

**Oral History Interview of
Stella Ferrer**

**Interviewed by: Daniel U Sánchez
March 14, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Oral History Project***

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Interview Series Background:

The Hispanic Interview Project documents the diverse perspectives of the Hispanic people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Stella Ferrer who talks about her experiences with Ballet Folklórico Aztlan in Lubbock, Texas as well as her experience as a Hispanic, single mother.

Length of Interview: 01:01:15

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Biographical and family background	5	00:00:33
Being a dancer as a teenager	8	00:05:06
Going to South Plains College as a single mother	9	00:07:50
Daughter, violinist in a local <i>mariachi</i> group	12	00:14:13
Experiences dancing with Ballet Folklórico Aztlan	14	00:16:58
Why Ferrer got out of dancing	17	00:23:02
Dancing as veteran dancer, how <i>mariachi</i> and dance has changed	18	00:27:30
Career path, improving situation through hard work	23	00:42:50

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sánchez we're at the Southwest Collection on March the fourteenth, twenty-thirteen. Joining us today is Stella Ferrer. And first off, thank you for being here.

Stella Ferrer (SF):

Thank you, I'm excited, it's different.

DS:

And next, won't you say your complete legal name?

SF:

Estella Ferrer.

DS:

Ok would you spell that last name?

SF:

F-e-r-r-e-r.

DS:

And where and when were you born?

SF:

I was born in Lockney, Texas. May ninth, nineteen seventy-five. A small little—I think it was a three-bedroom clinic if I'm not mistaken.

DS:

Oh, what was the name of the clinic?

SF:

I think it was just Lockney hospital.

DS:

Ok. And how about your parents. Tell us their names and dates and places of birth.

SF:

My dad is Luis Ferrer. My mother is Piedad Ferrer. And my dad is from San Luis Potosi, my mother is from Tamaulipas.

DS:

Okay, so had they met before they came to the U.S. or afterwards.

SF:

No, they actually met in Plainview during a— the process of cultivating.

DS:

So they ever tell you about that; why they came over here and how they met?

SF:

No not really. I know their educational life and how they met. My mother comes from a family of twelve; ten sisters and two brothers and so my dad's side of the family comes from a side of I think five brothers and two sisters. So of course the generation then was a lot bigger. And I believe it was one of the breaks, them not being out in the fields, they met. So that's actually how they really met was doing fieldwork.

DS:

Oh, and you said they were in Plainview when they met.

SF:

Um-hum, in Plainview. So my family is all from Plainview. For some reason I really don't know the story of why at that time, maybe it's just the way the fields were growing, but that's where a lot of the immigration came from. They were going down to Plainview, Tahoka, Lockney, down in that area.

DS:

Okay, so were your parents still doing that when you were growing up?

SF:

Yes. We even did it in elementary.

DS:

Where at? There in Lockney?

SF:

I would say the suburbs of this great big city.

DS:

Suburbs of Lubbock.

SF:

Yeah, exactly. It was around Plainview, it was like, what is it, Tulsa?

DS:

Mhm.

SF:

Yeah, those little small areas.

DS: Tulia?

SF:

Tulia, that's it Tulsa's, Oklahoma. I knew it was one of those. So that's where it was at. That's where we'd do a lot of—I remember as a child doing that.

DS:

How many siblings do you have?

SF:

There's five of us.

DS:

Where do you fall at?

SF:

I fall as number four. Three brothers and one sister.

DS:

Is she older or younger?

SF:

She's older. I have one younger brother.

DS:

So what did y'all as kids do?

SF:

As kids, well we grew up in Lubbock. We went to Plainview a lot. We grew up in Lubbock and I'd like to say were a baseball family. I love baseball. My two older brothers played baseball. And I remember my dad taking me out to go see baseball games and sometimes they weren't

even my brothers' games. Times have changed, as a kid I remember playing baseball and in the street staying out late playing kick-ball, riding on your bike and stuff. That's what I remember as a kid. I know we had an Atari but don't remember—latched on that as you see kids now days.

DS:

Yeah it was that important yet.

SF:

Yeah exactly. Then you get tired of seeing the little thing.

DS:

Maybe cause it wasn't so advanced, that's—

SF:

Yeah.

DS:

It was limited in what it could do. So what neighborhood did y'all grow up in?

SF:

I guess you would say more the Chapman area, southeast. I guess it used to be south-side at one time.

DS:

South-side.

SF:

Yeah. It's more down 34th [Street] and I-27.

DS:

Okay, I know the area.

SF:

Down that area.

DS:

And so as you're growing up, I know we were talking about that you were a dancer. How'd that come about?

SF:

The love of *mariachi* music has always been within me due to my dad. You know that my dad is very Mexican-proud by just looking at him. By the way he is he never forgot where he came from. And I think I'm the only one out of five of us that took that, the music, the food, the art; I took it to a different level. And I always wanted to dance, I think, because there was five of us and my brothers played ball. The attention was more on them due to maybe just financial reasons. I never asked. I just knew that my dad was a hard labor-worker and my mother worked. And it was just one of those things you know, if the answer was no, it was no. Versus now days, it's like, you just didn't ask why. And I always had it, and it wasn't until I was able to show up on my own, I had a car and out of high school, and I took it from there and I thought I'm gonna try it. I was the newcomer and there was all these dancers that had been there for years and danced throughout high school and they were already a group. So I kind of felt a little intimidated but my passion won me over. It was something that I knew that I could do, I just had to get it done.

DS:

What was that first day like? Meeting the new people there, trying to get into it?

SF:

Well I was excited and I show up not knowing what to expect. Then I hear that it can be expensive and costumes this, costumes that. I do believe it intimidated me because I was single mom but at that same point my passion and my determination were coming together. Being like, "This is what I want to do. I'm going to do it." I'm not going to let some obstacles; weather it's the finances, whether it's a different c—, I'm going to learn how to do this. I wanted to put that passion into my daughter. Not only that but the point of, "You can do whatever you want, you set your heart out, no matter who you are, where you're at, the sky's the limit," because I don't believe in glass ceilings. Absolutely don't.

DS:

You mentioned you were a single mother. How young were you?

SF:

I was eighteen

DS:

Eighteen.

SF:

When I had her.

DS:

Wow. So that's a big step trying to—

SF:

Juggle her and go to school.

DS:

And follow your passions at the same time.

SF:

Yeah I was going to college at the same time.

DS:

Oh really, here at Tech?

SF:

No. I was at South Plains, and so I always tell everyone I had a backpack in one hand and a baby on the hip, on the other. So that's pretty much what I did. My daughter actually learned how to crawl on South Plains campus and walk South Plains campus. So, it's pretty interesting.

DS:

So, why did you go to South Plains next?

SF:

I think my mind was limited due to the surroundings that we had I think just growing up; seeing what my dad went through, to get where he is at. Coming from an immigration family I saw a lot of hardship that my dad had to go through. Not being promoted as easily and the money and stuff like that. That I think I let that cover me. I took it to a certain level and it wasn't until I realized that I could break this. I chose South Plains because I was supposed to go to the Air Force. I was enrolled, it was what I wanted, but then they had told me—you have to give your daughter up to your parents, and there's no guarantee that you can have her back. Because I kind of wanted to go JAG, wanted to go, if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it. And it was just like, "You know what Stell, let that go and build a future with your daughter." And so I did and then I went to South Plains and I think Tech intimidated me. I was like, "That's a university; I'll never get in." because I didn't know about the scholarships, I didn't know about anything that was offered at that time.

DS:

And which school did you go to here in Lubbock?

SF:

High school? Lubbock High.

DS:

And at that time were they not—

SF:

It was more—No, I did work with Learn, I did work with Learn but I don't recall any major push at the time. You qualify for this, you qualify for that. It was if you qualify for a Pell Grant, you can get here; we can get you into South Plains. And it was at least a handful of us that were just like, "Oh, I guess you're going to South Plains." It was a big step breaking, "We're going to college." That was huge for us to even think, "We're going to a community college."

DS:

And then especially one where you would have to travel. It's not in Lubbock but you just have to go a just few miles just to go to it.

SF:

Yeah, exactly.

DS:

So, what was that daily commute like, on a young mother?

SF:

Well, I went daily. So we carpoled. And it's funny because a great friend of mine brought this up. He's like, "I remember I kind of altered my daughter around." I had two really great friends and if I wanted into a certain class or had to stayed late it just kind of fell that they could watch my daughter at a certain hour. So, I literally at that time would take my daughter to school on certain days. When I didn't have a sitter or—just took her; where I hear now you're not allowed to do that. And I remember that I would sit my daughter here in one of my math classes and she was just there and the teacher thought she was great kid. She just sat there with me. And it's funny because she's my nerdy child. She's my brainiac. She's actually in Dallas, going to college now.

DS:

She grew up on a college campus apparently so—

SF:

Yeah. And grew up at Barnes and Noble. We'd take a stroller out there.

DS:

So how was that personally balancing school, your daughter and work and all that?

SF:

I lost myself in reading. I was able to pull away from the world and get lost in reading. Whether it was fantasy books, whether it was nonfiction, whatever type I just lost myself in reading. And so I could go to Barnes and Nobles and there was a section for her. So I was able to bring reading into her life at a very very early age. And so now she is just—she reminds me of Belle from *Beauty and The Beast*. She will live in a library. That's actually her surroundings. She and I are a lot alike; we will read about a book a week. So that pulled me away from overthinking and overlooking at a situation and falling into, "I'll never be able to succeed." Because my mentality was, "Are you kidding me, this person did it in this book, this person did it here." I was able to get there.

DS:

What was the best experience you got from South Plains?

SF:

The support from teachers. Knowing that I was still trying to go to college as a single mom; and the support that they were okay at the times when I did take my daughter. I didn't take her all the time but that encouraged me to keep going. I never felt, "Oh, you're a Hispanic, single mom. You shouldn't be here." I was like, "Okay good, I'm glad you're doing something with your life." I broke my own barrier beliefs and I think through that I'm able to use that to a lot of other females now.

DS:

And you know you started off, segwayed into it from your dancing, because you had talked about, you started taking up dancing. Was that while you were at South Plains?

SF:

Yes. That was fifteen, eighteen years I've danced.

DS:

So talk about the dancing experience and what it was like to start at your age without really knowing what it's about, what you learned and how you progressed.

SF:

I found that it became a physical therapy for me. I found the beauty of dance, and art, and passion. And it was something that I could do to break out. It was something that, "If I couldn't do it, nobody could do it for me." Knowing my love for *mariachi* music, my love for the art, my

wonders—me wanting to know the different states of why we dance, it went back to me being a reader. Why do we dance *Veracruz*? Why do we wear different costumes? Why does one costume look like this? Why are there different steps? And I was able to research and found more passion through that. Then I passed it on to the kids. So, my daughter danced as well and was actually the youngest *mariachi* player here for a while in Lubbock.

DS:

Did she play with Gus's group?

SF:

Yes. She was the youngest violinist.

DS:

I didn't know that.

SF:

Yeah, she was the youngest. When they started, they were all in junior-high and she was the only one in elementary.

DS:

Gus sat down maybe about a year ago right there, and we were talking about his *mariachi* group.

SF:

Yeah he did a big art where he started a wave.

DS:

Yeah, and it's gone all the way to where now; it's at Tech.

SF:

Yeah, Amazing yeah.

DS:

For starting in somebody's living room or actually kitchen. I think it was the dining area.

SF:

Yeah, it was actually a dining area. And then one by one like he would say these—he would say, "These kids would just show up wanting to learn and my daughter had been playing violin since she as three.

DS:

I remember you had told me that. Which method was she doing?

SF:

Which method?

DS:

Wasn't there a method at the time where really works with a lot of kids?

SF:

She was doing Suzuki.

DS:

Suzuki, that's what it was.

SF:

Yeah. And then she also danced. So it was easy for her to learn the songs because she already knew them. And so for her to play them, she was able to play by ear because she knew what the song sounded like already. She was dancing them.

DS:

And so let's go back to when you first started. What group did you join with?

SF:

Aztlan.

DS:

Aztlan, tell us about that group. What it was like at that time?

SF:

Ballet Folklórico Aztlan, when I started there was a transition. I really don't recall their first name. It was a transition and the group was given Tuesday night to takeover. That's kind of how I started, so I just went right under her wing. And I didn't care what was going on. And I believe at that time the instructor was leaving. And so from there it was kind of like—the way I saw it was, “Oh I've got a newcomer, I can show her my way. I can teach her my way. I can do it.” And from there, I just went right under Zenaida to where I even named my other daughter after her. Just for the respect of what she did and how she installed that belief in me. And so it just helped me to keep my passion going.

DS:

Can you state Zenaida's last name for the record.

SF:

Aguero-Reyes.

DS:

Okay. She's the oldest daughter of Bidal Aguero. So—and I think Bidal was probably still involved at the time right?

SF:

Yes he was.

DS:

So tell us about that group. Because it's growing up and some of the things that they were doing.

SF:

Well, we got to go to Vegas. We danced in New Orleans. We've danced in several places. The group has been able to travel to these conferences and dance in—there's workshops. And just like now we do the Viva Aztlán competition where we compete and then we bring instructors, *maestros*, from Mexico or sometimes they're here and they actually teach and then everybody merges together to take these workshops and then they go out and learn and then they go and perform wherever they're at. It was very fun, it still is. We had a very strong group at one time. There was a good about seven, eight of us that stayed together. And then some would come and go. But there was just this foundation that was already there when Zenaida took over. So I just jumped on that foundation. I loved it. It kept my passion going. It was physical therapy for me.

DS:

What was your first performance like?

SF:

My first performance was in Plainview. I don't know what it was for; whether it was *Cinco de Mayo*, *fiestas*, or something that was going on. So mind you, my parents are from Plainview, both sides of my family are there. So it was like a big reunion for me. It was fun. I guess you could say I was scared but my excitement overran that and once I got a taste of it, I just knew that I loved it. And then seeing the pictures not only with me, but everybody else, when I saw it as an art. When I saw how great we looked in sync and how great we looked together. I didn't see myself like, "Oh my God that is me." I saw, "Wow, this is beautiful, there has to be much more, it has to keep growing."

DS:

And you mentioned a little bit about the travels. How well-traveled were you before the group?

SF:

I didn't travel any.

DS:

So the group was your first—

SF:

Pretty much, yeah.

DS:

So what was that like the first time you went somewhere with the group?

SF:

With the group, I think when we danced in Vegas that was like our big shot. Like, "Wow, what are we doing in Vegas and how are we going to do?" And that was fun. Because it was just us coming together and it was just the adult group. And so we were already close. We were already great friends. And so it was just give it your best, give it your all. We always did— if one of us messed up—if there was an error, it was never looked down upon you. Because we did it for fun, we did it for passion. We did it for the beauty of it. One by one we've all messed up on stage; we've all had—either that or a wardrobe malfunction.

DS:

The *chongo* [bun hairstyle] goes flying.

SF:

Yeah, fake hair flies off everywhere. You know, skirts not tied on right, you're holding on to it to make sure—you know.

DS:

And then it's a lot of times, outside right? So the elements come into play.

SF:

Yeah and learning to control the costume in the wind and still try to make it look great. And we traveled to like Muleshoe, Plainview, Slaton, all these little ones. So that was fun. It's like, "Where do we have a performance at? There's a wedding, there's a *quinceañera*, there's this." And what made it more exciting for big weddings or bigger *quinceañera* is when they had the *mariaichis* there. That was when it was a performance for the crowd. Because you'd have the

mariachi as a backdrop and then the dancers instead of the radio playing for you. So that just brought more of a memory for the family or the event and for us. It was just like this is why we dance; for that music.

DS:

And I think you said you did it for fifteen years?

SF:

For fifteen years and I stopped for a little bit. And now I'm back.

DS:

So why did you stop?

SF:

Because my kids, they were growing into their own. And even though I wanted them to dance—as I mother, “Oh my kids are going to dance.” But then I've come out that my oldest daughter, she was taking off in the *mariachi* world. As Gus's group was just expanding, and growing, and they were traveling. It's like okay, so you've still got to be with her and then I had my son at the time was playing soccer. And then my daughter was playing soccer as well and picked up softball. And it was just at that point where I realized they were athletes. They weren't dancers. I tried to do the musician part in them and my son was like, “Nope.” My youngest daughter she picked up the violin and she played for a couple of years but didn't want to do any *mariachi* music, it was just classical music. And I danced while I was pregnant with them so I don't know if it was just, “You know we've heard this music our entire life—“

DS:

From inception.

SF:

Yeah, from day one. And we hear it, we see it. And they would see me but it was just as—that's your world. We see that you're not even a mom when you dance, you're someone different, and I think that's what it was. I was like I don't want to step into her world, I have my own world. And that's when I realized they're growing into their own. And then from there my son eventually stopped soccer and is a boxer now. And my daughter she had to have her pick. And we chose softball and she is sky riding on that.

DS:

And you mention your oldest was getting involved with the *mariachi*, so what was that like for you trying to take care of the young ones then make sure that the older one gets to go to all these events for her?

SF:

The fact that she was in a group that was with kids and Gus was installing that culture in them, there was more kids involved and he was such a great mentor for her that he protected them as a whole. He opened her vision up to traveling so they'd go to Albuquerque and they'd go to Las Cruces, and they'd go to these big performances and sometimes I would go. There were various parents that would go. So it opened her mind to know that there's so much more out there than just Lubbock. And so of course that's why she was able to—by the time she was in her first semester, as a senior, she had already been accepted to five different universities. And so I knew, as soon as she left high school she was going to leave Lubbock. I guess I can say Gus had some part in that. And I can say for myself, there's so much more. Take your talent and take it to other places. Take it to where it's going to make a difference. I always tell my kids to be the change that you want to see in the world.

DS:

So right now she's a little older than you were when she was born, right?

SF:

Yes and I encourage her to live the college life. I'm not going to pretend that, "Oh, my kids' nose strictly in the book." And I told her to have fun with it. Go to the games, go to the tailgates, get dressed up. Do all that college has to offer you. Do it because when you can't do it you absolutely can't. If you go back to do it, it won't be the same. And so she got accepted to Boston so she's looking at leaving to Boston next year.

DS:

Cool. Cool.

SF:

Yeah so, I tell all my kids, "I've walked you to the mountain, it's time for you to fly or I'm gonna push you off." So I don't know. It's like, "You have a chance, if not I'm going to push you till you go."

DS:

We talked kind of quickly about your career during those fifteen years. During that fifteen years how did *mariachi* change in Lubbock? I mean Ballet Folklorico as far as—I think more groups were added, right?

SF:

Yeah well there were two other groups. I know that throughout the years that I've danced, there's been some groups that have tried to come out. And I think they lasted maybe a year, maybe to just perform here and there. And I guess you can say it's just all politics. That's what they say.

Rules and regulations didn't work over here or over there. So now there are two other groups. Which is Nuestra Herencia and Fiesta del Sol. and then of course Ballet Folklorico Aztlan.

DS:

Okay, and I think Fiesta del Sol used to be based in Shallowater or Slaton? Which one?

SF:

No, I think that was Nuestra Herencia. I'm not too sure. I know Fiesta de Sol is from here, from Lubbock and so maybe Nuestra Herencia started off that way. There used to be Saint Patrick's, that used to be a group, I think there was that one, and then they just stopped.

DS:

So as far as local venues that y'all played at what was the things y'all looked at to do locally?

SF:

Our big thing was competition, and then *Cinco de Mayo*, the schools, and then of course *fiestas*. Those were our three big ones. So those were the ones that you showed up to practice for. You were going to do that, so when we danced at weddings and *quincenñeras* it was an additional practice for the big event.

DS:

What kind of impact do you think you made in the lives of those kids that y'all performed for?

SF:

Actually I really didn't know that I did until I left. Until I left, and then I'd go back to go see them when I supported them for competition. I would do everybody's makeup to make sure everybody was in sync. Especially from the little to the advanced and intermediate it's just like as an adult group we knew whether you wore makeup or not that was just something you knew you had to do. We knew what a stage performance was versus something little. And so teaching these girls and parents, the mothers, saying, "I don't know how to put makeup on, how do you do it? The colors and how does that make it stand out?" It was like, "you're not dancing?" "No." "We wondered what happened to you, oh, we miss you, your passion, the way you smile, the way you look on stage." I was like, "Really, to be honest I've never really seen myself dance." I don't know why. I've seen a glimpse, you know like, "This is a video of us dancing," but as in really seeing what I was like; no. I've seen millions of pictures though and heard lots. And I would say in the last five years hearing, "Since you're not dancing could you teach my child?" or, "Do you bother to give lessons?" And I'd say, "You can't teach passion." I could teach the steps, I can teach the control movement and spins and *sombrero* turns which are famous for our big dresses to go around. But I can't teach passion. If you're not happy about it on stage maybe

it's not for them. Who's really dancing; the mother or is it the daughter dancing to make the mother happy?

DS:

That's a good point. How many stage mothers do you see out there?

SF:

Lots and lots. And they think there comes a point where a mother has to let her daughter change herself. Yeah I help with the headpiece and make sure everything's right, but there just comes confidence in that, confidence in knowing—I was able to put my entire costume together; the makeup, the hair, the shoes, everything. There's confidence and power in that as a dancer because when you go out on stage and everybody's saluting you and clapping for you, there's more passion than knowing, "I did this, no one helped me, I did it, or we helped each other," and you become a group. It's all about being a team and learning to look out for each other because as a mother we'll be like, "Yes I helped my daughter get on stage and she looked so good because I helped her put her makeup," and it just kind of might take down the confidence from a dancer. This is the only area in her life that she can do—it was for me it became physical therapy. The love, the power behind it, I loved that I could be on stage and again I wasn't a mother, I wasn't an employer, I wasn't anything, I was a dancer. It brought beauty to the culture. So I again knowing that I did have Maria, who is an instructor for Lubbock High; wasn't 'till last year, it's actually on Facebook. She requested me. I asked, "I don't know her. I know her as a dancer." But we had all these mutual friends up there. I was like, "Do I—". I'm crazy about stuff like that; and I did. And then one day, I was putting stuff up about running and working out and she's like, "You know, I go to the same gym as you, I'd like to—let's hang out one day." And I was like, "I don't know you," and then I finally was like, "Sure." And she was like, "For the last two years I watched you dance," and I was like, "Really." She goes, "I would watch you dance" and she was like, "I want to dance like you, I want to be like her." I was like, "What are you talking about?" She goes, "Your passion, your vibrance, your gracefulness." And then I'm very great friends with Angelica, who is the instructor for Nuestra Herencia, and she too was like, "I remember as a little girl being with St. Patrick's group looking at you and being like, 'I want to dance like her.'" and I was like, "Why don't you dance," and then it came to, "Would you mind showing us?" And it's like, "Y'all are the instructors. I don't know what you're talking about." But then being from the *mariachi* group, from the kids, they've gone into dance groups in the same way. And it's like, "What about showing us the way you dance. Would you do this?" And you know being told every time I'd show up to help, "We miss you dancing, we miss looking at you, we miss seeing you." Hearing some of the mothers say, "Watch Stella when she dances." I didn't know that. And it wasn't until I was like, "That passion was always within me, go back." And I keep telling Zenaida, "I'll be back, I'll be back, I don't know when," but it finally I think with my daughter going off to college, dancing was my stress reliever. But missing her and thinking, "Is she going to be ok?" Which I knew she was, but as a parent it's like fall into

something else that's going to remind you of who you are; and again; going back, they're all younger, they're all seem like toddlers at one time and I feel like I'm the veteran of the group but Zenaida's very supportive; and there's her sister dances too; and so having that support of, "Yay, your back, so glad." It wasn't, "Oh, your back." it was just the—and her sister saying, "Marisol." saying, "Oh my God, our groups going be so much more fun, it's going to be great." Again I was like, "Okay, wow." The welcoming was the best part of it, the coming back.

DS:

Ok, so did you just come back right now before this?

SF:

I came back and yeah, it was February.

DS:

Wow—

SF:

I was going to make my comeback for competition and I just think I came back a little bit too late. The choreography kind of hadn't—so, there was a part of me being, "Get out there and do it, Stella, you got it, you can do it." But then it was like, "You know what, I'm going to step back, I'm not just going to jump in," because the group, I didn't want them to be like, "Well who's she, where'd she come from, just cause she danced forever—". So I stepped back and I'm exited to go back and be a part of the choreography and go back to being a group.

DS:

You mention working out but dancing is just as strenuous as a workout doing it all day long.

SF:

It is. It can be.

DS:

Can be.

SF:

Yeah. But again if you look at it as something that you have to do, you lose the fun in it. When you look at it as, because I love to do it, I don't think you realize how tired you get until you're actually done. Because I could practice two to three hours because I want to get it right. Versus, "Oh, my God I've been practicing, I'm tired, I want to go home." Well there are times like that! But being a perfectionist I think, coming back from being taught the beauty of it. And you dance

and you dance, and you practice and you practice till you get great, until it looks right. Whether its three hours practice for a fifteen minute song.

DS:

And all that just culminated this past weekend. And so what are you looking for, for the future, now that you've already come back in, got your feet wet again?

SF:

To come back and— hopefully this has bloomed inside the other dancers, seeing what competition is out there, that you know what, “We’re going to come back or we’re going to come back better, we’re going to come back stronger, we’re going to come back more powerful.” That’s my goal is that every year we come back better as before. “We did good. We’ll blow you away next year.” And then they’re going to keep doing that. That’s a big goal of mine; just to really put passion in the group. As a dancer, teach the culture, be proud of who you are and what you do. If you’re going to put—it’s just like a soldier, when they put that uniform on, they’re proud of it. Not everybody can be a soldier. Not everybody will go out and fight for your freedom. It takes the chosen, those that choose. Same way as a dancer; not everybody can put a dance dress on, not everybody can put the shoes on and go out there. But when you are, be proud of who your are and how you wear it, how you dance in it. Regardless if you mess up; its—

DS:

So you know as a—

SF:

It’s *el orgullo*.

DS:

Well having that pride of being the perfectionist, what do you think of when someone’s doing it, not really full-blown, but just kind of doing it to do it?

SF:

It can get frustrating. It’s uh—when I see them on stage and I can tell who’s a new dancer or who’s not. When you see a dancer and they’re kind of looking around to see, “Am I doing it right, or am I doing it wrong?” And they’re not smiling. I don’t know if frustration is the right word but it’s just like, you always have to remember that you have an audience of one. You have an audience of one, don’t worry about who’s looking at you, don’t worry about if anybody’s taking pictures, because when I look at it from just somebody who’s looking at it as an art rather than a dancer, I’m looking at the whole group. Like, “Wow, look how beautiful they look, look how great they look, wow, that is amazing.” But when I look at her as a dancer it’s like ok yeah she needs to work on her foot work, she needs her posture this; but if you don’t know you don’t

see that. And so it's just when you're in that realm of dancing for so long, you know. And it's just the same way when I see *mariachi* groups. We're just like, "Yeah, y'all are not at all put together." Again Gus taught that very well.

DS:

In fact you mention something interesting about putting on that uniform. Because Gus talked about that how they would go over the importance of putting on the *traje* with the group members and how everything had a beat just right, because that was—

SF:

You know it was even the girls, if they had a part, at the left or the right, it was very noted, what side are we parting, the left or the right. They were all in sync. They all had the same bows, the same earrings, and that's what— what I think is great, because you need structure, you need that, and it just helps on a daily living, when you're not more organized, or you're more structured it just helps the work environment. It helps social skills, it's just that confidence, that power, going in. It's just, when you see a team even in baseball, softball, when you see a team that's together. They play better, they play stronger. And then you see somebody just, "Oh, here we are, we're the *Bad News Bears*. We're going to show up." It's just a respect that you get from your audience.

DS:

I'm trying to think of something else to ask you. Let's see, we covered your school. How about your careers, tell us about your careers.

SF:

Sure we can talk about my careers.

DS:

Okay, you're a young mother, going to South Plains. What career path did you follow?

SF:

I got very, very lucky and fell in the medical field. I did reception work and they needed somebody. I was going to school and I can't remember what exactly. I didn't have any experience in the medical field and they wanted somebody with medical terminology. I was like, "I'm a quick learner. I can get this, I'll do it." And from there I went from radiology to cardiology, dementions, neurology, to private practice, to a family practice, then outreach, which was by all means my favorite.

DS:

You're very gregarious by nature. I think maybe that's why you like being on the stage—

SF:

Yeah.

DS:

And so—maybe—maybe—so what was that like; that outreach and going out in the community?

SF:

I loved it, loved it. I was always on the other side of doing pre-certs and insurance. I was—when I worked with specialized doctors, I didn't see how hard it was to get in to see them. Because patients that I dealt with already had insurance or they were paying straight. I did not know how hard it was to get a referral because I was already working in that side. It wasn't until I completely crossed over and worked with those that could not get Medicaid, could not get any type of insurance because again they didn't have a job, lack of education, I worked a lot with homeless people. I worked with the undocumented, such as internationals. So, they would fall under the undocumented. For instance Asians that their family—their daughter went to school to do nails and they were able to bring their family over. Again no social, no good English. But again, what happens when they're sick? How do you treat them? You see it on the news; you see it on the TV. Society is like, "Oh, I don't have insurance." "Okay well whatever, you're sick, Blah, blah, blah." Versus looking at the humane side of it. You're going to treat this person, this human person like this, just because of who they are. They don't have insurance, they can't find a job. There was one person that stood out to me a lot. She had a PhD; she was a doctor. She got very sick and very soon she had to leave her practice. Well, her husband at the time was also a doctor and didn't want to deal with it. So, he left her and when they divorced she absolutely had nothing. She couldn't go to work, because she was too sick. She was diagnosed terminally ill. So little by little she became homeless and so when I saw her resume and I saw her credentials—blew me out of the water. Because coming from this, coming from an immigrant family on her side, striving to be successful and live the American Dream, and she was living in it. She just got sick and had to let go of her practice and then the husband could not mentally fight it with her. Trying to find a doctor for her—medical care for her, when she knew all the ins and outs. She knew how to treat herself she just couldn't. She couldn't go to a pharmacy. She couldn't because she had lost everything. So seeing stuff like that and working with veterans, that was very heartbreaking for me. Veterans were the ones that pierced my heart the most. Knowing that we at the time there was at least three, four hundred veterans, homeless in Lubbock, and knowing that they're the ones that we see in wheelchairs. People would consider them bums, losers, dope heads, whatever, what society calls them. Because they're in wheelchairs, they're not clothed correctly, you see them at soup kitchens, you see them here and there. But when I started to talk to them and realize, "Oh my gosh, you fought for me, you fought for my freedom, you fought for my dad, you fought for my mom, you fought so I could carry on." That's when it started to hit me. There has to be a voice. There has to be an advocate here and it made my job become more of my passion. So, at that time being an outreach educator, I assisted in helping them get

medical, dental, vision, care. So the good thing about the medical field—what I miss the most, is the pat on the back, knowing that I did something for somebody. Whether it was just, I was able to get them in shelter, to work with Salvation Army. Many people would donate hygiene bags which consisted of shampoo, toothpaste, necessities. Knowing that on monthly bases they were excited to get that. That was just, in itself, a reward, for the little things that we take for granted.

DS:

So that was interesting and I know that you don't do that anymore. What led to you leaving that field?

SF:

I wanted something more. I kept striving for more at my job. And I started taking more leads, and helping work with the CEO, and the business improvement manager. And I started getting overworked but I knew that I had reached the highest in that department. And at that time my boss, she was young, and I knew she wasn't going to go anywhere. And so I really was seeking God's faith. I want more. There's more for me out there. This is where I'm supposed to be. I'm getting overwhelmed. I'm tired. I'm working a lot. Bringing the tiredness home and trying to be with my kids and still try to have some sanity by going to the gym and stuff. And it's like—I want to be in a place I can be there for my kids. I want to be somewhere where—, “Where am I, what are you going to do, move me, move me,” and I wanted to move up. And I got a phone call stating, “I saw you do an education class and I think you'd be great where I'm at.” And I was like, “Who are you, what do you do?” “Come in for an interview.” So I went in, the hours were great. I asked, “This is what I want, this is what I need.” He was like, “Okay, when can you start?” And so, leaving where I was at; when I gave my resignation letter; I was crying when I just slid it on the desk. I was like, “I never, never thought I'd leave.” But I couldn't say no to an opportunity that gave me time to be with my kids. It gave me the freedom that I needed to be with my son traveling so much as a boxer and with my daughter traveling so much in softball, it's like I'm missing a lot of the things that—there were some fights that I missed my son winning. Just seeing his face whether I saw it on a video, saw it on a picture; I can't say I saw it in my heart. You know what I mean? That print wasn't there. The same way my daughter, she tried fast pitching for a while. I missed her very first pitch. I missed her striking somebody out. “Yo, your daughter did good.” But I wasn't there, because I'm still at work. And so having the leniency and freedom, again going back to, “This is what I live for.” It's about them. It's about building their dreams. Getting them—I say that my kids are made out of steel, I don't know where they get that from. They feel they can conquer the world. My daughter, my youngest one, has stated she will be a female president. She's very political. She's into all that stuff. I think it's just from me tapping into it. My son being like, “When I'm of age I'm going out to conquer the world.” Great, and so being able to push them and be like ok yeah this is who you're going to be. Look how great you are. Let's just keep going and going. And taking them to another school that we lived completely across town from for the fact that I felt they needed to be in a surrounding

here their talents were going to grow. Where their ability to learn was going to be a little but more aggressive—more assertive, than just from where they were going and they had competition and it's taken my kids to a whole different level. And so again, seeing the fruit of my labor I went back to think when my oldest daughter has told me, when I talked about degrees and just her going somewhere. She's like, "You do know that—" on her graduation she was like, "You are my hero." She wrote this whole thing and I was in tears. She's like, "I could be here if it wasn't for you. You are my hero." And she goes, "No matter what degree I have, no matter how many diplomas I get, no matter how many initials I get with my name; I'm half the woman that you are. I will be successful." And for my daughter to be like, "How come you can't coach me?" "I don't play softball." "But you'd be a great coach. We need you out there." And the same way with my son being like, "Hey mom, you going to go run today? I'm going to go run with you. You go the gym? I want to go with you." Knowing that there's that bond that my kids have seen me do things it's like, "Oh wait, can I hang out with you?" How many fourteen year old boys what to go to the gym with their mom? How many are like, "Hey mom, you going to go run, I'm going to go with you. Let's go." That's a challenge for me keeping up with him knowing it's a breeze in the park for him. I think my kids are seeing that I don't — any challenge I can face it. My family has told me that I'm the most ambitious person, and my brother, Joe, has told me, "You're the most ambitious person I know." His wife has said, "When it comes to challenges you're the first one there, you will look fear in its face and you will beat it."

DS:

And in fact you're going through a lot of changes right now, just within your family and yourself personally. How are you embracing all that and what are you looking for yourself to be doing in the future?

SF:

For instance, my dad always said "It's my rock. *Mi mundo mi* (unintelligible Spanish phrase)." He is a lot of who I am. I would always hear jokes from family and aunts, "Oh, your dad has that Mexican pride, that *orgullo de Mexicano*, that stubbornness." But because I was able to take that and be stubborn enough to know that you're not going to label me into being this statistic as in, "Oh, she's a Hispanic, she's a single mom." It was last October that I remember I can actually say it was one of the happiest days of my life, that I texted my brothers. The boss and I, we were crunching numbers and it was enrollment time for open enrollment for insurance, and I'm looking at it like, "There's just no way I can put my kids on my insurance." Just because it costs so much and so on. So I fell in between the gaps. I was making too much to put my kids on Medicaid. They weren't qualified for CHIP [Children's Health Insurance Program.] Yet I didn't make enough to put them on insurance. I was like, "Do I work more hours? What do I do? Do I get another job? Or should I have not taken this job?" I kept failing against that, I'm not going to stay here just so that I can't be successful, that I can't achieve. I wanted more. Just because I have that drive, I have that passion. I wake up ready to conquer the world every day. I was

crunching numbers and kind of going through some things. And I sat there and I teared up and my boss was like, “You ok?” I said “Oh my gosh, for the first time ever, I can put my kids on insurance.” It still tears me up because there’s a lot of families that can’t do that. There’s a lot of single mothers that refuse to do that because they’re like, “I can’t make more money because they’ll take away my kid’s Medicaid, they’ll take away my kid’s food stamps.” It’s kind of what you want to do, in some aspect. I finally was like, “Oh my gosh, I will be able to, as a single mom, put me and my three kids on medical, dental and vision insurance.” I remember texting my brothers, “Oh my God, I have reached that point,” and so that made me realize I didn’t know that I could come that far. I didn’t know that I had moved up enough. To know that I did it— and so with my daughter when she broke her nose it was great going, and the receptionist was like, “Is she on Medicaid?” And I was like “Absolutely not.” It was like, “But I know what you thought, I know looking at me. You’re a Hispanic single-mom.” Just never asked, “Does she have insurance?” It was like, “Does she have Medicaid?” “No.” And being able to go to take my kids freely and knowing that they’re covered and knowing my kid’s sick. I don’t have to sit it out if they’re still sick four days later. I can’t afford to take you to the doctor, let’s just—. These myths of remedies you know. What’s going to work? It’s like, “Alright, let’s get you there.” I didn’t have that growing up. I knew how hard it was for my parents. Knowing that I was able to do that it kind of all goes back to why I went back to the dance group, because the freedom in it. There goes my stress relief. Where’s the one thing that I can do, where you don’t have to tell me that I’m good at it, because I know I am. Just because of the passion of what—the belief that was put in me.

DS:

I think that’s probably a good stopping point, right? I think you’re happy there.

SF:

I guess, yeah. Just kind of full circle.

DS:

Full circle, okay. Well thank you.

SF:

Thank you.

(end of interview)