

**Oral History Interview of
America Ramos**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
January 25, 2011
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Series***

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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 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features America Ramos as she discusses her involvement with the fiestas and pageants in Lubbock. In this interview, Ramos describes her life growing up and leaving school to support her family. She then details her fight for getting her children better education. She recounts the pageants she has worked on and her continuing fight to help children that were failed by the education system.

Length of Interview: 01:25:51

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Keywords

Fiestas, Pageants, Education, Hispanic Community

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez, today's date January the 25, 2011 and I'm here with America Ramos and America has agreed to sit down and talk with us about her experiences with the *Fiestas Patrias* [Independence Day] here in Lubbock. She was pageant director for *Fiestas Del Llano* [Party of the Plains] for a while and first of all thank you for agreeing to sit down for the interview.

America Ramos (AR):

It is my pleasure. Thank you for asking me to.

DS:

Certainly and next I want to ask you to just start off with your complete legal name.

AR:

My name is America Ramos.

DS:

Okay.

AR:

And that's my legal name. People ask me about, "Is that your real name, America?" And I say, "Yes, that's my real name." [Laughs]

DS:

Yeah and where were you born?

AR:

I'm from south Texas originally. Yeah, I was born in Sinton, Texas but I grew up in Corpus, Corpus Christi.

DS:

Oh. What's your birth date?

AR:

It was January the sixteenth.

DS:

January the sixteenth.

AR:
Yeah.

DS:
The year?

AR:
[Laughter] Okay, I'll tell you. I'll be truthful, '41, 1941.

DS:
Nineteen forty-one, okay.

AR:
Yeah, but we came up here years later. My dad just moved us all up here for I guess better work and conditions.

DS:
In fact that's where I want to go next. I want to ask about your parents, your dad and mom, their information as far as names, birth dates, and where they came from.

AR:
Um-hm. Okay. Well my parents originally are from down south Texas. My father Julian Lugo was born like in Brownsville. My mom Maria Sanchez and she was—she was born in *San Patricio* [Saint Patrick], *San Patricio* County down in south Texas. And my grandparents lived at the time in Sinton, so we moved up to Sinton and after I think that's where I was born. So I think my parents moved out there around the grandparents. And we found—we stayed down there in that area for up until we became teenagers and then daddy—my father moved us up here to Lubbock which was such a desolate and [DS laughs]—we really weren't happy about the move because down in Corpus we had everything down there. But my father was looking for something more than what we could have there in Corpus so he moved the whole family here.

DS:
So what was his occupation in Corpus?

AR:
My dad was a—he was a cook and then he also worked as a—in a cleaners. As a tailor cleaners and doing all that work, and so mother didn't really have a job. She really mostly took care of us and she would do odd jobs just to help out. There was eight of us in the family.

DS:

I was going to ask how big was the family.

AR:

There was eight of us.

DS:

That's enough of a job right there.

AR:

[Laughs] And so we—and I think that's probably one of the reasons why dad just decided to move us up—up here and to try to get a better life for us, but we all worked from a very young age. We started migrant work and we as kids would have a lot of fun because of the travels and living in different parts of the country and doing that.

DS:

So after you moved here your father became a migrant worker?

AR:

Yeah. Well I think that probably before—a little before we moved up here he had already exposed us to the migrant work. And then moving up here was just because of the fact that he could work more here, make us a better living. We didn't like it but we had to. [Laughs] We had to follow.

DS:

So you moved up here you said when you were about sixteen? So then mid-fifties?

AR:

Yes. I was—I remember starting school in Abernathy, and I went into the seventh grade there in Abernathy schools. And so we stayed and lived in Abernathy for a few years before we moved up here.

DS:

So what was the difference like between the schools in Corpus Christi and Abernathy?

AR:

Very, very different. Of course, down in Corpus you're among your own people. You're where just everybody was family. The whole neighborhood was family. We just had such friends in the *barrios* [neighborhood] that where lived. They were just like—just like family and then we moved up here and it was difficult for us I think in the fact that we really—even in the schools

we were not together with the rest of the Anglo kids. We mostly were separated and I think that anytime that you spoke Spanish that didn't sit well with them, but made some great friends and got involved and all of this. But still in growing up we found out about discrimination, which we didn't have it in Corpus or we never we went through that in Corpus. We didn't realize that there was a difference as far as being discriminated against. You just kind of have to work through all that and make the best that you can. I mean we can't live our lives not doing things or not participating or not getting involved just because of the fact that we're Mexican.

DS:

How big was the Mexican population in Abernathy?

AR:

Abernathy had a pretty good size but we were all migrants and like. Now there were—there was some families that had lived there. For instance, my husband's family. They had been there since I think probably the forties. His father—his mother—my husband's mother died at a very young age but they grew up in Abernathy and they were involved in the school and all of that. All of his children graduated from Abernathy High School and they were well known. Their family was well known there in the community of Abernathy and that's where I met my husband. But my dad found work and he was able to work there and we went on to school and we did all that, and then times were hard. Times were hard and I remember that I had to make the decision of whether to stay on in school or to help the family by getting out and working. And it seemed to me like if I worked I could help and make a better living for all of us. And so when I was a—I was in school in the ninth grade and I thought, "You know it's time for me to get out and do my share of work." So I dropped out of school and—

DS:

So where were you as far as in the family? Were you one of the oldest?

AR:

No, I'm the third oldest. I'm the third oldest. I have an older sister. She was married at that time, and then I have an older brother, and he had also gotten married and then I was the next in line, and so I worked some there in Abernathy. I worked as a waitress in one of the little restaurants that we have there, and then from there I found work in Lubbock. And we didn't have a vehicle, or I didn't have a vehicle to drive back and forth so I had to drive—I had to catch the bus from here in town and I had to wait in Abernathy. I would have to wait for the bus to—they were coming from Amarillo and then they'd stop in Abernathy and then I'd catch the bus and come to Lubbock to work. And then in the evenings I would have to wait until the bus would go back and I would catch it, and sometimes I would miss it and it'd be hours before I would get home.

DS:

Yeah because the bus didn't operate on your schedule. [Laughs]

AR:

No, it was difficult but—and you know we just—

DS:

Wow. How long was that commute normally?

AR:

I think it probably I was—I did that for about a couple of years.

DS:

How long did it take to drive in or by bus?

AR:

Well I don't remember. It was probably you know maybe forty, forty-five minutes. I don't know but it's something I didn't—

DS:

So you would do that whether it was nice and clear like today or snowy?

AR:

Whatever the temperature was, whatever the weather was like we still had to do that, and I found work here and I started a full-time job and then I got married. My husband from Abernathy, we decided to get married and we got married in '59 and then he was inducted into the armed services, the military. So he left and I stayed on—I stayed working and then he was sent overseas to Okinawa for almost two years. He was gone for about twenty-two months and I didn't see him that length of time because he was overseas and I couldn't travel. I couldn't be there with him. I had—so I stayed and worked and I saved money and I was making until he got home and once he got home we bought a home and here in Lubbock. So actually, I've been in Lubbock since '62. Living in my house since 1962.

DS:

And where'd you buy that first home at?

AR:

It was in the Arnett Benson area.

DS:

Oh okay.

AR:

Um-hm, on 2nd Street, 3002 2nd Street. Yeah.

DS:

Really?

AR:

Yeah and we were there for a few years.

DS:

So we lived on the next block when we—we lived in 3005 First Place when we moved back from Kansas.

AR:

Oh. Oh my. Yeah. Well you know that our house is still standing and I go back occasionally. You know I go back and just check it out and it's still there. It just brings back lots of memories.

DS:

Yeah so y'all moved on to Arnett Benson right when all the change was happening there right?

AR:

Um-hm.

DS:

In the neighborhood?

AR:

Um-hm. Um-hm.

DS:

What was that neighborhood like? I know it's a fairly decent neighborhood.

AR:

Yes, it was. It was really decent. The people were great. We made such wonderful friends and we were all—seemed like we were all you know having our families and our kids were growing. They were all going to school together. We were all involved. We were involved in the

community as far as the church, the schools, the civic—the politics, all of these. We were just all involved in all of that so it was nice. We made some longtime friends that we still—

DS:

So what was it—you mentioned something interesting about the politics? What was it about relatively young Latinos getting involved?

AR:

Well it was great. It was great because I know that my husband belonged to this life. The G. I. Forum and they were politically minded and we would attend all their meetings, and conventions, and travel. As a matter of fact, I as a female was involved in the auxiliary, the Women's Auxiliary of the G. I. Forum and I got to be—held an office, state office, for the Women's Auxiliary. I was—I think I was like maybe secretary and then vice president and then they wanted me to take over the presidency and by then I was too involved with too many other things that I couldn't do the traveling. I couldn't.

DS:

As the auxiliary what were y'all's duties and roles within the [crosstalk, 0:13:30.7]?

AR:

Fundraising. Fundraising.

DS:

Fundraising.

AR:

You know yeah and mostly the men were into more of the political side of it and we were just kind of like there for support and doing.

DS:

Yeah because I mean the times where you're talking about that's when everything was changing in America.

AR:

Well it was you know an organization that really had a lot going and along with the LULAC [**League of United Latin American Citizens**] here in town. We never actually were members of the LULAC but we knew a lot of the people in the LULAC organization.

DS:

So I'm betting you knew Malvaiz right?

AR:

Oh yeah. Oh yes, yes. As a matter of fact, we—he was one of my husband's best friends and they used to play ball together for years. They played softball together and their kids and our kids grew up in school and all. And now his wife, Beatriz, is one of my stylists that works there in my salon.

DS:

I didn't know she worked.

AR:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. She's been a hairstylist for years.

DS:

I did not know that.

AR:

And yeah so we maintained a friendship all these years.

DS:

So how about your kids? You said they grew up there?

AR:

My kids, yes. We had two children, Veronica and Steve, and now they're—of course, Veronica is married and moved away from Texas. She's there in Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Steve my son is back home. He had left for several years and now he's back in Lubbock working here, so that's good. But growing up we—the children, our children growing up and going to a public school, we were being involved in the PTA being—I think I held every office in our PTA.

[Laughs] But we were striving for a better education for them and actually we really were not getting the best of education for our kids, and I would notice that and even my—for example my daughter would come home and say, "Oh, I'm so bored in school. I finished my work and then I don't have anything to do. It's just boring." And I got to listening to her and thinking, "There's something wrong if this child is already bored at school in her class and here she's still in elementary school." So I went to check on her and—because she was having the same kind of homework that she had had the previous year and I kept asking about it and she said, "Well we have to go back and refresh them and then start them back again on the higher level." Well you know that going on and on and I think, "Well it's time that she went on with a higher grade." And the school was just not challenging enough for them and I think that at that age those kids are just like sponges. They want to learn. Whatever you give them they'll learn if they have the capacity to do so. And she wasn't being challenged and she wasn't learning what all she needed to, I thought, and the first time that I approached one of her teachers she said to me, "Mrs.

Ramos,” she said, “These children are not capable of making A’s.” And I thought to myself, She’s not giving them a chance. Why would a young fourth or fifth grader not be capable of making A’s? I mean what’s wrong? I mean she had a good mind and she spoke English so there’s no reason why she wouldn’t have been capable of making higher grades. So I continued on and pushing them and pushing them, and finally I didn’t get any—I went to the principal and told him my—the problem that we were experiencing with my kids and they were not being given the type of teaching that I thought was required for that age. So I spoke to the school principal there and he said, “Well,” he said, “I’ll talk to the teachers and we’ll get them to give them harder or more homework.” So that went on for a while and that didn’t help, so then I went to Dr. Leslie, who was at the—he was the school superintendent of schools in town at that time, and I explained to him to the problem. And he said, “Okay well here’s what we can do,” he said, “We can test your daughter and see what level she’s in. So and then we can work accordingly.” So they did, they tested her and it come out that she was her grades were normal and above average and yet she was not being given the opportunity to learn more. So after that nothing was done again, and I thought, I don’t want to lose my child to— I mean she’s going to be a drop out at a young age and I thought, “I don’t want that.” So my husband and I talked about it and he said, “Well,” he says, “Let’s just take them out of public school and let’s go ahead and put them in private school,” he said, “We’ll just have to do that, and we’ll have to tighten our belts so that we can have the money to put them in private school.” So that’s when we took the children out, Veronica and Steve, and transferred them over to Christ the King School. And my daughter did fine when she was transferred over. My son was a little third grader and it took him a little longer. We had to get some help for him, some tutors, to help him get up to the level of Christ the King, but we did and he did fine. After that he was fine and my daughter graduated from Christ the King High School, and my son stayed on up until—they had closed the school, the high school at Christ King and so he wasn’t going to be able to graduate from Christ King, so we decided to pull him out of private school and put him in back in public school instead of the private school.

DS:
Right.

AR:
So he graduated from Monterey High School. Yeah and then they both attended college. They went to Texas Tech here. They’ve lived here in Lubbock all their lives up until the time that they were married and then after the marriage they went on to bigger better jobs.

DS:
So what’s it like up here when they grew—kids as whole, let’s say, they can’t do this?

AR:

Yeah. Well I think that if we stay quiet and if we don't question and if we don't do for our children you know they won't ever really strive to do better or to—the motivation is not there for them because they're not being challenged. So if we just go along with them and just, "Well that's what the school is all about. I mean they're in there," but if we as parents don't take an interest and don't take a role as a parent and a leader because you have to be able to direct your children and guide them and support them and help them to achieve bigger and better things than what we had. And I feel like that if I had known back when I dropped out of school—I remember talking to one of my teachers and telling her about me wanting to go college when I finished high school there and she said, "Well America," she said, "College is really expensive. It's going to cost you a lot of money," and that did it for me. I mean that was it. I mean I thought, "Well okay, I don't have the money." See, and I think if I had known better or if that teacher would have encouraged me a little to the point where maybe I could have had a better.

DS:

Yeah, college costs money but here are these options, you know, something like that.

AR:

But nothing like that other than just well college is expensive you have to have money, and that was it. And I didn't finish school until after I was married, and decided that I had to do something about my education. That I just wasn't going to stay at the level where I was in. So even after I had my children I did go back to school, finished high school, went directly into Tech, and started Tech. And I would—goodness, I would go like in the mornings, I would take the first class in the morning like at 7:20 and I would stay in—at Tech I would stay in class until—maybe it's time for me to leave and go back to work. So I would run back to work and I would work up until five thirty and then I would get back to Tech at six thirty for another class and I'd be there until nine thirty or so. So I did that for about two years, and I was going—every semester I tried to take some hours, which was difficult because I had a family, and I had a husband, and I had all these obligations. We were still quite involved, church and community and civic and politically and all of this. We were still involved.

DS:

What time frame was that?

AR:

I'm sorry?

DS:

What time frame was that that you were doing that?

AR:

Well that was—well my kids were growing up, that was the seventies, and at Tech I—yeah I was at Tech for—it was the mid-seventies. And I liked it, I think that I have always pushed myself to do all these things and I—the reason that I didn't finish and didn't get my degree was because I got sick and landed in the hospital and my doctor there said, "You are burning the candle at both hands. You have got to stop this. Without your health you cannot do anything. You can't be a good mom. You can't be a good wife. You can't work. You can't do any of these things. You need to take care of America first," and then all these things. She says, "I want you to stop working. Go back part time. I want you to drop everything that you're involved in. I want you to get eight hours of sleep. Eat three meals a day. Take care of your health. Take care of your family. After you get back and after your children get out of high school and graduate then you can go back. Then you can think about going back." I said, "I don't want to stop right now," I said, "I've got this momentum going. I want to continue. I want to finish." And she said, "You can do it after you get your children out of school. There'll be plenty of time for that." So I did. I got back to working and I dropped out of some of the activities that I had been involved in. Just spent more time with myself and my work and my family. And then when I got to feeling back healthy and all of this I did go back to Tech, but it was only to take classes that I wanted to take, not credit classes, but light classes at night. I went back and we took—I took some French classes because we had thought at that time that maybe we could sometime go to Europe and have to speak French. It's funny because my kids and I took French classes and I took several other classes and I did at night. Yeah and by then I had already lost my husband. He had died and I was working. I was still working.

DS:

Were you already working as a beautician?

AR:

Yes. I went to beauty school when my children were young. I think my daughter must have been like a five year old and my son was maybe two and half—about two years old when I went back to beauty school. I went back to school. As a matter of fact, I actually had enrolled in a business college because I thought you know maybe that might be a better profession for me. Maybe I would make more money being in the business position than I would as a hair stylist, hair dresser. And so I went and enrolled in a beauty college—in a business college and right before I started—right before I would start classes, I changed my mind. And I said, "I have always wanted to be a hair stylist, a hair dresser. I've always wanted to make women pretty," and I said, "And that's what I want to do. That's what I have always wanted." I remember being in the fifth grade when I was young and we had to write a paper, a theme, what they called them, and asking us what we wanted to do when we grew up, and I wrote everything about how I wanted to be a hair dresser. I wanted to fix people's faces and fix their hair and become a good hair dresser and that would make happy. That's what I wrote on my theme, and I was a little fifth grader. I

remember doing that. So it had always been my dream to become a dresser and now even today after all the many years that I had been in the business it's still—I've never regretted having gone into this business because I have done a lot. I have done the whole beauty aspect of the profession.

DS:

How has it changed since you've been involved to when you first started in the business to now?

AR:

Oh well now they're much younger. [Laughter] They're quite a bit younger and now with every—the computers and everything it's just—now we can go to our computer and put in somebody's name and here pops up all this information on that client and that type of thing. Whereas before we had to write down everything and their formulas and their information on that. It's technically it's changing somewhat but then also the business has always been a good business. It has always been a good business, and challenging. Challenging in the fact that you have to stay on top of things in order for your business to maintain the growth and that. I still have customers that started with me when I was in beauty school. I still have some of those clients. So after a while they just become family and they're just like family. You see them weekly or you see them monthly or you see them regularly.

DS:

Yeah and you probably did their kids too right?

AR:

Exactly. Yeah and now the grandkids are coming. [Laughs] But it's been a beautiful profession for me, and I think that I made the right choice when I decided to—not to go to business college and instead go to attend the beauty school and I've never—we've done a lot of traveling. I've learned a great deal. I studied also make up application and I studied under a makeup artist from New York, and then of course, all the different masters of hair design that we've worked under and the travels and all. So it's been fantastic, it really has been a wonderful—and through that work experience I was able to help so many others. There for a while I was helping out at schools, in the public schools. They would call, they would like me to do a class on personal hygiene or beauty and just speak on my personal life, sort of a motivational type of class that I would do. I did that for the Girls Scouts, I did that for the Women's Club, I did that for the sororities at Tech, I did that for the elementary schools, for the junior high schools, for the high schools, I would go and teach class. And they would call me every—I was probably going like every six weeks. I would go to all these different schools and do a class. It was neat. It was fun. But when I was going to these schools doing this, teaching a healthy out with what I could do in the class, I would see the problem with our children and it would touch me deeply because I would think, "Some of these kids are not really being given the opportunity to do for themselves

what could be done.” I mean they would place them in a special area or class where the kids would go to school in the morning and then by noon they’d be out and I think some of those kids would sent out to jobs, menial jobs. I mean fast food restaurants, the hospitals to clean, the rooms. Not anything that would help them in a career that would give them a sense of worthiness to do more with themselves, and then at home also—I think a lot of times we as parents are to blame for our kids not getting a better education or not pushing them enough to make something of themselves and I could see this problem that we had with our own kids in school. It bothered me so much that I thought, “These kids need a—they need guidance. They need a direction. They need the support of someone that’s out there already in the work market.” So that’s when I decided that I was going to back to Tech and get a degree. And I thought, “Well the way that I could help is maybe by counseling these children.” So I thought that I would work towards getting a degree in psychology so I could help those kids and give them the encouragement and give them maybe what they lack at home, what they weren’t having at home, and to make something of themselves because I would think, “These kids are having fun right now because they don’t have to do homework. They don’t have to go to school full time.” I mean and they were in these classes and they’d be laughing and playing and eating and drinking Cokes and munching on chips and things like this. And I would think, “What are their lives going to be like five years from now? Ten years from now? Where are they going to be?” They don’t—they’re not training these kids to have any kind of skill or higher level of education. You know those kids are going to be drop outs.

DS:

Yeah well they’re just indoctrinated to be in that working port.

AR:

And you know and we need people like that in those kind of jobs, but why just us? I mean you know? So it really bothered me to the point where I thought, “I’ve got to do something,” and I tried. [Laughs] I tried, like I said, going back to Tech and trying to get a degree in psychology so I could become a counselor and help some of those children that didn’t have that at home.

DS:

Yeah. How did all this that you were doing—how did that end up with you getting involved with the *Fiestas*?

AR:

Okay. I have always pushed myself to do things and to go beyond what was just the norm for me. So while I was working and taking care of my family and all, I had a great husband. I had a husband that supported me in everything that I wanted to do. He was just a wonderful father, and husband, and friend. He was truly a marvelous man and if I had not had the support of him at home I would not have been able to do all that I had been doing and he was behind me 100

percent. And so I decided that I would go to modeling school, and I don't have the height to be a model and all, but you know a lot of times it's not what you have, it's what's in you. If you have a passion for something, if you have a drive for something you do it. You get out there and do it. You don't wait until somebody says, "Well no I don't think you can do it because we don't need people your size or we don't—," I think on the contrary I think a lot of times if somebody says, "No you can't." I say, "Yes I can." So I went modeling school and I finished my modeling school, and from then I helped the school. We would go out of town to do classes in makeup or—your graces, your etiquette, and all these things that are taught in beauty school. And I would travel with the—Mrs. Bagnell that had the school there and we did classes at night and then I would do classes, like I said, I mean I would speak before groups of the Women's Club and here in town or the sororities, I would do all those things, and then in my work, in my profession, I would teach also. I would do classes like on professional appearance and of course having the knowledge of the hair, the makeup, and the dress. I could do those things and that's how I got involved with the Beauty Pageant. I could see that—see before me there was some great people that had done this before me that I was not aware of. I mean Gloria Madrid, Gloria Madrid—and also she was one of Robert's fans, the modeling school here in town. She was one of their graduates and she was a lovely, lovely girl. She also taught the modeling classes and did the—a couple of years I think she was involved with the pageant that was before my time. And she was a teacher here in town, in Lubbock, just a lovely, lovely girl. I didn't know it when I started helping with the beauty pageant. I didn't know that there had been somebody way before me that had really done these—these pageants had really done a beautiful job. I was not aware of it. When I got started there was not a form that would teach me how to conduct a beauty pageant.

DS:
Right.

AR:
I mean I did it all on my own what I thought needed to be done and how it needed to be done and all of this. If there had been a format for me to follow through when I first started, it would have been a lot easier. But I'm not saying that what we did was good because we were almost doing the same thing that those people had done before us without our knowledge.

DS:
Well as a matter of fact, I think if we're looking through the folders it's pretty much the way it's—even though it changed to Miss Hispanic Lubbock, even pretty much the way it's done now.

AR:
Um-hm. Yeah, once we got in there and started working those young ladies, I mean yeah we would train them. I mean I would have the classes for them on poise, on how to walk up on

stage. We would go out to restaurants and we would sit down and eat and we would teach the proper way of stirring your tea. You know your placement, your silverware, your—all of these things. We would do that and then the fun part was always the makeup, doing the makeup, and getting out there and walking with high heels on stage and making the turns and the pivots and all of these things. It was fun. So actually with the knowledge that I had and the schooling that I had already had as far as modeling, that helped me a great deal. And I didn't do that thinking that this is what I was going to do, o into the pageant and conduct the pageants, but it certainly did come in handy once I got involved in that. And we used to have some beautiful, beautiful girls, and beautiful pageants. It was a great time for the Hispanic community. I remember those pageants, people would flock to the auditoriums, wherever we had the pageants. And we'd have so many people there and they would look forward to the pageant and it was a great time for everybody to come together and support those girls.

DS:

And what years were you involved with them?

AR:

This was back in the—I would say the eighties.

DS:

The eighties. Was this right after the *Fiestas* had formed?

AR:

Um-hm. Yeah. Yeah.

DS:

As a *Fiestas* it is now?

AR:

Well we started out with COMA [?] [0:43:34.6] and with the Spanish—the Hispanic Chamber.

DS:

Okay. So that's before they were still separate and then they formed?

AR:

Yeah. Yeah and then later on they separated but it was really a good time. The whole community would get involved. I mean we had people that were giving history of the Mexican Independence during the *Fiestas*, and we had people that would do poetry in Spanish. And as a matter of fact when I started our beauty pageants I wanted the girls to be able to speak Spanish to where they could introduce themselves in Spanish and conduct—well the interview was not conducted in

Spanish. It was conducted in English and the questions were—told to them in English and Spanish. So if they wanted to do it in Spanish they could answer in Spanish or in English, whichever, but they had to be bilingual. They had to be bilingual, and a lot of times we had to train them in the Spanish, in the correct way of pronouncing the words and doing all of this. So it was—it was all such a community effort back then. I think that as a Hispanic community, Mexican community, we would all come together at that time to help out and to participate and to support the young ladies that were candidates for the pageant. They were beautiful, beautiful girls. And working with them, we would instruct them in the folkloric dances, folkloric dances, and then, of course, they would their own dances as a group and then whatever talents they—and if they didn't have a talent we created a talent for them. [Laughter]

DS:

What was the most creative talent you came up with?

AR:

Well I think that one of the girls that did not have a talent, we had her to come up and do something on stage that was totally not even a talent but just—like I said, one time I said, “If you don't have a talent create one or we'll make one for you. If it means that you have to make tortillas on stage, make tortillas on stage, but just have some kind of a talent.” [Laughs] And I remember one of the girls—and we had girls that could really sing, and they could sing Spanish and we—there were so many of them that had such an ability, such a gift to sing, and some of the ones that danced and some of them that played an instrument. And we had one girl that absolutely got so nervous during one of our pageants. She was—if she was passing out—I mean it was like [gasps]. We were just blowing air and fanning cold air on her and doing all this so that she could—so she wouldn't pass out on us. I mean she was so nervous and her stomach was just like [gasps] and she kept saying, “I can't do this. I can't.” And I said, “Yes you can. Yes you can. Take a deep breath. Slow down. You can do it.” I mean we'd have girls that'd be running to the bathroom because they—they were just so nervous. I mean they just—I mean to perform in front of crowds, especially that many people where they had never done anything like this before.

DS:

For some of them it was probably their first experience ever.

AR:

Oh yeah. Yes. Yes, and sometimes they'd go so limp that we'd have to put them back up again. [Laughs] But it was fun and they would make it through fine, and then after it was over it was like, “Wow. Did I do that?” You know so they could do that.

DS:

So I asked you about the most creative. How about the most surprising talent somebody has that just made you go wow afterwards?

AR:

Well you know we had one of the girls that performed a flamenco that was really, really beautiful. I mean nobody knew that she had such a beautiful talent. Some of these young girls can really surprise you by what they can do and then others had to learn, and learn, and practice, and practice. One time we were appearing on TV, the girls had been invited to perform one their dances on television and this was one of the Mexican dances that they had learned as a group. And I think at that time I think there was lady, beautiful lady, her name was Sylvia Bennett I believe, that we had heard of that would teach these type of dances. So we contacted her and we'd go to her studio and we would practice and we would—and she would teach us the type of dancing that the girls could perform. And of course I would be there with them and I would see them doing all these steps and all these dances and it was fun. It was real fun. So the day that we were invited to go to the television station to perform one of the girls couldn't make it. I mean she was not there and we needed her. We had, I don't know, six girls maybe to do this. I don't remember exactly, but anyway, they all had to be there. Well this girl was not there and I thought, Oh my gosh. So I thought, Well not to upset the dance routine and all, I thought, I'll do it. So here I go and I put on the costume that the girls were wearing, I put my hair up in pigtail or *trenzas* [braids] and I get up there and we're all performing. We're all dancing and having just a great time, and I was not one of the contestants. [Laughter] And yet I got in there and we did beautifully and everything went off fine and nobody would have known that there had been one of the girls missing. And I remember later my sister said—she was viewing the program, television program, and she said—she told her husband, she said, “You know I won't doubt if we see America out there dancing with those girls,” and she said, “In a little bit here's this camera right on your face,” And she said, “See, what did I tell you? There she is.” And but it was always such a pleasure, such fun, and I have—it's not how much I was able to teach the girls or how much we were able to teach the girls, it's how much they would teach us also. I mean because we learned from them, and those girls now they're young—they're women that already that are married and have their own families, their own children, and whenever I see them it's such a great pleasure, such a joy to see them and they still remember. And occasionally you'll have somebody that'll say, “Mrs. Ramos, oh I was in your beauty pageant when—you know—and this and that,” and it's always a joy to hear from them.

DS:

And how about one that you saw that you know the first time was probably not top level but grew so much afterwards?

AR:

Well yes, we had some of those girls that would say, "If it hadn't been for the beauty pageant I wouldn't ever had come out and done what I'm doing now." But that's the thing about giving them—giving them a—they get an assertiveness of doing all of this. That they become so confident and they know that they can do things that they didn't think we're possible. So some of those girls—I mean so many of them went on to college. Of course, they had to have—they had to be in high school or college during that—it's a few years there, and so I think among themselves they would encourage themselves. That they would see, well somebody else is doing this I can't do and they would—so many of those girls went on to college. And that's—they had such lovely talents and it was so good to bring this out of them. If it hadn't been for so many of these beauty pageants that we've had, and not only myself, but so many other people that helped because there was so many people involved with our beauty pageants. If it hadn't been for some these beauty pageants some of the girls would never have met their expectations. They would have not ever known that they could perform or that they could do something that they didn't ever think they could do.

DS:

Let me ask a question that's kind of always asked as a—by people that go like—that they kind of look down on beauty pageants and that type of thing. What would you say to those people that look at it like, well it's using women as items? But you know from your perspective what do you—

AR:

Well I think that this gives the young lady such a great opportunity that why would you deny a young woman that ability to do that and to perform and to be someone? And it's not just beauty because you're not out there just because you're pretty. I mean you're out there to show the people that, yes it's beauty, but there's something else more beyond than that beauty. There's a talent in you, there's a gift in you and you bring that out, and you're helping the community. You become involved in the community. Each girl has had to have a platform that they study and that they work with and they continue on lots of time working with such a platform, whatever the choice of topics were. And so it gives that woman assurance and a confidence and become a little more assertive, and yeah they go on to become a better citizen of the community, a better role model. We have a lot of those young ladies that became role models. And they were also young ladies that were involved in church, and teaching, and then like a lot of them would do things out of the ordinary. I mean maybe going to the hospital to visit and helping under privileged kids, and so they contribute. They contribute to the community. So why should somebody say, "Oh she's out there just for her glory? You know no, no. I mean we should be proud of them because it's not easy to be a contestant in a beauty pageant. There's a lot of competition and you have to come above—above some of that in order to succeed in it or in order to become Miss Lubbock. It's not just all fun and—it's hard work. It's a lot of hard work.

DS:

Well you know you mentioned the platform. That's kind of the area where like a lot of, especially the ones that are already in college, that take what they're learning in college, whether it be psychology or social work, whatever, and talk about that and use that as their platforms also.

AR:

Um-hm. Yeah. Yeah. So it's a great opportunity and it's—we gave them—at that time we gave them a different aspect on life. We gave them something that they could grasp and really hold onto. We gave them the opportunity. We gave them hope. We gave them the ability to know themselves and how much they could—who they could become or what they could become by just believing in them and teaching them and just giving them the chance. That's all we need. We need a chance. Whether it be in whatever educational area. I think that if my children had not been given another choice of school I would have probably a couple of drop outs that wouldn't have amounted to much.

DS:

Yeah and it's interesting you go back to that because when you were talking about it I was thinking about the problem of lower expectations. Because that's a problem that you were talking about there, you know they were certain that they couldn't achieve at this level. And somebody that I interviewed, totally different area in sports, that got on to major leagues, they were talking about college and he was from Miami, inner city kid, and he wasn't prepared to go to college. He goes, "Because where I went to high school they weren't preparing you to go to college," he goes, "They're preparing you to be an inner city kid."

AR:

Um-hm. Yeah. Yeah. When I helped out—later—years later I helped out with—I know one of the counselors from Lubbock High School called me up and said, "Could you be a mentor? We have some high school kids that are not graduating because they haven't been able to pass their tests," I forget which tests they were. But anyway and she said, "We need people that have made it or people that are in the business world and to be a mentor." And I said, "Sure," I said, "I could be a mentor." So they had called on several people from the community to be mentors for some of these high school students. So we all met together and we were, I think in Lubbock High in a classroom, and they were explaining to us what the mentoring program was going to be like and what we were going to have to do to help these kids graduate from high school. And they were kids that had already taken these tests but had failed them and this was going to be their last chance. If they didn't make it they weren't going to be able to graduate. And they—we had like a month I think to help these kids make that test—pass that test, and I was assigned a young girl and she was pregnant already and she had taken this test like four different times and each time she had failed it, so I had to working on her. Before I could start on her I had to train myself

because I had—I mean it had been years since I had been out of school and all. So I went—I remember going to the Texas Tech bookstore and taking out—buying some books on basics so that I could refresh myself with the math and the English, the basic courses that they were taking and so I did that. So I had this young lady to come to my house twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays and to study for two hours and the first time that she missed a class, that she didn't come, I mean I was on her right away. I mean the next day I said, "What happened?" I said, "I don't have time to be scheduling you every day," I said, "So you have to be at my house at this time," I said, "Because if you miss we can't make up this—we don't have the time," I said, "We need to learn and to study as much as we can," I said, "I'm here to help you," I said, "But I'm not going to take you not being there or not calling to say something came up or you couldn't be in class." So anyway we—from then on she came and I stayed with her, and one of my other friends had been given another student also to help out. And she decided—my friend decided that it was just too much. She said, "I'm not going to be a babysitter for these kids," she said, "I've got more important things to do," blah-blah-blah. And I thought, "I mean these kids—I mean you have to really work with them. I mean they're used to doing what they want and when they—and they've never had anybody to really push them to really be there to help them." So these are the kids that have fallen through the cracks. This is what the counselor told me. He said, "This is all the kids that have fallen through the cracks." And I said, "That many?" I mean you know where—what is the—I think at that time we had Mike Irons that was the—

DS:

Ed Irons?

AR:

Ed Irons, yeah. And I said, "What—is he not aware of this many kids falling through the cracks? I mean how can this happen? What is his job? Isn't he supposed to be helping?" But anyway and she says, "America," she says, "There's too many of them. We just can't take care of all them." So anyway, I worked with this young girl and that day she was supposed to take her test I was so excited for her, and I sent her flowers to the school because I thought, "This is a big deal for her." Well the counselor calls me and she says, "America," she said, "She missed it by two points," or something like that. I said, "Give her another chance." She said, "We can't it's too late already," she said, "We can't do it." I said, "Listen," I said, "If you all had failed her all these years, all this time, if the school has failed her, she deserves another time," I said, "Give her—give her another time. Give her another test," and I said, "And I'll work with her again." And man we got in there and we studied again, and it was—she didn't miss it by much at all. So she said, "Okay," she said, "I'm not supposed to do this," she said, "But I'll go ahead and try to get her in before the deadline. Before it's over and she's not going to be able to graduate." So she gave her the chance, and she passed it, and I was so elated. I was so happy. I was like—

DS:

Let me switch out the tape here.

[Pause in recording]

DS:

Okay you were talking about the young girl that had just barely made it.

AR:

Well when she passed it I mean I was just like, "Thank the Lord." I mean and it really just brought tears to my eyes because I think, you know, this little girl was really determined. I mean if she had failed it like four times before, and she was still trying, it wasn't her fault that all this had happened to her. I mean she was still trying to make it. She was still trying to graduate. And if she had not been given another chance she probably would have gone another year or so or maybe not ever gotten her degree—or high school diploma. I don't know. But at least it felt good that I was able to help in a small way to help her get her high school diploma. But there are so, so many kids like that, and I think that a lot of times we're just not compassionate enough or we just don't take the time to help our young people. Especially the ones that are struggling. The ones that don't have this kind of help at home and if we—I don't know. When I was young and when I decided to drop out of school so that I could go work, I had a reason. I had a purpose in life. I mean I had to help my family make a living, that's why. [DS coughs] But some of these kids—a lot of them just drop out of school just because, well you know I mean ,they're tired of it or they're not getting anything out of it or at home they're not getting any help to make them stay in school and to achieve, to become someone, to do something. And I'm not saying that education is for everybody but it certainly does help. You can—it's good for you to go ahead and get your high school diploma and then maybe go on to college but if college is not for you, well at least you have made it through high school to where maybe you can get some kind of a decent job. But if we don't have a high school diploma and we don't ever get back to finishing farther education or a higher level or education there's not much of a chance that's there for us to achieve or to become successful. There's some of us that were lucky. Like myself, I mean I don't have a high—I don't have a degree from college, but yet I've been able to achieve a lot, but that's because I think the drive that you have in you, the ability to want to become something, to do more than what you're used to.

DS:

Well I think what you have though is that quest for knowledge. I mean because going back, you know, no matter how busy your schedule was and taking classes.

AR:

Yeah. I mean because really to have been involved in so many things and to have been able to do so much and still have a family that I still—we still had to see through school. And then after my husband died I continued the work and getting the kids through college, and paid for that, and hoping that they would do something with their lives. So it just takes—sometimes it just takes a strong parent to help their child, their children.

DS:

So how old were your children when your husband died?

AR:

They were pretty well up in age. They were teenagers. So I think the hardest part had already been done with my husband. He had been there for us long enough to where he had given them a good sound foundation.

DS:

Yeah, because I was just wondering if you had to play that role of father?

AR:

If it hadn't been for him that he had been there during those early formative years I probably would've lost my kids. They probably would never have gotten out of school or taken the wrong the direction. I don't know but he was with us long enough to where he gave them that strong foundation of love and that God and respect—all of these things that a child needs growing up. So you know we were able to continue on after his death. So he left us with a lot of beautiful memories.

DS:

What was his profession?

AR:

Okay, he—when I first met him he was working as a sheet metal. He worked with sheet metal, and then he went into the military, and then he got out and he worked with Urban Renewal. He worked there and then later on he was insurance and so—and I think that probably because of his work he was able to help us out so much at home. He would be the one that would take off and run the kids to practice and football or classes here or classes there and all of this. So and then of course be so involved in so many activities. So he really was someone that I—that we could fall back on, and actually that's exactly why I did everything that I did when I did. Because I thought, "Well if I fail or if I don't—he's there to pick me up and to continue on." So like I said if I hadn't has his support I probably wouldn't have achieved this much as we did in life but he was always—he was always there. But going back to the pageant it really was a beautiful time in

my life because I had so many people that helped us out with the pageants. There was so many people that were involved and—but we all worked together.

DS:

How many months out of the year was devoted to that?

AR:

Oh my goodness. It seemed like one was over and then we'd have to start thinking about new candidates for the pageant again and putting out notices and calling or talking to different girls and encouraging them. Because when you first approach one of them, "Oh no. Oh I couldn't that. Oh I don't have a talent," or you know things like that but you'd have to start right away. And we used to have—I remember we would call on different guest artist to come and perform for us, and some of those would be from out of town. We used to have this young man that lived in Dallas and he—he used to be from Lubbock. He had been here in Lubbock, and he had moved to Dallas, and was—I think after he graduated from Texas Tech, but he moved to Dallas and he was singing in Dallas. He was a cantor at his cathedral church there in Dallas and he performed in some plays in the opera in Dallas. And we had him to come a couple of times for our pageants to perform and he was just a handsome, good looking, young man. And of course all the girls would just ooh and ahh over how handsome and good looking he was. And so a lot of the people that we had to help us out in our pageant were just really just wonderful people. I remember Ariel, Ariel Fernandez, he was one of my workers. We worked together with the pageant and he was wonderful. And even some of the girls that used to perform—that were candidates for the Miss Lubbock, some of them would stay on to help out some with the beauty pageants. And that is great memories, it's wonderful, wonderful memories, and it's always such a joy to work with all these different people. But I think that the most that you get out of working with so many of them is to see when you can bring them out to be someone that they didn't know that they could be and give them—you're giving them that opportunity for them to come out of their little shells and become someone that they wouldn't have thought that it was possible had they not been given this opportunity. So I hope it continues. I hope that because it really gives these young ladies a lot to look forward to, and it seems like it just makes them become more assured of themselves and just stronger in what they can do. And I just have such warm memories of everything that we did and all the people that helped and it takes a lot of people to help, you know you're not doing it by yourself. You know you can't say, "Well I did all of this." No. No. It's never just one person. It's always a number of people that are always there to help. So I think that probably if they say, "Well we don't have anybody to do the pageant this year. Would you help?" I think I would probably say yes because it's a wonderful opportunity for all those young ladies. Wonderful opportunity, and it's memories that they will have for the rest of their lives. You know and it's memories that they can go back and say well and tell their children. "I was in the—I was in the Miss Lubbock Pageant," or, "I became Miss Lubbock one year," or what have you. One of the young ladies that became Miss Lubbock and she was quoted as saying, "Well—"

you know when she gave her speech she said, “Well,” she said, “Who knows I might become Miss America one day.” So you know that’s good for them. I mean if they can think of themselves as becoming Miss America one day, that’s wonderful.

DS:

And what about what it gives back to community? Can you talk about that?

AR:

What the pageant gives back?

DS:

What the pageant, and especially that knowledge that you try to impart?

AR:

Well I think that probably the girls themselves learn so much from it, that they in turn can help the community with other young ladies. I think that they can see—other people can see what we did with this group of young ladies and it makes them feel differently towards the Hispanic community because they can see that we have achievers in there and that we’re not just out there for you know to.

DS:

Yeah because I can think back for several years a lot of those girls have become leaders in their own rights.

AR:

Um-hm and especially like I said they continue with their education. They’ve become something that probably you know they might not have had if they hadn’t been exposed to all of this. Even the little bitty things that we would teach just had to set a plate setting and what fork to pick up or what dish that you were going to eat. All of that training that they get and how to—

DS:

You know and you’re right about that. That seems not a big deal but if they weren’t exposed to it and yet in a social instance later in college or later in life I bet it came in handy, purpose well served.

AR:

Yeah and well too, we’ve had some young ladies that have gone on to participate in other pageants and so that’s always good for the community, exposure for the community. But it just takes—it just takes a little—just a little work with them. Just teaching them a little here a little there and have to be—I think it teaches them how to be productive, young ladies of the

community. It gives them a different aspect of life as far as what they can do in the community. So the beauty pageant it's a beautiful opportunity for the young ladies and it's—it always brings out the best in—brings out the best in them. And like I said some of those young ladies that wouldn't have been able to perform because they didn't have a talent but yet we were able to find something that they could do and they were surprised at what they could do. Some that thought that they couldn't sing, perform. Some that they couldn't think that they could dance danced and some would read poetry or would say—I mean all of these things that they did and would never have known that they were able to do that had they not been given the opportunity to do the pageant, and their parents helped us out. They would encourage them and then all of the sponsors that would help with money, that would help—helping them buy something or buy tickets for them. You know just a lot of sponsors that would give their time and money for the girls. So it's a community effort, and it's not done just by the people that are heading the pageants. It's done by the whole community. The whole community helps in that.

DS:

Okay. Well thank you for sharing your time with us.

AR:

It's been my pleasure.

DS:

And were you ever expecting that you'd wind up here after starting off in Corpus Christi?

[Laughter]

AR:

Oh, Lubbock was not the place that I would've chosen because moving from down in south Texas with its beautiful—the weather and everything is green and lush and the flowers and all. And then we move up here and it's so dry and desolate and especially when we moved to Abernathy. I mean—and we think, “Why did we move up here? Why did we leave Corpus?” And of course when you're at that age you're leaving all your friends behind and you just can't handle it.

DS:

Well just think of Lubbock as a beach without the water. [Laughter]

AR:

But you know this is my home. I'd rather be in Lubbock than anywhere else. And there was a time when I thought, “Where would I want to live if I ever left Lubbock?” I couldn't come up with any place. I really couldn't, and I've traveled. I've been around our country some, but I really could not come up with a place that I thought I could call home. And I'm glad I didn't

really move or made an effort to move away from Lubbock because this is home. I love it. I really enjoy—I love the people here. I like the small town of you know we're growing, we're expanding and there's so much that's coming into Lubbock, some businesses and what have you, but it still has that small town atmosphere I think. And it doesn't take me an hour to get to work. I go up to see my kids and my daughter in Indianapolis and they have to travel. I mean it takes an hour, takes an hour and a half or take forty-five minutes or you know all this time and distance to get where they need to go. Whereas here, I mean we're there in ten minutes. [Laughs]

DS:

Exactly.

AR:

It doesn't take long at all and the weather here is just beautiful. I love the weather here. Whereas in other places, especially like where my kids are, it's cold, it's snowy, lots of snow, or it's gloomy, it's rainy, it's cloudy and the sun doesn't shine for days and so no I like it here. [DS laughs] This is perfect for me.

DS:

Okay. Well I really appreciate you coming in and I thank you so much.

AR:

Well and I thank you for having me. It's been my pleasure.

DS:

And hopefully we'll put an exhibit out there where the—everything you've put into the pageant out there.

AR:

Well you know like I said it wasn't just me. It was lots of people that helped out.

DS:

Well I thank all of y'all then.

AR:

Yes, that's right. [DS laughs] Yes, thank you again for having me and hopefully we'll see you again soon.

DS:

Well thank you. All right.

End of Recording

