

**Oral History Interview of  
Karla Rosa Vargas**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez  
July 25, 2018  
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 11<sup>th</sup> 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Karla Rosa Vargas as she discusses he journey through becoming an activist. She describes how she got involved with activism and her plans for activism in the future.

**Length of Interview:** 01:49:14

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### Keywords

Social Issues, Animal Rights, Activism

**Daniel Sanchez (DS):**

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is July 25, 2018. I'm interviewing Karla Rosa Vargas here at the Southwest Collection Special Collections Library. Mrs. Vargas is being interviewed as part of the Diversity Initiative. And Karla, thank you for being here.

**Karla Rosa Vargas (KRV):**

Thanks.

DS:

And could you please state your complete legal name?

KRV:

Yes, it is Karla Rosa Vargas. It used to be—I got a name change a few years ago now—and it used to be Karla Soria [?] [00:00:36] Lopez. Lopez is my father's name and Soria was my mother's maiden name but I changed it a few years ago because of things that we'll probably talk about in this interview.

DS:

Okay.

KRV:

So yeah.

DS:

All right. And when were you born?

KRV:

I was born in 1992 on May twenty-ninth in Santa Rosa, California. So yeah.

DS:

Okay. Well then, let's start working on your family history and find out more about your name. State your dad's name and where he was born.

KRV:

So my dad's name is Carlos Alfonso Lopez. And he is from Mexico. I believe he's from Jalisco. I don't know too much about him, honestly, because my parents divorced when I was two years old. So he ended up going back to Mexico, to my knowledge. I think he might have remarried and had another family, but we never really kept much contact. So I honestly don't even know if he's still alive. [laughter] I've actually been thinking about trying to, like, find him and just see where he's at, but it's kind of a difficult journey to choose to go into, because I don't know if I'm



going to like what I find. You know, just the fact that he left and never really kept in touch is kind of very telling. So my mom hasn't really told me a whole lot, and my mother's name is Ballina Soria Rojas. [?] [0:02:14.9] She changed her name back to Rojas, I think sometime when I was a teenager. Or maybe a preteen. It was Lopez as well as mine, but she changed hers and then a few years ago when I was I think about twenty—I think when I was maybe twenty-two years old, maybe twenty-three—is when I went through the process to change mine. And the reason was because my dad had just never been a part of my life, so I just felt kind of strange my whole life carrying his name. The reason why I didn't change it to my mother's name—Rojas—is because my mother was mentally and emotionally abusive when I was a child. So I have a very difficult relationship with her. There were a few years recently that we weren't speaking and that was my choice and we recently are trying to kind of speak again. Although it's just a difficult thing to manage because there's just still so much toxicity in the relationship. So I decided to change my name to Rosa Vargas, which is my grandmother's name on my mother's side. Or part of her name, I should say. I believe her—I might mess up the order—but I believe her full name was Rosa Aliana Vargas Pérez [?] [0:03:45.7] So I took Rosa Vargas, because she was always a huge just source of love and energy in my life as a child. I got to live with her for a really long part of my childhood. When she passed away it was really hard on my mother, of course, but also on me because my relationship with my mother was so just difficult that when I lost her it was—you know my grandmother was really that only kind of source of like unconditional love as a child. And my whole—my mom has like five brothers and so three of them were also here in the States or in California, and they all—including my mom—have a lot of trauma that they bring because they grew up in poverty and with an abusive father. So I don't really blame my mother for treating me the way that she did. It still doesn't make it okay, but I know that it's something that's passed on. So I just wanted to—I just wanted my name to continue a legacy of love and light and I felt like the only name that I felt comfortable taking that reminded me of that was my grandmother's.

DS:

And you mentioned you were raised by your grandmother. Did you—were you still in that Santa Rosa, California area?

KRV:

We lived—so I was born in Santa Rosa, but we kind of moved a little bit further south to Marin County. That's where I really grew up for most of my life. And Marin County is one of the wealthiest counties in the country. It's right above San Francisco. Right across the Golden Gate Bridge. So I grew up—my first kind of situation growing up was actually not with my grandmother. It was with this white Jewish family. [laughter] Because my mom was a nanny after my parents got divorced. She was a nurse before that. I think in like elderly care. She then switched to being a nanny, because—I mean, these family pay a lot of money. They have a lot of money for childcare. So she makes pretty good money. She still does it today. So I grew up with

this family whose two boys that she took care of who were about my age and so it was a very, like, weird place to be in. Because we ourselves weren't wealthy, but we lived with this family that had this huge house. I mean, their backyard was, like, insane. Like, we had a pool and there was a playground and there was—what I love is that there was this—they built it very soon before we ended up moving out, but there was a big treehouse. But there were two of them and they had like a bridge between them. That's how much money this family has.

DS:

Wow.

KRV:

So growing up with that was so interesting. I knew from the beginning that I was in a weird headspace, because I knew that I was not white, but being so light-skinned I blended in very well with white people and this white community. My mom very much pushed me towards, you know, just like assimilating. Because she knew that that would equate to an easier life. You know, she didn't really necessarily phrase it that way but she warned against me going to the "bad neighborhoods." Those were usually black and brown neighborhoods. So it was—like I knew something was going on here with race and with class from a very young age. So I was very angry from a very young age, because it was all very unjust. I could tell, you know? So once we moved out from this house with this family that's when—somewhere around there is when my grandma moved in with us, because she was living with one of my uncles before—during—that time. So she moved in with us and I think I was like a preteen when that happened. So those were really—you know, those are formative years when you're a preteen/teenager. And that's also really when I think—once my mother and I were not sharing the house with this other family the issues in our relationship were now in a different—we could be—we didn't have to hide our relationship, right? Because I definitely remember as a kid feeling like I had to hide my feelings and my struggles with my mom from this family that we lived with. So when we were alone it just got worse because there was no—there was no one to make us pretend anymore. So that was hard. My grandma, she did her best to mediate, but she also didn't speak any English so she couldn't leave the house very much. Not on her own anyway. She actually spoke no English whatsoever. So that was hard. So she was really the only source of comfort that I had for those really formative years. When she passed away it was not easy passing at all. She—you know, it's hard for me to remember what the health complications were, but I just remember that when she was hospitalized because she didn't speak any English it was a horrible experience for her. Because she became so confused. She really entered a state of, like, delusion. You know, I didn't know—I still to this day—don't even know exactly what was happening because I was a kid. But I just remember how heartbreaking it was, because she was clearly not okay. And eventually I think we got her out of the hospital and I think my family decided that she would go back to Chile in Santiago where our family's from—my mom's side of the family is from—and live with the two—my mom's two brothers who were still down there. Not too soon after she returned she

passed away in her sleep. So it was kind of like a—it was just like—I just remember it being so fast almost when I was a kid too, because she got sick and then she just kind of went like a little crazy and then suddenly she wasn't here anymore. She went to Chile. And then I get this knock on the door and it's my uncles and my aunts telling my mom and I this news. So it was—that really—

DS:  
Wow.

KRV:  
Yeah, was a lot. [laughter] It was a lot as a kid. It definitely just made—yeah, just made my relationship with my mom that much worse because she wasn't there anymore and now my mother was depressed. I was depressed. So it was just—it was a hard—very hard time.

DS:  
Yeah. So you're trying to balance all that and school work?

KRV:  
Oh yeah. I know. I know. My goodness. I was a really good student in school. I got all my work done. I don't remember my exact grades in middle school when that happened, but I mean, I've always been an A/B student—grade student. I think I've always known that education was the only way to get out of the situation I was in. By the time I graduated—or I should say by the time I was looking at colleges to go to I knew that I wanted to go as far away from California as possible, because I wanted to get away from my mom and get away from just this toxic family that I had. So I managed to do it somehow. I got into this private school in upstate New York. And looking back on it I really wish I hadn't chosen a private school [laughs] because it was so expensive. I did manage to get a lot of scholarships to be able to go, but I probably could have gotten a free ride if I had gone somewhere else that's, like, you know, not private or at least—it was a liberal arts college, so I don't know. If I had known more. I mean my family—my mom had never really gone to college. She went to community college, I think, a little bit. I'm not sure about my dad. But no one had ever gone to university, you know? Four year university, anything like that. So loans and financial aid—that was all just like a mystery to figure out. [laughs] But I knew that whatever—I had to do whatever I needed to do to just leave that situation.

DS:  
And how supportive was your mom about you taking off across the country?

KRV:  
She was supportive. She was supportive. My mom—this is what made the abuse in my childhood so confusing, and honestly it took me years to even accept it as abuse because I



justified it so much to myself. Because the nature of emotional abuse is manipulative. It's not—and like I said, knowing that my mom comes from a traumatic childhood I know it's not conscious in her. It's very much something that's just being passed on, because it hasn't been dealt with. She never went to therapy. Therapy is so stigmatized, right? In like Latino communities, we don't talk about mental health. That's like a weird white people thing. You know? That's how I remember kind of growing up with it. Therapy is you're crazy and *loca*. Like, whatever. So no one in my family—everyone in my family felt like that. No one ever was going to like go to therapy because their dad hit them. You just get over it. You just move on. So with my mom it was weird because she was very supportive of me in a lot of ways as a kid. I was really into theatre when I was a child. I loved to act. I've always loved just like the power of a stage, which I guess explains why I'm in activism now. I use my voice a little bit differently now, but it was this kind of like—she was proud of me in this way that was very almost—like, objectifying, almost? You know, “This is my trophy child,” kind of thing. I think my mom also kind of tended to push things on me that she wanted for herself. It was like she wanted to do her life over again kind of thing. So it was just so weird because one minute she would be like this loving, supportive person but then the next minute she would be just saying horrible things and—I think a lot of things you block out when you're mentally and emotionally abused, because it's like a coping mechanism, right?

DS:

Right.

KRV:

This is what my therapist helped me understand a few years ago when I first entered therapy. So it's hard to remember the specifics, but I do remember her making these statements about how her life would be so different if she didn't have a child, you know, and things about me being selfish and being like, you know—and just never—just things you shouldn't say to a child. Just things you shouldn't say to a child. And so it was just so hot and cold with my mom. I felt like I was always walking on eggshells. So it took me a really long time to just accept that my mom was toxic in my life. I just defended her so much to myself and to other people, too. I also remember one of my best friends in high school—she would make comments to me sometimes about how my mother treated me and the things she said. We kind of like sometimes make jokes about it too, and try to like—I would try to play it off. You know, like, “Oh you know. It's just my mom. She's overprotective.” And yeah. It just took me a long time to get that point. To say, “No. This isn't okay.” And even though I didn't—I started to accept that a little bit in high school, but I think I managed to kind of push that—push all these problems to the side when I went to college because I knew that I needed to leave, right? I just didn't really fully understand why. When I left I was able to just put all that on hold, because I didn't—once I was in college I didn't think about my mom, I didn't miss my mom, I didn't miss really anyone in my family. It

wasn't until I came back from college that I realized, "Oh this is still here. I have to deal with this now."

DS:

So what was that fresh start like in college?

KRV:

It was so great. My goodness. I really came into myself in college. I mean, like when I said before that I kind of wish in a way that I had chosen a different school, made different financial decisions, at the same time I really can't regret the path that I chose. Because I remember—I was flown into—the school was Ithaca College. They flew me there. Paid for everything for me to see the school. And that—that was like, "Wow." Especially for our family. I mean, my goodness, that was just like—if they didn't have me already then you know like—that was just really—it was really beautiful. When I went just everything about it felt right. It was some—I'm really not much of like a—I don't really believe really that much in destiny or things like that, but it makes me want to believe in that sometimes. Because it just—the whole trip felt so right. Everyone I connected with. The whole trip was a part of a—basically like a trip specifically for minoritized people. Mostly Latino, black, Asian, just anyone—any minoritized race to go and see. It was kind of a recruiting effort, I think, for the school too, because it is a majority white school. But still I mean I met so many people of color and white that I was like, "This is amazing. I love the vibe that I get here." And I think I went in March and it was kind of cold because it's upstate New York, but I still remember it just was so beautiful there. There's all these gorges and waterfalls in this little town. It's like a little college town right by this big lake and it just felt—I just felt so at peace there. And maybe it was just because I wasn't home anymore, but I went to one other school too. I think it was Earlham College in Indiana. They flew me out to their school as well. I didn't get the same vibe there. I liked it. I vibed with the people well. But at the end of the day I was like, I don't know if I can come to Indiana. It's just such a different culture. And Ithaca was such a progressive place. It's just this little bubble of—it's just this little blue dot in the middle of like a lot of conservative red mist. So it just felt really right. When I went there to start school it's like my whole four years there were just—every day was just a new discovery of like, This was the right choice. This was the right place for me to be. You know the first—I wonder—I'm trying to think timeline wise—like the first kind of major discovery I think that I had about myself was coming out as queer. At first it was like it was a journey. Because I didn't quite use the term "queer" at the time. But when I did realize things about my sexuality and my gender it was so easy there. Like, all my friends were so supportive. I really—it was just such a perfect environment to come out in. I really could not have asked for anything better. So it was just experiences like that in all those four years. And not just that, but I connected so much with the community there. I discovered a passion for music that I had always kind of had, but my mom never let me go to concerts as a kid. When I was in college I ended up becoming the local music director for the radio station there. And—not to toot my own horn—but it's one of the best

college radio stations in the country. So it was really cool to be involved with that scene because I managed to go—the year that I was the local music director I was going to concerts in the area—small ones, you know—small concerts in the area three or four times a week. [Laughs] Like I think it was my sophomore/junior year. So that became a huge part of me too, because I was involved with the school, but really not to the extent that I was becoming involved with the community. I just loved the people there. I met so many locals that were just so proud of who they were and it was just so beautiful. And just beautiful musicians. Amazing musicians. And people who were just so smart. I mean, you know, Cornell University is in the same town, so you go to a bar and you're like talking to all these people with PhD's and it's just casual but you're learning so much. So it was just a beautiful, beautiful four years of really just embracing these parts of myself that I felt like I really couldn't before. Which I guess everyone experiences, right? In college, to a certain extent. But I do think that Ithaca was a really special place for me to be in.

DS:

And so while you were there were you thinking about what you were going to do with the next stage of your life?

KRV:

Yeah. I mean, I thought I was going to go into the music industry, because that's what I was really doing a lot of in radio there and with—actually did a lot of interviews myself with musicians and you know I had a little radio show and all that. We did a couple of other shows as well. Some talk shows. We had one called—I had one with a friend—called Les Be Honest. [Laughs] Which was pretty fun and we just talked about LGBT things or just other things but from an LGBT perspective. So it was just really fun and I really thought I was going to go into entertainment. I had been acting in school, right? So—sorry, you had a question?

DS:

Oh no, no. I'm just thinking about all that, because I know you were talking about acting earlier and I was going, Did you carry it on there?

KRV:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, you know, I did a little bit of acting in college as well, but I really just like fell into the radio scene because I just found a community there and made so many good friends through radio and in the community through that as well. I actually, because of my job with the college radio station I actually got a paid gig at another—at basically the Top 40 radio station in Ithaca called Z95.5. So I was like their weekend personality. I got paid for that. I had some of the coolest jobs in college. It was really quite amazing that I was able to pay my bills with these kinds of positions. So I was like really thriving in Ithaca. I honestly didn't even think I was going to leave. I was thinking about just staying there because I loved it so much. It was really hard for

me to decide to go. But I realized that if I didn't—I talked to so many people about it and I realized that if I didn't leave that I might—in that moment—that I might not ever leave and experience other things. So at the end of the day I just kind of swallowed my fear and I decided to go back to California. But yeah. I really thought I was going to go into entertainment. Maybe stay in Ithaca. But when I decided not to I still said, "Well, I'm going to stick to this entertainment thing." And my first job out of college was—it's actually kind of horrible. I hate it so much, which is why I left—it was this job with a ticket brokering company. And basically what that is—or at least this job was—and it's perfectly legal even though I think now that it shouldn't be—but you know how you can buy concert tickets on StubHub now? And they're like way more expensive than the tickets that you buy directly from Ticket Master? So I basically worked for a company—which is apparently just one of many companies that do this—that actually buy these tickets in bulk and then resell the tickets at like market value on places like StubHub. So my job was to help with inventory management, which was just a lot of computer work. And I also tried to help with spotting new artists—like up and coming artists that aren't like mainstream and that people don't know about but are going to sell out and their tickets are going to be worth a lot. So I was helping with that but eventually I was just like—I just felt like—I think I was exploiting artists. I feel like I really—I just started to have a lot of ethical issues with it. And my boss was kind of an asshole so I was like, I need to get out of this job. This is not—I realized very quickly that was not—I didn't want to have an office job. Definitely didn't want to be exploiting artists for profit. So that made me realize I need to be doing something completely different. And on top of that I had moved back to California for this job with a friend of mine from college, and I was having all of these personal issues going on on top of this job that I hated. So my friend that I had moved back to California with, she ended up really falling into alcoholism, and drugs, and was just taking advantage of me and my family. Or, I should say, my kind of like pseudo-family. Because what I meant by "family" is this family that I grew up with. The wealthy one. They offered to help house her and myself for a little while, but I was able to find an apartment. We started having all these interpersonal issues because she was just partying and not really looking for a job. Eventually I realized it was a toxic friendship and I hit a really, really low point when all this was happening. Pretty much rock bottom. One night I just—or one morning—well, I guess it was night. Morning, kind of—but I woke up in hospital not knowing how I had gotten there, and it's because I had passed out drunk on the sidewalk and my friend had just left me there. Just abandoned me. And the next day when I confronted her about this she just thought it was funny. I just realized how toxic this person was in my life and part of why I had drank so much that night was because I had just started therapy. Because I was dealing with coming back and dealing with this toxic relationship that I had put on hold with my mom for four years. And those first few therapy sessions were rough. A lot of crying and a lot of just, you know, just taking me back. Taking me back to all of it. And so you know she took me out drinking because that was her way of like, you know, "This is how we deal with our problems is we drink." And that's what ended up happening and I ended up waking up in a hospital. That's just—that was when I realized. When she just laughed about it I was like,



This is so telling of the fact that I chose to have a friendship with this person. And this wasn't even the first person that was probably a toxic friendship in my life. There's been so many. I realized me dealing with my relationship with my mom is so important to my ability to have healthy relationships with people in the future, whether it's friendship or romantic. So that was just really the point. I mean, this was like really right after I, you know, graduated. A few months after. I was like, I need to really make some changes. So that was the big turnaround for my life. Yeah.

DS:

So I'm assuming you moved on from that friendship and the job?

KRV:

Yes. Yes, so I quit that job. It felt really good to quit that job, because—God, my boss was just such an asshole. [Laughter] So I left that job and I got my first position in social work. I moved to San Francisco and I started working for a women's homeless shelter. I was like, I want to just do something I know is bettering the world. And so that was my first kind of—well, I don't know. I think my life was kind of my first introduction to social justice, but that was my first job in social justice. It was pretty—it was just such an amazing few months of growth. Like, I was really taking my therapy seriously and I found through this job where I was helping these women—like, they were giving me—I know it sounds so cliché—they really were giving me so much. It wasn't just me helping them. For the first time in my life I was so exhausted with my work that I didn't have time in my personal life to deal with bullshit, you know? I didn't have time to deal with toxic people. It helped me prioritize. It helped me realize how to invest my energy. So I met a lot of—became friends with people who really were positive influences in my life now. With this job, too, I realized this is exactly the line of work that I want to be in. I want to be in nonprofits. I never want to go back to—you know, to just corporate jobs. But then, not too long after—a few months after I started this job, you know San Francisco is such an expensive place to live. I couldn't afford to live in San Francisco, even though I was working there and I was working there full time. I started part time, but I managed to go full time a few months into it, I think. And then I still couldn't afford to live there, though. So I lived in Oakland. I had to take the BART to work every day. I got really frustrated, because in San Francisco you have all these tech companies and all these young people who are not from the Bay area. They just—they're the ones who can afford to live there, so they move in and push people out. That's part of why the homelessness issue is becoming such a problem. And so I got really frustrated. I mean, just walking to work. Passing by people on the street—homeless people on the street—and then these young people clearly with a lot of money just walking by. Not even noticing. Not a care in the world, you know? I was just—I just got so frustrated. I couldn't even—I could barely pay my bills, and I was just feeling like I don't want to be—I don't like this environment. It was hard for me. I think part of it was just that I was—it was like a second awakening. My first awakening was my childhood. Realizing, Okay, things are a little bit unfair.



And then this was the second time where I was like, This sucks. This really sucks. I mean, the nonprofit that I worked for, too, had like a very limited amount of resources, and I just thought that was so ridiculous that we have all these tech companies in San Francisco pushing people out and not investing any of their finances to support the communities that they're pushing out to be able to do business here. So I decided that I needed to figure out my next steps. And thankfully one of my uncles and aunts they allowed me to go and live with them. So they live, like, also in the East Bay, but way up north. So in like Fairfield. The Fairfield area. So I couldn't—I was trying to figure out if I could still work at the shelter and commute, but it was just so far that I decided that I should just leave. So I ended up moving into my uncle and aunt's house to try to figure out what to do and so I got a job working for—it's like a credit bureau company. Basically I was kind of checking people's—doing tenant reports on people. So if someone wanted apply for an apartment we basically had a bunch of clients who had apartments or homes that they were renting out and we would do background checks. So I got a job working for them for a few months to save up some money. It was during—oh actually I'm not sure now—it was somewhere around the time that I started—that I moved in with my uncle and aunt—or maybe I was still in Oakland. I can't quite remember—but I do remember that my friend from Los Angeles—or actually she's from New York but she was living in Los Angeles now—she came up to Oakland to visit and it was that visit where she started talking to me about veganism and animal rights. That was, like, I don't think I knew it at the time but that was like huge shift in my life too. It basically was just like a day long conversation. We were just hanging out. I was asking her all these questions about it because I was really curious. I had never really explored it very much. I don't—I don't know if I'm remembering it wrong. I don't think so, because my friend attests to this too. I wasn't very defensive. Like, I really was very curious about it. And by the end of the day I had gone vegan. Literally in a day, which is so rare and never happens. But you know I just decided I would try it and if I didn't like it or it would too hard I just wouldn't do it anymore. And the reasons that convinced me to do it was actually not because of the animals. It was because we were talking—the questions I was really asking her a lot about was how the production of animals affects the environment. And for me what I was thinking as someone who had just worked with the homeless and the hungry, I was just like horrified by the number of resources that it took to produce food for animals so that we could then eat them. And less food is what that means, because they have to eat so much food in order to produce a certain amount of meat. And that really shook me to my core, because I was thinking about how that affects people. I was like, This is absurd. There is a billion hungry people in the world and here we are just using all these resources, all this water. I had just never—it just blew my mind. It just really was such an eye-opener. And so I was like, Okay, well I'm an environmentalist so I want to do this. This is important to me. And I remember thinking when I did it, My family is going to think I'm crazy, but I'm going to do it anyway. Because I've always kind of been the weird one in the family. You know, especially with being queer and going off to college all the way in New York. I've always been the one that's all over the place. So I was like, You know what? It's fine. I'm going to do it. And if I don't like it I'll stop. And so—what was I trying to get at? So I made

this switch. Oh and I remember thinking, I'm not going to be one of those vegans that's pushy. That's like—I'm not going to be an activist about it. I'm not going to, you know, tell—push people to be vegan. It's just me, it's just my choice. Okay. And so I remember thinking that and it's just so funny to think of that, because that's a huge part of my activism now. And so anyway. I moved in with my aunt and uncle and they were like, "Oh my God, you're like, vegan." It was weird. They were actually very accommodating about it, thankfully. Not everyone in my family is. Some of my family members are, like, really mean about it. Really, really mean about it. But I was flexible with my family at first too, because they were learning just like me. So I ate things I shouldn't.

DS:

About year was that?

KRV:

This was in—let's see. It must have been 2015.

DS:

About just three years ago.

KRV:

Yeah. Three years ago. Yeah. Because May of—it was in May of—Yes, so it was in May of 2015, which means I was still working at the shelter. Because I was working at the shelter until about—I want to say—was it August? It might have been around August. I remember I started working in Fairfield in August, or maybe it was September. So it was somewhere around there. So I was still in Oakland. That makes sense. I was still in Oakland when I went vegan. And yeah, so you know I moved in with my family. Now I was this vegan, and I was learning more about veganism with my family who was like, "You're crazy." I was working for this credit company, saving money. I was just like—I don't remember feeling lost in a way that I was desperate, but I was kind of a little lost. You know, I was just kind of like floating around. Living with my aunt and uncle and trying to just figure out what my next step was. So not too long after that in about December of 2015 my friend—or maybe it was January. But it was in the winter—my friend who had convinced me to go vegan, she messaged me. She said, "Hey,"—and she works for PETA—and she messaged me and she said, "Hey, so we do these, like, college tours where basically two or three activists drive all around the country going to different colleges with a different kind of, like, presentation about veganism. And you just go and you just basically sit there all day and you just talk to people about veganism. That's all you do." And I was like, "That sounds awesome!" This was like a new thing for me, so I was like, I'm learning so much and I was getting so passionate about it and it was an opportunity, most importantly, to travel around the country for free. And actually, they were going to pay me too. Not a whole lot, but they would pay for all expenses and on top of that pay me a small salary. Or stipend, I should

say. So I didn't know much about PETA at the time. [laughter] So I was like, "Okay. I'll do this." This is perfect, because I'm trying to figure out what my next step is and I know that I want to work for nonprofits and I'm really excited about this veganism thing. So this sounds good. So I was like, "Okay." I quit my job with the credit company and I told my family what I was about to do and they were like, "Okay? All right? You're going to go do something weird again. That's fine. You do you." And so I left and I think the tour started in January of 2016. So that was—man, that was another experience. [Laughter] I was working with two white women. They had very little experience and understanding of other issues. They were very informed about animal rights, but I quickly learned that they didn't understand a lot of human rights issues. And of course for me, from just my background and my work with the homeless, I was really shocked by the kinds of things that they said. So, you know, a few months—I think this position was about four months long. The tour ended in June of 2015—or 2016. By the end of it I was so fed up. I was so fed up with these coworkers of mine. I was fed up with my boss, because they were just so—my boss was just so, like—because I complained. I complained about the things that were said, things that were done. And nothing happened. I was just basically told, "Just be patient. Be understanding." Or whatever. I just—I remember that first experience in animal rights, thinking, I don't think animal rights is the right movement for me. I'm going to stay vegan, but this is not the movement for me, because you guys clearly don't understand these other issues. And that's the experience a lot of people have when they meet animal rights activists. So that was hard. It was really hard. I entered this job thinking that I might even work for PETA Latino at the end of it, but after that I was like, "No frickin' way. No frickin' way." And PETA Latino is run by a white woman, so, you know, there's so many problems with PETA that now I'm very well aware of after being on the inside and just from things that I've read and other experiences. So that was disappointing. But the incredible thing that happened on this tour is that I met my partner. Because one of the schools that we went to to do outreach was Texas Tech University. So of course in my mind, I'm looking at the map of all the schools we're going to and I'm like, "Lubbock, Texas? Oh God. Here we go. This is going to be,"—we knew it was Ag country. Like, you know, we knew that going in. We were warned about Lubbock. So of course, to my surprise, we get to Lubbock and it was one of the best days of the tour. Not just because I met my current partner, but because people were much more receptive than we thought. And I learned a lot on this tour, because I learned how to talk to people about veganism. I learned what worked and what didn't work. And that was really, really important because I think when you first—veganism is one of those things where you're so mind-blown by how fucked up it is that you want to tell everyone. But you're so passionate—it's like with any issue. You're just like, "Fuck these racists!" It's anything. You can be so aggressive.

DS:

That you turn people off.

KRV:

Yeah, that you turn people off. And so it was so powerful to have four months to literally every day for like—let's see. We would be set up usually by like 9:00am and we would be out until I think around three or four, maybe? So that's what? Three, six, plus we have to set up and take down, and usually we would go out and mingle with the—because we would always connect with the animal rights student groups at each college and coordinate with them. So it was long days of talking about veganism and animal rights. Every single day. Monday through Friday. That's what we were doing. Just such long work weeks. And on top of that you're living with your coworkers because you're living out of hotels, so it's just exhausting. So I really learned how to navigate those conversations. So for that I am so, so grateful. But yes. By the time we got to Lubbock I had started to hone in on some of these skills. And so it was a really good day. It was a great day. And then on top of that we went out to dinner with the animal rights group here on campus. Animal Rights Coalition. And so my partner is in this group. And it's funny because as a queer person I was not at all expecting to fall in love with a straight white man. [Laughs] That was, like, very not expected in any way. So we met and I knew that he was—had a crush on me, pretty much from the beginning. Because he was really just like loved talking to me. Was just asking me all these questions. Not about veganism, but just other things. A lot of—we talked a lot about philosophy, because that's really what he's into. We ended up just talking so much that he asked me for my number, and I was like, Okay, all right, this guy likes me. Whatever. I didn't think anything of it, because I was on tour, you know?

DS:

Yeah.

KRV:

I was moving around and I was trying to find a new home. I was trying to find another city to move to. I remember also thinking and saying to myself and to my coworkers, "There's no way I'm ever going to move to Lubbock. There's just no way." But it took only basically a few months for that to change. My partner Joey moved—or didn't move, sorry—traveled to visit me in different cities that I was in on my tour. He drove, like, hours to go and see me. And some of this was before we were even officially dating. So I knew that this guy was into me and committed. So by the time the tour had ended we had already said, "I love you," to each other. We were, like, an official couple. I was like, All right. Well, I have to decide where I'm going to move now. And so I decided to give Lubbock a shot. [Laughter] I decided, All right, I guess I'm going to try it. I've always tried to not let fear keep me from doing something. So moving across the country to go to school and then moving to Lubbock. I was like, Well, I've lived on the east coast, I've lived on the west coast, I guess I might as well try Texas. Something new. And if it doesn't work out I can always just go somewhere else. So yeah, I managed to stay here for two years before deciding to leave again.



DS:

Wow. Well, let's talk about that. When you first got to Lubbock to live, what'd you think of Lubbock?

KRV:

Well, I knew what I was getting myself into. And honestly, man, yeah. There's a lot that happened—that has happened in Lubbock. I've learned a lot. I've learned a lot, a lot, that I'm so grateful for. I really try to just approach life—everything—as just like a learning opportunity. I really hope that I keep that mentality forever, because I think it's so important as activists that we're always willing to learn, even in uncomfortable situations. And Lubbock has definitely been uncomfortable. When I first moved to Lubbock I was like, Okay, I don't have any friends here. My family thinks I'm crazy. Like, they really—they're just like, "What are you doing?"

DS:

Right.

KRV:

"You are just all over the place." And my friends even thought I was crazy, because they were like, "You're dating a boy? Are you all right? Are you okay? You're moving to Texas? Like, are you okay?" Because people in New York and California, their idea of Texas is like, I mean, like everyone is Trump. That's their idea of Texas. [laughter] So the fact that I was moving there people were really worried about my safety. But I was really impressed with Lubbock in some ways. I felt like there's so many—people are so friendly here. I started talking to other vegans and vegetarians in the area, and I just kept meeting more and more people that were either vegan or vegetarian or just curious about plant-based eating. Or wanted to eat more plant-based. Maybe not completely. I was like, "We need to have a potluck. We need to support each other. We need to have a community here." Because I know at least I need a community, because I'm out here by myself. Joey is in school so he has his community-network here, but I need a network. So I was like, "Let's have a potluck!" And so we did it and I think thirty, thirty-five people showed up. I was like, Whoa, this is awesome. It was so fun. It was in our apartment and it gave me a lot of hope. I was like, Wow. I can live in Lubbock. There's vegetarians here. So this isn't going to be too bad. So we started having more potlucks and eventually we were like, "Let's make this a thing. Like, Hub City Veg Community. Let's make this a grass-roots effort. Let's do some classes." Everyone—people were really excited and whenever other people get excited about having a space where they feel comfortable and energized that's what excites me in my activism. So we'll get to that today, but that's always what drives me. Is, like, people. I work for people. I work for other people. Not too soon after Hub City Veg starting to come to fruition I experienced—multiple times, for the first times ever—people who were vegan, animal rights advocates, but who were racist and homophobic and other -isms. And I was like, This is weird. This is weird, because the vegan community is supposedly very progressive and seen as a very



liberal space. So being in Lubbock was honestly a great learning experience. I think coming—really blossoming into my inner animal rights activist in Lubbock was actually in a way a blessing, because I firsthand experienced these people who were classist or transphobic or any of these. So it made me realize, No. Vegans are not this—vegans are not automatically progressive people. You can very much not care about people—about humans, I should say—even though you care about animals. And that is a really, really important realization that the animal rights movement as a whole needs to address. Because it's a really big problem. It's a really big problem. And as—especially now—as veganism becomes so—becoming just more popular. More mainstream. You're going to absorb the ills of society if you don't actively make sure that the movement remains an inclusive, safe space. So that's the issues that—some of the issues—that the animal rights movement is facing. And Lubbock made me realize that. So there's—founding Hub City Veg and managing it has been such a whirlwind for that reason, but also in my personal life because being in Lubbock and wanting to make sure that Hub City Veg is successful and reaches as many people as possible, I've also realized that we don't have space for bigots. [laughter] Like, this is not a space for you if you're a bigot. So it's been a process trying to stand up for those things with that organization and with that space. Both kind of professionally with the organization but also in my personal life, because what I started noticing that I was doing after moving to Lubbock—well, really moving to Texas—I was so invested with Hub City Veg being successful that I wanted to make sure we were as least controversial as possible. And part of that meant me and my own presentation of myself not being completely honest about who I was. Because I knew that if I told people—if I was outspoken about being queer. If I was outspoken about being gender-fluid or just any number of things, but especially those things. Or being a person of color, you know, being anti-racist. Like, those are controversial things in this community, because we're in Texas. People don't—people are not, you know, tolerant of those things. So that affected my mental health quite a bit. And at the same time I'm also dating this cis man—straight—well, not anymore, but cis man. So I felt like—I felt myself—not forgetting, but suppressing who I was. Like, totally unconsciously. Because I was so invested with my work being successful. Or a specific aspect of my work being successful. And so it was here in Lubbock that I started—instead of using “she-her” pronouns, I've started asking people to refer to me as “they” or “them” or just say my name Karla, or K, KR. And I had never felt the need to do that before—to change my pronouns—until coming here. Because when I came out in New York, you know, people were like, “Yeah. That's cool. I'm not going to put you in a box. You are who you are and whatever.” But here it's “Miss”, it's “Ma'am”, it's you know. And I get that it's a part of the culture, too. People are just—that's how you talk here. There isn't really like a gender-neutral miss/mister. There's no—I mean, there's “Mix”, but I don't really personally like how that sounds. I think—Mix Vargas—I don't really like that. But you know, with my pronouns though it was like—I didn't really make the change with my pronouns for other people. It was to remind myself. Because I felt myself slipping away. I was really losing sight of this part of myself. And feeling like I had to put myself in this feminine category all the time in order to be in public. You know, because you look at pictures of me in

college and my goodness, I had so many—this is not the first time I’ve had my hair cut short. I don’t even know, probably the fifth time now. But my hair was long when I moved to Texas. And it was long when I started the tour. It was long when I met my partner and when he fell for me. So all these things just really felt like—it was just so unconscious. So unconscious. And it just got to a point that I was like, I have to remind myself of who I am because this is really affecting my own happiness. And not just that, but it also just came to a point where I was like, Man, I have to put in some work in Lubbock but it’s such an uphill battle. I’m sure as you know, it’s like the amount of labor that I have put in to this organization in Lubbock and other projects in Lubbock it just takes so much to get an inch of movement forward. And it drives me crazy because I know that if I were in a different place I could be working with other people that we could be taking way bigger steps forward. Just way bigger steps forward. And I would be in spaces where I don’t feel like I have to hide who I am to do the work that I want to do. So it just came—I just came to a point in Lubbock—I feel like these feelings started maybe like a year ago where I was like, I need to get out, because I think I’m getting a little bit too trapped here. And it was hard for me to accept—it was hard for me to decide to leave because I felt like I was leaving Hub City Veg behind. But my other Hub City Veg organizers and I talked a lot about this and they said to me, “You have to take care of yourself first. You’re not going to be any help to us if you’re not happy here.” And I also realized that my goal with Hub City Veg was attained. It was successful. Because now there are people who are going to continue the work without me. And it might change. The organization might change. And that’s okay with me. It’s going to be whatever the community needs it to be. That’s what it was started for, was for the community. So I think it was hard for me to look at my leaving the organization as not a failure. As not giving up or just like running away. Instead looking at it as, You accomplished what you set out to accomplish and now you have different goals. Now your own understanding of these issues has also changed. Hub City Veg is solely focused on veganism. You know, mostly animal rights, health, and the environment. And really mostly for Lubbock we focus on health and animal rights. But because of my experiences here and in the animal rights movement as a whole with racism, with homophobia, with classism, and because of who I am as a person and my experiences I’ve realized that this—the work that Hub City Veg is doing is not where my heart is anymore. And so that’s what led me to move to my current work with La Raza for Liberation. Because for—since I’ve entered the world of social work or activism it’s like I’ve felt like I have to categorize my identity or like I have to choose one part of my identity and I can only work on that one issue, and I hate that. I want to work on everything. You know, all of these things are connected, so why on earth—why do we even have separate movements, you know? I’ve talked to so many people who feel this exact same way, where they’re just like, “We need dialogue between the movements.” And not that it’s not happening. There are amazing people who are doing that work, but I want to be one of them.

DS:

When did you realize that’s what you wanted to do?

KRV:

I think it was after my first animal rights conference in 2017. It was a horrible experience. [Laughter] I was really hesitant about going to the animal rights conference. It's the national conference and it was in Washington, DC. It was just, I mean—so I went there with a few friends of mine, most of which were Mexican. When we first got there I left the group to do I don't know what, but my friends were outside of the hotel—by the door or something—and this white woman came up to them and started talking to them in like broken Spanish, and was like asking them why Latinos don't care about animal rights and that they need to bring more Latinos into the movement and to the conference. And they were like, "What do you—like, what? Excuse me? We're right here. We're right here. Maybe we don't come to the conference because of people like you saying these kinds of things to us every time we show up." You know? And that was how we were introduced to the conference. You know? I wonder if things would have been different if I was there when it happened. I don't know. I don't know. I would have said something. They said something, too, but man, I would have gone off on this lady, I swear. But you know there were all these other instances of things like that that happened all throughout the conference. All throughout the conference. By the end of it I was like, No. This sucks. It was the same feeling I had when I worked for PETA. It was like, I hate this movement. This movement sucks. And, thankfully, at that conference I met a lot of other people who felt the exact same way. So it was like bittersweet because it was a horrible experience but at the same time we all bonded through that experience. And so I think that was really when it hit me that I wanted to do some kind of work that was different. After that conference a few other Latinx people and I were talking about starting La Raza for Liberation and creating a space and resources for Latinos in this movement to come to so that they don't feel alone and so that they have a place to come and complain about this kind of stuff and so that we can do something about it. And so that's really when this idea formed, but as we started fleshing it out more I realized this isn't just about creating a space for Latinx people in the animal rights movement. This should be about being able to work on—work in justice movements as a whole and work on—because the fact that we feel like we need a space like this in animal rights speaks to the racism in the movement. So addressing that isn't just—it's not just an animal rights issue, that's a race issue, you know? That's a class issue. So that's why it's so important to me that—with La Raza for Liberation—yes, we're creating a space for Latinx people in this movement, but it's not just limited to this movement. Because we recognize that everything is connected and we want to start building those bridges with people. We want to do outreach in a way—do outreach to our own Latin American communities in a way that resonates. Because right now these big animal rights organizations they just translate all their websites and their pamphlets into Spanish and they thing their job is done, and I'm like, "You don't understand how to translate to a different culture at all." And it's not even translating because really when it comes down to it everything, everything comes down to colonization. Everything. The way that we feel about animals comes down to colonization. And the reason why these big mainstream organizations like PETA don't want to talk about that is not because they don't know. I mean, maybe some of them. Not



everything who works for these organizations understand white supremacy and how it functions in animal rights, but even if they do understand the issue is that they're going to turn people off. There's a very real reason why the mainstream animal movement is mostly white people. Because they don't—you know, you start talking about colonization and racism you turn—people say, "You're being divisive."

DS:

Um-hm.

KRV:

That's their response. So with La Raza for Liberation I'm not here to educate white people. Y'all are going to do whatever you're going to do, and you know what? If it works for you—if you're turning people vegan if that's what your end goal is, which I think is unfortunately becoming just a consumer capitalist trend—fine. You do your thing. But that's not what I want to do. That's not what we want to do. That's not the kind of change that we want. We're not—I'm not interested in fighting for some sort of consumer capitalist change. I want to dismantle capitalism. I want the end of that. I want the end of that and if veganism is not centered in an anti-speciesist framework, which again really comes down to decolonization because of the way that colonization has affected our relationship with animals and what we accept is appropriate treatment for other animals. You're not being radical. I want to be radical. I want to address all of these issues and the only way, in my mind, that you can do that is if you address the root cause of all the issues and the more that I learn, the more that I really feel strongly that it comes down to land sovereignty and people being stripped of their land and not being able to grow their own food. Not being able to live on their land. To basically continue their cultural food ways. And not just food, but just their entire lifestyle is stripped from them. And when you strip land away from people, what happens? Why are people immigrating to the United States? What is the root cause? This whole issue with immigration, it misses—it's lacking so much depth sometimes. Even from—quote, unquote—"progressive" people. People advocate for being compassionate and why aren't we letting refugees come into our country? We should allow free immigration. Open immigration or just better immigration than we have now at the very least. At that's great. I'm all for that too. But let's look deeper than that. Because why are these people—why do these people have to come here? It's ugly. It's ugly and it's the United States' fault. It's our fault that people are being—are unable to stay in their countries. In their home countries. So those are the kinds of conversations that I want to have. Those are the conversations I want. I want to talk about the root issues, because I really think that when you look at those root issues that's how you see how everything is connected. And when you start attacking those issues you can have change for everybody. You don't have to work on a single issue, because it's all going to trickle down. And there's so many ways to do that. Personally, I have never been super invested in creating political change. Like, you know? Getting people to vote and things like that. I think it's great. I think it's great. I think we need that as well. But personally I know that my strengths and my interests lie

in a different place. You know, I think we need that kind of political long-term change. We need to be fighting to change these institutions, but I also know that we cannot wait for our government to change its mind. We really can't. There's very real suffering happening right now. People need relief right now. So my interest is in connecting people working at all the different angles. We need all the solutions. It's not—I hate the fight over tactics and like which tactic is better and which is not. I believe that we should definitely talk about tactics that are harmful. It's definitely not okay to step on some people in order to liberate others. But as long as you're not doing that we can use all tactics. We can do the political change. But we can also do the community investment. We can do the work that our communities need right now. We can pull together the resources, figure out a way to take care of each other right now. Because like I said, we really can't wait for the institutions to change. So that's where my heart is at now, and I'm at a place where I just want to learn. I just want to learn because veganism has completely changed the way—one of the most amazing things that veganism has given me is this perspective of looking at root causes and looking at how everything is connected. I've never—I mean, I remember kind of reading about that stuff a little bit before veganism. You know, with like intersectional feminism and things like that. But I mean, veganism really took it to a whole other level. Because when you look at how we produce animals it's just insane, and it really does affect—it affects all these issues. I mean, it really—it's just astounding. I remember when I heard about Claudia Patricia Gomez Gonzalez, who got murdered on the border. She was from Guatemala. I remember, I was looking at the history of Guatemala because I was like, How? This is insane—how did this happen? And I found out that the thirty-plus year war—civil war—that had happened in Guatemala that just ended in like 1990—I think it was like 1999? God, was it that soon? Well, it was in the nineties that it ended. But that whole war started because the president at the time was taking land, basically reclaiming land from an agriculture corporation. UFC, I believe it was. United Farm—no, United Fruit Company was the name. And United Fruit Company, of course, had really strong ties to the presidential administration at that time. So not only did the US see this as like a communist threat to take land and give it back to indigenous peoples in that country. They were like, “Oh communists.” But, on top of that, they had—this administration had really tight connections with an agriculture monopoly corporation. So it's like—it just blew my mind, because I was like, Everything comes back down to land. And agriculture. Agriculture affects so much. So I read that I was just like, God, this is why we need to talk about this stuff because we really need to understand just how interconnected it all is. Because then we're going to be that much stronger. If we can unite. If I can work with people who are leaders in different issues and different movements and we can start working together, I mean we can accomplish some incredible things. I really think that we can. So that's where my heart is at. I could probably go on forever, but that's where my heart is at right now. And I want to learn. I want to learn more and more about how these things are connected, because it just—there is so much work to do and it can be really, really overwhelming. You know, I'm just one person.



DS:

Let's talk about that. You talked about the one person aspect, but you had met this group of people. What's it like trying to start a new network for a new cause?

KRV:

Well, it has its challenges, but it's honestly been so rewarding already. I think the challenges lie in doing things—just doing things differently. Especially for animal rights. I mean, we're doing things very differently. We're not the first. There's an amazing organization called the Food Empowerment Project that's run by Lauren Ornelas, who is just an incredible hero and role model of mine. She has had just the same, if not definitely worse, experiences within the animal rights movement. She's been in the animal rights movement for like thirty-plus years. She started the Food Empowerment Project because she wanted to work on food worker issues. She wanted to work on farm worker issues, because she understood how, "If we're going to advocate for veganism then we're going to need to support the people picking our food." So you would be amazed how much resistance the animal rights movement has to this idea. It's just there's so much—there's just this idea of, "Well, that's not our issue. That's not what we're talking about." And I've noticed that it's not just the animal rights movement that's like that. It's a lot of other movements that are just like, "That has nothing—that issue has nothing to do with us." You know? And especially when you talk about animal rights, because people think it's a white, middle-class, if not upper-class, issue. So it's frustrating, because I'm trying to basically start an organization that says, "No, everything is connected. And we're going to work on everything." And this hasn't really been done a whole lot, if at all, so there's really not a template for me to go off of. There's organizations like the Food Empowerment Project that are inspirations and give me an idea of what I'm going up against, but we really are just so open to everything. And I don't pretend to have all the answers or know exactly. I mean, now we have concrete things that we know we're trying to do in terms of events and projects. But it's still very open to influence and criticism. I think that makes it really risky and challenging because the way that most non-profits go is you have a very clear board of directors, advisory board, "These are the things you're going to be doing." And this first year is—I'm specifically using this first year to just learn and meet people. And meet people where they're at. Both within the vegan movement but other movements as well. So it's radical. I mean, the whole thing is—it's founded in radical decolonialism. So our first conference is going to be in DC and again, it's like this situation where we're taking a lot of risks. The way—I almost even hesitate to call it a conference, because it's more of like a knowledge and skill share. There is going to be the kind of similar, kind of classic things in a conference where you go, you listen to talks, you network. But the end goal of the conference is, "Let's start building together. What can we do—what hands-on work can we do right now and start creating?" So we don't want to just talk about de-colonialism, we actually want the whole structure of the conference to be de-colonized. We're not going to do things the way that they've always been done just because they've always been done that way. We want to just try new things and we're going to see how they go. And some things are probably not going

to work. [Laughter] We don't know how big it's going to be, so that's going to be a challenge. We're going to try to estimate and have RSVPs and all that, but we're just taking a lot of risks and it's hard also for us to categorize ourselves, because we are basically trying to just work across movements. So it's tricky because it's hard to get funding that way, too, right? Because if you're—"Are you animal rights organization? Well, then you need to be doing more animal rights things." Funders are going to be like, "I don't want you to be talking about these other issues. You're taking away time from the animals." But then you look at other organizations and they might say the same thing. "Well, why are you talking about animal rights?" So it puts us in this really weird spot, but recently after the animal rights conference this year in July—or yeah—at the end of June, beginning of July something came up where one of cofounders, he was accused by a lot of people of not being—not treating them well. Other activists accused—accused by other activists of not treating them well, not paying them when they should have been paid. And so long story short, when my other cofounder and I brought this up to this person it did not go well, which was really disappointing because we were hoping that they would be willing to take some time and reflect on their behaviors and actions and try to move forward with us. And that's not what ended up happening. And the reason why I'm bringing that up is because this person had a relationship with a funder who was going to fund us basically for our first year. Everything that I requested in our proposal, which is amazing. Amazing. It was like eighty thousand dollars that I requested. So they were going to give us this money, but when this situation came up they decided to resign and not be part of the group anymore. They tried to take the money with them, basically. And that was exactly what I was afraid of. So this experience made me realize something really important about my activism and La Raza for Liberation in general, which was that I was really scared, I think, because I realized I had to make this decision. But I decided that I don't ever want to let money affect the ethics of my work. I don't want to ever do—I don't want to ever not do the right thing because I'm afraid to lose funding. I don't ever want to water down my message and be less radical because I'm afraid to lose the funding. Maybe that makes me naïve, young, inexperienced, I don't know.

DS:

You're charting new courses.

KRV:

[Laughter] There is—I know that you need money to accomplish things, but I also know that in the last few months that I've started reaching out to people all over the country that are doing incredible work with zero—if any—resources. We have each other's backs. So many people whose work that I admire are all about community. They're all about community. And it makes me way less scared and nervous to make this decision about finances knowing that there are so many people who are doing this just on a budget and so willing to work with me. So willing to just, like, open their home to me or organize with me or help me find a space or find a sponsor for something. I know that we're going to find a way to do the work. I know that we're going to

do it. Because I'm stubborn. I'm going to do it. This is the work that I want to do. I would rather—like what I'm doing right now. I would rather be living in my car, traveling around, doing this work that I love that I feel needs to be done than whatever the other option is. Because this is more important. Community, again, coming back to that community value—it's not about me. It's really not. It's about our communities. It's about doing what we need. So I've just made that decision for myself. I don't ever want money to affect my ethics, because that's the whole problem. That's the whole problem that we're up against. How are we going to preach that if we're not going to do it ourselves? So I'm not afraid. And it looks like the funding might come through anyway, so I'm crossing my fingers. We're going to see how that works out. But in the meantime I'm still going to be hitting the road. Still going to figure it out. So yeah. That's where we're at.

DS:

Yeah, and that's just around the corner, isn't it?

KRV:

Yeah, on Sunday.

DS:

Sunday? Wow.

KRV:

Yeah. It begins.

DS:

And you mentioned a little bit of it when you said DC when you were talking about the tour. Let me ask, when did you decide you wanted to do it and how did you decide where you were going?

KRV:

Um, wait. What was the first one?

DS:

When did you decide—

KRV:

The tour?

DS:

—that you needed to do a tour, and where did—?

KRV:

I had been thinking about—so it started with me trying to—or I guess, really planning on doing talks. So I was reaching out to different organizations and student groups and cultural centers saying, like, “Hey, are you accepting speaker proposals? I’d love to send you something,” and talk about, basically, how all these issues are connected. And founding it in—basically the talk was kind of going to be called—and I might—I’m probably still going to do them. But the talk was basically going to be called, “Comida: The Story of Our Food Culture and Health.” I want to talk about things beyond that too. I’m going to be speaking at Black Vegfest in New York City in August about similar issues, but really just like—my talk would really just focus on colonialization and how that affects all these issues, including things like gender. Just things that we don’t even think are related to each other. And just trying to make those connections. And so I was going to reach out to people about doing those talks. And while I was doing this—and getting some responses here and there—I was starting to also process these feelings about wanting to leave Lubbock and I figured, Well, if I’m going to be traveling to these places to give these talks anyway maybe I should just tour around the country. I had toured before with PETA and I know that there’s also other activist groups that tour, doing outreach. And so while this was happening and I was doing this outreach about doing talks, feeling like leaving Lubbock, noticing other people going on tours, I was also having issues with my employer—with the Ethical Choices Program because basically I was trying to bring up issues other than animal rights and classical animal rights movement is like, “That’s not what we’re about.” So I was like, Well, I’m fed up with this. And I also found out about other issues that related to why I wasn’t promoted earlier in the year. And so I just kind of felt like there was no growth with this organization in terms of my career so I was at a crossroads. I was like, Well, I don’t want to be with this organization anymore. So I quit. Because there’s nowhere for me to go upwards in it. So here I was without a job, trying to figure out how to go to these places and give these talks and I was like, I should just—I’m already broke so why not just move into my car and do it? It was half survival. Just like, this is just the reality that I’m in where I just don’t have the money to continue my lease and I want to go connect with activists in other places. I also want to be in a city or just in another place where I’m with people who share parts of my identity. So I just one day was like, Maybe I should make my living out of a car a trip? Maybe I should just turn this into activism. And I didn’t really take much more thinking about it to do it, because it just—I’ve always wanted to live out of my car. I’ve always wanted to try it, because I’m a minimalist. I think part of the reason why I’m a minimalist is because my mom was really good at not hoarding things. We moved a lot as a kid to different apartments and also living with this family for the first decade or so of my life. We didn’t have a lot of stuff, so I’ve always just never had many things. I’ve seen people live out of their cars before or live out of an RV. That’s ideally what I would like to do. I would like to have an RV. But I don’t have the money.

DS:

You know, as you said it I was thinking, There’s your tiny RV.



KRV:

Yeah. Yeah. You know those tiny houses, too. I've always wanted to live like that. And so I was like, Well, this is as good a time as any. I'm kind of being forced into it a little, but I might as well be positive about it and turn it into something good. So yeah, and then in terms of deciding where I was going, that was a little trickier because I had to figure out—because I wanted to just travel leisurely and just be like, I'm just going to spend time wherever I'm organizing. And that's the beautiful thing about this first year is that it is so flexible. I do have a schedule now, so I'm a little nervous about it because I want to be able to have enough time in each place to organize. So we're going to see how that goes. But yeah, I have a—I basically created this tentative schedule for the first year, because I knew that there were certain cities that I definitely wanted to hit and I just kind of filled in the gaps from there. So it's still really flexible, but I do have a timeline for the first year. You know, I might expand it for another year. It kind of just depends on how this first one goes and what I learn and just—it just all depends on what kind of support our communities need. That's what's going to drive this organization always. So the first thing I have to figure out is what do we need? What do we need to do? Or what—you know, part of my organizing isn't just going to be organizing events and projects, but it's also just—I just want to go and help people with their projects, with their events. I don't know when we'll get to a point where we can maybe fund other people's projects, but even if I don't have the money to fund you, let me help you fundraise. I'll help you fundraise. We'll do a bake sale. Or there's organizations—I can write a grant proposal, you know? Even if it's just a small grant—five hundred, a thousand dollars. Whatever I can do to support you. I don't feel comfortable with just going to these cities and being like, “Oh come help me with my things.” This is about community, again. So a lot of it is just going to be me helping other people with whatever they want to do. Yeah.

DS:

Well, much success with that. [Laughter]

KRV:

Thank you. I already feel a little bit overwhelmed with some of the projects I've promised to people. I mean, everyone's a sweetheart and I don't think anyone is going to blame me if I don't accomplish everything that I said I was going to accomplish, but yeah. I have quite a long—I have like a Google Doc and it's like my to-do list. It's like two pages long. But it's great. I mean, I'm a workaholic.

DS:

Yeah.



KRV:

So you know. And I guess I found the right career, you know? Being an activist. It never really—you don't really turn it off. You don't really go home at the end of the day. Self-care. You definitely need to do self-care. But yeah. It's hard to stop caring about the issues that you're working on. And they're a part of me. They're a part of who I am, so you know.

DS:

So you've gone a one-eighty from that little girl that didn't want to reveal her real hurt to this super activist, now.

KRV:

Um-hm. Yeah. Yeah. And now I'm even publishing things about my history and this interview is so cool because it's like just another thing out there now that's documenting some of these stories. I'm working on a book right now with a friend of mine who has a publishing—you know, a mom and pop kind of publishing company. She basically runs it herself. She's amazing. It's called Sanctuary Publishers. It's going to be a book about white-passing privilege. I think I said this earlier, but I think in communities of color sometimes we forget that racism isn't just something that white people do. It's very much something that we internalize in our own communities and push on each other. I mentioned this earlier with my mom really pushing me towards being friends with white kids. Having—my mom had white boyfriends growing up. So telling me not to go to the bad neighborhoods, the black neighborhoods. So it's those kinds of things that we need to talk about, because there's this anti-blackness that pops up and especially for people like me who are white-passing. We need to be aware of that, because it's so easy to fall into that narrative. It's so easy to just subscribe to this idea of success. And we need to talk about that. We need to address that. So this book is—my friend Julia asked me to be the lead author on this book. We're taking submissions from other people on it as well, which is so cool. I love the way that she works, because, again, it's community. The way that Sanctuary Publishers works as a community. It's like a communal effort. So that's just a reoccurring theme in my activism now. But I'm really excited because she asked me to be the lead author on this. So I'm going to be really diving deep into those kind—my own upbringing and how that affected me, but also it's meant to be a guidebook for helping other white passing people of color to recognize the privilege that we have and recognize—really try to utilize—how do we fit into the liberation movement? What responsibility do we have? What do we need to work on in ourselves and what is our place next to our darker brothers and sisters, you know? So I'm really excited for that.

DS:

Yeah. And there's so many out there. I guess you could almost—could you call it white-passing privilege?

KRV:

It's—we don't have a title for it yet, but that's the theme of the book. It's a white-passing people of color guidebook.

DS:

Yeah, because I mean it's a topic that others that I've interviewed—they've talked about how, "I was light-skinned. I could do this. My brother, who was dark-skinned, couldn't do this."

KRV:

Mm-hm. Yeah.

DS:

So people do recognize within the community, but whether they use that for the benefit of everyone is a different thing.

KRV:

Right. Right. Yeah. How do we use that, exactly? And I think there's also the really important issue, too, of addressing how we sometimes isolate people. Because I have felt sometimes very rejected from my own communities because of the way that I look. You know, sometimes people assume that I'm white or that I don't speak Spanish. So they'll just be like, "Oh you speak--? Oh sorry."

DS:

"Maybe you shouldn't have said that in front me," right?

KRV:

Yeah, yeah. So there's very real—[phone ringing] there's very real things like that too. [phone ringing]

DS:

Sorry about that.

KRV:

So basically we're going to be talking about all of that and there's another book project that we're working on as well, so it's exciting. There's a lot of—I am always happy to share my story now, because I want, maybe, my story to be a good source of learning for other people too.

DS:

Yeah, and I'm glad you let me take a little bit of your story down today. Because, you know, in twenty years I won't be here doing this. Somebody else will look you up again.

KRV:

Yeah. Yeah. How cool. I wonder where I'll be in twenty years. My goodness.

DS:

Exactly.

KRV:

What will have happened with all of this, you know?

DS:

Yeah.

KRV:

I wonder if I'll look back and be like, "Wow, that was so cool."

DS:

Or you'll be going, "I thought you said you wouldn't be here in twenty years." I'll go I'm sorry.

[laughter]

KRV:

Yeah.

DS:

Okay. Well, thank you, Karla.

KRV:

Thank you.

*End of Recording*

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