale, graduated from Yale, and you came back, you immediately seemed to locate jobs in the social justice movement. How did that happen?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, I came back to be a teacher, remember? And nobody would hire me. I was expecting that I could get hired at my high school. Again, well, I've got a Yale degree, they'll want me here, or my junior high — and they wouldn't hire me. What I was told was that I looked — you know, I didn't have any gray then and I was small, you know, five foot two, and so, they just wanted somebody — if I had been, you know, five foot ten, they might have hired me at the same — because I saw a lot of other younger people also getting hired, but they were taller. And so, from May through August I wasn't getting hired, and September was coming along and I knew if I didn't get a job before then, then I wasn't going to get hired to be a teacher.

So, um, within the people I was talking to, I found out there was a job opening at the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project and Willie

Velazquez was the director and they were looking for a paralegal. And one of the things I was thinking at that time was that I would possibly become an attorney and go to law school. So, I thought, Well, this will give me the experience of working and seeing what that's all about. So I applied for that job and got that job in August and it was a month later that I got offered a job as a teacher and I said, Well, I already gave it up. I already committed to these folks for a couple of years so I'm going to move forward with it.

And so, that job was — they were doing a lot of filing of lawsuits throughout the state of Texas to create single-member districts throughout the state and offer, you know, an opportunity for people to get elected and represent their communities. So I did a lot of the research and created a lot of districts in Lubbock, Texas, Lamesa, Texas, Big Spring, Texas, and so helped to create single-member districts and helped to testify. I got to do a lot of work with the plaintiffs and make relationships with the plaintiffs and I think, ultimately, that's the reason I never became an attorney, because the lead attorney, who was my boss, wanted to win cases. And so, winning cases sometimes meant settling out of court and settling for a compromise mixed district, so it was both single-member districts and at-large districts. And I saw that he was making these decisions without taking into consideration what the community wanted, and the community kept on telling me that they didn't want to settle. The community kept on telling me they wanted to fight and go to court for single-member districts and I had no power to change anybody's minds, because the decisions were being made without me even participating.

And so, that was really disappointing and very — it made me angry, also, and at Southwest Voter Registration Project, what I saw was a social justice organization, I mean, again, set up to get the Chicano community registered to vote, you know, getting them out to vote and getting them to elect Chicano officials so that they would represent the Chicano community. And what I was seeing was that wasn't necessarily happening. And Willie Velazquez's vision and what he put forward was that he understood that the masses looked to the leader to make decisions, and whatever [decisions] the leader made, they would follow. And that we had to educate the leaders that were getting elected, so that it could filter down to the community. Whereas my philosophy was that the masses have the understanding and the vision and we should be working to follow and work with them. So it was from the bottom up and his was from the top down kind of approach.

And what I was also seeing was people who were elected in the '80s and '90s and on, you know, weren't necessarily representing the community. They were representing personal interests, ultimately, and that's been the biggest disappointment. So we have registered lots of people, people have voted, but they're getting disappointed that their leadership doesn't represent them. So right now, we have a council, a city council in San Antonio that has for the last 30 years been, I guess, selected

19:00

— less than 30 years — been selected through single-member districts. But most of those guys, and they're mainly guys, have continued to just represent the status quo, except now they're dark-skinned people, you know, representing the masters — and so what was that all about? And I don't see a lot of women running for office. I think women see what you have to basically compromise, and so it's just young men and older men who keep on applying and being elected. But we're really very angry at who they are.

But working there made me connect with the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, where I also worked with for a while there, and I also worked for the Chicano Health Policy Development for a while there, just as — I worked for MALDEF. I did Southwest [Voter Registration Project], I went to Nicaragua, then came back and decided that I was just not going to work anyplace else. But then I needed more money so then I worked at MALDEF for a while but then was in that abusive relationship so, stayed there for a while until the abuse was so bad that I just had to quit. And I did come out to my boss and [said,] I have to quit and it's not that I don't want to work here, it's just that I'm in an abusive relationship and I have to figure it out at home before I can be present at this work. And so, again, I don't know if anybody else would've have come out to their boss who, to this point, hadn't been sensitive, but I felt that there was some rapport and they were good about that. And then, I went to resolve that problem and worked at the Chicana Health Policy Development and then helped to start up the Esperanza.

So, those were the main jobs that I had. And in between those jobs, I was working as a consultant with the city of San Antonio, or wherever they might need me. I might get a job for a month. Just before I went to Nicaragua, I probably made \$5,000 that year, but it was like working a month, getting \$500, and then doing the work to help create the Esperanza and then going back to a consultant job.

So, I liked that because it allowed me to have access to be able to travel a lot and to make connections with funders before the Esperanza got started up and I remember knocking on doors just all over New York City, just knocking on doors. It's like, I was reading about them and I wanted to know who they were and I wanted to make those contacts. I went to the Center for Constitutional Rights, just because. I went to the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, just because. I just was knocking on doors. And again, it's something that I had no fear on some level, because I didn't know you weren't supposed to. Now that I've had this position as the director of the Esperanza, I always want people to call me up and give me a couple of days' notice, you know, because I'm so busy and not having been a director, I didn't know that you don't go and look for the top dog at a national organization and say —

I mean, that's how I met Urvashi Vaid in the mid-'80s, also. I was in D.C. and just traveling and wanted to get to know people at the National Gay Lesbian Task Force. And so, I didn't get to meet the top dog but they

introduced me [to] Urvashi Vaid, who was a press person, a media person at that time and she said, Well, there's a demonstration, come and be with us. But that's where our friendship kind of started up, before she was the head. And so that friendship has continued, you know, at a distance — but it was just knocking on doors.

That's when I first heard about — when I was at the Lambda Legal Defense, when they started to discuss gay marriage, and I saw how the men were pushing and promoting marriage but the lesbians were saying, This is not an issue that we're interested in — because they were understanding it in the form of patriarchy, and why would lesbians want to participate in a patriarchal relationship? I remember kind of saying, Yeah, I agree. But the men kind of pushed it, and here we are, 20 plus years later and gay marriage is a big issue, so obviously the guys' agenda moved forward and not the lesbian agenda.

ROSS: Which speaks to the politics of the LGBT movement, which we may get into. So, you made the decision to found Esperanza. Tell me who was involved in the founding and why did you think Esperanza was needed?

24:20

SÁNCHEZ: Again, when I came back to San Antonio, I was looking for the same dynamic energy and organizing and resistance that I was seeing happening in school, at Yale. And it was dead. And I was also looking for the same sort of thinking that was going on. And it took me two years, literally, to find Susan Guerra, who helped me co-found the Esperanza, and other women, principally because — and it was the women who were doing the organizing around Central America. It was women doing organizing around women's rights. It was women doing any work around the LGBT community.

And so in the first year and a half or two years, actually the first six months, I ended up going to the doctor because I was depressed. I didn't know why I was lethargic and I didn't know why it was hard to get to work. And, you know, when I talked to the doctor, it was like, You're fine, you're just depressed. And I think it was just not having like minds around my life, like I had for four years, and I didn't know how to find them. Again, I was organizing with people but, you know — so little by little, I was just kind of making those friendships, after hours with people who were interested in the same thing.

And as we started to talk, again, they were just women who were saying, Well, can't we create a space that's a central meeting place that all people working around economic, social, environmental justice, local-to-global, sort of way to look at this, can come together and meet and not spend all their energies looking to meet with each other? One. Two, how can we use this space as a place to share our resources? Because up to that point, we were having meetings in different peoples' homes and it moved around a lot, so people would forget, people didn't remember, we were lugging everything we had in the back of our cars, you know, so, from

selling of bumper stickers and tee-shirts and all the paraphernalia, it just sat in our cars and got lugged in and lugged out. And it's like, wouldn't it be a good place where it's just centrally located and people can come and look for this stuff? How can we create something? How do we share those resources? What are those resources?

There's the thinking of our resources, so that like-minded people can come together, but this is a time that computers are just barely new and people didn't have computers. There was just the typewriter, at least, that one person could share the electric typewriter with one another —and if there was a computer, how that computer could be shared. If there was a copier machine, how could that copier machine be shared amongst many people? How could the space itself be shared amongst many people and that different groups could pay to keep that place alive?

What was the synergy created when you had these, although progressive-minded people, they were coming at it from different places, so you were talking about black and Latino, people working around civil rights and social justice, coming together with people who were working on international issues and the struggle, and then coming together with queer people, coming together with feminists. Not everybody necessarily knew each other or liked the approaches, and they were very much single-issue approaches to the organizing. But if they all came together, they would bump into each other and they would learn from each other, and they would support each other and become allies with each other.

28:00

So, that was the vision. So we all kind of had that idea, and then nobody would move. I said, "Come on." So I found myself, when I got fired from my job, that, it's like, OK, this is a moment that I have that I can just dedicate for the researching what it means to run an organization like this, what it means to create it. As I traveled, I was picking up pamphlets and magazines and literature from other places in California and New York and just kind of saying, OK, you know, if we were to show films, if we were to do a café — we didn't know what we were going to create, we just knew that we needed a space, so once we had some of that information, it was just like, OK, let's look for a location.

And so people, these women — Carol Rodriguez, Emily Jones, just a lot of people I had been working with, you know — kind of finally just allowed, supported, the planning and the thinking. Susan and I kind of kept on moving it forward. We found an organization, the Interchange, who were a group of social justice groups that met once a year but put out a newsletter every month, and they were a 501C3, and we came to them and said, Can you umbrella this concept of a peace and justice center? And they said, Sure, why not? And so, they umbrella'd us and we started applying, just — well, we got the place. We ended up talking to that priest that I mentioned.

ROSS:

The Oblate?

30:00

SÁNCHEZ: The

Oblate priest, yeah, Bill Davis, and we went to Blue Star Complex and for very cheap, they would give us something, but that cheap still was very expensive, because it was basically a shell, whereas, what we ultimately got with the Oblates was a building that was intact and all we had to do was furnish it and they gave it ultimately to us for a dollar a year, so we were able to move into that space. We cleaned it up and named it the Esperanza. Susan kind of took that on. We talked about it and as we would lie down in her living room with the hot weather in the summer, the fan blowing, just kind of dream. And she said, “Well, how about Esperanza? What do you think about it? It means hope.” It’s like, That sounds good.

It’s a woman’s name — that’s right, it’s a woman’s name. Esperanza brings up images of immigrant women. It brings up images of your grandmother. It brings up images of a single head of a household, teen pregnant girl, an educated woman who’s a lawyer — just the complexity of all the different types of women that it represents. But it also is about hope, and it’s a woman’s voice. And so, I liked the idea, so we moved forward and that’s how the name Esperanza came on. The Peace and Justice Center, I think somebody just kind of put it together and we didn’t really think much more about it.

And so, that’s just the name that we’ve had. And I know that funders have challenged us to change our name, because for some of the people-of-color funders, Peace and Justice Center meant white nuns organizing. And we’re like, We’re not. And as we tried to change the name, people locally in the community said, No, just keep it. That’s who we know. That’s how you’re recognized. And so, in Spanish, we go by Centro Esperanza Para Paz y Justicia, or Centro Esperanza, but again, with all this experience, maybe we’d have kept the Esperanza and had a different name, but at that point, that’s how we named ourselves.

And again, we were also responding to, you know, by that time, four or five years of Reagan Administration and the policies that were being enacted. And as I understand now, the highest number of nonprofit organizations that were created up to this point came out of that time period because I think people just didn’t know how to respond and the institutions that existed weren’t responding in the way. So I think a lot of us got started that way — and with no money, no budget, we just had a building suddenly, you know. That’s how it got started.

But as I mentioned, that was the year I — you know, it was December and I had to make a decision, so I ended up going to Cuba. And so Susan and Carol Rodriguez and other — and then my partner at that time, Gloria Ramirez, went ahead and just kind of took it on. So for the first year and a half it was a volunteer organization with a volunteer director who didn’t get paid. And so, because it was very part-time, they really kind of didn’t — there was programming that happened but it was much more limited. When I came back from Cuba, people basically said, Here, you can have it. If you still want it, you can have it.

And by that time, Gloria had already written a grant for \$6,000 that she got from Gen Vaughan with the Foundation for Compassionate Society, and so that was our first \$6,000, which I used to pay myself very part-time and help to do the work of the Esperanza. And from that point on I started writing the grants and on some level, because of the support of Gloria, financially, you know, both of us could live off of her teacher's salary. And that's how we kind of moved along the initial years.

ROSS: I hope that someday someone does an oral history of Genevieve Vaughan, because she's had a tremendous impact on the work that was done in Central America and taking women's delegations down there and supporting work there as well as solidarity work here in the U.S. And that was one of the ways that I originally met Luz Guerra, because she was working for Gen Vaughan at the time.

34:14

SÁNCHEZ: It's always an interesting story because it's also women with wealth and how eccentric and strange they all are, too, so, I mean, they initially got money from them and I think we probably got another \$10,000 later on when we moved into the present building. But otherwise, we've never got funded by them any more, because she decided to target her Austin community and definitely had, you know, 20, 30 women of color working for her and doing a lot of the projects that they were interested in, as she was interested in. But she never looked to San Antonio. And on some level, what was good about that was that I personally didn't get dependent on her money, because she ultimately was pulling. If she didn't like it or she got bored by it, or, you know, she would just pull money from them. And I know that a lot of women just quit working for her because of that power dynamic. But, I mean, again, what good came out of it is something to be said.

ROSS: I believe her strategy was to spend down her wealth, too, so that less and less became available. She literally was emptying the coffers.

SÁNCHEZ: Right. And so, when everybody was losing their jobs or quitting — she did say she had no more money, we weren't dependent on that, you know, and we had diversified our funding since the beginning. We just knew that we couldn't depend on any one source, and so, where a lot of organizations don't exist anymore in Austin because they depended exclusively on her money and didn't go out of their way to look for everything else, I think I had understood from reading the — you know, Stephanie Ross and what's-her-name, her partner, the big funding person? I can't think of her name — the one that does all the work around foundations and giving and —

ROSS: Ki m —

SÁNCHEZ: Kim Klein, right. So, again, through — and I learned about that through, again, the Funding Exchange and the folks at the Live Oak Fund here in Texas, when they had a super fund meeting. And so I went to one of their workshops and learned where you diversify. So it's get the money from the local community, yes, get grant foundation money, but get it from the local and make sure it's coming from different sources, so I was able to learn that early on and just kind of — I think that's why we're still here 18 years later.

ROSS: I also read in my research that you were able to purchase your building through a socially conscious investment fund of nuns? (laughter) Could you tell us about that?

37:07

SÁNCHEZ: Well, we were at the old Esperanza from 1987 till almost to the end of '93. We got kicked out of that building because — this is where I think, again, how we have to challenge our local so-called social justice community to deal with issues of racism and sexism and homophobia and all of the classism and the issues that divide us even amongst ourselves, as progressives. And so within that time period, in '93, after we had our Fifth Annual Lesbian Gay Art Exhibit, the next day, I came to work and there was a letter we had received that said, You have a month to clear out, we're tired of you. And that was coming from the director of the Refugee Aid Project, and he was, you know, a macho man. He's a sexist man who was wanting control and power, and he was a new director and he had been given the —

The Oblate priests had actually taken the — we, the Esperanza, had been the people who had got the space for a dollar a year, but after three or four years, because of their homophobia and they wanted us to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church, and we were talking about pro-choice, and LGBT issues — those they felt weren't teachings of the Catholic Church — and I challenged that because I said, Well, there are gay priests dying of AIDS and there are Catholics for choice.

And so we did programming and that — so they got tired of that and so they pulled the power of the Esperanza to be in charge of the building and they gave it to another group, the Refugee Aid Project, who at that time was being run by a nun. She and I had a great working relationship, but once she left and they brought in this Latino man, he just clashed with me and no — and his board of directors didn't want to even speak to our board of directors. They just said it was a clash of personalities. And I said, No, let's talk about sexism, let's talk about homophobia. And they didn't want to talk about it.

So he finally gave us our walking papers and we spent the next six months trying to figure out how to get money and to look for a new building. And we asked the community, Here's a moment we're either going to close down our doors or we're going to stay alive: what do you want us to do? And the community said, We want you to survive and we

think you should be centrally located in San Antonio, and we're going to help you raise the money.

And so, in three or four months, we raised \$40,000 and had a down payment for this building that we're presently at, and now this is going on our eleventh year in that building. And we worked for the first two years with an owner-financed building. But, you know, time was going to click away and here was two years coming up and I didn't know [how] we weren't going to raise the \$200,000 for the building that we needed, that were still owed, so I started calling friends around, I said, "Do you know how to get this financed?" And we were looking to banks, and banks weren't going to give us a loan because we didn't have that much, you know, we weren't going to be a good investment.

40:00

And so, in one of my conversations, I talked to a woman named Janie Barrera, who had been an ally of the Esperanza and she was with Acción Texas. And Acción Texas had gotten funded by this Partners for the Common Good 2000. And she said, "Well, why don't you call up Carol Costen and see what that means?" I called up Carol, I said, "Look, we're interested. We hear you have some money. We're interested in seeing if you will loan us some money." And so she made phone calls to all the people she knew in San Antonio to see who this Esperanza was and she traveled a lot, so she was not really — she's from San Antonio — she was living in San Antonio but had never really been involved with the organizing, because they were funding Haiti, they were funding Bolivia, they were funding other places in the world, low-income communities, but not San Antonio and not the U.S.

So, she talked to people like Maria Berriozabal, who's an ex-city council woman who's a good friend of the Esperanza, and she talked to a few other people, and we all got thumbs up as an organization. So they just made us apply in the same process that everybody else had applied. The Partners for the Common Good 2000 is a group of nuns and priests who put some of their retirement money into a fund and get a smaller investment of, like, 7 percent on putting this money, and they would lend out their investments as loans to poor communities throughout the world, mainly to create these small micro-enterprises and so they were small micro-enterprise loans.

And ours became a loan to buy this building, and part of what they thought was that we would earn income by renting the upstairs floor, or if we ever created a café, and so that was the micro-enterprise they were hoping to support. And what that allowed us to do was to have another — from 1996 to the year 2000 — four years to basically pay them back their loan, because everything — it's Partners for the Common Good 2000, the loan runs out in the year 2000 so everybody that got lent a loan had to pay everything up by the year 2000. So we were able to calmly, you know, take the time to raise the moneys and pay them on a quarterly basis at a 7 percent interest rate, which is much better than 15 percent or 20 percent that banks were lending at that time.

And so, it was a surprise, you know, searching around to see where to look for it and to find it in your own home, and to be able to kind of work through with them. And it was the first loan they ever lent to any organization in the United States. So they had never even considered giving moneys to women of color or poor communities in the U.S. So (unclear) we were successful for them and they liked a lot of the projects that we had, including our Women's Clay Collective. So, that's when Partners for the Common Good 2000 won an award from the Clinton Administration and so we went up with them and highlighted our Women's Clay Collective, because they really liked that as a project that we had done.

And so, yeah, while we were kicked out of the building by the Oblate priests on some level, we were then supported by another set of progressive nuns, you know, and so, yeah, this is the radical fringe of the nuns, I think, Carol Costen and company. So it was good.

ROSS: Well, I do want to say for the record that we are embedded on the West Side of San Antonio and the roosters and the –

44:10

SÁNCHEZ: You are hearing them?

ROSS: In the background. It's part of our community music.

SÁNCHEZ: Absolutely, yeah. I'm glad they're there.

ROSS: Tell us about the Women's Clay Collective, MujerArtes.

SÁNCHEZ: The Esperanza has many projects, and part of what we do is a lot of — we don't separate art and culture with politics. I think that understanding of the separation is very white and very U.S.-based. If you go to any other part of the world, you can have a poet that's the president of the country, right? You can have a cultural — do you want me to close the door?

ROSS: No.

SÁNCHEZ: OK.

ROSS: Václav Havel just came to mind.

SÁNCHEZ: Right, exactly. But in this country, you know, art has been ruled by white European culture and it's separate and it's elitist and it's not connected to anything else. And I think in communities of color, it's always been constant, and has been the role of cultural genocide to basically come into and destroy our culture, our heritage, our traditions, our language, our values, and basically make us into zombies, you know.

And so, part of what the work of the Esperanza has — even before there was an Esperanza, when I was doing work around Central America, it's like, OK, it's a film that's going to bring people together, you know, this documentary that will bring people together, and they'll talk about it and, you know, how do we get people out to an event? Well, let's have a festival, where poets and artists and singers are performing outside in the plaza after people get out of church and they're going to want to eat, so let them come out and eat and as they're eating, they're going to listen to people and they're going to engage and then they're going to get involved.

And so it was all these cultural ways to bring community together, to break bread, to just to hang, that was at the core of the work that we did in terms of organizing. I think 18 years later we call it cultural activism and it's been central to it. And so, as I was programming — I say “I,” I mean, I was working with many people, the Esperanza's not Graciela, the Esperanza is this larger community — but as I, working with others, sat down to think of what people to bring, we were trying to bring artists and activists who connected race, class, gender, sexuality, all the different issues and could speak to all of these issues and complicate things and (pause in recording)

OK. So, again, we've recognized that cultural genocide has had a profound effect on art communities as communities of color and part of what, you know, we can't get our people out onto the streets demanding justice if they can't even get themselves out of bed to live the next day because they're angry, they're frustrated, they just want to commit suicide or whatever, because they don't understand what's going on in their world and they don't love themselves because they've been taught through history books, through TV, through their interactions with the world, that as, you know, dark-skinned people of color, who are poor, working-class, aren't worth shit, you know. So, a lot of our program is to say, No, it's all worth it. Let's look at your history, let's look at your culture — you know, challenge them to see themselves and who they are in their communities.

47:20

And so, we've created programs that have allowed for that to occur. So, we'll bring a Sharon Bridgforth [sic], who's a black lesbian performance artist who's out of LA but now lives in Austin, and she's a poet, she's a griot, she's a genius, and can talk about race and class and gender and sexuality and violence and all of that in the poetic and beautiful way and can bring a community together, but talk about really important issues, and we can invite Lourdes Perez, who's a Puerto Rican lesbian folk singer who sings one note and you just hear it 20 miles away, because she's just so strong, but she's connecting the struggle of Puerto Rico and all that's gone on there in terms of a colonization of her community and connect[ing] it to the Palestinian struggle and connect[ing] it to her struggle as a lesbian, and make connections to all communities of all color.

And so, again, one would say one is being entertained on some level, but at the same time, is being educated. And we were creating community

also at the same time, so we were bringing people — you know, we could promote the event, saying, OK, lesbian community, this is a lesbian. Puerto Rican community or Latina community, this is a Latina. Women who are interested in feminist issues, come on over. You know, we were able to promote the event and bring diverse communities together to sit at the table together to listen to these performers, to listen to these activists, because they're also activists. It's not just someone that comes to entertain but someone who has a message that's profound and it's not just at a demonstration right before the demonstration starts, it was, you know, they were the highlight.

And so we were doing a lot of that programming. And women are always at the center at the Esperanza and women of color have always been at the center of our programming, because what, again, I had seen with the civil rights organizing that happened before, is, the women were doing the work, the men were getting all the credit, the men were getting the pay. And what we were seeing here at the Esperanza was, pay or not pay, women were the ones doing all the work and continue to be the biggest organizers. And so, we were just going to center women, because every other project we saw, locally as well as nationally, was centered around men. So we were going to just challenge that.

But what was also happening with the cultural programming was, it was a moment, also, you know, to come for two hours to hear someone, or even if we extended it and had the person come in for a week's time, it was still a limited time. So when we created MujerArtes, it was through an initiative, actually, of the city of San Antonio wanting organizations to work with homeless, with people with AIDS, with women, with underserved communities and do some sort of project. So I said, "Well, let's work with women and young people."

52:00

So we started up two projects. One was the Youth Media Program, so the film work that I had done could kind of move it forward and start training some young people to do film of the community. And then the women's program was going to be a collective, a co-op that was going to work in the form of art. And we didn't know, but we ultimately decided clay, because we figured women have always kneaded bread, kneaded tortillas, and it was a moment to kind of play off the clay. And so that's when the co-op for MujerArtes got started and the women themselves named, self-identified themselves as MujerArtes, Women Art, Women Artists. And that's now been around for ten years and many women have come and gone through that program, although right now, I would say, there's a core of about ten women who have been through that program for three or four years. So the quality of their work is also that much more transparent, because they've learned the skills and they've just continued to grow at it.

Our work has been to try to get them to learn what it means to work in a collective and a cooperative, because there are no other sorts of examples of that. You know, the way cooperatives work in this country,

again, is that a group of people will pay money to rent a space and they do their things separately, and at the end, pay. So that's the sense of cooperation, but they all kind of put in money. For us it's like, How do they design art work together and figure out how to do it together? How do they clean the space together? How do they promote themselves together? How do they start sharing the knowledge of working in clay to the kids in the community, to elders in the community? They make the decisions together and then, how do they — and our job, besides helping them kind of really struggle through that — because again, this is a capitalist structure that just says, No, that's the wrong way to do it, so we've had to fight with, say, gallery owners from the city who, you know, [say,] Oh, good, this is a new kind of idea, brown women working clay, and we could come to MujerArtes and select out the artists we like and promote them in our gallery. What that did initially, without my knowledge, you know, these gallery owners were coming to their space and self-selecting them and it caused division, because some of the women were being selected and some weren't. And so, there was competition amongst them. So what we were able to do was at least tell the women, From now on — you know, a new group of women had to come in, because the women that started off in the first and the second group that came together were basically fighting each other, not trusting each other. So we graduated them out and they're actually still working and they've gone on to find themselves in restaurants or buying their own kilns and, you know, teaching themselves. But this new group of women, we said, Don't let anybody come through. If there are people that are interested, have them come through the Esperanza and we'll negotiate things that way. So there hasn't been this division amongst the women any more. They've kind of learned.

We've had to bring artists from outside of San Antonio and from Mexico because what we found initially was there were no Latina women who worked in clay in San Antonio.

ROSS:

The skills were lost.

55:50

SÁNCHEZ:

Yeah. So we could find white men who were working in clay and white women, and we really wanted it to be a person of color. We initially started here in this town, on this side of town, the idea was to have cooperatives in all sections so that the next side was going to be going to the black community and saying, OK, let's figure out what we want to do. Would it be photography? Would it be sewing? What would it be? But it's been so hard to even fund this project, because nobody wants to fund women of color, and then women of color working as artists — that's just like not understood.

The Ms. Foundation has an economic development project but they're not interested in the concept of cooperation and they've never worked with these projects that use art as a form of making economic

development. They've done the women who become childcare workers and run their childcare center because, you know, that's what they're used to — or women as secretaries. But it was like, Well, here's a different [idea] of women making money off from the side, so, and they just never funded it.

And when we went to receive the award with the Partners for the Common Good 2000, Ms. Foundation also won an award, and I was walking around with one of the pieces that they had created and everybody was, Wow, this is beautiful. Because the women ended up giving it to Mrs. Clinton at that time, so this was something I had to deliver on behalf of the women. And so Ms. Foundation said, "What's that?" I said, "This is a project you didn't fund."

Anyway, part of what's been at the core of the thinking there, besides them working cooperatively, is also telling their stories, because our stories in San Antonio, our stories as people of color here in the world, is that it's not written. That's one form of telling the story but in our cultures, maybe it's the oral history and the tradition of telling your children and your grandchildren what the story is that keeps the history and the traditions alive, but in this culture of materialism and commercialism and individualism, we've cut out. You know, the extended family doesn't exist. It's the small nuclear family, and so, none of that is being shared any more.

So part of what we've been trying to do is bring that interaction between each other, and having the women say, OK, tell your story. What is it growing up in this neighborhood? Oh, there were chickens? Put that chicken in that image that you're creating. What else is around? What are the colors? What are the trees? Was it a grandmother? Was it a mother? Was it a father? Did they have little farms? What was it like? And so, as they've had to acknowledge that somebody's interested in their story, they put that story onto a plate, they put it onto a sculpted piece. And then, what they've seen is that people come in to buy and that they're firm, because people like the story within that piece and they're surprised. It's like, Why would anybody like the story? It's my father and my mother in the cornfields. Or, you know, picking the cotton: what's that? But five people want that same piece and there's only one. So, I see it blinking again. So, the next time you don't know.

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END DVD 4

DVD 5

ROSS: I wonder what are some of the other programs that Esperanza runs and manages?

SÁNCHEZ: Around the cultural arts programming, we get different funding, but we have the performance of women, so we have a thing called *Mujer Canto*, a celebration of women's song and thought. So, we bring together many people over more of a festival format. And we have film screenings. We had two different film programs that we've combined into one. One was called *The Other America: Films by and About the Other America*, so from the tip of Chile to the Inuit folks in Canada, the Caribbean. But all of the work had to be antiracist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic. And then *Out at the Movies*, which is the lesbian/gay film festival. And most recently, we combined them and put *Other Out and Beyond: Movement and Resistance*. So then we have series around that.

Right now, I'm working with the junior college to also do a women's focus at the end of March for women's history month, and it's going to be called *Cine Mujer, Women in Cinema*, or whatever — so again, with those social, economic, environmental justice platform. So they have to say something and they have to help organize, be it fiction or be it documentary, be it experimental or animation, so that's kind of the focus. And we're also trying to show those films — I mean, we participate in getting the local communities from other organizers to student groups to social workers, you know, who have never used film, to kind of promote and learn how to use it as an organizing tool for them.

We've shown films like, from *Señorita Extraviada*, that talks about the women in Juárez getting murdered and no one has figured who's doing all the killings, to again, making connections of how globalization works, so showing films of people, women, losing their jobs in the Southeast from Levis leaving the Southeast to leaving here in San Antonio and going off to Costa Rica and, you know, kind of letting people locally see what's happening in other parts of the U.S. but also in other parts of the world.

We've had, again, teaching workshops around writing so that, especially, women are able to write their own stories and just to be able to write. And bringing in authors like Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Barbara Smith, and not just those writers and also having them give workshops but also just as thinkers, just as activists and kind of making the connection of activists, artists, and scholars, because we believe that community members are activists, artists, and scholars and again, the way the society works is that they are all separated and we see them all kind of coming together.

But we've tried to bring some of these people in as a way to kind of teach what they're teaching at the university level to regular common folk who haven't ever gone to college or any place like that, and this is the place that they share. But there's also an exchange, because we have

things that we are able to teach them. So that's kind of, like, been *Platica* series, a dialogue series that goes on.

So there are many other sorts of projects like that. We've worked with youth. As I mentioned, we've started a youth media program that kind of floundered because a lot of the young people — we wanted young people to teach young people, and a lot of the young people of San Antonio wanted to not be in San Antonio teaching other people. They wanted to make their own work. So we haven't really — I mean, we did that for a few years and then we just kind of expanded it just from being media to all arts, so it's Art Escuela, Art School, and we were teaching kids to drum, to make puppet heads, to just learn about their history and culture and traditions and then connect them to the social justice organizing and help them do antiwar organizing, you know, challenging the ordinances in the city that were against youth and teaching them how to present and go before city council. And again, this council was very surprised because they hadn't seen young people at council ever. They helped make videos about the water issues, and interviewed young people as well as old people about the importance of water and then used that videotape to kind of organize as well.

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But again, funding has been just hard, so we — because we're not just a youth organization, just because we're not a women's organization, just because we're not an artist organization, just because we're not a social justice, so many foundations just kind of don't — we don't fit their criteria and their criteria is very static and it's very, you know, you have to fit in that box. And we have always been about outside the box. We're always about challenging forms of organizing to be reflective of our communities who haven't been organized the same way, who, back in 1930s without any foundation support or whatever, you know, it was their hunger, it was the oppression, it was, you know, the horrible conditions that they lived and worked in that took 10,000 to 12,000 women in San Antonio to organize and march on the streets. We haven't seen that happening in years, but I think we have a pulse on what the community here is thinking, feeling. It's not us, the missionaries, you know, coming from other parts of the country to organize people of San Antonio. We are the children born and raised and bred in San Antonio who have a sense of what it means to organize here, so we've been kind of coming up with new strategies.

And we put out a news journal called *La Voz de Esperanza* that comes out ten times a year and it's free and it's given as a gift on our behalf to the community of San Antonio and we also mail out to a couple of thousand to people throughout the country as well. Again, reflecting stories, mainly on the local level but always trying to connect to what's going on nationally and internationally. It's going on its eighteenth year and it's one of the great success stories. Our mailing list has gotten so big and the cost of printing and postage keep on going up, that we're having to maybe rethink about it, because we don't want to have people subscribe, because what we've seen is communities of color aren't used to

subscribing and sending 15 dollars or 20 dollars. If we limit it to that, it might be a very white group of subscribers, so we don't want to just limit it. That's why we've given it away as a gift, but maybe we ought to just give more away on the streets, you know, on the corners and drop off and have other people, you know, just find it that way, rather than spending the money mailing it out. We're thinking about it. We don't know.

And then, again, just the organizing and the teaching, not just through the cultural voices and cultural warriors who have come to the Esperanza and the activists who have come, but also just long term. What is the long-term work? How do we talk about racism over years of time and how do white people understand racism? How do people of color understand racism? In this city of San Antonio that's 60 percent Latino and another 10 percent black, you know, majority people of color, you're not allowed to say the word racism. That causes a lot of friction and it doesn't allow for the tourism to be built up, because this is — our city leaders keep on saying that we all get along together, brown, black, and white, you know, and we just put our hands together and everybody's happy here.

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But there's racism in this town and it's just getting worse and the policies that the city is enacting are a total counter to the working class and the poor people of this city. We just set up an ordinance two or three weeks ago on the homeless that, because they were seeing too many homeless downtown, so we're going to basically ticket them and charge them for up to five hundred dollars. And, you know, they're homeless people, they're not going to have any money, so what does that mean if they don't have money? They're just going to be put in jails, and that's all so we can safeguard and make the tourists feel comfortable in the downtown area.

The downtown area is now only set up for the tourists, you know. Local youth can't go downtown because they're usually given tickets for jaywalking and again, the same sort of thing happens to them. They're sent to juvenile centers. I remember when there was no juvenile jail at all and then, and it was part of a smaller adult jail downtown, and then all of a sudden, they had their own little space a couple of miles away. And now it's just grown into this full-blown, super-structure jail. So obviously they're just putting more and more youth there, and so, part of what we've been trying to do is work with youth, work with elders, you know, and everybody in between, to just kind of challenge the institutionalization of our young brown and black people. Again, all because they want to clear out the downtown area because they want to make money off of the jails that they're building and creating.

And so, the Esperanza gets very involved in, again, what is the culture of this city? What are we doing to create jobs and educational opportunities and health care for the community, you know, that's respective of the culture and the people here. And instead, what we're seeing is the continued growth and development to the North Side of San Antonio, which is, I mean, I think we've moved up 20, 30 miles away

from downtown San Antonio. The central part of the city of San Antonio is now called North Star Mall. That's the middle — as they look at the whole city, that is what they now see as the middle of the city. So that's really further north.

And so, again, how is that accessible for people who have — the only transportation is buses. And the bus transportation used to be pretty OK but, you know, it doesn't meet the needs for people now. And they just cut back services last year so it takes a young man or a young woman, or anybody, if you're cleaning homes and the homes are 20 miles away, it's taking people to wake up at 4 in the morning, get out on the bus at 5, 5:30, take them to child care if they can, drop them off there and then go on to work and be there by 8 o'clock in the morning. So what was an hour, hour and a half bus ride has now become almost three hours in each direction, and that's recently. That was done last year.

So the Esperanza, when a lot of the women who were cleaning houses, most of them immigrant workers and Spanish dominant, saw that these rules were kind of coming down and it was just going to change them, they started organizing. One of the women had been involved with the Esperanza, and we're right across the street from the headquarters for the Via Transportation Bus Line, so they said, Can you offer us your space? And it's like, Please join in. So we ended up helping them just kind of think how to do press, because they hadn't even thought about press. We went in and ended up translating for them, because they were, again, Spanish dominant and they didn't trust the city, the transportation people, to translate for them correctly. And then we got them really good press.

And then we also challenged them to look outside of their own group of women that were workers that were cleaning houses and said, OK, how's this also — the same transportation, these cuts, not only affect your line, but affect the lines of the people in the East Side, the South Side, you know, the people right here in this immediate vicinity who are all disabled people and elderly. So for them, it was that the lines have been moved into an area that didn't have sidewalks, or how, if they were in a wheelchair, could they move around? If it was on this very busy street, how could they, blind or with canes or with wheelchairs, move around? And it was very dangerous. So they started working with the other people who were also fighting. So we helped them kind of expand their vision.

So, that's kind of the way we also help do a lot of education for individuals that we're working with, you know. And an individual may come and say, This is happening to me. And we'll say, Let's talk to other people so a group of you all can come and we will help as a group, because it can't be just about your issue. You have to see that it's affecting more people. So, we've done a lot of that the entire time.

And, you know, we make our connections. This is a city that has essentially five military bases, although one of them apparently closed down, but that structure, Kelly Air Force Base, the people lost their jobs, but that doesn't mean that it's still — it's now called Kelly USA and it's

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just become another space where Boeing and other airplanes that are used for the military are still being built there and so the military component is still pretty much in action. It's just that the civilian workforce is no longer working for Kelly Air Force Base. It's now working for Kelly USA. This is a military town, which means it values and loves war. (laughs)

And I think when the Esperanza gets started, one of the biggest things was we were going to be against the wars in Central America, the wars in other parts of the world, and so we really value the concept, the peace and the justice, and so we've worked hard to educate the local community about what war means, both to the people that were killing in other parts of the world as well as how it's affecting their economy and their lifestyle here in the U.S. So we've always been the headquarters organizing against wars in other parts of the world and teaching people about that.

Teaching people, again, the theory behind the haves and the have nots, because what the schools do from K through 12 is just basically teach people the Horatio Alger story, raise yourself by your bootstraps and it's all up to you to do it, and if you fall, it's your fault. And what we're trying to say is, No it's not, it's institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia, it's all these things that are going to keep you down and keep the low-rate jobs with no benefits.

Our city leaders talk about wanting to educate our community, but everything that they do is, again, contrary to that, because, I mean, the jobs that are available here are really jobs at the hotels, which means being the maids or working at the restaurants or working at the Sea World or Fiesta Texas, again, or seasonal jobs that pay nothing and have no benefits, and we see the results. I mean, after five years or ten years, we've run into people, as we've done organizing for, say, International Workers Day, May Day, we've done some performance pieces downtown and invited people that are walking through to talk about them, so we've talked to workers who say, five years ago they were getting paid \$5.25, and here it is, it's five years later, they're making \$5.65, you know. And so, where's the justice in the type of jobs those are? And yet, that's what the city leaders continue to say: Let's keep on building the tourist industry here.

And we see that in San Antonio, like Puerto Rico, like Hawaii, like San Diego, like Miami, like communities that have a lot of people of color, there is a desire to make them tourist towns, because there's culture, there's flavor, there's exoticism, so people get excited by that and go to those places but then again, the types of jobs that are created are just horrendous. And, you know, you don't need an educated workforce to have them work in the hotels and the restaurants. You need a very docile group of people to work there, people who aren't going to challenge authority and who are just going to accept that. And based on our culture, we have been loving people and respectful people and so people come to visit San Antonio and tend to like the way they're treated and so they continue to come. But we don't have organized union people, you know, working in the hotels at all in San Antonio. It's just — it's the state of

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Texas, like most of the South, is not unionized and it's against the law to unionize, on some level. Not that we don't have unions, but they really don't have much power in this city.

And so, Esperanza does all of that and consequently — well, starting in the early '90s, I think, we started getting — we were seen as troublemakers and pretty much, I mean, we were just being noticed. Here we were, receiving city arts funding to do cultural programs, which, for them, is just, entertain your audience, but we were organizing numbers of people. They were acting and reacting. They were going to council, and so some of the city leaders said, you know, We can't fund the Esperanza because they're political and art can't be political, so we have to do something.

We had that coming from the city leaders' point of view. We had people within the religious right, conservative folks, who knew the Esperanza was pro-choice. And there's a yearly sort of moment where the churches come together and do the Hands Across San Pedro Street. And I don't know, I think this might be a national thing that goes on, but anyway, they take over the street, and they've selected San Pedro, because San Pedro has a lot of women's clinics. And so, when we found out they were taking over San Pedro, and we are on San Pedro, we decided that we were going to break their chain. So they hold hands and, at least in front of the Esperanza, we went ahead and brought in, you know, the first year, we didn't know what we were going to do, so we had 30 Esperanza people there and holding it and broke their chain, and they were traumatized by that and they were very angry because elsewhere around the street, you know, from North Star Mall down to downtown, they were able to hold up the chain, but not in front of the Esperanza. And the next year, the Planned Parenthood joined us and so we just kind of did that. And so, they were very angry so they started saying, OK, the Esperanza has to be broken. So they started organizing within their churches to help to figure out how to hurt us.

And then, on another level, there were gay, white, conservative men who didn't like the Esperanza either, because the Esperanza's led by lesbians of color and for us, the issues of being lesbian within the gay community, the queer community, is that we look at other issues and other people. It's not just a gay agenda. Or, what the gay agenda is, is to look at immigrant issues, to look at poor people, to look at what's happening in the other parts of the world. It's this understanding the connections between all the issues. For these gay white men, it was only about being gay and being white and being male. And we had also worked within the white lesbian community to challenge them and they had become good allies. So, they saw the Esperanza as a place to use to have meetings, to organize, and to plan, and they had worked with us very well from 1990, until that point in 1994, '95.

These gay white men came from outside of the city and started to challenge us and they just started to demonize us through their local gay

newspapers, which had been supportive of us, but they bought that newspaper and then they started demonizing us and they started doing anti-affirmative action discussions, because when we were helping to create new gay organizations, we made sure that at least 50 percent, if not more, of their board of directors had to be brown or black. At least 50 percent had to be women led. And so, we were putting all these caveats into their bylaws and helping people do that. And so, that really limited them because they were so used to being white men essentially in charge, and they were very unhappy that as they worked with the Esperanza that they were having to play a secondary role. Or, that's the way they felt.

So they even started saying, We like the Esperanza. But they were talking about the building. And so they wanted to see how they could take over the Esperanza as a building, get rid of me and everybody else associated with the Esperanza and just take over the building and make that their gay community center. They also came in, saying, We need a gay community center. And everybody was saying, We don't need a gay community center. The Esperanza is the center for social justice, and we've been meeting here, so we don't need another place. We don't have money. Why should we do it? But they were insistent on doing it.

And so, there were challenges and they kept on challenging myself and many other people within the Esperanza community, so what they were dealing with is a smart, articulate, intellectual, brown and black people that were progressive and they just couldn't figure out how to do it. So they found themselves in alliance, suddenly, with this conservative religious group and they started organizing to defund the Esperanza. And then you have a city council that's seen as pressuring them on another level, so these three powers kind of coalesce, and within two weeks of us getting funded in 1997, basically defund the Esperanza.

But prior to the 1997 defunding, in 1995 — because, again, you also have to understand on the national level, Newt Gingrich is in town and is the power in 1994 and 1995 and what is he pushing? He's anti-affirmative action, he's anti-poor, his politics on a national level are filtering down to the local levels, so a lot of people hate everything that has to do with affirmative action. So, within the gay community, they're agreeing with Newt Gingrich, they're supporting him, and the Esperanza's holding firm and saying no. So in '95, the women's arts collection, MujerArtes, gets defunded, or gets cut from — when we received \$10,000 the first year, the next year we received \$5,000. The Youth Program, which had received \$20,000 in its first year, got cut back to \$10,000, because, they said, we were only working with inner-city women of color and inner-city youth, and that was wrong. So they had been able to articulate their anger about the vision that we were promoting. But that the city itself, as they wrote those guidelines to fund, they had said, We want to fund programs that are working with youth, that work in the inner city, that work with disenfranchised. So they had created the language and there we had applied, saying, We fit perfectly. And the first year, get funded, and the

next year, the same criteria, and we get cut back. And so, they were definitely targeting the Esperanza.

So that happened in '95, and they just continued to quietly send a lot of faxes to all our — all the people that didn't like us and without us even having any knowledge, they were demonizing the Esperanza in a profound way, and with support of some of our allies. Because, you know, I figure if I'm an ally and I receive faxes — because e-mail still wasn't such a big deal, you know — that trashes one of my allies, I would say, Hey, do you know that this is happening? But they were very quietly receiving them and kind of saying, Well, they're crazy. We're not going to deal with it. But they were organizing and applying that.

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And so, by 1997, it had just kind of become a big thing, and I remember calling the city arts department and saying, Is everything OK? They were starting to attack the arts. They started to attack the arts. I mean, the religious right is also attacking the NEA at the national level, too. And so, we're saying, They're attacking the arts. Do we need to help you organize and support? No, everything's fine, everything's fine. Then one of our board members, who's a midwife, while she was in the hospital, received a little flyer that was being put out by the Right to Life San Antonio, that said, "The Esperanza is supporting this gay lesbian film festival and we need to organize. Call your council person today." So within two weeks, they were able to get two or three hundred people to make phone calls to city council. We were not aware until we went to council meeting to say, you know, support the arts, whatever. And then we saw all these people coming in and attacking the Esperanza. And because we were there, we were able to just go up and speak and defend ourselves.

But within a week's time, we had lost \$60,000 and we were the only organization that lost funding by the city. Again, everybody had different reasons because, you know, we were political, because we were promoting gay lifestyle, because we didn't bring in tourists, you know, all these different reasons were the reasons that council gave. But they didn't give it to us publicly. They made a decision to defund us behind closed doors. All of a sudden we just received the new budget and where two weeks before, we were in the budget to receive those \$60,000, two weeks later, we were totally disappeared. And it's like, Well, where did the decision get made? When was it made? Because we went to council meetings, so there must have been a meeting behind closed doors, which goes against the Texas Open Meetings Act.

So we got defunded. We were traumatized by it. The *New York Times*, because they had been doing stories on the arts getting defunded throughout the country, had just done a story on San Antonio in general, so when we got defunded, we called them up, and we called up our local press and we said, Look, this is what's happening. So they did a story the day we were going to get defunded, and then the local people didn't do anything about us, right? Because again, we're their enemy, too, because we've been challenging the local newspaper as well for their racist, sexist,

homophobic, and classist newspaper reporting. So they're not our friends, so they don't even want to write about us. They only respond to us because the *New York Times* does a story, so then they have to respond. And so, that's how we kind of get national notice, because, just by chance, they were already doing stories on that.

So, I think people were just blown away. It had never happened. It allowed for people associated with us to kind of move away because we were finally the big demons, and to be associated with the Esperanza meant that they might lose their funding. So it was disappointing on that level. I mean, that's not to say everybody. There were many people that also continued to support, but as organizations, lots of organizations stopped. There was the individuals who were socially engaged and activist-based and progressive that kind of said, OK, what do we do next? Are we going to file a lawsuit? Do we have a chance?

For me, since 1995, when we were initially cut back for MujerArtes and the youth program, you know, I had been talking to lawyers and they said, You don't have a case. There's no case. But in 1997, there was — it was just so — we were just very much targeted that everybody just started coming to the Esperanza and saying, OK, what do we do? So we spent, you know, almost the year having dialogue with the community. Every Saturday or every other Saturday, just coming together, and 40 people would show up one week and we would explain things that had happened and they'd say, Well, this is what we need to do. Well, maybe there should be a lawsuit. Then Amy, who's the lawyer, started saying, Well, there might be some issues. So she started trying to see if she could find attorneys in the community who could do pro bono work. So she was kind of doing that and they were coming to meetings.

And the community, after a year's time, basically said, Yeah, we're ready to go file a lawsuit. Not to file a lawsuit to win, but to use the lawsuit as a way to organize, because we felt in the conservative city that we were living in, with the judges, even though they're federal judges and shouldn't deal with the politics of the city, we figured that we'd still get a ruling that was going to go against us, if this was a way to organize and to talk about the issues, then we should move forward. And that's [why] the community made the decision, because they had seen how in the '60s and the '70s, a lot of lawsuits that were filed kind of moved the agenda of the organization, so they became focused on the litigation and they stopped doing the organizing. And so, we didn't want to fall into that trap, so we said, But if it's a tool, even if we lose, we're still able to talk about the issue. So then that's when we said OK.

And we had to start to rethink, also, about the vision of how we were going to talk about the issue, because around arts funding, most people were talking about the Esperanza was being censored for our political points of view, or because we were promoting the gay community and that was censorship and we said, Well, as poor people, as women, as queer people, we've always been censored, so that concept of censorship doesn't

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make sense in our communities. So, as we talked about it, you know, the concept of *respeto*, respect, became an idea, and it's like, Yeah, you know, even if we don't agree, out of respect, you're supposed to allow people to be who they are. So we came up with the concept of *Respeto es basico*, respect is basic. And that kind of gave a bigger, more overarching concept that people just bought into. And that was our first phrase.

And then, another thing that the council people had mentioned was that poor people and people of color don't support the arts, because the arts are elitist. And so, they were going to start cutting the arts down so they would put that money into streets and drainage. Well, first of all, that pot of money can't go into streets and drainage. It's supposed to go to arts programming, historical preservation, and the convention center, so you can't use that money. But we also said, But when did you figure out that poor people and working and people of color didn't support the arts? So we started another project that talked to the community. It's like, Let's ask the community what they think about art and culture.

And so, the first moment was the 1998 MLK [Martin Luther King] March. We said, Well, let's march and let's bring up our black elders who were artists and activists, you know, who were alive and dead. And we just made big banners of the Harry Belafontes, the Zora Neale Hurstons, the Marion Andersons, and we made them big placards and they marched with us. And we had people sign postcards that said, again, The arts and the politics aren't separated in our communities and here are perfect examples. And so we had lots of people marching with us and we were very festive and we're the only ones organizing and marching within that march of, like, 50,000 people in 1998.

And then, as we were having people sign postcards, somebody wrote the concept of *Arte es vida*, art is life, and so, it's like, that's a good phrase. And then we just had people continue to sign the postcards if they support it and write little notes, and so we were able to gather in, like, six months, 9,000 postcards. And then we organized a group of people to go before city council and deliver them. And so, again, thinking through, we made sure that there were young people and old people and brown and black and white people who delivered those 9,000 postcards to city hall and dumped them onto their, you know, where they were sitting down, and we had the city council chamber filled with, like, 500 people, and they hadn't seen that. And we said, The community of color, the people of color, and the community in general of San Antonio support culture and arts and so you can't be cutting back the funding. So they didn't cut back the next year's funding and they were upset because the Esperanza was in the midst of this whole organizing. We had come with bumper stickers that said, *Arte es vida*, tee-shirts and big banners, and all of that was helping us organize around the lawsuit.

And finally, again, those meetings that were happening in the community continued to meet and they said, We have to get the word out, so how do we do it? House parties. Well, we call those house parties

cafésitos, where people could just have coffee, tea, and buy *pan dulce* and then bring together five people or 20 people in their own home and then we could talk about the issues.

It was a First Amendment case. It was a Fourteenth Amendment [case,] under the [equal] protection [clause], and it was the challenge of the Texas Open Meetings Act and having the decision to defund the Esperanza. And so, those were the three issues that people, as we had those Saturday meetings and talking with our attorneys, and we told the attorneys what the issues were, and so the attorneys kind of came back and said, OK, this is how we play them off. And then, so here's the language around First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment, Texas Open Meetings Act. And then we were able to go back into communities and articulate without the attorneys what the issues were.

And then the community said, OK, we'll do those house parties. How else can we do it? Well, let's do street theater. So OK, wow, street theater. So we talked about street theater for a long time and then finally, after a year, we're starting to do street theater, because somebody was willing to take up the challenge. And we did pieces, like, instead of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* which had just come out, it was *Who Wants to be City-Funded Agency?* And then, just kind of played around with that and went to different parts from the churches on Sundays to just the parks and started doing that performance. And again, it was from a university professor to high school kids, to just people that wanted to do that and they just did it for free and went around planning that, and we taped it.

And then the concept of *Todos somos esperanza*, We are all hope, or We are all the Esperanza — you know, it kind of was a play on words. That came, again, with the community of people sitting there on Saturday saying, OK, what's the slogan going to be? and the slogan actually comes from what was going on in Chiapas — *Todos somos Marcos* — when they were going after Marcos. Where is Marcos? Who is Marcos? And they said, We are all Marcos. We all are the same. And so that connected our organizing and our international struggle and seeing that, too, [was] something that we could play with. And we also wrote it in Spanish. And people said, Well, should we translate? I said, No. This is San Antonio. It's a bilingual town. If they don't know, we can teach them what it is, or they can go to a dictionary and look it up. And it just kind of played around.

So again, bumper stickers, yard signs, and we finally put big banners. We were able, with \$5,000 that we got from the Andy Warhol Foundation to do — because of their First Amendment support, we thought, Well, we can hire somebody to help us to do publicity, but everybody doing publicity was going to charge \$20,000 or \$25,000 for one hit, you know, once. That was their going rate. We're like, we can't afford that. OK, we'll have to do it ourselves. So, we were able to, again, come up with the slogans and figure that all out ourselves. And then, we said, OK, so there's

money for the banners and the posters and the bumper stickers. And that's how the \$5,000 got spent.

So as we went to house parties, people willing to take those yard signs took them. People who wanted to take the bumper stickers took them. And before you knew it, by 1999 and 2000, just as we were ready to go to court, every place in the city had those yard signs. So if I'm the judge, I'm driving into Alamo Heights and there are bumper stickers and yard signs, and I'm over on the East Side of town, and, like, everywhere he went and everywhere any of us went, we were able to, have been able to, take over the whole city. So it wasn't just what they expected, that it was going to be in the West Side of town, or it was just going to be the gay community. Those yard signs were everywhere. And everybody was talking about it and we were able to get a lot of press around it and just kind of keep on telling the story. And so –

ROSS:

It sounds like a great model of community organizing to support a legal strategy instead of the legal strategy leading the organizing. So what happened in the case?

39:04

SÁNCHEZ:

Well, a couple of things. I was just about to mention, you know, initially, also, we were scared to — we didn't have money for the lawsuit. We got some moneys from foundations just to help us continue to survive, but funding for the legal strategy, even though our local attorneys were coming for free, we didn't have any money to pay for depositions. We didn't have moneys to pay for all the little extra supplies that we had to do and the copying and so, we thought we needed some national support.

And we were starting to get phone calls, from the Lambda Legal Defense in New York to the National ACLU. And so, at one point, I went along with Amy to New York to interview them and to see what we wanted and the Lambda Legal Defense said they were only going to focus on a gay agenda item and we're like, Well, it's not gays. It's people of color. It's poor people. And they were like, Well, we still want to do work with you, but this is what our strategy is. So we said no to them. And then we went to the National ACLU and they seemed to be more open. But as they started working with us, they sent in two of their attorneys and they were two women in their mid-30s without any experience. But they came with money. So, you know, we worked with them and they helped to pay a lot of those things. But at some point, their strategy was, We're the attorneys, we know better, and we're going to define that. And we're like, No, no, no, no: this is about the community. You have to come to these community meetings. You have to sit and hear what the community has to say, and you develop your legal strategy based on what the community is. And that's what our local attorneys were doing. But they were like, No, it has to be this way. And so, there was pushing and pulling and struggle with the attorneys.

And what I saw was, even though Amy and Mary Kenney and a few other white lawyers from the San Antonio community who had more experience, who were better litigators, and smarter, in my opinion, were basically being dismissed by the younger, New York City–based attorneys. So it's the national also working with the local and defining that they know better. I remember sitting with the attorneys from New York and saying, "Do you know who Cherríe Moraga is? Have you ever read Audre Lorde?" And they're like, no. So I said, "Well, before you work with the Esperanza, you need to read these books. You need to read about what they think, because that's going to make" — and they didn't want to read them. It's like, Well, we're here to do this lawsuit.

So after a point, and the legal strategy, you know, we wanted go to court and they were like, Well, maybe we cannot go to court. Let's try to see if we can get to some other place. So at that moment, when the strategy changed, we went ahead and kept to our strategy and they — they pulled out. And so, we were very scared what that would mean on the national level, that the national ACLU is pulling out of our organizing effort and we were concerned that they would talk to funders and then here was this little group of people that can't even follow what the national ACLU is doing. So, it never hurt us, fortunately, but they did pull away.

And so, we were all so scared. What would that mean for us? But it didn't affect us. What we just ended up doing was we just kept organizing on the local level. The community also said, Let's do a mock trial. And the attorneys said, Oh, that's an idea. That's good.

So that's what it means to go to court. We'll watch what you're doing. We'll act. So one person acted as the judge. Some people, you know, some of the students acted as bailiffs. We had our students videotaping and even acting as court artists. We had, some of us who were going to be presenting practice what we were going to say. We had the attorneys practice what they were going to say.

And then we had, at the end of that, we had the community saying, Well, we didn't understand this. You might have to do that. Why don't you try this? So they critiqued that process. And we invited the whole community. So it wasn't just the Esperanza people who had been organizing. It was, like, anybody. So even our enemies could've come in to see our strategy, which they didn't. And, one of our attorneys was afraid, they said, But everybody will find out. And you know, Amy just said, "No, No. Everybody needs to know what it is. It should be transparent, because what law has done and the legal community has done for their own power is to keep things hidden from you so that we're the experts. But we're not the experts, you're the experts."

So, we did that. We challenged the fact — like, when I was going to speak, I wanted to speak in English and Spanish and one of the attorneys said, "Oh, no, you have to only speak in English." I said, "No, but I feel comfortable." And so Amy was like, "They could speak whatever

43:21

language it is, because this is San Antonio.” And so we were able to make all of our witnesses feel very comfortable.

And of course, we had had all these depositions so we had learned a lot of how the city council was contradicting themselves. We had found out how they had indeed done these meetings behind closed doors, where the rule is that if five or more council members meet together, that’s basically a meeting. So what they were doing was having, well, I guess, six people because that’s a majority, so they would have up to five people in one of their offices, the mayor’s office, they were meeting, and then they would tag off and come in and meet with each other, so they never had the quorum but they were making decisions and the other ones were sitting outside and the mayor was also making phone calls to other council members who weren’t present and saying, “How are you going to vote on this?”

So we were able through their depositions to find out how that meeting happened and the decision to defund us happened. And we found out, again, all the connections of who, from the right wing to the gay conservatives, and all how they were doing that. So, so all of that became part of the lawsuit .

And with the mock trial, we had vigils. We went outside the court house, it’s a very round space, so we went the night before and took candles and had people, you know, the indigenous community, come in and do a prayer and then people spoke and all the candle wax fell and there were flowers. But all those moments were ways of bringing community. We had people doing quilts also, and everybody — so there were just different opportunities and we were in different places. So I think that was the key to the success of the win, because we were able to connect to the larger community. Everybody was talking about the issues. Everybody understood what the court case was about. And so, that was the buzz.

And so, we went to court in August of 2000 and we didn’t hear anything for almost a year. It seems like it was nine months before we heard the ruling. And again, we had the banners flying right around the lawsuit, and then we brought them down because they charge you every time — per month, they charge you to put the banners. So we put them away and then they called us up and said, Is it time — and I thought, huh, it’s May. It’s got to be time. It’s time for the judge to rule. So we put up the banners and, like, within two or three weeks, the judge ruled, and he ruled in our favor. And he brought us all back in.

What we also did was we made sure that the community was in court. So when we were in court in August of 2000, we filled it up, right? And parents made sure that their kids didn’t go to school because they figured that was going to be an educational moment for them. And we were expecting to be in court for a whole week, but the judge kept us down to two days, which meant we had to fill it up with a lot of information.

And again, people like myself, you know, spoke. I said something like the word *quinceañera*, you know, actually somebody else said *quinceañera* and then translated to the judge and said, “That’s the fifteenth birthday party.” And the judge said, “I know. This is San Antonio. I know how to speak Spanish.” (laughter) And so, when I came up, I was able to go back and forth like I expected to do and so did other people. And so, we challenged that whole notion of having to only speak in English in San Antonio.

And we talked about cultural rights as a right, because, again, as law has been played out in the U.S., First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment, all this didn’t talk about cultural rights, and that takes on that human rights perspective. And so, our lawsuit really speaks to the cultural rights of communities, and the judge supported us and so it really — I think people in communities of color, especially, can use that lawsuit to really speak to, and use it just on behalf of where they need to go, because it takes a different perspective.

ROSS:

So how did the city have to compensate you once you won?

48:35

SÁNCHEZ:

Well, the judge decided that he didn’t want to make a decision on his own about what the financial gain was, so he asked us to meet with the city attorneys and come up to some financial compensation. And so we sat with them and with one mediator and got to know where and we had to bring in another — you know, the judge brought us back together and said, OK, I’m going to have to bring in a second mediator. And so, the second mediator came in and, you know, what we were wanting was the money for the attorneys, even though the attorneys had done it pro bono, a couple of them said that if we did win, they would like to be compensated for at least a portion of that, so we wanted to pay them up. And Amy’s fees were going to come to the Esperanza, so we wanted to get as much of her attorney’s fees — so the attorneys’ fees alone were over \$500,000 over those four years of doing the work and they had been able to write them all down. And then the other amount of money we were looking was, if we had continued to be funded, how much would we have gotten. The year we got defunded it was \$60,000, but the assumption is that we would’ve been making more money because we were a growing organization. Other organizations who didn’t get defunded were getting more money, so we figured another \$500,000 that way. So we were asking for over a million dollars.

We finally — the city just agreed at the \$500,000 level, \$550,000. But that was more than anybody ultimately expected. Again, we didn’t even expect to win, and then that we won and we were able to get \$550,000. So we paid out our attorneys and we kept some money, and with that money we’ve been able to put back the money into the building of the Esperanza because, you know, it had not been — we hadn’t been able to work on it and clean it up and fix it up. There was an elevator that had died and so we

had asked the community to help us pay for that but they had only raised \$50,000 and the elevator alone was going to cost \$150,000. So some of that money went right directly to the elevator.

And then we just kind of kept a little bit there for these moments, like today where the foundation world isn't funding us and we're needing to put some of that money back into the coffers. What I saw amongst the community was, you know, as we won, their expression on their faces was — hope. I finally understood what hope looked like. It was in people's faces and their eyes and their energy and the way they reacted.

And what we saw happening later on was other organizations started fighting city council and the same sort of energy, and other people started saying, Well, we can file lawsuits also. Or, we can just take over city council. And you know, some of the strategies we had used, other groups had started using as well. And there was a respect, I think, as an organization that was given to us that, up to that point, had never been given to us. So we were players at the same level. Again, we still became threats to other groups who had been used to being the only game in town, and you know, for us, we're not the only game in town, either. There are many ways to organize, or many — but we have to work together. And I think that's a strategy, because everybody wants to be the big guy, and we're saying, No, it's got to be shared, and we have to bring in more people and we have to fill that council chamber. We have to teach people how to do it and we can go into council.

I mean, now, when we — like, I've been organizing around the Pro Golf Association building a golf course on top of our only single source of water, Edwards Aquifer. You know, it makes no sense that you're going to destroy your water by putting a contaminating sort of entity like a golf course that requires pesticides and fertilizers that are going to seep through below and onto a very sensitive aquifer, which not only is drinking water for San Antonio but for New Braunfels and for Austin and for other areas, and we're going to destroy it by building. So we've been fighting that for the last two and a half years.

But one of the things we were able to do, again, is not only bring in the diverse voices but to — like I remember going before council and saying, Well, I'm going to sing in here. And I sang "La Llorona" and talked about "La Llorona." And so I sang. And they're like, You're singing — you're not supposed to sing in council. And then, within the audience, there were, like, people from the Native American community, and I had told them, "Bring your drums." They didn't bring their drums but when they heard me singing, they started singing and so all of a sudden, you had different people trying to do different ways to bring forward a message to the council.

The council still hasn't paid attention. We're very frustrated. You know, many members of the council have been kicked out of office and they're going to get kicked out again in May because, you know, people are just really dissatisfied. The frustration is that we have the most limiting

term limitations in the whole country. We have two, two-year terms. So that has really caused council members to just continue to support developers and wealthy people because they're going to be gone anyway in two or four years.

ROSS: And they'll end up on the boards of directors of those corporations.

54:04

SÁNCHEZ: And that's exactly what they're doing. You got it right. So that's been hard, but at least, you know, when organizing around that came on, people were willing to work with the Esperanza and try different ways. We had learned again a lot how to use media to our benefit, so we helped them organize that way. But it's still a struggle because, you know, when we work with white environmentalists, they don't want to talk about racism, again. And we're saying, No, in this city, you have to — if it's about the environment, it's about the water, 100,000 petitions, signatures, were picked up. Those were majority people of color. You have to respect that. And we're running out of time.

ROSS: We've got about ten more minutes on this tape. In terms of your vision for Esperanza, you've done something that in my mind is pretty remarkable because you've been a visionary and entrepreneurial type of leader, in terms of Esperanza. But you've also been able to put in systems and it's the systems leaders, not the entrepreneurial leader, who can actually make the institutions sustainable. So, how have you done that? Have you been intentional about it or has it just happened?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think part of, like, my leadership strategy has been one coming out of being raised a woman, and raised a woman of color. And so that leadership for me has been — it's a collective. Listen to what the people say and take all that information in and maybe also have the community for the most part make a lot of those decisions. And then, my position, by myself, when I was by myself as the only staff person, but as more staff people have come in, is to have the staff — as we're the ones honored to have the money to be able to work and support the community, so we're going to try to do the best work we can, as we're getting paid to do the work for the community. So we want to honor them. So they help to develop the thinking around it and our job is to move it forward.

But because I am also in that position to have a full-time work is to read, to listen, as I travel to other parts of the country — I don't get to travel a lot to parts of the world — is to hear how other people are also doing it, and to also bring back that information and share that, so that I'm not just listening passively, either. I am definitely part of the group and hold them accountable and offer different ideas.

And I forget that people see me as a leader also and so, when we, again, were kicked out of our building, you know, yes, there was a choice of closing down this place or buying a new place. I was never really

believing we were going to close it down, you know. So, obviously we gave them the choices but I was moving forward to say, OK, you know, let's be serious. We're going to survive. I'm not going to close down this place. So the community agreed to that. But then I had to figure in really quickly how to raise that money. And they helped, you know. OK, we're going to have to do film screenings, we're going to have to pot lucks, we're going to have to do dances to raise all this money. But I had to make sure that at the end of the day, you know, when that \$10,000 every quarter was due, that the money was being paid for this new building and that by September 15th, 2000, we paid off that building. So, ultimately I had to figure out the multiple strategies, working with that community, and then kind of being the cheerleader to get them to, OK, hold that pot luck. You know, they walk in and it's like, How can we help? Here's how you can do this. You need to do that.

And right now, we're in that same sort of situation. The foundations have stopped giving us money. We don't take corporate moneys because of what the corporations represent and stand for, unless there's a good progressive corporation, which I think Ben & Jerry's is one of very few. So, you know, it's the community that has to figure in, when they walk in and say, What can we do? I'm saying, "Have you considered a party?" Oh, I didn't think about it. "OK, so do it." So it's kind of holding them accountable. You want to support us, don't put it all on me and the staff. You are the Esperanza. It's all of us. It's not me and it's not the staff. It's all of us and if you — we're here in the year 2005 but don't we want to be here, you know, a hundred years later? I mean, hopefully, we would be able to achieve all our goals around social, economic, and environmental justice, but the reality is such that it ain't going to happen in that time period. So, let's just assume this organization is going to be around forever. So, how do we sustain it forever?

59:18

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DVD 6

ROSS: So, within Esperanza, you all seem to make quite a project of documenting the histories of women. Could you tell me about that work?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think the documentation actually started coming from an artist who said, as artists, they've learned to document all their work, and so we needed to photograph when we were having art exhibits, you know, the work itself and in teaching young artists to start doing it. We should photograph the exhibits, we should photograph the moments that we're doing it.

We had the cameras and started videotaping every single person, from someone like yourself, Loretta, we have you on tape and you've popped up in all our video promotions — because it's also a moment that if you're not around, that we can also — you're still teaching that to a smaller group of people. We've got students, we've got elders that — who's going to teach that human rights concept? We've got it taped. It can be reused for smaller groups of people or for anybody that's interested in it — if, of course, there's an OK by the person.

And it's also about gathering all the people who have come through the Esperanza and again, all of our focus have been predominantly women of color, so we've basically, since the early '90s, taped almost everybody that has come through — prior to that we didn't have the infrastructure. I would've had to do it, and I, to this day, do a lot of the videotaping or audiotaping of people that come through, or photographing. I mean, it is a skill. It's not something that that's complicated, but the idea is to have other people learn how to do it as well and to respect and to honor that these voices are really important.

So we've compiled just hundreds and hundreds of interviews that, again, it started around the people who came and presented and taught us, and those exchanges. All those meetings with community or many of the meetings with community have been photographed, and audiotapes of the community, what they're thinking, how they're thinking, how these ideas get formulated.

And then, most recently, we've been doing oral histories as part of understanding how we've come to this place. We've been doing a lot of work in the West Side because, again, a lot of the history of the Chicana community in San Antonio starts here. And when I think of the theories again that have helped make the Esperanza, it has not been by people who have written any of that theory down. It has been our elders, mostly women, who have a way of — again, the concept that I've learned from them is *buena gente*, which translates into good people. And in Spanish and in Mexican culture, there's a concept of *buena gente* and *bien educado*, being well educated. Being well educated, *bien educado*, doesn't mean how much education you've gotten, how many degrees you have, but how you treat one another, how you open — you know, make sure that

you respect your elders, making sure that you're teaching young people. Making sure that there's compassion and concern and community. All those concepts, you know, where again, the other person, the community, comes first, and you yourself are — I guess as you were mentioning it — are the servant, you know, servant leadership. Just taking care of the community in thinking terms and that the community isn't just this community that sits here in San Antonio but that the community is a global community. And I think those concepts come from our elders. And again, they haven't written it down, so how do you gather that understanding, those values, except in talking to them.

And so, rather than it coming from me having the opportunity to just do oral histories one on one, or as a filmmaker, it's how do we create a project that allows people from the community to start gathering those stories of the local community so that we learn from them all those values, that vision, the way community used to be. How they did take care of each other, where you didn't depend on the city coffers to bring streets and drainage and lights, and to help you build houses. You kind of did it as a community, you know. People came in and you helped build the house together. People were sharing food, you know, if you ran out of food from the Depression time, each shared the food amongst the other. You knew your community. You knew your neighbors. The cars weren't around so people walked back and forth and so you knew who your neighbor was, you talked to that neighbor. Salutations at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day. You sat down. There was no air conditioning so you went outside and you hung out at the porch to catch that breeze, or you walked up and down the neighborhood and talked to your friends. You played.

So we don't do that anymore, and I think part of understanding how we do the work around social justice, also, is in knowing one another and breaking down stereotypes, because so much of how we've created enemies of ourselves and we don't work with each other is that we do work off of the stereotypes of each other. So, you know, in San Antonio, so much of this friction has been between Latino and black communities. We haven't created it, on some level, I think. Again, the white establishment has decided to pit us against each other, as they've done on a national level, because I know we have black and brown babies, you know, that come out crying.

So people are loving each other, but, you know, and it's not to say that we haven't been raised with those bigoted prejudices that have [been] learned also. But for the most part, I think we've understood that we're friends. But until we hear each other's stories, we don't really know how similar we are and how different we are. And so, I think part of what I've learned in the organizing is to try to have people tell each other stories as part of a real concrete way to dispel those stereotypes and to see the complexities that we have.

So even though I look and sound a certain way, people will find out that I am from the West Side, that I did grow up and that I did go to public

7:05

schools and if they see a frown on my face, it might be because I'm concerned about funding and how I'm going to make sure people are paid rather than it's a frown that says, you know, Keep away from me. So we don't do that. That's not the style of organizing at all. And it's never been taught because it's woman-centered.

And again, a lot of organizing that's happened in this country has been very male centered, and white male, and labor based, and it doesn't talk about singing and dancing and talking to one another. It's not about building community, even amongst ourselves. We just kind of come together to build strategy and meet, but we don't even spend — and then, once the meeting's over, we go on to the next meeting, and the next meeting, and we say, How do we slow down and just kind of get to know each other?

So that storytelling was kind of critical back in the early '90s that I started seeing as a process. And then, it's now been, how do we gather those stories of the elders who have a lot of the secrets and have the magic that can help us — we can stop, we can slow down. Even though the world is a transnational, global world, we can still stop and rethink about what we're doing on a day-to-day basis for ourselves. We can still stop and say hello to the person as we cross them. That's a simple thing. We just have to be conscious and take the time to say hello. What does that mean if I start saying hello and then how do other people start saying hello and start asking each other questions and talking to each other? This past Saturday, we interviewed this elder woman who's in her mid-80s, and she said, "Well, we don't do that any more." But it's good to hear it because we can challenge ourselves to kind of take on that role of doing that.

If, once upon a time, people's houses burned down and people came together to fix up the house, how can we do that again? How do we just do those — and so, we're trying to find those secrets, which aren't secret, but it's a way of being that will challenge the globalization and just stop it and slow it down and take time to get to know each other and care of each other. And if that's how social justice at least happens on a day-to-day basis with and amongst each other, you know, maybe we'll help to change the culture of the city, the nation, and the world. I don't know. So, we're trying.

And again, it's actually honoring these people who again feel, because of the cultural genocide of our communities, they don't feel that nobody respects them, that they don't feel that they're smart about anything and that they have anything to contribute. So, we're challenging them. We're saying, No, we really want your stories. Who else can tell us about San Antonio in the 1920s and the '30s? It's not written in the books, so you're the scholar. You're the one with the Ph.D. with this information. You have to tell us the story.

And as we've had individual interviews, we've also had various members of the elders, like five and six and ten of them at one time, and then they get off and they want to continue to come back, and they're

feeling like they're participating. And then they're feeling a good sense of themselves and now they're kind of coming across and saying, OK, I have something that I can offer you. And I think it's the same way that we do for each other, on some levels.

ROSS: Have you had any formal training in doing oral histories? And are you providing training opportunities for others to learn how to do the oral histories?

11:00

SÁNCHEZ: I think, initially, we were just doing it, right? But this past fall, I made sure to talk to some professors at the University of Texas in San Antonio, Norma Cantú, who actually has worked with the Smithsonian and with some other entity, in the library, who does a lot of oral histories and has done some studies of people in South Texas where she was born and raised, in Laredo, Texas, and I approached her. One of the students at UTSA who just turned 20 was very interested in this project and said, How come it's just kind of come and gone? I said, Because I need staff and I don't have it, but if you're willing to volunteer — so I brought her along and we talked to Norma, and then there was another who was an archivist at the university in the library and he's a gay Latino — I don't know — anyway, this is their — Norma and Dennis are both gay. I don't know if they're out or anything like that, but both of them said, We want to help you out. Then they brought in a third professor from UTSA.

And so, this past fall, they trained about 15 people here and the idea is that we've now got books. We've also taped their workshop. The group that's working right now can now start leading new trainings and have the books that we can replicate or we know that we can order them from the Smithsonian. And as we're getting skills, then we'll be able to do a better training for another group of people. Because what became just, again, a concept, this is how you interview, this is what you do, as we've practiced it, they're able to do it a little bit better and be able to train other people. So, yeah, we've finally formalized it this past fall, and so I think we're feeling more centered and comfortable because, again, before that, we were just doing it. But now we know that we give them pieces of paper and they have to sign over and such.

ROSS: Well, one of the things that made Esperanza in general and your story in particular so attractive to the Sophia Smith Collection was that I was able to persuade them about the great work that you all are doing in leading the way in capturing Chicana oral histories. I mean, this is way beyond the city of San Antonio. It is movement-building work to be able to integrate oral history in the community organizing you all have done. And so, I appreciate you for it. And so does the Sophia Smith Collection.

13:20

SÁNCHEZ: Even before this storytelling, again, it was just the one-on-one organizing that also happens with many people is, you know, it's seen — again, a

Chicana who marries a white man, who takes on that white man's name, who, you know, is now an ex-board member, her name is Dolores Zapata Murff, but when I met her she was Dee Murff, and she was wearing blue contacts and she was part of MujerArtes and she had grown up in the West Side but now is living in the northwest side of town and living in suburbia and, you know, wanting to be white and, you know — but somehow, she was depressed and suicidal and she heard about the women's co-op and so we let her join in and through our friendships, and then, our confrontations around assimilation and, you know, she hated to use the word Chicana, she hated all these sorts of things but at least she continued to struggle along. Now she works — five or six years later, she works at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. She's now the press person. She's a self-identified Chicana feminist. She's discarded the blue contact lenses. Zapata, like Zapatistas and Chiapas: that's her last name, you know, so now not only is she Chicana, she's part of the legacy of revolution in Mexico.

So part of that was, again, challenging all the racist notions and the internalized oppressions that she totally accepted and took on. And we see that with individuals but then, also as a larger community, we've seen transformation. And it's profound. Can I quantitatively do that so many times? And I want to be able to have everybody that walks through the Esperanza answer a questionnaire and then give them a test a year or two later to see all that we've taught them, because they won't necessarily believe it and they'll definitely go through a moment where they're fighting us because they've learned so much that they have to be critical. And then, years later, come back and say, This is what we learned and you taught us and yes, we had to go through that teenage moment of not liking what the parent was teaching us, or whatever. And you know, for me to know that it's just part of their development and most people do come back and thank us for what we've learned.

But, yeah, it's hard. I mean, there's an image there of those two elder women who are with a goat and these are the images that come through, that people bring their photographs, and again, people hear, identify and appreciate them and we use those images and we put them on the front page of *La Voz* or we'll tell their stories and that, again, also gives people a better sense of who they are, that somebody cares about their story, that their story's important, that their story speaks to many, many other people's stories that's similar.

And again, this is what's not written. It's not in books. It's not in films. So if we're able to capture some of that, and hopefully, we're also giving people the skills to maybe write their own book, even if it's a chapbook, or even if it's so — the one story that they'll write. Or to be able to take those photographs. We've seen people take photographs and they have some skills in computer and now they've made — you know, this past Christmas, I saw one person create, with her aunt, DVDs that they gave to everybody in their family of 100 years of photographs from their family,

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and I thought, Well, you see, it wasn't forced upon them. They just have some of the skills. We've given them the right to love themselves as brown people and working-class people and oppressed people and they've just taken it on, and that's affected other people and their families who are now claiming it and it's OK to have come from this part of town. It's OK to be a social justice activist. So, it has a profound effect on lots of people, I think.

ROSS:

It seems that in what you describe, though, you've also successfully bridged the academy and the community, that you've created relationship with people in university settings that have come back — those relationships have come back and helped transform what's going on in the community. And often, university is very separated from community.

18:30

SÁNCHEZ:

And I think we're still struggling, but I definitely — it's interesting, like the Esperanza, one year, we did our survey that the city somehow helped — we did surveys and then we handed over the paperwork to the city and the city then came back and what we saw was that the Esperanza, of cultural organizations, had the most undereducated group of people and the most educated. It was people like me and you, who might have been raised poor but then went off to college and gotten Ph.D.s and now they're at the academy, and they see that the Esperanza is doing something for the community that they at the university can't do. So they're working with a pocket of students. They might even be older students in their 20s and their 30s, but they're working with that group and they see that the Esperanza is reaching out to the larger community and yes, taking advantage of the resources that the university, including those professors, can give to us — but also how they can also send their students at the community level to participate in the work that we're doing, and to also support the movement building that seems to have stopped totally at the university level. I don't see a lot of activism, at least not in San Antonio, happening at the student level, like there might have been once upon a time, so professors are sending them to kind of get them involved, because we need so much help, right?

But once upon a time in the initial years of the Esperanza, it was hard to get the professors involved, and I think that was homophobia playing a big role, because that's how we were perceived. Because I'm not just a woman of color, I am an open lesbian of color in this position, suddenly the whole organization becomes a lesbian organization, when it's not that at all. Again, that's not my only identity, but that's how I am kind of placed.

One of my best friends in the work of the Esperanza in San Antonio is Antonia Castañeda, and she's a professor. She came from — originally, she's from Crystal City, Texas, but her family moved up to Washington State to follow the migrant stream and to pick cherries and whatever Washington State does. But she, as a 50-something-year-old, came back

with her husband, partner, who got a job at Trinity University and so she was kind of fluctuating of where to teach and so she didn't come with a job, he came with a job. But in that time, they immediately got to know the Esperanza and as a straight Chicana ally, quickly became the professor who challenged other professors at all the other universities to respect the Esperanza. And so she brought her students and she started working with the Esperanza and then she brought other people along.

And that was in 1993, so six or seven years after the Esperanza was in existence that we really see the university community, through women of color, come to the Esperanza. That makes me feel good because so many — for the first six years, I kept on saying, Well, we're doing this. And wanting the university professors to support us, to bring in interns, and what we were finding was, interns were coming through the Esperanza from professors who lived and taught at Brown, who taught at Stanford, who taught at other universities that knew about the Esperanza and were sending their Chicano students, or even their white and black students, to the Esperanza because of what we were doing. And they said, Oh, you're in San Antonio: when you go back in the summer, why don't you intern and get credit? So we were getting those students, but we weren't getting them from the local base because of the homophobia. But once this woman Antonia got involved, it changed. So we're getting both those students as well as the local students, and that really feels good.

ROSS: Have you thought about both succession and legacy? I mean, assuming that Esperanza will outlive you, outlast you, have you thought about a succession plan, the next generation of leadership for Esperanza, and what legacy would you like to be remembered for?

23:00

SÁNCHEZ: Um, I've never seen the Esperanza as mine, and I've never wanted to lead it by myself. We're actually in the process of rethinking, also, how the Esperanza looks and feels, because, you know, it's — although we've always challenged the 501C3 model and we've always challenged the hierarchy of how these institutions work, I mean, we still have kind of picked up some of those things.

So we have a board of directors and we have staff, and then we have community. And so, again, when it was a small staff of one and then two, the staff always showed up to board meetings and we were essentially part of the board. But when we had staff member three and staff number four, all of a sudden those other people thought, well, they can go if they want but you know, they didn't necessarily feel like they had to go to the board meetings and so, when five and six showed up, none of those staff members ended up showing up to board meetings, so it was just me and the other person who had been around because we were so used to doing it and because we wanted to participate.

Those board meetings have always been open to this staff. But then I saw tensions happening between board and staff because staff started to

take on, you know, ownership as a staff and saw the enemy as the board and the board just felt, like, Wow, we're not being invited to do the stuff that we used to. We're a working board so why is the staff in conflict? Well, part of it was because — you know, that's part of what I want what a 501C3 does is, there's division and there's community. And the community, again, in the beginning, since there were few staff, just joined in and said, What do you need, Graciela, what you do you need? And as we got bigger, they felt, Well, you don't need us anymore. There are other organizations that have no staff or have few staff. So they moved over in that direction. And we're like, No, we still need you. We still want you.

So we're rethinking, because we've come up with that concept of *buena gente*. We don't call our volunteers "volunteers" because we think if they're about social, economic, and environmental justice, they're not just regular volunteers who are just trying to, you know, be do-gooders. There's a bigger vision and it's more profound. And they're usually people who have full-time jobs and still come in and, you know, with very little energy and put all their effort and sweat and money and time into the Esperanza, so we're rethinking that.

But, you know, throughout this entire time, yeah, for me, everything I do, everything I learn, is just given to anybody that's willing to listen and participate. I mean, that's part of how I've always taught, you know, because I don't always necessarily have the time to write it all out, but you're with me and you agree to be a *buena gente*, I'm just going to — everything I've learned, you know, it's yours. I'm going to tell you, you may not follow this route but I'm letting you know. And I'm also letting people make mistakes because they have to also make the mistakes to learn, because sometimes even if I tell them, they're like, Yeah, whatever. So, I have to let them falter and stumble and then come back and say, You're right.

But I've always hired young people. One, because I want them to take it on and have it be theirs, and two, initially the sort of work and what we could afford, the only people willing to take it on were young people who were in for the summer or weren't used to getting paid a certain amount and didn't care about health care benefits, you know. And we didn't have health care benefits for the first ten years, even though we kept on writing them, we just couldn't raise enough money and even though the board said, You need to give yourself health care, it's like, Yeah, well, help me raise the money. But after year ten or so, we started putting in — it was only two staff people, but as we kept on getting bigger, had to pay for everybody else.

But what's funny, again, is, as you were talking about, we mentioned second- and third-wave feminism, and this is where the academy also, the university professors, have been sometimes — as I love them, I'm also frustrated by them, because we have been able to bring the brightest minds to come to the Esperanza, again, because professors are sending them through, because on their own, they're reading about it and they want to

26:40

come in and work at the Esperanza. I mean, I just had somebody who was at the University of Chicago who lives in Lubbock and said, I want to work here because I've read your web site and you're exactly where the art and the politics comes together and nowhere else have I seen it, and on and on and on. I said, I'm sorry, I don't have a job. But she's bright, she's exciting, I would love to hire her in a minute, and I can't right now.

But as they come into the Esperanza, then those professors come in and say, You're bright, you're smart, you're a woman of color. What are you doing wasting your time at the Esperanza? You can't stay here. You need to move on and do something. Why don't you become a professor? Why don't you do something? You can't just stay here because this is, you know, this is activism. There's nothing in it. You're brighter than that. You're going to get caught up and we don't need to waste your time here.

And I'm like, Stop it. You can't do that. And they're like, Well, I have to have somebody that follows in my end. Who's going to take over my position as a professor in history or whatever. And I said, Well, what about me? I need somebody to take over here, too, and there should be many people who want to take over.

And that's happened to a lot of people. So what's been good is people who haven't finished up college or never even thought about going to college and have worked at the Esperanza — because I don't require any formal education, you know — have moved on and finished up college or started college. And so they leave the Esperanza.

Another group of people who were writing and interested in the cultural work that we were doing have also said, What am I doing wasting my time? I could be this important artist. I could be performing. So another group of people has gone on and ventured in that direction, because what they also see is, again, this is a younger, third wave, says, Graciela works all the time here. There's [more] status in being either an academic or being a starving artist even, than there is being this activist who, even though I can make more films, I'm stuck doing the administrative stuff. So they would rather write, make the film or they would rather write the performance that takes them out in the world, write the book, so that's where I've seen them go.

And so that's been the struggle. Because, again, I mean, I think, Oh, here's this 18-year-old. We're going to see her go through college and then she says she's going to come back and that's who — she's got it. She's perfect. And then, you know, now they're going off to graduate school. And I, just, again, this one young woman, Fabiola, who came last year as an 18-year-old and said, I hate school. I'm bored. My professor told me to come here. I don't want to be an academic. And a year later, she's saying, I'm going to go to graduate school, and this and that. So, something happens, and that's OK.

So we're rethinking a lot, because what's been good about me being at the Esperanza for so many years, where you get bored and move on and give people a chance to take it on and the organizations you helped

envision continue but maybe with different visions — for me, what's been good is I continue to learn and create better understanding of how to do the organizing here and come up with different ways to do it, different strategies.

Again, this whole cultural activism piece is something I don't think too many other organizations in the country are doing, and it's not easy enough just to explain it in two hours or — it's profound because, you know, when I first wrote the grant to get funding, and I did talk about art as a tool for social change. [Now] I don't see art as a tool for social change. Again, it's not separated. But I didn't know that in 1989 when I wrote that first grant. I did see them as separate. I don't see that any more. I've learned.

I didn't understand how important cultural grounding was, but I've worked with communities and I've seen how much they hate themselves and how they've internalized this racism, sexism, homophobia, how they're not, you know — and I've seen people transform. So, I've learned a lot because I've been around, and I think a lot of people who have been with the Esperanza from the beginning to now have also come along with me. Of course, you know, they might've been — and I've seen, like, I've got a board member who was a 16-year-old and she's here ten years later, so she came into the Esperanza as a high school student and now is a board member — see how she transformed and now how she's working with all these young students and bringing them all into the Esperanza and see — you know, so we see these generations coming through. So, as a 27-year-old woman, she's grown old with the Esperanza.

And so, I think that succession is part of the discussion that we're dealing with because I don't know if I need to leave, but I definitely don't like the pressure of being the only one that has to constantly figure out how to raise the money, because that's very stressful in a very profound way. And I know that my bones are aching and I can't stay up as late any more, and I don't want to die early, because I do love life. I just want to live as many years as I can and to be able to share what I've learned also. And I think it's those elements of organizing and working in and with for community that are — I hope I'm able to articulate or write or figure out ways to share that learning, because it's different than most of the organizing that has happened in this country. And I think people like yourself and myself and other women of color have something that we can teach to our communities of color that may have profound changes and differences.

Again, we are frustrated that the foundation world doesn't get what we're doing, doesn't understand it, wants to limit us to identity-based organizations that have to be women-centered and that's it — or have to be people of color-centered, which means male and that's it, or have to be gay-centered, and that's it, or have to look at local but not global. And we're like, Well, wait a minute. Our lives are all those things. And even though, again, Audre Lorde and Anzaldúa and Moraga and Barbara Smith

all wrote about those things almost 30 years ago and we've kind of acted and done the praxis part of it all, I find myself, you know, people haven't read those people 30 years later. Where I'm having to reintroduce those concepts and thinking to the younger generation, because the professors aren't teaching them anymore. And yet, nothing new is coming out, and the new stuff that is coming out of the academic community is unaccessible, so I can't read their stuff.

ROSS: Postmodernism has done a job on the women's movement and probably every other antiracist struggle.

35:35

SÁNCHEZ: Absolutely. Right. I mean, I remember when the twentieth anniversary of *This Bridge Called My Back* came out, they had a conference at Berkeley and I went. Nobody paid, I just got myself over there because I thought it was a historic moment. And Cherríe Moraga got up at some point and she said, You know, *This Bridge Called My Back*, what was good about it was that you saw women in the fields reading that book, and everything that's being written, nobody can read any more. And it's true. It's not like I'm picking up new books, because I can't read them. I don't understand them. But I think we have learned from them and yet we're creating something new.

And so, how is it that we can share that new learned wisdom to people coming along? And how do we challenge the funders and how do we challenge other organizers to look at things? I think a lot of organizing is still coming from this white perspective. You know, it has to be written, it has to have one through ten, this is how you do things, and here are the results. And it's like, No, process is more complex than that, and the result may be, again, that you don't see something happen for ten, 15 years. Again, funders want to — and within a year's time — to tell qualitatively, quantitatively, how many numbers of people you affected, how many people you got off the welfare rolls. And it's like, It's not that easy. It takes a long time and you're not willing to fund us for 20 years at a time, you know, and the right wing is funding their organizers for 20 years at a time, at much more money, and they're creating whole institutions and we have to keep up with them.

ROSS: I had a women's foundation that gave us a \$15,000 grant to organize around welfare reform not fund us in the second year, because they weren't sure, in 1997 — now, welfare reform happened in 1996 — they said that we could not prove that we'd made a difference in overturning the legislation.

SÁNCHEZ: Uh-hm. And that's —

ROSS: They thought that was a legitimate reason.

38:08

SÁNCHEZ: Right. And they're not –

ROSS: – for \$15,000.

SÁNCHEZ: Right, \$15,000. And this whole thing of, you know, quantitatively being able to ask all of us, Give us numbers, show us, and do it all within a year's time — or, if you're lucky, two years' time. You know, all those number-crunching things. As if we have the time to, one, write the grants, two, do the analysis and reflection and give numbers of how we've changed people's lives and changed policy within a year's time, when it took the right wing 30 years to plan it and organize and institute it in such a way that's going to affect us for hundreds of years, you know, just blows me away.

Do the people at the foundation world challenge themselves and reflect on how wrong — you know, I mean, it would be just nice for them to say, you know, Here, we've identified X number of, you know, a hundred groups that are doing the work and we're going to fund them and we're going to fund them very well and let's see what they do in ten years. We'll watch them, but — but instead, we're just spending most time just doing that administrative bullshit work instead of really doing the work, because we're always having to worry about usually paying the rest of the staff. We're paying the bills rather than even paying ourselves. So we have to challenge that, but I do hope that what we have learned, especially as women of color, where people start learning to respect the work that we do and see us as the leaders, not just of our own institutions but of community organizing of the latter part of the last century and the beginning of this century as the way to do the work, and I think we've all come up with different strategies of doing it.

And what works here may not necessarily work in Atlanta. It may not work in Boston. And that's part of it, because again, everybody wants one size fits all, but there's no way that one size fits all. I think, again, for the Esperanza, people say, How can we create one in San Diego, and how can we create one in LA? And I say, "Well, part of it was the people in San Antonio came, brought it together, so you'll have to work with people born and raised in San Diego, or LA, or whatever, and see — or people, even if they weren't born there, who have just said, This is my city and this is where I'm going to live and stand and die." Because then you have a different sense of ownership of that community that you're working in. If you're just going to be in and out, after a while, you don't care how you come in and damage relationships and you leave, so you don't care about how that's affected the community. You have to care. You have to care. And yeah, you have to love and care and respect the people that are there year round, and honor that history and legacy that came before you.

I still work with women and men who are older than I am. When I was a 20-something and came in, I looked to my elders to teach me, to learn from them, to honor and to then say, OK, how can I learn from them and

say, OK, but here are the problems with it, but I'm going to take what I've learned and try something new, rather than say, Fuck you all. You don't know what you're doing. I'm young, I know better. No. And I've always had them around me. And I've always been that bridge. It's like, my generation was in between. I was too young to be part of the '70s movement and out there, and just right underneath, you know. And yet, I'm too old to be part of this new wave, but I think –

ROSS: Well, many of us have sat around who were in the '60s and '70s in that bridge-building role that they talk about in *This Bridge Called My Back* and we've decided that we're going to write the sequel to the *Bridge Called My Back*. We're going to call it *The Bridge That Never Ends*. Because sometimes that's the way it feels.

So in concluding this interview, I need to ask you, have [there been] previous oral histories or interviews that have been done of you, with you, that you know about, and could you tell us about them?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, I do know last year, I did have a short interview with some people with the Smithsonian who were doing something specific, looking at me as an artist, and I've never self-identified just as an artist, so I'm not really sure how that happened.

And there's been this Ph.D. student who is looking at — who didn't do it as an oral history, but did it as part of her dissertation to look at myself and two other Chicana women born and raised here in San Antonio, as part of her dissertation to look at social activism as part of curriculum that can be created for teachers. And so, that's a different thing but that's been something that's been ongoing for her for about a year, and it's been different questions and — because she's wanting to look at that element. So, her name is Graciela Garcia, so another Graciela. So, if you're looking for that, I'm sure — I mean, I'm not sure. She audiotaped, so it wasn't videotaped. It was on audiotape.

ROSS: Did she ever transcribe it? Is there a transcript?

SÁNCHEZ: She's transcribed some stuff. I'm not sure what all she's done. I don't know if she's done a whole 100 percent and she is pulling excerpts of all of our words to support her thesis and her dissertation. I know that I read something recently here, because she had the meeting here and I saw, oh, I only got quoted once or twice, and the other women were quoted more. I'm like, Wait a minute, you said you liked what I had to say and how come I'm not being used in the way. She told me that she liked what I had to say but, you know, again. And then questioned, like, how do I speak? Do I run around in circles and don't have a good quote here or there? But I'm sure I haven't seen the final piece.

ROSS: Would you consider donating your papers, your files, your photos, your memorabilia to a collection like the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College? Number one. That's the first question. And second, talk about your thoughts of putting your papers, your files, your photos, your memorabilia at an institution like Smith College. What does that represent to you, and how do you perceive that could benefit the community?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, it's only been because you've mentioned it before that this was a possibility. It has made me, again, think about it. I mean, because I'm actually working with folks around Gloria Anzaldúa's papers and what it means for her papers and where are they going to be. And, you know, her papers not only will be taken somewhere, but people will probably pay to have her work and papers, and maybe a lot of money, so — which is different from what I'm [hearing] — so, nobody is saying that people will pay, you know, which is the question.

But when we think of Anzaldúa, from someone like myself, a Chicanita from the sticks, as she would call herself, in South Texas, I want to be able to access her papers and her words. I mean, she talked to me about all the stuff she was still writing that we never have gotten to see. And then, there are people from the academy that were saying, Well, she could be at Harvard. I'm sure Harvard would pay a lot of money and Stanford would pay a lot of money. At least at Stanford, there's a bigger community of people of color there than, say, at Harvard, although there's Boston and all that stuff. But say, Chicanas and Chicanos who may be more interested, so, how do people access? Yes, internet is more accessible now, but you have to also pay to participate in some of those and be a member or something like that.

So I think it has become a question for myself, also, what does that mean? What does that mean to be at Smith? You know, on the one level, it's a world-recognized institution. On the other hand, it is, you know, a couple of thousand miles away from people where I grew up in. On the other hand, as you mentioned, these oral histories and the work that Smith and the Sophia Smith Collection is putting into it is economically — is putting down the money that is required to do a good and thorough collection of women. I think a question would be, like, I mean, the way you have done, Loretta, of making sure other women of color are participating, I would almost wish to make sure that if, you know, I gave up my papers, that in return, I want to make sure that even more women of color come along, that their money just doesn't run out once they finish this.

And again, how to maybe collaborate with other people-of-color institutions. You know, you were saying that there maybe will never be black colleges and universities that have the money and the infrastructure to do that. Well, how do they collaborate with black and Chicano institutions to be able to somehow be sister institutions to share that information? And I think that makes me feel more comfortable, that they

not just raise the moneys for their institution but then put it into Howard, and then put it to UT San Antonio or, you know, places like that, so that there's this collaboration, because I think, on some level, this Casa de Cuentos that we sit in, you know — I want to make sure that as we're getting the oral histories of this community, that it, at least for the moment, is here, so that people in the neighborhood can walk in and walk out. There's an Institute of Texan Culture that has some of our photos of Chicanos, but nobody goes there, and the institution is very white and very racist and people don't feel comfortable going into that place, and they don't even hire Chicano or black professors and historians to work there, and if they do hire them, they quit after three or four months because of the racism. So I don't want the Casa de Cuentos to collect and not then be accessible to communities.

So I think those are questions that I have and I think that's a challenge that I would offer as we continue to converse. Because I do think it's important, and I appreciate that they're looking at women of color activists and honoring the work that we do, because I think we're not honored. I see, again, if I had been a writer, where I have continued as a filmmaker, a lot more would have been written about me. If I had been a visual artist, and I kind of ask, Well, why do visual artists get all this stuff written about them? And somebody said, Well, because collectors who pay money want to have their art work valued, so they have to have people create catalogs around them and write about the artists, so that the value of the work gets up. Well, nobody values our work.

ROSS: The people with money actually dislike our work.

50:27

SÁNCHEZ: Exactly.

ROSS: Because we're the ones that make them a bit uncomfortable.

SÁNCHEZ: Right, so, to fund our work and the work of our organizing and all the time and trouble that we've put — you know, our voices haven't been heard. The voices of the women who have come before us aren't written anywhere else, and if anybody's going to do it, it's us that are doing it, if they're not already dead. And so, that's sad. I think, again, of my mom as a big organizer and I'm the only one that's going to do her story because nobody else kind of respects who she is, but I see how amazing of a leader she has been, and so, I guess I'm the only one. But what about all these other women as well? Who's writing their books? Who's telling documentaries about their stories, or who's fictionalizing and making a wonderful narrative piece of, Emma Tenayuca or the other pecan shellers of this city who, again, led the largest demonstration in South Texas in the 1930s? So I'm glad that it's being done and I would hope to be able to have a dialogue, to make sure, because it's important.

ROSS: I think that, with this Voices of Feminism Project, that we're going to see some paradigm shifting, that it's not just the competition between collections, who has this celebrity or who has this person, but frankly, how can we push the whole field of oral history archiving and collections to be user-friendly, not just to people working on Ph.D.s but the people whose living history is in those collections, who need them to animate community change. That's something that has not, as far as I'm aware of, really been taken up as a serious need, again, the bridging of the community and the academy.

51:40

SÁNCHEZ: No. I mean, again, Emma Tenayuca, who's here as an 18- or 19-year-old with her fist up in the air, her collection, I think, is close to Dallas, at North Texas State Women's University. That's five hours' worth of driving if you're going to drive. And yet people have been trying to do a theater piece around her, have been trying to do film around her, and nobody has access to that collection, so it has to be accessible to those of us who want to do something with it. So, yeah, for sure, and I appreciate that you're there challenging them, too.

ROSS: Well, we're going to try. As I say, it's going to be when I've turned over my 37 boxes to find out that now I've got to apply for a scholarship to get up there to see my own papers, because I don't have the financial resources to do that.

SÁNCHEZ: Right.

ROSS: And so that is an issue. But at the same time, I also appreciated it that nobody had access to them, even me, while they were moldering in my basement and attic.

Now, we're going to provide you with a copy of this interview. Would you prefer it be on VHS or DVD?

SÁNCHEZ: The DVD would be good, as long as it works.

ROSS: OK. And so that concludes the interview, or at least my questions. Do you have any final thoughts that you wanted to say about what you said about your own oral history or even the process of getting interviewed?

SÁNCHEZ: Well, one thing, um, that I would also ask. I mean, I don't know that they've done this before. I saw this in an interview that became a movie last year or two years ago about this German woman who worked as the secretary for Adolph Hitler, and they were interviewing her as an 80- or 90-year-old. And what the filmmaker was able to do was to take her and then come back and show her some of the tapes. And then based off of the tapes, more questions and more issues became — and so that it became more complex even then.

So, if that's a possibility, not just for Graciela's interview but yours and other people, because I think, you know, like going back home last night brought up all these things I didn't answer for you, and I thought, well, I could have been more profound here and said that, or I came up with an example of — here, I mean, I appreciated, like, your question of, your being able to reflect back to me this thing about having gone after Henry Cisneros and the president of Yale University and then, when I sat with my partner, she said, "Well, did you tell them about Fidel Castro?" Oh, that's right. I also went after Fidel Castro, and I didn't say that to you.

So, in that case, it was, he had come to the film school, and this was like a month after the school had gotten started and he just wanted to hear, and he kept on saying, "I want to hear criticism about the film school. I want to know what's wrong. I want to make sure that it's going well. And so, are there any changes?" And everybody kept on, you know, there were a hundred students, and so, only ten or 12 people were going to be selected to answer questions because he didn't have that much time, and everybody that did raise their hand said, Oh, we love it. We love it.

And he said, "No, no. I want to hear some criticism." And so I raised my hand, and I was still stumbling in my Spanish and I said, "Well, my criticism is that of the selection of the students, there's a third world amongst the third world. And the first world students are people from Argentina, Venezuela — all those students that were selected. They're light skinned, wealthy, and apolitical at best, and they're oppressing people from Ecuador, Bolivia, the Chiapanecos, the Oaxacenos from Mexico, and they're mistreating the workers of Cuba. They're treating them like servants." And so I kind of offered that critique and I stumbled through every single word, because I wasn't as strong as I am today. And his response was not to respond. He was dumbfounded. And I felt, Fidel Castro, who will speak for three and four hours at a time — for me to be able to say that I held his tongue (both voices) that I silenced Fidel. He just kind of accepted it.

So that was another moment that I, you know, nervously, but it was important to put out because I was basically challenging, not him, but the creators of this film school to really make sure that the people that they were selecting in coming years really focused on the vision of the institution, and not just to select the best kids because they scored well, or because they were connected well, but the students who were going to do something with that vision of — and to be able to put that out to support social economic and environmental justice in those respective communities, be that Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

And so, Gabriel Garcia Márquez is also there and I also challenged him, because he saw how I stumbled and he said, "Well, it's good that you're practicing your Spanish." That's what he said to me. And then a year and a half — every time he ran into me at the film school, it was, How's your Spanish? I said, "Getting better." How's your Spanish? "It's getting better." And then after a year, he said, "How's your Spanish?" I

said, “You should stop asking me that question and you should start asking me what I’m all about, because now I have improved my Spanish and if you really want to know who I am, then” —

So it’s those sorts of things — to be able to reflect. And I know that maybe that’s not possible, but maybe there is that opportunity and really questioning, because I do — and I know that you have said that as it gets transcribed, we will be able to review that and offer some sort of things, but for busy people like me and you, it’s hard to come in and do that. It’s all a little bit easier just to reflect on. So that might be a suggestion.

ROSS: I would also like to add that I didn’t get a chance to ask you a question about why you aren’t proficient in Spanish growing up.

SÁNCHEZ: It’s the racism of the city, of this country, of this world, I guess. So I grew up, and my parents said, You will speak Spanish. And so I, up to age six, that was my first language, and then, going into the school, you know, my name, Graciela, was suddenly starting to change and it became a Gracie and a Grace, and I had to fight. I remember up to age 12, I kept on insisting that my name was Graciela. But as I kept on speaking, people started making fun of me. I knew that it was better to speak English, so I stopped practicing the Spanish and so I just lost the ability to practice. And I know that historically, our people have been washed — their mouths have been washed out with Joy, as in Joy the liquid detergent — and the people have been penalized. I remember being castigated by our principal for speaking Spanish because, you know, it was white people not knowing what we were saying about them and stuff like that. So you lose it and you have to reclaim it and take it on.

ROSS: And it’s painful to be forcibly stripped of your culture.

SÁNCHEZ: Absolutely, and that’s the cultural genocide of this country.

ROSS: Well, thank you, Graciela, for allowing us to do this interview. I thank you on behalf of Loretta Ross, on behalf of Smith College, but especially, on behalf of the Voices of Feminism Project, which I’m urging to be renamed the Voices of Feminisms.

SÁNCHEZ: Great. OK. Thank you.

ROSS: Thank you.

1:00:30

END DVD 6

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