

**Oral History Interview of
Margaret Reyez Ceja**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
December 20, 2017
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Project***

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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 Margaret Reyez Ceja as she discusses her life and family. In this interview, Margaret describes moving to Lubbock, and her activism in the Democratic Party.

Length of Interview: 01:04:16

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Basic Information; her family's migration to the US	05	00:00:00
How her parents met; growing up	09	00:10:56
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Striking out on her own, meeting her husband; involvement with the Democratic party	16	00:31:47
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Keywords

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is December 20, 2017. I'm in my office in the Southwest Collection and today we're interviewing Margie Ceja. Margie, thank you for coming in today.

Margaret Reyez Ceja (MRC):

Thank you, Daniel, for having me.

DS:

And what's your complete legal name?

MRC:

Margaret Ceja.

DS:

Could you please state your date of birth.

MRC:

My date of birth is 2/26/63.

DS:

Where were you born?

MRC:

I was born in Bay City, Michigan.

DS:

Could you give us the same information on your parents?

MRC:

Yes and no. My mom was born October—I cannot—she's eighty-eight years old, my mother is, and my dad's eighty-seven, so 1927, I think.

DS:

What's your dad's name and your mom's name?

MRC:

My dad's name is Fred Reyez and my mom's name is Bridget Reyez. My mom was born in Shepherd, Michigan and my dad was born in Minneapolis, I believe.

DS:

So do you have information on your grandparents?

MRC:

Yes. My mom's mom and dad are from Old Mexico. They are from two areas, different areas, of Mexico. My grandmother is from Guadalajara, Mexico and my grandpa is from San Luis Potosí, Mexico. On my father's side, my—his dad is from Mexico and he was from coast Monterrey, Mexico, but my grandma San Antonio, New Mexico, born and raised, and my great-grandmother was also born and raised in San Antonio. So, [coughs] I know that as well.

DS:

Okay. And you mentioned your maiden name was Reyez. Could you spell that, because it's not the traditional spelling that people would think of, right?

MRC:

Yeah. It's R-e-y-e-z, is what the name—my dad's last name, R-e-y-e-z.

DS:

I ask that because since they do a full transcript that way, they'll know the correct spelling.

MRC:

Oh okay. Yeah, it is R-e-y-e-z, is what it is.

DS:

And you mentioned your grandparents had come to Michigan. How did that happen?

MRC:

Well, my grandparents—my grandmother was fourteen, I believe, and grandpa was like sixteen years old. They came all the way from Mexico to Michigan and their goal was to get up north, was to work, because they needed to find work and Grandpa, you know, married Grandma and he wanted to give her a good life. So his goal was to get to America. And they did share, within the family, to never stop down south. There was a lot of activity, negative activity, going down in the south, to pass Texas as fast as you could maybe through the nighttime. Just do whatever you had to do to pass Texas because you did not want to stay in Texas because there was a lot of racial divide, discrimination. So being a Mexican, they were told to, "Just pass Texas as fast as you can get. Just get out of there." So they started working their way to Michigan, and I believe I heard they worked little farms till they got to Michigan. They even stopped in Arkansas and they had my Aunt Connie, my *tía Consuela*. She was born there in Little Rock. I believe they may have had two—my uncle was born in Mexico. He was a newborn, so they traveled with a newborn and on their passage to Michigan, my Aunt Connie was born, and the rest were all born

in Michigan. They did farming, so they—it was a family of fourteen. They picked pickles, is what my mother would tell me. The family had to put all the money together and their goal was to stay in one place. They did not want to travel around because Grandpa, of course, wanted stability so he, with the money that they all gathered, they bought a farm. So this was in Quanicassee, Michigan. They were able to buy their own farm. Through that farm they were able to invite people in the Mexican community all the way from Detroit to come and visit the farm, and here is where they would enjoy activities like eating, playing the accordion. My grandpa was an accordion player. So different people around the state would bring their instruments, and they really loved it when the people from Texas would come down because they could, you know, open their house up to them as they were traveling through. So it was a good time for people. As I hear in the family reunions, everyone worked hard during the week and there was time to play during the weekend. A lot of times the activities that took place were the singing and dancing at grandpa's farm. And they say that people would come from all over the state just to enjoy, you know, each other after not being close to their language or being close to their food, they were able to all do this together during the weekends.

DS:

But what years was that?

MRC:

I'm going to say that must've been in—by the time Grandpa bought the farm it must've been in the fifties, 1950s, mid-forties, because by the time the sixties occurred, the kids were already grown up, Grandpa's children, and then they took jobs on at GM [General Motors]. So that was the place they would go to work, at General Motors. So they left the farm, you know, and they turned around and married their wives. And they did stick with—a lot of them did stuck with the Mexican community because they felt comfortable and they had things in common, so they would meet other family members from around the state or within their godparents, godmothers, things like that. This is where you would meet other people. So my uncles, they married and then they turned around and started working at GM.

DS:

When did GM start hiring?

MRC:

I think in the 1920s.

DS:

They started hiring Mexicans that early?

MRC:

They started hiring Mexicans very early. Very, very early. So, if my mom got married in 1956, they were already working in the steel mills in Detroit, already working there.

DS:

What was your dad doing?

MRC:

He worked in the steel mills.

DS:

Did he ever talk about that, how he started working there and all that?

MRC:

He did. He said there was an accident that occurred, because they didn't have OSHA [**Occupational Safety and Health Administration**] back then, and he saw one of his friends get killed in the steel mill. He got chopped in half my dad walked off the job, said he was never going back there again. He just could not bear the thought. It was too hard on him. So he tried to find work that was outside, so he ended up getting—because he—I believe he may have gone through depression. He did not want to be indoors anymore, ever. So he went through different jobs but then he eventually found a job and he became a project engineer over construction. So that was a repavement. So he became a union worker and her stayed there until retirement. But as a young kid he started working as early as fourteen in the steel mills. He was going to school. He was a sophomore in Detroit and quit school. Out of his family members, he was one boy in four girls. He was the only one who did not graduate from high school. The rest all graduated from Detroit Mercy High School. And then my aunts, in order for them to go to the private school, the agreement was they had to help with chores around the church, so my grandmother agreed to that, that that's the way they would earn their way to go to high school. [Coughs] And that's what they did.

DS:

So that's on your dad's side. How about your mom's side? What did they do as youngsters?

MRC:

Well, on my mom's side, they all became housewives but it did seem like definitely the ones who attended private school in Detroit, they were much more educated, much more refined. That's just who they were, because my grandmother was the big city of San Antonio, so she was just—she was demanding. She demanded expectations of them. And one of them was that they graduated from high school. That was an amendment that she wanted for them to do, the girls. She was very disappointed of my dad because he did not finish, always was till the day she died,

was real upset with him for not finishing high school. Now, my grandmother, since she came from Mexico and was so young, education was not a priority to her, but family was. It's always in the culture, in Mexican in culture on both sides, that you took care of family, you watched out for each other. But my aunts, my mother's sisters, seldom ever worked out of the house because their husbands worked at GM so they did provide for them, and they were in charge of the household activities.

DS:

Because GM probably paid a decent wage.

MRC:

Yeah, they all paid decent wages. They had health insurance. They had vacation pays. It was—they didn't, you know, hurt for anything. They did fairly well. And my dad's side—my mom's side did and my dad's side did. That's what they expected when they came here to the United States, they expected—that's what the grandparents on both sides instilled, to work hard and to do things right.

DS:

Did you parents ever talk about how they met?

MRC:

Actually, my mom and dad met in first grade. They went to the same school in first grade. That's how they met. My mom and dad rekindled when Grandpa would have his parties on the weekends. The music would be playing and Grandma had the girls cooking the food. I think my dad knew one of the brothers so he went over there to visit and that's when he rekindled with my mom. Well, he got to know who she was, he goes, "Hey I remember her from first grade," and that's when they started dating.

DS:

So when did they start having kids?

MRC:

Well, it was—they were married at least nine years, nine years later, before they had children; nine to nine and a half. But that's an interesting story, too, because my mother, she had pets instead of children because she really loved—she wanted to have children but she just could not get pregnant. So my mother said she went to a *curandera*. A *curandera* is a Mexican doctor. So the regular doctors couldn't get her pregnant so she went to a *curandera* and then this *curandera*—whatever she did, my mom was able to get pregnant nine years later. So my mom had her first child at twenty-nine, then after that she had five children back to back.

DS:

Where are you on that?

MRC:

I'm in the middle.

DS:

In the middle?

MRC:

Um-hm.

DS:

So you have five siblings?

MRC:

Two brothers and two sisters, and I'm in the middle.

DS:

Oh okay. So what was it like growing up? What do you remember?

MRC:

In Michigan, it just seemed like a really good place. Bay City was far away from Detroit but you knew about it. We lived in the Tri-City area: Bay City, Saginaw, Flint, and then became Detroit. But we stayed in our city, Bay City, pretty much most of our lives growing up. It was fun because we would see our aunts and uncles during the holidays. We seldom ever saw them during the weekday because everyone was working. So you got to see them during Christmas; tamales, sharing gifts, Christmas carols at Grandma's house—at my dad's house. [Coughs] And my grandmother on my dad's side would have the party. I believe the side that had fourteen—we didn't see them too much because there were just too many of them to see, so there was not a whole lot of communication with them. But growing up, it was just a type of city that everyone seemed to be from different parts, like their parents did, because what you had is a lot of people who immigrated to Michigan, World War II people, so you had people from England that lived close to you, people from Ireland. There was a—well, this was a little different. There was a Polish side of town, a German part of town, and then there was a mixed part of town. So it was divided, but you didn't realize that until you became older, that it was divided.

DS:

And what school system did you go to there?

MRC:

I went to the public school system.

DS:

What was that like?

MRC:

It was good. I mean, I didn't—you don't know anything different. It was—I think it was a good school system. I really liked that you got to swim indoors. Every single school and junior high school in Bay City had an indoor swimming pool, so swimming—being near the lakes, you had to learn how to swim. So that was a neat activity that you had. You had like time to exercise and enjoying learning how to swim. I liked that. The classes were good classes. They taught us well, I believe. They demanded a lot of you in the public school system. College wasn't expected of everyone. That was, I'm going to say, in an all-white community. It was not expected. You were expected to go work. I'm sure GM would've been the place for you to work, but then in the eighties, that's when it just went down. GM just crashed. When it crashed, I think the city crashed. It really hurt a lot of people from all over. No matter who you were or what type of job you had, you were affected by GM. So that did hurt.

DS:

What years were you in high school?

MRC:

I was in high school from 1978, '79, '80, '81; '78 through '81. [Coughs] Freshman, sophomore, junior, senior.

DS:

What were you thinking about doing—in your high school, were you planning for the future?

MRC:

Well, my sister was two years ahead of me so she was influenced by my grandma to become a nurse, so that was her, you know, expectations, Grandma's expectations of her. And the grandma from San Antonio told her that's what she would really love for her to do, and so that's what my sister did. She went to junior college and got an associate's degree, then passed her RN [Registered Nurse] so she became a registered nurse. So I was right behind her. So I thought, Well, I'll be a dental assistant. I liked teeth. I liked being in an office. So I went to junior high school and I got a dental assistant certificate in junior high school. And my brother, he was—there was my sister **Lupe** [0:17:28] and then my brother Fred. He went to the same junior college, Delta College - University Center in the Tri-City area. He became an electrician. He had his certificate and he went on to work for Dow Corning, and from there he—actually right now

he's retired. [Coughs] I truly enjoyed, you know, going to school. I learned a lot. I liked the health field, but I eventually ended up down here because my brother and I came here the summer after junior high school. We both just took off because we came to explore Texas. I think we came to explore our roots. I think we knew there was something else out there.

DS:

You mean after junior college?

MRC:

Yeah.

DS:

Let's back up a little. You know, growing up, you know, given that you had boys and girls in the family, were the expectations the same for both of y'all, that y'all have the same set of rules?

MRC:

It always just seemed we expected more out of my sister who was the oldest. It wasn't the female-male thing, it was **Lupe** [0:18:37] was the oldest. **Lupe** [0:18:38] was expected to just fill out any—like the tax returns. I think my dad had her filling out tax returns in junior high school. He would tell her, "You need to fill out this, this, this, and this." Even though my brother was a shining star in school, she was also really bright. She always got really good grades. But for her being the oldest, I think that's—my dad placed a lot of responsibility in her, because he was just—he just liked her to fill out paperwork. My brother, he was expected to have a job, so he did have a job all the way through—from sixth grade till high school. His job was throwing out the newspapers. He pedaled newspapers, even in the wintertime, on a bicycle. So, they were expected to work. Always expected to work. **Lupe** [0:19:38], since she went to college first, everyone was—everyone followed her lead. But it wasn't like my parents said, "You have to go to college. You have to do this." It was my grandmother who would say that. She would come to our house and say, "You guys don't have a choice. You have to do this." So she—the one from—grandma Aster from San Antonio.

DS:

And that's unusual because a lot of people during that time, they were just happy with, you know, trying to get their kids through high school. They weren't thinking beyond high school.

MRC:

That's true.

DS:

So, you know, what was it like, you know, as a young girl growing up there? Did you have friends? What did y'all do for activities? What kind of entertainment was available for y'all?

MRC:

Well, yeah, we had friends. On the week—like Friday nights, the YMCA, they would open—because we lived on the west side of town, so there was a difference between the west side, south side, east side. It was a little town but the west side stayed together. [coughs] West side junior high school, there was dancing. I think you paid fifty cents to get in. So Friday night you'd go out and there'd be a DJ and you'd dance. They'd sell popcorn, sodas, and you would get to hang out with your friends. During the wintertime, junior high school right behind my house, we had an ice skating rink that the city built. So, all we'd have to do was walk behind the house—buy our ice skates, that was a challenge. So Mom and Dad did have to buy us ice skates. So, I think, sometimes my mom would find used ice skates at the—like at the secondhand stores. But we all managed to have our own ice skates, and she'd pick up some really good used ice skates. So we would go into the warming house, which was provided by the city, and you'd have to buy your own hot chocolate. You would enjoy going to the ice skating rink. You started off as a double skate then your goal was to get to a single skate. So that was really neat. It really was. And your parents expected you home by eight o'clock. You didn't have a choice. You'd have to skate in the dark, and you'd be with a brother or sister and you'd load up. [Coughs] You'd take your ice skates off in the warming house, put on your boots, then get back home, and that was a block away. So ice skating was a big deal during the wintertime. During the summertime, the library was really close, it was walking distance, and that was really fun. You'd check—as a child, I remember always checking out books, records—because we did own a record player. So that was fun. And that would be my brother and I. We would go together and we would get books for my brother and sister, the younger brother and sister. That's how we would learn how to read better. And he—I noticed he was especially fascinated with World War II, so he always checked out World War II books. So he was fascinated and knew a lot about World War II by the time he hit high school.

DS:

You know, another component you mentioned there was the music, that they had records. Would y'all check out records?

MRC:

Yes.

DS:

What kind of music did y'all—

MRC:

As a kid I remember renting out the Mary Poppins, Mary Poppins music. I just really loved Mary Poppins. That's the kind of stuff you could rent out. And a lot of kid's poetry. As a child, I loved that. Yeah, they would have little stories you could check out on record back then. [coughs] That was fun. But my mom would buy us the regulars. We got an allowance every week. We had a Christmas club. So, I was able to buy my—the records that I really liked, I could buy them at Lucky's Record Shop, which was down the street. It was like two blocks from my house.

DS:

What type of music were y'all listening to?

MRC:

Well, we were listening to the Partridge Family, music that—Cassidy music, listening to Michael Jackson, Jackson Five. What else? I think Jackson—Michael Jackson was a hot one back then. And Bobby Jones, some guy named Bobby Jones. I remember some 45 [redacted] [0:24:45] buying some music with him. We just tried to keep up with whatever music was the latest and buy our 45's. I think they were ninety cents back then, so you had to save your money. That's the kind of music we would listen to. It was fun

DS:

And you mentioned striking out with your brother. When did that come about and why, when you said y'all came to Texas?

MRC:

Oh, that was 1982. We came here because the job market was really slow and we had just finished junior college, both of us had. Remember, he was in there two years and my program was three semesters; dental assistant. I could've gone another semester and got a full associate's degree but I decided to just take off because they said, "Your program's finished. You've already got your certificate." I did the graduation ceremony. So my brother and I decided to take off for the summer to Texas because one of his classmates from high school had moved to Lubbock, Texas, so we thought we'd stop in Lubbock and then we'd go to Houston then we'd get summer jobs then we'd go back to Michigan. We thought, Well, maybe it'll take the summer for the economy to get better. I just stayed in Lubbock, ended up staying here. [Coughs]

DS:

So the only person y'all knew was your brother's friend when y'all first got here?

MRC:

Yeah.

DS:

What was that like, when y'all first got here? How old were you, about twenty, twenty-two or so?

MRC:

Yeah. Twenty. Nineteen. I was nineteen and I turned twenty in February. We moved here in August—June. I'm sorry, June. June or July in 1982. Lubbock was a different place. It really was. You noticed the segregation right away in Lubbock. You really noticed. Things were different in this town. It didn't really bother me because I thought I wasn't going to stay here long anyway. It didn't really matter to me. It just was a place I never thought I would stay. I never thought in a million years I'd stay in Lubbock, Texas. My brother felt it right away. I don't know what he experienced here. Maybe he—I think he did sort of date a girl and she was a Caucasian girl, and I think he got some slack right away from someone around here. I think maybe her parents. It was just really disappointing. He was just like, "This is really"—you don't even know you're identified as Mexican in a bad way until you get here to Lubbock. You're like, "This is weird. I'm just a human being." And that's the way I was raised and it seemed like people in Michigan did not ever mention that. You never felt that, you know, since I was born there—and then you come here and it's like, "This is a whole different planet, Lubbock, Texas." So this is what I noticed, discrimination right away in Lubbock. It was—

DS:

Who were the first people you met or friends you started to make in Lubbock?

MRC:

I'm trying to think. Well, I guess I got—I didn't really make friends, I was just sticking with my brother. I don't think I made that many friends. But when I did, they were Mexican-American people and they were really nice to me. There was someone by the name of Big Frank they called him. I don't even know how I met him. He's dead now. He died. He had some health issues. But he was very nice and he invited me to his church. That is interesting that you ask me who were my first friends. I'm trying to think. I met a girl—her name was Molly—and we became friends and we became roommates, because we worked together, because my first job that I got was at Texas Instruments here at Texas—here in Lubbock.

DS:

What were you doing out there?

MRC:

I was working in an assembly line, just putting these computers together. They called them mainframes. They were hiring everyone so a lot of people came from all over the place. I just applied and I got the job and I thought, This is cool. I've never made this kind of money in my

life. I want to say eight dollars an hour. I don't know. There was a lot of overtime. So my brother and I both got jobs there so we were both excited. He really wasn't excited. He never—just being in Lubbock, he didn't like it. So I met a coworker there and then her and I became friends and we became roommates.

DS:

Where was she from?

MRC:

She was actually from Lubbock. She was born and raised in Lubbock. Her name is Molly, Molly Gutierrez.

DS:

Gutierrez?

MRC:

Um-hm. I became fond of her. We started taking night classes together at South Plains College, because South Plains College was downtown. She was a very good student. I remember that. She still lives in Lubbock. That's what I know about her. But my brother eventually moved back. He was with me working at TI [**Texas Instruments**]. I think we worked there together for about seven months. He had already had his application in at Dow Corning so they called him for an interview. He could not miss that interview so he said, "I'm going to have to just leave this job. I'm leaving. I'm getting back home. I'm going back home," so the goal was, "Go ahead and stay here and work and then if they decide to lay you off, which they will, just go back home." He said, "Okay. I'll do that." What happened is I never—we did get laid off but I never went back home because I met my husband, so that's what kept me here.

DS:

That's the story of a lot of people, right? [Laughter]

MRC:

Lubbock, the place where you meet your significant other.

DS:

So, I mean, you know, how long was that between the time you got here and your brother left and you met somebody?

MRC:

I'm going to say twenty-four months.

DS:

So two years. What was it like being in—away from family for a couple of years?

MRC:

Well, since I had my brother with me, it wasn't bad. But it was hard. It was really hard because you just wanted to get back with your family. You just wanted to be back with your, you know, brothers or sisters. But there's a part of you that realizes, "Maybe you better try to make it on your own a little bit."

DS:

And how did your parents feel about that, you striking out on your own as a girl?

MRC:

I think they were really sad. I think they wanted—because I was with my brother so that made them feel really comfortable and they knew that I was safe, but once my brother left, they were not happy at all. They would call me to ask me, "When are you coming back home? When are coming back home? It's time now. Just go ahead and quit that job and come back home." They called me quite a bit and I'm like, "I will be there." Then when I met my husband, they understood and they supported the idea when they met him. They came down from Michigan to meet him. They liked the idea.

DS:

So when did y'all meet?

MRC:

We met in the summer of '83, then we got married in the fall of '84.

DS:

That was pretty quick.

MRC:

Yeah. Yeah it was very fast.

DS:

So what did you do—and your husband is—

MRC:

Sergio Ceja. He's actually from—I'm going to say he's from Lubbock. He's been here since he was in fifth grade, but he's an immigrant. He came from Old Mexico. He's a graduate of Texas

Tech University. He's exactly what I wanted, you know, a hardworking person, and he's very much in touch with the culture. He speaks both languages fluently.

DS:

When y'all got married, did you continue to work or did you become a housewife?

MRC:

Yeah, I always continued to work. My husband said that was a very good idea that I worked because you never know what could happen to him or happen to his business, so it's always good for you to be independent, which now I can see, yeah, it is a good idea, because now I'll have my own retirement, I have my own independence. If anything were to happen to him, you'll at least want to make sure you have a backup plan. So I never did stop working since the day I got married.

DS:

How about relationships, did you start meeting other people to have friends and stuff or was it pretty much just work and marriage?

MRC:

Well, I was working and marriage and then now—I got involved in a few activities. I'm a volunteer for different organizations, like here on campus on the Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association. I'm the secretary. I helped found the organization's [redacted] [0:35:13]. I'm also helping with different races, like people—candidates. So I do that activity because I understand how important it is to get involved and make sure that our elected officials are doing what they're supposed to be doing. I've always had that passion for people to do the right thing.

DS:

In fact, I think the first—when you first got involved, it was probably a Democratic party, right?

MRC:

Yes.

DS:

How did that come about?

MRC:

The Democratic party, it was actually—I was talking to a professor at work on day, Scott Frailey, and I was actually helping Victoria Sutton—she's a Republican here on campus. She worked—she's a law professor but she was a female, she was running, and she had really good ideas. But he did remind me, you know, that I was a Democrat and I told them I understood, but

he said, "Get involved with your own party. You're helping someone whose—their party's never going to help, you know, you." I'm like, He's right. So I called up the Democratic party and I communicated with Irma Guerrero—she was our Democratic chair at that time—and I said, "I'm willing to get involved with my party. You just tell me what I need to do." So from that day on I started helping in any way I could with the Democratic Party.

DS:

What year was that?

MRC:

Oh, I'm going to say that must've been at least 2007, maybe even earlier. At least ten years ago.

DS:

Okay, so it was after LHFSa [**Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association**] then. For some reason I was thinking it was before.

MRC:

No, I think it was after LHFSa.

DS:

Okay. So then let's go back to what you were talking, because, you know, in 2003 was when they were forming the Latino Faculty & Staff Association and they sent out the call to everybody. What did you think when that came across your desk, that they were forming that—

MRC:

Oh, I thought it was real important to have an organization like that on campus. It's very important that we identify with the Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association. It's just something that's not even a question whether it needs to exist here on campus. It should exist here on campus. It has to be here. We are here.

DS:

Were you at the initial meetings?

MRC:

I was.

DS:

What do you recall, if anything?

MRC:

I remember people sharing how back then we wanted to be included, and we did not feel like we were included, like we were really a part of this university. It seemed like we were not a part of the university. So I think it was very important to be identified as Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association. Include us both because we both work here and we both contribute. As the Hispanic population increases, you definitely want your leaders to reflect what your population is. So it's just—I'm going to say we were either ahead of times or behind the times. It could've happened sooner but we had it. Of course, you were the one who helped lead the organization, Daniel, I appreciate that.

DS:

Well, this is more about your story so that's what we're going to talk about. [Laughter]

MRC:

Well, I believe in it.

DS:

That's good. You know, the other—and we'll come back and talk about LHFSA. We'll just kind of map things out. Another thing you mentioned was the Democratic Party, but you were also on the Staff Senate for Tech, too. What years was that?

MRC:

I'm going to say it may have been 2008 through 2010, maybe.

DS:

How did that come about?

MRC:

I believe there was—a position opened and I think I may have just put my name down to say I was interested in that and I got it. I got it. I don't think it was an election, I just got it, because it was an open seat.

DS:

Just like if you've—like if you've run one year, also, and you're not elected, then you're an alternate and if an open seat comes up, you can also fill one of those also like that. So you did that and you were doing LHFSA, so you were involved in two organizations at once.

MRC:

Yeah. And actually, I'm involved right now in LHFSA more than I ever have been. I think I'm giving a lot. As being a secretary, you have to keep up with sending the minutes out, sending

meeting reminders out, helping with the ideas, because you're on the executive committee. You just, you want to keep on raising the bar for that organization.

DS:

So this organization is now on its fifteenth year and you're probably one of the handful of people that have been a member of that since day one.

MRC:

Yeah.

DS:

Wow. I mean, and it's contiguous without—because you just renew every year.

MRC:

Yeah, I try to remember, because they've had different leaders so if they don't remind you to pay your dues then you might forget. I can't say that I've always paid my dues but I consider myself a member, always a member of LHFSA. It's been a great organization and I think it can continue to get better. I really believe in it and understand that it has to exist. It's essential.

DS:

And part of that organization, when it came out, there was a group on campus that was a department—and it's still here. It's the Center for Cultural Academic Advancement. I think that's the complete name. [MRC coughs] That would be run out of the President's office, and it was—Rosa Gallegos was leading the charge at the time. Then Juan Muñoz came over there and then he went on to become the VP [**Vice President**]. How crucial were they in helping LHFSA and other organizations like it continue to prosper and grow?

MRC:

I think they were very helpful, especially Rosa. I believe it was Rosa's vision to have an existing organization like LHFSA. Rosa is a kind person. She is a thinker and a—and has a vision. She has future vision. So I really am impressed with Rosa in the work that she laid out. In addition to that, Juan came on board. What I like about Rosa, she really is familiar with the area. She's familiar with the 150-mile radius. If you're at Tech, it's very important for you to be familiar with the 150-mile radius, because if you're just at Tech and all you are is in your bubble, you know, that's all you'll ever be. But if know there are people outside of this community that are looking outside—Arnett Benson, East Lubbock, North Lubbock—and they would love to come here to Tech. We have to let them know we're here for them, too, or, like I said, the 150-mile radius. And Rosa has that vision. Rosa understands that. And Juan was an outsider coming in from California. I think he kind of got it, whether he ever really did or not, I don't know. I didn't have a whole lot of communication with him, but he was instrumental as far as funding us and

supporting us, as far as LHFSAs goes. I know in his area, he had to look at different organizations just beside Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association. But he was never going to give you ideas of what you could do, what you should do. He's not that type of person, to where I think Rosa is that type of person who can give you ideas and share and care. But they were both instrumental in different ways.

DS:

And you mentioned that, you know, being at Tech, which we kind of jumped over, how did you come to be employed at Tech?

MRC:

Texas Tech, the first way I became employed is I put in my application and I thought, I'll just apply for something that I know I can do. So maybe I applied to ten different departments. I had several different interviews. My first interview, I believe, was like the agricultural sciences. I remember I didn't get that job. Then I had a second interview at the International Cultural Center and I got that job and I got it as a temporary. I didn't get put on right away. Once they did offer me the job, they gave me, like, maybe thirty hours a week. They watched me for six months and after those six months they said, "Oh okay. We believe you're a good employee. You'll make a good employee." So I went on and I started working full-time at Texas Tech. So I was real appreciative that they gave me the opportunity to work at Tech. I was excited

DS:

What position were you doing over there?

MRC:

That one I was doing secretary at the Division of International Cultural Center. I was doing recruiting for—also in that secretary position, they had you go to different schools and set up a little exhibit to let them know that the International Cultural Center existed and the different programs that the K-12 program offered. So I'd go to different elementary schools around the area. So I did do that. And I realized that I really liked to work with students and I decided to apply for a departmental position under a department on campus. That's when I got on with engineering. That's where I'm at today. But I managed to be very successful here at Texas Tech, moving my way up by also earning my college degree while here at Texas Tech; and moving up in position. I give that gratitude, of course, to my grandma who made us persevere and always told us to, you know, "Don't just settle. Do more. Work harder." The professors looked at me and the professors guided me. They said, "Hey, I want you to be an advisor. I want to help you. Would you like to be an advisor?" I'm like, "Yes.", "Okay. You're going to work with me side by side. This is a degree plan. Let me show you what it is. Let me show you what's expected of you." So I was basically their assistant in the advising sessions.

DS:

And now your title is what?

MRC:

My title is Chief Academic Advisor.

DS:

So it must've worked, huh? [Laughter]

MRC:

Well, we also have a dean who really [coughs] invests in his advisors. He believes, I think, in all of the college of engineering advisors. He was instrumental in changing our titles. I really believe if Dean Sacco would not have been here, that would've never happened, because you do not see that in the other colleges of engineering—of the colleges of this Texas Tech campus. You have to have a dean who's going to fight for you, and Dean Sacco I know has fought for us, to get the raises that we've gotten and to get the title that we've gotten.

DS:

You also mentioned you're working, you're volunteering, and then you're also going to school. When did you decide to go back to school and why?

MRC:

Well, it happened before I came to Texas Tech. Yeah, I started going to school, taking courses. My kids were in junior high school. The reason I did is because I always wanted to get my college degree but I didn't know on what. I had no idea what I was going to do. I just never thought about it because I didn't—when I came to Lubbock after TI, I did get a job at a finance company, so I worked there for ten years; ITT Financial Services. So I got to learn a lot about the finance industry, so I know I didn't want anything to do with numbers after that, but I liked to deal with people. I like to help people so this is why I got my bachelor's degree in psychology. You're just learning about people and learning to have empathy for people. Out of that degree, what I learned is that you never underestimate people or try to have empathy for people, because you never know what they're going through or what causes them to make the decisions that they make, whether they're good or bad or different.

DS:

Are you thinking about going to graduate school?

MRC:

Actually, there's a lot on my plate right now as far as doing the volunteer work with LHFS. I really want to—I want to be committed to that, and I also am committed to my job. So that's like

having job. Having LHFSA, working as a committee person or working as an officer, that's going to take some time. And I want to help with LHFSA more than I ever have before, especially now that we're a Hispanic-Serving Institution. It's vital that we have a presence and we have a voice on this campus. So I don't see myself getting the master's degree right now, or may never get the master's degree. I feel it's important that I do this work right here: be an excellent advisor for the students of Texas Tech University and to help with Latino Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association.

DS:

Now we're going to go back to the Democratic side because I know as part of that, you've helped several candidates over the years. Can you talk about the first candidate you helped with their campaign?

MRC:

Yeah. I'm going to say the first person I really helped and got involved with was Charles Dunn. He ran for Democratic Party chair. He's one of the people I helped that I believed could turn the party around. That took a lot of time and effort and I really enjoyed working for him on his campaign. I've done phone calling for various candidates, block walking for other candidates as well, like Victoria Sutton. She was actually my first one that I really helped. That was a treat. [Coughs] But she wasn't running as a Republican, she was actually running as—I didn't think—I think she was running, like, as an independent at that time. I recently helped Lala Chavez. That's a non-partisan position in the school board. I really enjoyed working with her and holding signs and working at the booths, just supporting her wholeheartedly. Then next person I want to be involved in his campaign will be Miguel Levario. I really want to help him. Then there's Samantha Fields. She's a very good candidate. She's a Democrat as well. I do plan on getting very involved in her campaign because I believe Samantha's campaign is the winnable campaign that has more Democrats in that district than it does in any of the other candidates. That's winnable. That's winnable and we can maybe boost Miguel Levario over the edge if we can get Samantha to win. I know there's Drew Landry, he's running. Samantha Fields is running against Frullo. I'd love to see her win as a Latina female, hardworking, smart lady. I think this is a winnable race with Samantha Fields.

DS:

There's another organization that I'd forgotten that you'd help on. That was basically started. That was CUDAD.

MRC:

Oh yeah, Citizens United Discourse Against Discrimination.

DS:

Yeah. Just kind of walk us through what was going on when that happened in 2010.

MRC:

Well, CUDAD was way ahead of its time. It was way before this current leadership. But we felt that something was going to happen. We felt that this type of leadership was very possible. I believe we were trying to prevent that. We were trying to prevent people from being discriminated against. That's why we came up with the name Citizens United Discourse Against Discrimination, because our Muslim brothers and sisters were being tormented, our Latino brothers and sisters were being bullied. So it was very important to keep this organization alive, Citizens United Discourse Against Discrimination. Whether it's police brutality or discrimination in the workplace. It was important for people to have a place to go and to share, and talk, and to organize. It was an organization that that's what it was to be organized.

DS:

I mean, that was early—that was 2010.

MRC:

We had a march. We even organized a march.

DS:

So by that time you were already involved with Democratic Party as well, weren't you?

MRC:

Yeah.

DS:

How did they feel about your involvement with—because it was—a lot of people thought it was part of the Democratic Party but it was its own thing, it wasn't—

MRC:

Right, it wasn't. I think they supported us wholeheartedly, the Democrats, yeah, because we were representing the same thing. But like you said, it wasn't part of the Democratic Party, it was just a people—it was a people organization.

DS:

A grass roots group.

MRC:

Yeah. Yeah, and it was a while back. Like I said, that one was way ahead of its time because we

knew—Citizens United Discourse Against Discrimination and look what we see now every day with this president, Trump. We're hearing things and we're seeing things we've never saw in our lifetime. It just is awful. There's no place in America for that behavior.

DS:

We can come back to that aspect, but I guess we need to go back to when Obama was elected. This is kind of like a backlash to that so we need to talk about that first. Were you—how active were you during those years when Obama was first elected?

MRC:

I was going to say I was pretty active. I was pretty active. I was pretty excited. I was pretty happy. But at that time when he was elected, we felt that there was, of course, 40 percent of the Americans who did not like that idea. It was a great time but then a scary time because there was backlash. There was backlash on our president.

DS:

I mean, just two years later in 2010, that's when all the—like Arizona, places like that, started coming up with different type of legislation.

MRC:

Yeah. "Show me your paper state." SB 1070 I believe it was.

DS:

Yeah.

MRC:

The female governor at that time wanted to just do away with Mexican people in her state. That's essentially what she wanted to do.

DS:

Just a state that was basically started by Mexicans first.

MRC:

It was our land and now they're trying to kick us out of our land. So this is where, I think, CUDAD was able to see the rating on the wall, that this was coming. What we see now was coming.

DS:

But Obama did manage to win reelection, but at the same time, you know, Democrats had lost control at both—

MRC:
Houses.

DS:
Houses. It became a stalemate, at best.

MRC:
And they gave the President a hard time. They would not let pass anything because he was a black man in office. A right-wing conservative group got together and decided they didn't want him anymore. They didn't want to see his face in the office but the majority of us voted him in, again, him and Michelle. We wanted them both in there. We were happy for them to be here. Local races do matter. These House of Representative seats do matter. If you do not vote, it hurts us all. As we can see, it happened to President Obama.

DS:
I think you have a different perspective than a lot of people that grew up in Lubbock and were in Lubbock, because you came from Michigan where it was already more egalitarian, everybody was more equal with each other. Then, like you said, when you came to Lubbock as a twenty-year-old, you saw right away things were different.

MRC:
Yeah.

DS:
It kind of mirrors what happened in the U.S. We went through this cosmopolitan period with the President, then a backlash, and now people are trying to take away some of those gains from the seventies. Sixties and seventies.

MRC:
Sixties. Our civil rights. I'm surprised as well.

DS:
So you as an individual—I'm not going to get into party affiliation—but what are you doing right now to try to help, to swing things back the right direction?

MRC:
I'm going to be voting, of course, to make things swing back. We've got to get the right people in office and support those right people, those kind people, people who are going to have a conscience, people who are going to vote for—care about people and vote for people. As far as caring whether they have medical care, caring whether they have a good school to attend, a safe

school to attend. That's my part, definitely going to be a voter. But as far as every day goes, I'm trying to just meditate, to be calm, to not let things get me down, because the way things are right now, you cannot lose your cool. That's not the thing that we have to do right now. We have to say, "Hey, I'm better than what's up there in Washington. America is better." Just keep your head up high and keep on doing what we've been doing, being good stewards of the city that you live in, being good stewards of your community and caring for everyone, because if you go down to that level, then we're in trouble. So, I think my goal is to keep on raising the bar and to help others, just like I do in my job, you know, helping students. I think just being courteous to them and helping them, they're going to go out into the world and they're going to make the world a better place. If they see good in you, they'll say, "Hey, that's a good person. I can be a good person," or, "The world isn't a bad place." No matter what they're seeing at home or what their parents tell them, you are going to be the example of what they see, the true example. And they'll realize, "Hey, my parents were not telling the truth. This is untruthful."

DS:

You know, another component about you is your religious component. Can you talk about your church? Did you grow up Catholic?

MRC:

Yes I grew up Catholic. I did. I grew up Catholic and I am involved in my Catholic Church, St John Neumann Catholic Church here in Lubbock, and I have been involved with that probably for twenty years. I'm in the adult education class. We do have a very good instructor who is actually a professor here on campus, John Zak. So he brings a different perspective to the classroom. The perspective is treat others the way you would like to be treated. Religion is not a big deal. Just because I'm Catholic doesn't mean that I'm always right. If someone else has a different opinion, we need to be open to that opinion and let them speak, hear them out, and try not to judge them because they do have their own ideas and how are we going to understand them if we don't listen to them? So this is the part, the religious part of me, that comes in, that we have to treat all brothers and sisters with humanity. Whether they're treating you that way or not, you still have to do it because that's what we're called to do.

DS:

We're right at an hour. Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to talk about?

MRC:

[Coughs] Well, I think that's a lot of the things that I suspected you would ask. I think we're in a good spot to close it up. I want to thank you for allowing me to interview and to share my experiences with you.

DS:

Thank you. We've been trying to get you to sit down for a couple years at least. All right, Well thank you, Margie.

MRC:

Thank you, Daniel.

End of Recording

