

**Oral History Interview of
Rebecca Arriaga**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
April 9, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic History Initiative***

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Interview Series Background:

The Hispanic Oral History 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 11, 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Rebecca Arriaga, a winner of a distinguished alumni award at Texas Tech. Arriaga reflects upon her time at Texas Tech and her career in marketing.

Length of Interview: 00:13:56

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Student at Texas Tech and early career	5	00:00:00
Being a Latina in the business world	7	00:04:53
Rewarding moments	7	00:06:04
Lessons learned and reflections on career	8	00:07:45

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is April 9, 2015. I'm at the Southwest Collection in Lubbock, Texas. And today's interviewee is Becky Arriaga, and Becky is here because she won a distinguished alumni award from Texas Tech this week, and she's going to talk a little bit about that—Becky, thank you for being here. First off, what's your complete legal name?

Rebecca Arriaga (RA):

Rebecca Ann Arriaga.

DS:

And when and where were you born?

RA:

I was born in Waco, Texas, May 11, 1964.

DS:

Okay. So you're distinguished alumni, so let's talk a little bit about what brought you to Lubbock and to Texas Tech?

RA:

Well, growing up in Waco, and I finished most of my high school in Waco, and then moved my junior year to San Antonio—I still had a lot of friends in Waco and to be completely honest, most of my friends were coming here to Tech, and I was interested in mass communications. And at the time there were really only three universities that offered that as a major, so it was UT, which I thought was way too big and not interested; North Texas, which was—I feel like the three bears, right—a little too small, and Lubbock, which fit just right. So that's what brought me here.

DS:

Okay, and what was that experience like?

RA:

It was interesting. It was great because it was the first time being away from my family, and you know, of course all those new college experiences. And having grown up in Waco as a Latina, I was already used to kind of being the different one in the group, so coming here and having that same experience didn't feel unfamiliar to me, so it was a very familiar environment. And of course what I did love—and still love—about this campus is because we are out here in West Texas, it becomes very much your community and your family very quickly. So I felt that here.

DS:

Let's talk a little bit about what happened when you graduated and you went out into the business world.

RA:

So I graduated here in 1986 and went back to San Antonio, which was where my family was living at the—still does—and decided to try to find a job like any new college graduate, and was fortunate in that my sister, who's three years older than me, was working at the Coca-Cola Company in the marketing department in San Antonio, and had gotten a call from a headhunter saying, "There's an entry-level position at this advertising agency; they focus on the Hispanic market. Would you be interested?" And she told them, "I'm not interested, but I think my sister would be." So immediately called me, connected me with the recruiter, and I landed my first job at an agency called Sosa and Associates, which is now Bromley Communications, which is probably one of the largest Hispanic agencies in the country.

DS:

And how long were you there?

RA:

Ten years.

DS:

And after that?

RA:

After that, I decided—my sister, who had continued working for the Coca-Cola Company—she and I had had conversations about where we go next, and I didn't want to stay—I was kind of—had experienced ten years of one agency, and didn't really feel like I wanted to go to another agency. So we decided to start our own, and started consulting, she and I. Two years later, a third partner came in that we met in Austin, and at the same time, what brought me to Austin was I decided to go back and get my Master's. So I got a Master's in account planning, which was a new graduate program for them at UT, and decided instead of commuting back and forth from San Antonio to Austin that I would just move there. And that's where we kind of established the business.

DS:

Okay, is that the business you still have today?

RA:

It is—called Mercury Mambo. So we've been kind of official for fifteen years.

DS:

And talk about the growth in that business.

RA:

It's, you know, it was an amazing—and still is an amazing—experience. So when we started in kind of '99, early 2000, you know, and as within all kind of Hispanic marketing industries, the industry itself had—is gaining a lot of momentum. And I spoke earlier today about how every ten years with the census, you know, a lot of companies wake up and say “oh my gosh, it's an opportunity.” So it's been wonderful to kind of see that, you know, see Hispanic marketing grow from just a community service and nice to do to really a need to do to sustain a viable business. So we've been very fortunate to continue to ride that wave. In 2008, however, as with a lot of agencies, we kind of suffered as well. Not only did the economy crash, but probably a week before it crashed, we decided to resign our largest account based on some philosophical differences, and little did we know that the entire economy would crash about two weeks later. So it's been a little bit of a struggle getting back up to where we were, but we're still optimistic. We're still in there; we're still in the game, so I'd call that success.

DS:

So what was it like, you know, you're starting off as a Latina—were there a lot of Latinas as role models in this industry, or were you just striking out on your own?

RA:

Well, I was fortunate that I was in kind of the Hispanic marketing industry, and I had some great mentors in Lionel Sosa, who is just an amazing wise man; Earnest Bromley, who is an incredibly intelligent and strategic and just has a giant heart—was Lionel's second partner; and then they brought in a third, Al Aguilar, who is just all business, and I really learned a lot from all three of them and each very specific areas. So from kind of an industry perspective, I was fortunate to have them as role models, and from a Latina perspective, I was so fortunate to work with an amazing group of people, and we continue to stay close. As a matter of fact, every quarter we have a Bromley girls' reunion either in San Antonio or Austin, so whether you worked at Bromley when it started in the early eighties, or this year, we all get together and it's really become a really nice kind of support network for all of the Latinas that—and non-Latinas—that work there, at the agency.

DS:

What are some of the most rewarding moments you've had?

RA:

You know what, I get the most reward out of watching people grow. I love watching interns become account executives or event managers; I love kind of seeing them click with a career and

get very passionate about it. So those are my personal rewards. From a business perspective winning an account is always a great feeling because we all put our heart and souls into those pitches. This past January, we won the REI account which, for us, was a super great opportunity, not only because it's a Class A brand, but also for us it was a new industry to be in the outdoor industry. Every year the wins come—the losses come as well, but—

DS:

Well, I know you're here because of the award you just won. Talk about that, and what that means to you.

RA:

Well, I'll be honest, the award was a couple of years ago—so not, yeah. But I was completely honored and overwhelmed by receiving it and being recognized. I consider my time here at Tech just that twilight time where everything is possible. And the education that I got here and the mentors—you know I consider Jerry Hudson one of my mentors really—I think helped pave the way for how I wanted to approach my career and, you know, how to nurture people because it was such a great environment to seek assistance—to seek help. And it was challenging—it wasn't easy, and it shouldn't be easy. But it helped me learn how to think.

DS:

What were some of the greatest lessons learned so far?

RA:

Well, time management is always good to—you know, and when you're in college, that definitely comes in handy. But I would say—I don't know, I think just the support system and the encouragement that the faculty gives the students here is critical. And if you're wise enough as a student, which some of us are, and some of us aren't, to really listen—if you're a good listener—I learned how to be a good listener here, I'd say.

DS:

And we just met—you were at a conference, or a luncheon, for the Lubbock Lights Creativity Round Table. Can you talk about creativity? And since you work in a field that's highly creative, can you talk about that?

RA:

First, I thought that was an amazing experience; I've never really been to a luncheon where they—it was that interactive and that conversational. So I thought that was wonderful. And then, in terms of creativity, I agree with what was said today, that every one of us—just because I'm in a creative field—I think every one of us is in a creative field. You have to be in order to prosper and succeed, I think, in today's world. You have to be resourceful, which is a different way to

say, I think, creative. And for us, it comes in really handy, because whether we are coming up with new ideas—whether we're coming up with creative ways to manage a client's budget so that we can maximize their dollar—you know, creativity is kind of all around us, and that's one of the things that we really try to nurture at our agency in terms of making sure that everybody feels comfortable to be creative, and I think part of that is being comfortable knowing that, if I fail, or if I make a mistake, someone's going to be there to catch me. So that's definitely something that we pay a lot of attention to, like allowing people to make mistakes.

DS:

You know, I think one of the issues that you brought up there was, you know, the things that impede that creativity is you know, not being given the leeway. So how do you balance giving someone the leeway and yet having to be within the structure of your business?

RA:

That's a great question. I think, well, for us it really starts in the hiring process. I mean, you hire people that you feel are competent, but also have the confidence to ask the right questions, and also when there is trouble the confidence to come and talk to you about it. The last thing you want somebody to do is kind of hide it, you know, or not feel the—be fearful of being able to share, “Hey, this isn't going the way we thought it was going to go.” And in the events business, that's critical, because events—there's so many logistical dominoes that when one falls, it could have a cascading effect. So it's really just, I think, creating that environment and letting everybody—kind of leading by example. So I'd be the first to say that I'm not perfect. So it's having that continuous dialogue about how can we improve this, and after every event, what went right? What went wrong? You know, what are we going to keep? And what are we going to throw away?—and knowing that there's no judgement on any of it.

DS:

As you look back on your career, what do you think of it so far?

RA:

Of my career? Oh my gosh, being here it seems like I've just started, but then I've been doing this for a long time, so I'm trying to find the finish line. (laughter) I think I'm extremely lucky. I'm incredibly lucky to have been in the career that I have landed, and I've met amazing people, and been given the opportunity to do some really amazing things. Early on when I was at Bromley—at the agency—I mean my first account was the Coca-Cola account. How much bigger can you get? That's the number one brand in the world. And I was fortunate enough to spend half of those years working with talents that ranged from Tito Fuentes to Celia Cruz to Selena. So I was the one that went down and negotiated the deal with her to be the Coca-Cola spokesperson, and we became friends. It's just allowed me access to a world that I didn't even know was available to me.

DS:

What was it like the first time you met somebody like that?

RA:

Depending on who it was—

DS:

Well, who was the first one?

RA:

Oh, I'm trying to think. It was probably—well, the first one, I think, was Little Joe—Little Joe Hernandez—so we did a whole series with Little Joe, and he was amazing, and everybody was so nice, and it was great. And then I worked with Rita Moreno who, you know, was just terrifying because she was just so smart. And her husband, who was her manager, was just like the biggest sweetheart in the—you know, teddy bear—in the world. But she was a perfectionist. And it's like “Okay, we've got to raise our game. If we're going to be—our job is to make her happy and to make Coca-Cola look good in her eyes, so—”

DS:

How old were you when you were trying to deal with this?

RA:

Oh my gosh, twenty-three.

DS:

Wow, young.

RA:

Yeah, I mean, I seriously had no business doing that.

DS:

It was, you know, it's great training.

RA:

It was amazing training. And, you know, to sit in a board room with the president of Coca-Cola and present a creative concept—I can't tell you how incredible that felt. It's like nothing you can ever imagine, and I think at this field—advertising, marketing—allows you those opportunities that, you know, that we're very fortunate. Not every career will allow that.

DS:

Well, I know you have a busy schedule, so do you have anything else you'd like to get on the record?

RA:

Oh my gosh, where do I begin? No, I'm just incredibly grateful to be here, and it's been so far a wonderful day. Every time I come back to Tech, I'm like "Why don't I come back here more?" So—

DS:

Yeah, well next time give us two hours. (laughter)

RA:

I was going to say, if Kent has his way, we'll be back here a lot.

DS:

All right. Thank you so much.

RA:

No, thank you so much. I tend to rattle on sometimes.

(Unknown):

No, that was like trained professional interview, there, I'd say. It was good.

End of Recording

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