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Oral history interview with Graciela Sanchez,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Graciela Sanchez on June 25 and July 2, 2004. The interview took place in San Antonio, Texas and was conducted by Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas.

This transcript has been lightly edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

CARY CORDOVA: All right, we are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. I am interviewing Graciela Sánchez at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center [922 San Pedro, San Antonio] on June 25th, 2004. This is Disc One, Session One. And with that - with that intro - let me just ask you, Graciela, when and where were you born?

GRACIELA SÁNCHEZ: I was born here in San Antonio on April 24th, 1960 at the Baptismal Memorial Hospital - [laughs] - half a mile down from here.

MS. CORDOVA: And were your parents born here as well?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: My mom was born here 1923 - she will be turning 81 on July 1st, and my father was born in Tampico, but again, his father was born in San Antonio and his grandfather, great-grandfather. So I think on my dad's side, we still go U.S. at least, you know, somewhere in the 1850s or whatever, and he - his dad was born in San Antonio in 1900 in the same neighborhood where they still live. So it's just that they skipped that generation because of the Depression and go down - he goes in from the Depression - my grandfather - to Tampico to try to make a living and then later on in life, they come back - in the '40s - they come back to San Antonio.

MS. CORDOVA: So your father's family already had strong ties here in San Antonio?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes, San Antonio and I guess Laredo, although I don't know much of that history.

MS. CORDOVA: How did your parents meet?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Through my paternal grandmother, who was showing off her sailor son in 19 - probably at the end of the war, something like that - 40 - well, actually probably around '47 or something like that. So, again, both my mom and my father have roots on Veracruz Street, which is where they still live, and so met my mom on her way to work, which is right there in Guadalupe, in Salinas - that is a little corner store - was walking to work. And Samira [?] Sánchez stopped there and said, here, meet my son because you are very pretty and - [laughs] - and that was it. And they just - my mom was very, you know, just noticed this very respectful man with lots of manners and just thought him a very nice man, and my father I guess just kind of liked my mom. And they just started courting, which is not what my grandmother wanted because my mom is very dark-skinned so of course she never expected that, you know. It was just an introduction - [laughs] - nothing more than that. I think later on in life, you know - I mean the consistency that my grandmother kind of wasn't happy that my dad married this dark-skinned -

MS. CORDOVA: How did that appear?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I think - well, my mom has really been - again, I keep on trying to find those - that magic and those secrets and that wisdom from my mom because she didn't ever say negative things about my grandmother growing up, so I never grew up to resent her. But I think in those little stories every once in a while, if you ask a little closer and dig a little deeper, you will find that, you know, my grandmother said some hurtful things and so - you know, in the late '40s, '50s, and my mom and my dad moved to Chicago, which is where my grandparents then moved to, you know, on my dad's side. And so she was away from - my mom was away from her own mother in San Antonio, and the way she tried to resolve those problems was to write letters to her mom and say, you know, here is what is happening with the in-law. And my grandmother would write back and say, find out what her favorite food is, cook her that food for her and give it to her - you know, so ways to just continue to be loving and giving and just kind of forget those hurtful things and just try to win her over on some level rather than saying anything negative.

And so that was just a constant practice, and to this day, my mom - you know, by having a hard time, you must

make your enemies your friends or whatever. That is not as easy, I think, because, one thing is to have a mother-in-law and you want to try a little bit harder and then, you know, when you are fighting against the politicians that hate your – the right wing that hates the progressive left wing – you know, it might be a little bit hard. But anyway – so that is – those are the signs about, you know, kind of – just those – through the tías [dad's sisters] – or actually my dad's sisters and maybe brothers – there were moments that – if they were eight, nine, ten growing up, they would be mean to my mother. And so that is kind of the little ways that I found out. You know, and they would always blame their mother for saying, well, my mom says you are ugly, or, my mom doesn't like that you got married to my brother, or something. So, I mean, you know, now these women are in their 60s and 70s and my mom is the matriarch, you know, and is respected and loved because their mother died 20 years ago or so, so my mom has been the person that they look to if they are living in San Antonio or they visit from Chicago.

Long answer, sorry. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] No, no, that's great. Now, why did your parents move to Chicago, and when?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, that's a good question. I think, again, my grandfather – Adrian is my dad's father – Adrian Sánchez – he was an auto mechanic. He was also a sergeant in World War I and was stationed here in Fort Sam [Houston, Texas], and I think, again, he just probably traveled, you know? He was going to find a job, he was going to try to raise kids, and so – so yeah, he moves from here to Tampico, but then they come back up through Monterey and come back here to San Antonio to try to make it here. I guess it's not good here, so then they move up to Chicago and follow the stream, I guess, that many other people were following. Then they stayed there for a long time. I think my grandparents – my dad's side of the family came back to San Antonio in the '70s, so – I mean, again, some of their children are still there. They are my aunts and uncles, but most of them started coming back. But my dad was the one that just lived there for two years and just came back with my mom. And so we – from the Sánchez side of the family, we were kind of more isolated. You know, my mom's side was definitely here, and still is here. So, again, it's just – maybe it's mechanics really couldn't find jobs.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and then your father had been enlisted in –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: He joined World War II as a 17-year-old just to get out of the house, I think. He probably – it wasn't necessarily a healthy – I mean, he doesn't talk about it, but, you know, he probably just didn't want to be around. And as he had come here in San Antonio as a 13-year-old, I think, they could be put into elementary-school-age to learn, so I think he found it very awkward to be this teen with, you know, a lot of elementary school kids. You know, by 15 or 16 – you know, junior high was also now into high school then, right, so he was able to be in those classes, but he was just a little awkward and I think he just wanted to join, so he joined a year before. But it was at the end of the war, essentially. He was born in '28, so he was 17, I guess, in '45 or something like that. I haven't figured it out.

But what he ended up doing seemed to be a lot – he, you know – well, actually I want to say, a lot of parades – [laughs] – you know. He got to go around to, you know, to all those little ports in California and Washington, Oregon ports, and then I know that he did – that the Navy moved around and got to see other parts of the world, too, but his – you know, I knew that there was a gun that blew, and his hearing is really bad and all that sort of stuff, but he was never – I never heard of major combats – sort of, you know, anything like that, but it was more about pretty girls and parades. But, you know, like a lot of men his age, they do talk about that time of World War II and in order to –

MS. CORDOVA: Right and he was probably stationed in the Pacific.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Right, on that side. And he didn't have tattoos, and I found out just last Sunday that part of it was that he – a lot of his friends got tattoos and they all got sick because they were – it was a bad –

[Audio break.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So yeah – so basically, he just saw everybody else get sick from an infected needle and so he just kind of pulled away from – you know, from probably having a tattoo. And I was wondering because everybody else I know that was in the military in the '40s, you know, has a tattoo and he doesn't have anything like that. You know, again, he was also grounded, I think, in his early childhood, having been born and raised in Tampico or in Mexico. So, I mean, I use – I always am curious about, again, where we come from and why we become who we become, you know, and I think that whole sense of cultural grounding that I talk about kind of speaks to, like, just the differences between my mom and my dad in terms of, you know, their sense of who they are. My dad really – besides being a man, and I guess that helps – because that is the way this society works.

But the sense of being a Mexicano, but also very much a U.S. citizen, but just – you know, always thinking it's important to speak Spanish, always thinking it's important to maintain cultural traditions, and he thought us to sing Las Mañanitas and all those other songs and created a little choir when I was, like, seven and eight and

nine, and, you know, took all the neighbors and my brother's friends, my sister and myself and, you know, others just to learn all these little songs, and then to give those songs as presents to all our mothers on Mother's Day, and then taught us songs from Las Posadas and yet another moment and so we were able to sing at churches and - or the church that we were going to and, you know, to follow up and do those sorts of things. As a little girl, I mean, my first dancing instructor was my father. He learned to dance growing up, again, trying to hustle in the streets of Tampico, and he said one time he was rounding a corner and heard this music and saw this Afro-Cubano dancing at one of the cantinas, and he just fell in love with the guy's dancing and he says, teach me, and so this man, you know, taught my dad how to dance. Because I always thought it was my grandmother because, again, mothers teach - usually it's through the mothers that the culture seems to be passed, you know, but it was like the staff of Afro-Cubano that taught him in the ports of Tampico.

So, again, I know that dancing happened within my Sánchez family because they're all dancers, but he told me, it was a southern man that taught him. So anyway, my dad taught all his children how to dance as well. So it was just kind of fun to kind of learn those sorts of things that I thought were - I just took for granted; I just thought it happened in everybody's household. Not so.

MS. CORDOVA: And what kind of cultural traditions did your mother give you?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I guess it was - we talked about that and hers tended to be more San Antonio or Norteño based. My grandmother on my mom's side was an orphan and kind of got pulled from Monterey when she was about a year old and brought to San Antonio because - here's the story; let's see - so my great grandmother, Teresita, I guess couldn't have children, or wasn't having children because I don't know of any other great aunt or anything like that, but - so her husband was in Monterey once and kept on seeing this little girl in front of a house that seemed to be abandoned, and so he knocked on the door and said, it looks like you're abandoning this kid, and will you give her to me? And so she was just given to my great-grandfather and he brought her over, and that's who I get to know as my grandmother my Abeulita Panchita.

And so - and it seems like she was young, and there's a picture of her as a 16-year-old or such with a little parasol and an American flag in the back, and it's probably a July 4th celebration. So somehow she was getting into the groove of San Antonio, I mean, because that's what she knew, I guess. But I don't - that was kind of on some level - I was going to say assimilated but that's not the word because, again, she only grew up in this culture but I guess took on whatever was contemporary and was having fun. She was born, I guess, in 1893 so I'm not sure what it was that she was up to at age 16 but just having fun, but she ended up being - she did lots of jobs like most women, and so did her mother. My great-grandmother Teresita seemed to be a businesswoman who was probably one of the "chili queens." And, again, we don't know too much about that but that she did set up a spa and have a couple of other women helping her and lived downtown close by to the Spanish governor's palace, and moved away from downtown when the flood of 1921 comes around. So it seems like a lot of people were wiped out or maybe got scared and moved.

Maybe she had already bought a lot of land in the west side, or something like that, but the west side seems to be a little bit higher up and safer in the area that they selected, so she moved into that west side. And my grandmother also - great-grandmother also had tenants, like I guess she rented a room and then whoever she rented it from said, "Oh, you can subdivide and make some extra money by bringing in these borders." So they talk about a couple of boarders that ended up being famous, wealthy Mexicans, like one of the guys that started one of the - como se llaman? - where they slaughter the - the slaughterhouses of the west side, the mantanzas, right. So one of those guys ended up being very wealthy, and later in life when my grandmother needs some operation, they go to him and ask him for some sort of loan and the man just gives it away: it reminds me of when you took care of me way back when, when I got started, so I'm going to give you this and send you up to my doctor or something like that.

So that's how my great-grandmother was a businesswoman, and so my grandmother I guess kind of learned the same sort of thinking and washing clothes, becoming a nurse's aid and whatever the job that needed to be done, because she gets that good work ethic, because people liked her and kind of pulled her into different directions, so she had those sorts of experiences.

And I know that she was - my grandmother, my mom's mom, married three times, and so, again, it's like to know my mother, my grandmother would have just married once, because my mom just had this traditional sort of - what Ronald Reagan would probably love. But her mother had married three times - I guess she got married when she was 15 and then left that guy for whatever reason. The second guy she met in Oklahoma and married him, because I guess he - no, he was chasing after her and she was just looking - trying to stay alive I guess at that time and ran away from him and came back to San Antonio and he followed her back to San Antonio and told her to help him set up a store in San Antonio, and she ended up having to marry him because she had said, yes, she would marry him, but she didn't really want to marry him, and helped him set up that store and basically made it go under, because he was a businessman - I guess he owned a restaurant or a little store in Oklahoma.

And then I guess after a while they split up and then the third one was the grandfather that I get to know, who was the Casillas. So there was - Benavidez was the first one; Martinez was the second one - and that was my mom's dad; she never knew him - and Casillas was the third one who basically raised my mom.

And so, again, it's just - you asked that about what was the culture.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Actually, though, for me I know that the "chili queens" were an important here in San Antonio, but maybe you could explain why or what that lore is about the chili queens.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think these were Mexicana women trying to, again, make a living in San Antonio and downtown was where everything happened, from the Alamo down to where the Mercado is and the Mercado and the Plaza del Zacate, which I guess is known as the hay market in translation, something like that, and that that Plaza del Zacate was the area, I think, that my great-grandmother worked. And so, vendors coming from all over the region and being hungry and needing to eat, so the women put out their puestos and I guess the chili con carne is what they're talking about in terms of the "chili queens." And so it was - I understand that that wasn't the only thing. It was just basically a puesto for the men, or the tamales and chili con carnes to whatever else the mujeres would want to cook, and they had - they all had good businesses and were doing fine, and then I think from the competitive business - white businessman they probably got a little angry that they were - at least that's what we hear from our own stories, that they got upset and basically wanted to get rid of them because they were taking away business from them. So they started to impose all these health permits and so basically wiped out the women from the downtown area.

And yet, apparently the "chili queens" were so famous that, again, more of the white businessmen kind of exoticized them and pulled a few of them to go up to the Chicago World's Fair [1893] in, I think, 1898, or the 1890s, and so that's how they kind of got more of a national prominence in the storytelling, and yet they were basically wiped out. And so what I say is then they don't come back until, again, it's just the sort remaking of the history of these women. And so nowadays that all have their little stalls and they charge a lot of money, and they do have to follow city code, and they're only there on weekends and are allowed to be there on weekends. And that's it. But it's not the same re-creation of that time period.

I think we hear that people like Lydia Mendoza and a lot of the troubadours of that time, for nickels and pennies used to - while the women cooked their food and people ate, these other folks came around and sang for them. So, again, you can imagine Mexico more than you can imagine the U.S. when you think of those images. It's what still exists in Mexico that has been erased from San Antonio, unless it's, again, tourist - the cultural tourism that plays itself out nowadays.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, I know you've confronted that a lot. Now, when your father came back from the war, what did he do first? What kind of work did he do?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I think he was looking for jobs, and probably because his father had been an auto mechanic he kind of got into working with my father, and at some point in that time period he then started painting cars. I mean, that was what I knew him - he's an auto painter for many years, but I think initially probably did a little bit of auto mechanics. Although when I think about him being an auto mechanic I laugh, like he doesn't know anything about cars - [laughter] - but he does. He's just never been somebody that likes to fix things up in the same way, I think. What he always said is, I'm an artist; I paint bodies or something like that.

So, yeah, he was good at what he did and he kind of excelled also. So he would win - he worked for Chevrolet, he worked for Volkswagen, he worked for different companies and he'd always seem to win these little prizes while I was growing up so he was known as a pretty good painter. And when I was a little older, back in junior high and high school, he was able to become a subcontractor for Mission Chevrolet and then he started hiring and he started hiring kids from the local high school in town as interns for him, and always very frustrated that - the work ethic probably - well, I know it continues to change as each year comes along. But it was exciting for him to be able to hire kids from the local high school, which was my high school, and I was at Lanier Vocational, right, so - and we're known as the Voks, V-O-K-S, and people say, what's a Vok, and it was like if you look at the image, the icon, it's a screw basically; it's a little screw. [Laughs.]

And so that's the image there, but we were vocational students, and so that's where you had all those types of departments and auto mechanics and auto painting was one of them, so he had access to those students and for many of us to pull away from that vocational track was something to be done. And, again, each year less and less of the vocational stuff goes on, but that was, I guess, from the 1920s to probably the 1960s or '70s - I guess the '70s when affirmative action really starts to take - the late '60s when young people have more access to other venues to be educated a little bit.

MS. CORDOVA: And so, did your mom - did your mom ever work outside the home?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: My mom graduated from high school, which, again, from friends - her age it seems like not too

many of them graduated. And then my father just went up to 7th grade and then joined the Army - I mean the Navy. And then after that I think - well, during the war she went, like many of the women, to work at Kelly Air Force Base, and she ended up working the night shifts and just doing assembly work, and I guess she just did that for a few years until she got married and then basically became a housewife. And then I think that was my parents' agreement that she would stay home and raise the kids and he'd just make the money that was going to feed all the children. It took them three years to have their first kid, though, and so - first of all, she was 26 when she got married so people thought she was going to be a *hijas de Maria* - you know, how students changed - *como se dice in Español? Los Santos - Vestir Los Santos*, because she was just going to be an old matron and whatever, and then she did finally get married and then they complained because it took them three years to have babies. And so she was 29 when she had her first child, and then they had six children and they were like getting upset with her, like, it's time to stop having babies. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: So what year did your parents marry?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: In '49.

MS. CORDOVA: In 1949. So you must have been one of the youngest -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes, I was born in '60 - I was number five out of six; four older brothers and myself and then my sister. And I think there was a baby that died in between there so - I always say six but there is that seventh one that comes somewhere - I'm not sure - between myself and my brothers.

MS. CORDOVA: That must have been a challenge with that many brothers.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was. I mean, I think it was always keeping up with my brothers. I remember from being able just to walk next to them, right, so I learned my long stride from trying to keep up with my oldest brother, and to this day I have a long stride. [Laughs.] And then my third-oldest brother was just not going to let a kid sister around, so he was always pushing me away, pushing me away, and he and I just were always at each other, where I think my older two brothers - I was that much younger so they didn't bother me that much. This other one was four years older than me so - you know, he would play war with his friends and I'd want to play with them and he'd just push me aside. So I was just watching every move that he did and I just kept on being pushed aside.

But on the other hand, I think my dad did teach them to be loving brothers, right, and all that sort of stuff, so they were probably not as mean and ugly as they could have been - or, again, they didn't have that - they weren't taught that. They weren't taught to beat up on anybody. So I guess, again, I talk about that as an experience that - when I moved out of the house it was this major blow to what I understand of men, who are supposed to be respecting me and loving me and thinking of me kind of as equals. Again, it's just that one brother that kind of challenges that, but it has never been as ugly as I've seen sexism and misogyny really play itself out as I try to speak my truth or - and I guess it was also the reason, in relating to boys and then men, myself, you know, I have always wanted to be respected for what I think, and - even yesterday, just thinking of a conversation I had with one of these important men in the community and they're not interested in hearing what I have to say; they're just doing regular little chit chat, and if I put out something important they just kind of dismiss it. And so I'm always blown away by that because that wasn't my experience growing up, but it allowed me at least to say, "Well, I can be equal and I should be equal."

Thank goodness there were four older brothers, that they did get to practice, you know, to raise children, and there was definitely a distinction between taking care of the girls versus taking care of the boys. And growing up we traveled up to when I was 12, so as we went from San Antonio - you know, we started in small little trips up to maybe Corpus and then further down, and then the idea was to visit my grandparents and my great-grandmother that lived in - Tampico, so that we would know her before she died. And it was all of us scrambling to a car and all of us sleeping either in the car or small hotels or whatever as we went into Mexico. But we would rent two rooms and the boys would stay with my father and my mom and my sister and I - it was just always separated that way.

So there was some - they did take care of just kind of acknowledging that there were differences, and they never talked about anything else and there was no - again, thinking of all the - eight of every 10 women that I run into nowadays - in thinking of incest, you know, in their own families and things. Wow, again, I was so lucky not to have ever run into it because there were so many men in my life and with all my brothers they also have friends that would come around, and there were the grandfathers. But that never happened in my family.

So I think, again, it was people were just watching out all the time as well. I mean, to this day my mom still talks about, you've just got to be there, you've got to be alert, you've got to take care of everything that's going on.

MS. CORDOVA: Were your parents political at all?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: They've always been active in the community. They've always been involved. Mainly I saw them involved in schools - in the schools, my mom in the PTA [Parent Teacher Association], and getting my dad involved as well, but I know that there used to be programs in the '60s and the '70s through the church my parents were involved - or my dad even, through the church, he was somebody in the church for a little while and then they kind of moved away from the church. But there were probably community development projects going on in the urban renewal efforts of the '70s, and prior to that there was another project, which I can't think of, and I think my dad probably sat on their committee and made decisions, and then got frustrated about a lot of stuff.

I think - we were raised also to always eat together at dinnertime, you know, so we could play around when we got home, from like 3:00 to 5:00 but then at 5:00 you'd come home and help clean up and set up the table, and then we all ate together. And so it was just always that. And then within those conversations we talked about the day, right and so I would hear what they were thinking and I would hear if my father was on this committee and my mom was in some sort of activity, you know, what they were thinking. And that was within the community of Chicanos, and I think that's where at least I acknowledged that. They were holding our own Latino community to the same standards. I could see that all Latinos weren't always up to par to taking care of their own communities, but - my parents saying, well, that can't be. You have to - this is the trust you have to create. You have to be honest; you have to be all of these things no matter what color you are.

And so they were - so, those are the stories, again, and those experiences that kind of allow me to understand the complexities, I guess, so it wasn't just about the bad white people and the good brown people or - and I think it was just more complex that way. And again, nobody said it and such but it was just the storytelling that, again, nobody does anymore, and in those stories you find out - you're teaching. And we all got involved, so it wasn't just about what they were doing; it was what we were doing, and then they would get involved, and like something happened at school and they'd say, well, why don't you document stuff and why don't you try to talk to the teacher? They wouldn't just come in and solve the problems for us; it was just like, here are some ideas that you might take back and try to do. And you'd come back and say it didn't happen or it didn't work, or whatever. And I think on their own they were probably going around asking a few questions, but they were also allowing us to kind of create our own actions if we needed to as well.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of challenges were you finding in your schools?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I mean, again, because my mom was a PTA mother, whatever the situation was, from like bad food during - which nobody wanted to eat, and just kind of being concerned because a lot of the kids were eating free lunch, so people would complain, to just the types of classes that we could take or not - weren't even available and so kind of challenging that, or teachers who - a few teachers who might not really be supportive and we were wanting them to just be better teachers for us, were kind of things that we responded to. And again, we just wanted more and we figured if other schools were having access to these programs - because we would be in exchange with some of these students - or, again, I had cousins that would be at other schools who were like, well, why can't we have that too? And when the PTA mothers would seem to get together it seemed like those PTA mothers from our side of town didn't have any ability to change policies as parents whereas parents from other schools seemed to be able to do that.

So I think that from junior high to high school I started seeing class differences, right, and kind of saying, oh, well, because in that neighborhood even though they might be a mixture of white and Latinas, those parents are lawyers and doctors and over here what we have is working-class people who don't even have a high school education. I remember even between 11th and 12th grade we were devastated because they had switched out a really, really good principal and we really loved that principal, and he had worked really hard to offer students trigonometry and Russian and all these - we were trying to get Tejano history class, and he was going to help us do that.

I mean, I remember him going to classrooms: I need some kids to take Russian because we need to have Russian. I didn't end up taking it but he was: we need more classes so you all have more choices. You need to take these classes, calculus and things. So he expanded that and within the time that he was a principal, so many kids got to go get lots of scholarships to go through college. So that's what we wanted and we had kind of - since 7th grade - because my brothers went to those schools - I wanted him as the principal and he had been our principal for a couple of years and then they switched him out because politically he wasn't following the superintendent's desires and so they kicked him out. So we protested and we held demonstrations at independent school districts headquarters.

I think - I was helping to organize with my friends and lots of other people and we went before the school board, and like when I read something of course they said, some adult wrote that for you. It was like, no. [Laughs.] But that was the way we were treated and mistreated - anyway, just disrespected I guess, in so many ways that way, that we just kind of wanted to respond to those things.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that your first experience protesting?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, I think in 7th grade – it really was about food in 7th grade. [Laughter.] It was a really important thing. I mean, we protested even by bringing our own food and making a bigger deal of it, and people had food fights, and little things like that because, again, people didn't know how to protest. And so we did go to the principal and we did kind of ask, you know, for better quality of food, and that really never changed much. But I think it was in 7th grade probably when – most of that protesting started.

MS. CORDOVA: How were you learning your strategies for protesting?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: That's a good question. I don't think that I actually have thought through that, but, I mean, this is the '70s so – but I'll really have to think about that because I want to – I know that there was a lot of activism going on in San Antonio but on some level I don't remember it, and yet maybe – and I had, again, the older brothers, that I'd know there was a walkout one year in the '70s, so maybe I heard the stories and kind of knew about it and thought, well, we can do that here as well. But there was nobody coming in to organize young people at the junior-high level or when I was in high school either. But I think we were just a few years younger than the whole – you know, the '60s and '70s movement, I was 10 years behind everybody. But maybe it was being able to hear it and see it on TV or something like that. So that's a possibility.

But, yeah, I don't remember going to protests with my parents, say, and they actually weren't really impressed with the Chicano movement because – I think it was really about respect. They just saw that they were – that the people protesting didn't respect other people, didn't say it nicely, cursed, and so you've got to have your manners, like I think a lot of our parents, right? And they didn't use the word "Chicano" and then all of their kids go off – or some of their kids go off to college and we all become MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan] Chicano and all that sort of stuff, so they kind of learned from us what the words meant and so they've been better about it and they probably self-identify as Chicanos – Mexicanos themselves. But, again, it was about how you treat each other.

So I think – I mean COPS and Metro is across the street and the community is organized for public service, and they were organizing in the '70s as well, and my parents – and so those were adults like my parents, and they felt that they didn't like the way that they acted out and booed at city leaders and walked away and walked out, and so they just kept on saying, "You don't do those things." I think, again, if you asked them to understand it they probably couldn't understand it. But it's those sorts of things that – I mean, I still act out more than my mom would probably like me to.

But I remember like in high school probably being angry at that superintendent that kicked out my principal, so I would want to boo and say – Graciela, no – [laughs] – or I would just slouch down, and it's like sit up, all those sorts of things – you can't do that and you can't do that. And nowadays when I see the city leaders and their board and they're making fun of other people – I mean, they're being seen by masses of people and they forget that they're being watched, and I think, oh, that's why – that's why – be alert, be respectful, and people notice. Because yesterday the city mayor was making fun of about two or three people that walked up, and it was all as a jest – as a joke, and people laughed in the audience and I thought, well, I don't know; that person must feel, okay, he's going to laugh and it's going to hurt – it's hurting. So it's like – I just thought that was problematic coming from the mayor. And I'm sure he didn't have any mean-spiritedness out of it, or he just doesn't understand the consequences.

That's too long of an answer.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, to go back to your high school, now, what did you want to be when you grew up, in high school?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I was very involved in everything. In growing up, again, having four older brothers I think – they were in school before we were in school. Because my parents were involved, you know, some teachers would give them books, so my sister and I had all these books to play around with and to underline and scratch up. So we played school all the time, right, and so – and taught – and we'd always bring in all our friends to teach – you know, to have something to do to entertain us – I guess three, four, and five, or whatever your age, and then when we finally went to school, I really enjoyed going to school and socializing, where my sister liked school but didn't like it for the social reasons that I did.

And so I just kind of took anything that was extracurricular just to be involved. So I did band, and all my brothers had done band, so, again, music is just part of us, but my brothers were brass players and they played trumpet and trombones but I had to play something that was different so I wouldn't be like them. And my parents also talked about being different, to always be different, always be different; don't be like everybody else. Don't follow the sheep, don't try to – if something's wrong and everybody else is going away from it, follow through, and people may not like you, people may say you're different and ugly and whatever, but that's okay. You have to be different because that's going to be good for the community. Just don't follow the sheep. Especially my



father said that.

So therefore I couldn't – I had to play French horn so that I wouldn't be like my brothers. They didn't do drama so – there was a new teacher so we did drama, and I ran away from my friends because I didn't want them to follow me there so I could do something by myself, and all my friends followed and so we did drama and we excelled there. So there were a lot of the arts definitely involved in all of this. But any other after-school extracurricular project, I would be doing it. I think when I probably left to college I was thinking of being – I probably thought, what would it mean to be a city councilperson or a leader, a politician of some sort? I could probably do better than what they're doing. But I didn't necessarily – this is probably the first time I say it out loud, but that might be something I was thinking, and I think I was that naïve also on some level, because then I think in college I was realizing, that's not at all what I want to do and I wouldn't want to be part of the system, and kind of being able to see systems and institutionalized – racism, sexism, homophobia and all of that.

But I think that's kind of – and I was going to come back – my parents had also said, come back home, you know, people – not really saying, Graciela, you need to come back, but kind of saying, notice how kids are going away to school but they're not coming back home. All your brothers' friends are going away but not coming back home. So, again, affirmative action, that's really good for San Antonio but then a lot of people don't come back. And many haven't come back, but – so it was really important for them to have us come back, and so I think we've all come back except one. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: That's pretty good. What about the process of applying to Yale? How did that come about?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think – the brother that I fought ended up going to every school. He went to prep school and there was – some Chicanos did what's called the Wolverine – a Chicano group of people raise money and somehow made contact with some professors that were in the East Coast and somehow got one or two kids a year to go to a summer program like Choate and Worcester and little private schools. And so my brother, when he was 14, got to go and finished up there and then ended up going to Yale. And so like we followed – when he went north, we went to pick him up – instead of going back to Mexico to pick him up – to go on vacation, we started going north to pick up my brother. And so when he graduated I was like, he's going to Yale; I'm going to Yale. It was like; I don't want to go to the same school he's going to. I was very upset, because there he was, the one that was my antithesis, or whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: What is his name?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Fernando.

MS. CORDOVA: Fernando, ok.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, Xavier is the oldest – Xavier with an X – Bernard, Fernando, Gustavo, myself, and my sister Leticia. So there's that element. Actually, growing up – in elementary school I read a lot of biographies – really, those dumb little children's biographies, but the bigger ones, the better, and yet most biographies were written about boys, right, and about men, but I always tried to look for the women and I always tried to look for the people of color. There were only Native American and black – I think. But looking for those stories, and the men went to those schools, right, I think. So in my head probably was recognizing the name of the school, and that really was what it was.

So I knew the top 10 football team schools and then these Ivy League schools. I didn't know anything about California at all, right, so those schools didn't come up. And then, like I said, that principal that was at my high school the year before, they had just gotten their counselors to really get kids into schools, and I was friends with some of the seniors so I was able to see them applying for college, and the process. And there was Project STAY, which is like a 30-plus-year-old nonprofit that helped to teach lots of the Chicanos around here how to apply to schools and how to get some scholarships, or not get to pay all those little \$10 and \$20 fees for applying. So I didn't have to pay any of those fees because – but I had learned from the friends that I knew that had applied.

So basically I had a head start with my process of applying. I knew what to do and just kind of started doing that. But nobody told me where to apply, so I applied everywhere, like 20-30 schools, because I didn't know, you know, and I figured, well, okay, if I don't get out of San Antonio I'm going to apply to Trinity. If I go into the state of Texas – you know, I've heard of UT Austin, I've heard of – I don't remember but I applied to Southwest Texas State, three or four in Texas and then I went national and all the Ivy League schools, probably a couple – I probably didn't even know about the women's schools either because, again, in hindsight maybe I would have gone to a women's school, and I didn't know about sizes – small, medium, and large – and I think I was really just lucky because, I mean, the size that I got – I might have been a little overwhelmed with Austin.

And UTSA had just opened up and I remember being taken there and hating how ugly it looked. The architecture is real cold and sterile, and so I'm thinking, why would I want to come here? But that was like the only time I'd

traveled to see anything. We weren't given money to go anywhere else. But because I guess I did get to travel to the East Coast my parents were also comfortable with that area. My mom had heard stories about California being - from my dad, so California was not where they were going to send me off to. But, again, I didn't even - I wouldn't have been able to say Berkeley or Stanford or anything like that. So that's kind of how -

MS. CORDOVA: She'd heard stories about California from your dad's travels as a Navy sailor.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Probably so.

MS. CORDOVA: I see. [Laughs.] That might scare a mother.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Again, I'm not sure about, again, Yale versus whatever, but I ended up having second interview because they had interviews and the first interview I went to school not knowing there was going to be an interview, and I was wearing corduroy pants and whatever, and some other friend of mine had applied also and got an interview, and the guy was like, "Well, how come you didn't dress up like her?" I said, "What do you mean, how come I didn't dress up like her?" I was, like, dressed fine, and besides, it doesn't matter how you're dressed. And so I kind of challenged that whole notion of how one looks and whatever. And he was really, really upset and I thought my interview was going to be based on looks and all. And of course, I just cried and told my mom, and somehow she knew somebody who had gone to Yale, and it turns out to be Henry Cisneros's cousin Mungia. She was a teacher at one of the high schools in Burbank. So my mom just made her a little call and all of a sudden I got a call from Mungia and said, "Well, you don't really need a second interview; you got a really good interview and it was just fine." She said, "But if you want one, I'll get you another one."

And it was through her that - just the moment of friendship, and she took me out to eat a little cheesecake and whatever, and I remember when I became a recruiter for kids to go to school, I kind of took that process, like, oh, this is friendly versus the white man who - the lawyer who put me in a bank and interviewed me there and he - for Princeton, or the one from Harvard. So maybe it was because Yale also had Chicanos that were really working actively versus the other Ivy League schools that didn't have it, so I guess it just was a friendlier space and that's how I ended up there.

MS. CORDOVA: Had you ever felt trapped in the San Antonio school system? I mean, it's interesting to hear you didn't have any college counseling at all, it sounds like.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. Well, again, there was tracking and there wasn't tracking. So I remember in elementary there was A, B, and C, and I was in the A group until fifth grade and then I had a teacher who couldn't keep any sort of discipline, so my mom could hear from a block away that - my classroom, because it was the classroom that faced that street, so a block away my mom could hear it. And I would probably come in complaining, and she'd say, "We're going to move you." So, again, these are the places that she would - and I got moved down to a B, right, and I was - so then it's like, oh, I felt bad because - so I knew that there was something about tracking. And then by - and I think it followed a little bit in junior high but in junior high it kind of - I felt more mixed and so I saw, again, different schools coming together and kind of feeling, well, these people are keeping me behind, because my elementary was small compared to a couple of other feeder elementaries into the junior high, and so I think - I would say to you that my best education - public school education came from 1st through 6th grade.

And then after that I was basically repeating and bored a lot. And so in high school when I finally - there was, yeah, you could take English for those that were going on to college, and I remember again being bored because - reading some Shakespearean thing and people are going, well, me, oh, oh - you know, and in 10th grade learning stuff I had learned in 5th and 6th grade. So I was really upset by that. So, again, it's like, okay, can I leave class and let me go and do something else and just kind of learn that way. And so, you know, again, I was going to go on to college, I guess. I knew that my parents were going to not keep their daughters - which, again, most of the other young Chicanas, that was the problem is they wouldn't let their daughters grow up, but in that case my parents didn't have that problem.

But, yeah, it was really - the first semester of Yale was - it was the first time I got B and a C, you know. I got C's. I had never gotten C's. I had gotten probably a B and been traumatized by those B's in high school for band because I thought I deserved the A also, and I didn't know what it meant to have one class and eight books for that and four 20-page papers, or whatever, and you multiply that by four classes. And I didn't understand what it meant to work and also have all this free time. And so the first semester I was working more hours than I should have probably worked, and I was the only one in my group of friends that had to do any work-study and had loans. Everybody else seemed to have the time and all of them seemed to do really well really quickly, but, again, until I learned about their experiences, for them, that's all they had been doing for all their lives, so it was easy for them. They were probably repeating in the way I was repeating 5th grade stuff in 10th grade; they were probably repeating stuff they had learned in high school as well because they'd got to go to really good schools.

I mean, they didn't have remedial classes or anything like that, but I just had to learn. So by the second

semester I kind of said, okay, I can only work so many hours, and I was the first one in the library and I would park myself there and just study for a few hours and then leave my books, so I knew I would have a place to come back to, which is not – being hoggy I guess, but I kind of learned those sorts of things. Otherwise you don't have a place to study.

And then by second semester I was getting A's and B's so I had stopped moving into the C. And then by the final year I was getting C's again, but then it was a political decision. What I was writing was the concern, right, so I was going to get a lower grade because my political viewpoints weren't what the professor liked, and I knew that and that was okay. So there was definitely a growth for me from not caring, also, about what the grades were going to be like at all.

MS. CORDOVA: How did that happen? How did that shift?

MS. SÁNCHEZ. I think, I mean, what was wonderful was having those eight books to read, right. And probably whoever those professors were – maybe they were liberal ones that said, okay, "I'm going to give you a whole lot of Marxist stuff, but I'll give you a conservative one and you decide what you like." And so, one of them, I guess when I was a junior, I remember being – during mid-term or spring break – I would just stay at school, right, so I had more time to keep up and catch up with the reading. And so reading like *Schooling in Capitalist America* [*Schooling in capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. New York: Basic Books, 1976] – so, okay, I underlined almost every word – [laughs] – or something like that. I was like, oh, I enjoy what I'm reading.

All of this is making sense and kind of following that. Just finding those books – I was taking labor history classes and saying, oh, this is what's happening because I wanted to take Chicano history, but there was only one Chicano history class, right, and I wanted to take other things. And so it was in those places that I guess I got to have a better critique of the world and that's how I understood it.

And again, I can't remember any professor that just really guided me. It was just – they were mainly quite professors that were there too, but they may all have been somewhat liberal in that – they weren't somebody I wanted to be attached to and so I kind of left without having that guidance. When they come back here and now see all these Chicano professors working really hard with Chicano young students and saying you've got to continue with the track of going on to college and being a professor. You have to do this, you need to be there, you need to go on to graduate school – all this guidance, just like, that wasn't there.

To have an Antonio Castaneda – [inaudible] – was like, wow. [Laughter.] There's so many more, but, yeah, there was the one. Juan Bruce-Novoa, who is actually Colombiano, but he was there, and –

MS. CORDOVA: Did you take a class with him?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Actually, no because he was there when I was a freshman, so he was teaching upper-level courses. But I remember going to some lectures and he was involved with helping the Chicano students any way. So, I always engaged my older brother, who ended up taking a year – he and I were there when he was a senior and I was freshman because he took a year off. So, through him, I kind of saw – it was when I was in college there, all off the sudden, we became friends.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And I think, political stuff, too, I think. So, he got to know him and I didn't get to know him, and he took two years off, and came back, and whatever. And only some deans, the Chicano dean, who wasn't a teacher – those were the people who were the only Chicanos at the school besides the students and there were a hundred students, I think. Well, 30 students for every incoming class.

MS. CORDOVA: The East Coast must have been a bit of a culture shock for you.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I loved it, right, because I also went to movies all the time when I was a little kid. My sister and I would take the bus. I mean, again, this was where a teacher tells you, like, here are all these films, maybe you can check them out. We don't have access to anything but the bus, so my parents gave me – We would catch a bus at 5:00, do the double feature up on San Pedro, which is the [Omnis?] theater that doesn't exist any more, and we would see foreign films, or old '40s and '50s movies. And so we were there for four hours and my dad would pick us up.

So I think the exposure to other places was just something I wanted, and so when I was there, sure it was a culture shock, but I liked the pace, I liked the – I liked the diversity in people. I mean walk out in New Haven and some guy comes up to me, ¿Tu hablas Español? And I say, sure. And then he talks like Puerto Rican and so it's like oh no. [Laughter.] I don't understand what you're saying. Slow down, slow down, slow down. And then to be able to differentiate that and New Haven wasn't necessarily pretty as New Haven until you get into the campus

and then – it's all – that's pretty.

And did do so some – I was thinking of coming back to San Antonio to teach. So, when I started taking those Schooling in Capitalist America, or whatever, I was like, well, maybe I should just kind of take extra classes, so I can teach when I come back to San Antonio before I become a lawyer. I think by that time I was thinking of maybe doing that. So then I was teaching within in my senior semester, the first or – the first semester I teaching in the schools – one of the schools. In New Haven so it kind of got to be more integrated into the community. And I walked to work and walked back and so it was a lot of poverty and a lot of East Coast, urban, ugly. [Laughs.] What is it at its worst and that compared to what I was living in and known.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you were at Yale in the early '80s, is that right?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: '78 TO '82.

MS. CORDOVA: And you joined MEChA there, right?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: After like, during the second semester. Probably more the second year, yeah, again, rejection at first because of what I had been raised – think Chicanos are bad and all that sort of stuff and then – and hanging out with more of my white – well, the people in the dormitories. It wasn't by floor, it was by entryway, so across the entryway was a Chicana from El Paso, across the way was another Chicana from somewhere else. Downstairs was another Chicana. And they had their roommates and there was diversity.

There was the woman whose daddy and mom worked in the – for some embassy, whatever, so was exposed to people of color, and so she was very – good people. They were more sympathetic and understanding of difference, and so kind of, the African, Afro-Jewish woman, and so it was kind of fun with those sorts of people. And then, after getting to know some – getting involved with MEChA and – a little bit of the time – and they were doing theater there. And one of my, again, entryway friends was – was she from El Paso? So she said, let's do some – all the guys were doing theater, let's do our own stuff. And we did something like "Macho MEChA Men" from "Macho Macho Men." [Laughter.] So all of us did drag and we did Luis – whatever his name is – Lois Valdez's – what's the other one that he does all the time that everybody does? I can't think of it?

MS. CORDOVA: "The Vendidos?"

MS. SÁNCHEZ: "Los Vendidos" – and kind of playing off. And then someone like Juan Bruce-Novoa seeing that and saying, ya'll are so passé, don't be doing stuff that was done in the '70s or whatever. Kind of, not – feeling hurt because it's like, I never even have been exposed to it and somebody kind of showed it. And again, we still played with gender and all those sorts of things, and – but I understand, like, okay, I see where he was coming from, but his critique could have been little – [laughs] – nicer.

So, kind of did that with friends like that, and by junior year I lived off campus and ended up rooming with a Chicana from Tucson and so, again, I got much more integrated in all of that – I mean but still kept my white friends too, but less and less each year.

MS. CORDOVA: Was MEChA like one of the primary organizations you were involved with or were there others that you were –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Principally MEChA – again, I did Children's Theater also because of some of my white friends who had seen that a lot of you were doing theatre – and I had done theater in high school and junior high school, but it was kind of nerve racking because again, that's working with the white kids. I mean Yale has a lot of good theater – not just the graduate school, but it was at the undergraduate level, everybody just did it just it as volunteers so it was just a lot to see. There were 12 plays that popped up every you know, week and different people doing it – they were all student run, amazing kids, right – [laughs] – and so it was the place that really –

I mean I'm not one that – I would always memorize but I was always memorizing at the last moment so I was like, mm can't do this here. So I did some of that with them but I kind of pulled away in that – in a way that I felt comfortable and I guess I wanted to see, you know – feeling safer with Chicanas, to be able to do that a little bit more. But you know I think that years later they did this thing with Chicana theater group, but not while I was there – just those are the moments that we spent entertaining ourselves and really – and the community. And it was Chicanas and Boriquas right, kind of working with the African-American and the Asian communities. So there was definitely a lot of that junior and senior year and trying to push to get a MEChA house and we ended up doing MEChA and Asians, kind of dividing up a building and so –

MS. CORDOVA: So it much more, sort of third world kind of grouping of what, Chicanos and all the Puerto Ricans along with Asians.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And not the international types actually, like so although I get – and this was the

late 70's, 80's so we're in a lot of exposure to all the struggles in Central America - started coming some friends that I happened to get to know from the international level, who were really active in trying to stop wars in Central America and there was all that you know, South African and Apartheid - so there were demonstrations that were happening. And you know you walked to classes and there it was. So you were just exposed to all of that and people that came and spoke were always, you know, radicals - and again this is funny, I think of where I met [Gloria] Anzaldúa was up at Yale and that had just published *This Bridge Called My Back* [*This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color*, editors, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa; Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981], so you know, I have first edition, 1982, you know, while they were there.

But in also being kind of caught up and trying to write something about Anzaldúa and you know, people were - the Chicano, the people of color - saying Eldredge Cleaver is in town, and he's going to speak so you all have to go, right? And it's like who? Who's he, right? And then the white women were saying, oh there's this book called *This Bridge Called My Back*, so it was white women saying the book. So I did both and I checked out Eldredge Cleaver and felt really bad that I hadn't gone to the other one, and that next day Anzaldúa was having a small session, whichever Chicano showed up, and there were six or seven of us and so it was just like breakfast and lunch with her, just we hung out with her.

But, you know, again, always being divided is like am I a person of color, man, woman - and I hadn't identified as a lesbian then, but I was really - that Chicana from Tucson ended up being a lesbian. She had to take her time coming out to me and all that sort of stuff but you know, and so I don't know that I even knew Anzaldúa was a lesbian per se, but that was just my moment with me, not that they're because of the - I mean, again, those schools bring in a lot of big names, right. So we would go, so I don't know, that's what I guess in hindsight think, well those are good things, and those are the places that I kind of remember even to this day.

I can think of all the bad places of being attacked - I mean I would probably have killed myself with all the depression and you know, that happens and the abuse - that can happen to the work that we do here so we try to think of the good things. So that's not - it's a good thing, it's a bad thing.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughter.] So was *This Bridge Called My Back* immediately influential on you or was it sort of a timed process, over time.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think I probably read it right - I mean I was basically going to graduate that - I mean it was probably March, April - the spring of '82 when they came through, and so I probably picked it up afterwards and read it and read bits and pieces of it. I think it was pretty immediate, I mean because I always say that that's the theory that ends the basis of the Esperanza. And again, it's many women of color kind of putting their voices there, but - with Anzaldúa and - kind of having their ideas in - I remember certain grants you need to be able to quote any of these women saying there's no higher gear of oppression and bah bah bah bam. And so because, again, I can identify that and say well this is how it has to work here at the Esperanza because what we're dealing with - I mean deal with the men urbanizing is that it is about race and class and not the rest of the stuff like - what the white people are - same sort of thing - [laughs]. And I think Anzaldúa, especially her more recent stuff, you know, working with white people and working with men, and you know again, this was the Esperanza just because we - I mean I think of it as both exposures of our reality but was existing here and what we want it to create plus - that's another thing writings also said.

And it was Audre Lorde, and we were trying to bring Audrey Lure and then she died and so - but again, because we knew their writings and I knew them and I mean to this day, again, there are young women that come in and they've never read any of their stuff, and it's like, here's a book, you know - here's your present you know, read it now. And I don't know that they're necessarily reading it, I would like to actually have time to say, okay let's do this and let's do that. Some of the staff, you know, especially some of the younger staff never would know these book at all, especially if they were educated in Texas. So they went their way to California, somewhere open, and it's supposed to be - [inaudible] - but if they stay in Texas, another loss. So you know, it's been fun to have 16 and 17 and 18-year-old girls come back you know 10 years later saying, thank you for giving me these books, thank you for introducing me to these names. Like when I went to this college I was able to not get lost, just go right to the place of the people who I would be teaching the vision anyway.

MS. CORDOVA: And so when you graduated from Yale in what field?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Is it combining with sociology and history? And I think it was, again, it was for the classes, one that I was taking. You know, walking into a political science class, it's bullshit and walk out of there, you know. This is what you could do, you could go for a week or so many days or two weeks and check out classes, right, and of course you'd be falling behind if you didn't focus and take classes to classes continue, right, but at least you - got exposed at first I found myself jumping in and out of classes until I found people that I liked. And so that's - and then it ended up being there, so no to political science, couldn't get into economics whatsoever, you know, but the sociology classes kept on popping up and these history classes kept on popping up, and women's study was brand new so there really wasn't much there, you know taking class in film. These little things like

that that - wanted to take the one about more ethnic studies on [inaudible] or whatever that was being done by some guy named Tom - or whatever. They always had groups from New York, you know, playing Salsa - so I'd go to the dance but I never took the class because I thought I'm not supposed to take that - that's the easy class. [Laughs].

But that's what people were saying about sociology, those were easy classes, you don't come to Yale to take sociology and so I kind of had to hide that also because that was a piece of guess you weren't finding the classes that I'm interested in. And this is explaining my life to me in a better way and nobody damned history, but definitely sociologists are kind of problematic - nobody was going to - shouldn't have also done the teacher certification, but there was a group of them and so within that group it was okay. But still people - again, you're going to either be a doctor or a lawyer if you went to Yale, and so those were good choices. A politician would be with a lawyer and it's just a known fact, yeah. So I really had to hide everything else - [laughs].

MS. CORDOVA: All right, let me - this is a good point to stop this tape and put in another, so we'll take a break here. All right, we are recording, this is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Today is June 25th, 2004 and this is session one, disc two with Graciela Sánchez. And so I guess my first question to you on this disc would be, did you come back to San Antonio immediately after Yale, or what happened? I mean I know your parents have already sort of been very clear that they wanted you to come home. Was that a tough decision at all?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, I wanted to come home, I had had that experience and I thought - I was coming back to teach. And I had learned all this stuff and I wanted to work with my community and so I applied to teach and didn't get hired - [laughs] - and I went to my high school and said, "You need to hire me because I came through this school and I went to this school and you should want to hire me." I didn't say that, but in my head I probably was thinking that it would be that easy to get in and I applied in two different school districts. San Antonio has like 13 school districts or more.

I finally get accepted to teach but it was after I took on another job and that was work at Southwest Voter Registration Project because it was getting closer to September and I didn't have a job, so probably at one of these Chicano, East Coast, school reunion, somebody said, "Oh, there's Southwest looking for somebody as a paralegal." Again, by that time I was really thinking about teaching so it was like well, maybe that's something, I don't know what that is. So I really -to you - [laughter] - and -

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughter.] So I mean you didn't very much about the project, the - before you joined it.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Actually it's interesting, in my junior year I actually took - I got accepted to the LBJ School for Public Policy, or whatever that they had you know, kids of color getting accepted to these programs so then they could maybe go on to graduate school and public policy. And four Chicanas - two from Princeton, one from Harvard and myself - got in and then maybe a couple of Chicano guys from the East Coast, but everybody else was Texas-based Chicanos going for this program. And so we all kind of hung together, and found - politically, again, found ourselves being more radical than anybody going to school from the undergraduate level in Texas.

And so we formed friendships around the schools, which is kind of - I mean we made friends with these other women, but these other Chicano women were looking for their husband-type sort of discussions and they, you know, young Chicanos that were coming with us from the East Coast were interested in those young Chicano women - [laughs] - all those horrors, right?

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs].

And I don't know if you know, but Luz Calvo, she's now in Ohio and she said - I'm not even sure what department - but she started at UCLA in political science as a graduate student and then dropped out and maybe went to the school of History of Consciousness Program at Santa Cruz and now - [inaudible] - in Ohio. She was one of those friends who I've continued to be friends with - the other two became attorneys and became further centrists, and not politically. And Luz and I became friends, and we both also came out to each other, but while we were there as juniors going into senior years, they were all very straight.

[Cross talk].

MS. CORDOVA: Actually you were just telling me how you and Luz had just come out to each other and this was -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, actually when we were in the program, everybody was real heterosexual and I had just had my first year living with a lesbian and got to be -

MS. CORDOVA: At Yale?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: At Yale.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: My roommate was a lesbian and she had her friends, right. So I wasn't that big, and I still hadn't identified and that was okay – I mean if what I did with my four years – you got to study. I mean you're going to really mess up if you get involved with anything or anybody or whatever, right, and even the – [inaudible] – can only be MEChA because of the skills that I had to build up and I just need what I had versus what everybody else had. And so, all of us are good kids and good smart kids but some would be more experienced to know how write as well as they did – whatever – it was too many 20-page papers and 30-page papers.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs].

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So that was my focus, not really dealing with my sexuality, but at least in my junior year, being exposed to my roommate and her friends and you know just – I mean I had been raised to be about justice so there was no way I was going to feel awkward or you know – well, awkward I was feeling – but being able to discriminate, because I was exposed into going to you know, a magazine – a woman's magazine, but then all around me were lesbians. It was like wow I haven't been around a whole bunch of lesbians. And kind of feeling a little awkward about it and those sorts of moments and not knowing, again, who to talk to because I wasn't going to say anything that was going to hurt my roommate.

But so that exposure at least made me feel a little more comfortable and by my senior year, the first national like gay/lesbian days at the university's Glad Days as I guess they would call happened, and that was 1982. And I know at that time I was the president of MEChA, you know, had to challenge the homophobia coming from the younger undergraduate students from freshmen and sophomores – you know again, not identifying as a lesbian but walking around with a pink triangle and saying, you know, we have to support other people that are different and end up being, you know, same oppressions. So kind of making those connections. And so at least I had those experiences, then coming to Texas and kind of seeing the super heterosexuality of the U.S. – supposed to get married and the dorms, the men, could go on to the women's side after you live in a – [inaudible] – that women couldn't go to the men's side after 11 o'clock and would be penalized and pushed down and kicked out. You know, we were called communist – [laughs] – they just – my lower scores of any time was at the LBJ school because again, it just became a – that's where I guess I realized the politics – [inaudible] – did here and never ever followed up with whatever grades. I don't even know if they passing or whatever, but so that again, allowed us to be strong friends amongst the poor Chicanos.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was between your junior –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: '80, yeah,

MS. CORDOVA: And senior year in the summer.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, the summer. And so, I don't know where the – how I got into that. But, oh – so then I did come home – I guess you were asking about that – and during that summer program, though, one of the Chicanas, Juanita [Hernandez] and others who were at Harvard got new – Rillian was maybe doing her senior thesis on voting rights because she was from Crystal City, so for her it was a strong connection, so she was a strong Chicana from Crystal City and –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And so she came to interview him and she brought me along, and so we got to meet him, and that's kind of how I met him, and so I knew of Southwest voter registration project, but I wasn't interested in voter registration education. When I took the job, it was just like, it's a job, I'll do it, and after like two or three months, I didn't want to be there any more, and my mom said, "You gave them two years, that's your commitment, you have to be there for two years," and so I kind of went ahead and stayed on.

And again, all of those – and again, in hindsight, say, okay, but at least it was the experience, so I understand what it was to work in a non-profit from that point on. I understood the inequities within a Chicano, non-profit organization that's about speaking about justice, not actually being interested in a lot of the issues that I thought were of interest because, again, I was doing work around women's issues and Central America activism, and wanted to see why we weren't asking – it was about polling the community about issues and how do women think? How do Latino women think? And their response was Latina women think how their husbands think, and I was like, no. [Laughs.] And what do you they think about Central America? And it's like – it's an international issue is not a domestic issues. But it's like, yeah, but our domestic moneys are – so I knew all those things and kind of was frustrated and had no entry to talk to William [Willie Velasquez] or to any of the men who were the people with power.

All the women – I was the person – as a paralegal, I had more power than any of the other women because they were all secretaries or research assistants who didn't go to an Ivy League school. And so I didn't – I was given

that respect of kind of being above them for that reason even though they had a history of being in that institution and were smart and good research assistants. But they all got paid less and they had very little insurance or they didn't - I mean like one of the secretaries had a baby and they had no insurance for her that covered maternity leave and all that sort of stuff.

And so David - David Montejano, who worked their for a couple of years or a year - that's how I met him - had his partner at that time, Margarita, have a baby and so he did insurance to cover so then all of the sudden they were able to cover them, right? So I saw - I was like, this is really messed up, right. And I was getting paid \$16,000 as a first year in 1982, which was, again, more money than my father had ever made. But that was more than any of the secretaries were making and yet much less than the 40, 50 thousand dollars that the men were making as director of litigation, and policy, and Willie's own position.

And you know, all the women had no names; they were all called ladies. Hey lady, hey lady, hey lady from Willie's point of view and I - like, my office was right across his, but it was always closed. It wasn't an office that I could just walk into. And so I didn't like that and I didn't - and MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense] was just a little bit further down and always wanting to see how MALDEF could get more involved in the local issues, or the regional issues that were affecting us.

And again, I understand non-profits a lot better, and so they have to pick and choose what issues - but their issues were education and voting rights for the most part and we were like, but there are all these other issues that we wanted to be involved in, and their excuse was always, well, California - which is the where the office headquarters are - doesn't want to get involved. And so they just never got involved. Years later, I saw a new director there and he didn't - he did what California said, but he also got involved locally, and I was like, wow, finally.

So they were just making it up - they didn't want to get involved in their own ways. I mean, like, around immigration - if we want to get them involved it's hard for us to still just call them in because they can price beat the issues, but they're not integrated in organizing at all on the local - or even as it affects on a national level because that's just not the policy that they have taken or, again, the local council not to be involved.

And working as a paralegal, what I was doing was on redistricting. And so it was kind of funny because I guess computers were real brand new, message machines were brand new. Nobody had computers except for the secretary, right, and they were just learning how to use them. So I mean all the calculations really to figure out districts were all by hand and - oh and that junior year, also - going to senior year - that summer - I also worked for the city planning department because somebody got me a job - I don't know - because maybe because of the policy institute. And it was interesting because I was helping them in planning to do division of the city by the district, right. And I remember being used by the white city planning department when they took me to meet with MALDEF and Southwest Voter Registration Project to talk about the plan that the city was integrate - was interested in bringing up and running to someone named Judith Sanders-Castro, and saying they're using you. And I said, oh, well that's - I'm just an intern. I have no idea that I'm being used.

And then again, seven months later I'm working on the other side - not with the city. But that was just an internship and so I did a lot of calculating of that - addition, subtraction, division - and color-coding maps and being frustrated because I was bored. It was like, this is what college got me was - I had learned this in up to third grade or something like. I didn't need a - and I see this with young people, too, because some of the work here, is like, yeah, we have to sweep, we have to mop, we have to do these things, but hopefully finding them projects that really get them excited, whereas over there was it was the same thing, but it had to be done. And I guess nobody sat with me to explain the bigger context of the work, right. It was just like, here's what you need to do and just do it. And again, I had to learn the larger context at some point.

Again, I wasn't supportive of the politics because Willie also talked about the power - coming from the top, and that the leadership - we had to educate the leadership. So if we're going to get them elected, let's select people that are going to be elected and then let's educate them what the issues are, and then they will tell their community, and it will go back down the other way. So if you want to - okay, let's get involved in Central America; okay, let's teach them what's going on in Central America, and it will set that right versus - most organizers go bottom up, right.

MS. CORDOVA: How were you learning what was happening in Central America? Like what were your sources?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, again, I learned, initially, the stuff in the East coast, and when I came here, I searched out for similar sort of program or any organization doing that, and there was group called Latin America Assistance. And it was a whole bunch of white activists - older than me, but they doing some of that work. I know that during the '82, '83, '84, there was the socialist workers party, and other folks like that were around, and they were going to these events or they would always pass out their little newspapers and then try to recruit.

So I remember some platíca [workshop/talk] somewhere, so I went to that and of course they were trying to



hone in on me, and I just didn't feel like I needed to be on anybody's party. It's like, I didn't know them enough and I felt just too much pressure. But I would go to these talks, or workshops, or film screenings or whatever was around in San Antonio at that time, and that's how I just kind found out what was going on, but feeling that there wasn't a lot going on also. That it was limited again to a lot male-centered stuff or nothing on women, and the Chicanos were very mainstream and very domestic focused. And they had been doing it. I mean if think MALDEF and Southwest they all lived in Southwest, they think they had - [inaudible] - differently since '68, so it was a little less than 20 years, but - I guess Southwest was probably 10 years old at that time, so for me they seemed old. They just seemed really - so even though I probably thought they were that much older, they were just kind of - that was the energy the interest they were focusing on.

And at some point I ran into Chicana women doing organizing around Central America and another Chicana that helped set up - well all these Chicanas ended up helping to set up the Esperanza at some point. And were finding each other, but it was like year '83 and '84. It was like, God, it took us that many years to meet each other and we were in the same town. That shouldn't be happening. There should be some place that we can all can know to come that makes it just that much quicker. [Laughs.] And that we were real frustrated with the sexism that we were seeing within our own Chicano community, and outside of that, but especially with that because we were working with these guys. And again, just their lack of global vision and so we just talked to each other.

And then I kept on saying, why don't we do it, why don't we do it? We can do it; they did, they did, and they who just did in the '60s and the '70s. And again, not really knowing the history about like how in '60s and the '70s, there was more money from D.C. that was coming through and they were looking for these sorts of projects to be able to underwrite and to support, and that's how a lot of these groups got started where we were in the midst of the Reagan years - [laughs] - and yet it was so bad that we were present and we were organizing off the street, but it was like we were still so isolated, and it's still a big, spread out city. So we just moved around and had everything in the backs of our cars, and what else?

And then, I did get involved in my first relationship when I came back.

MS. CORDOVA: While you were with the Southwest Voters?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. And I guess from - for about a year, I lived with my parents and that - and all my high school friends - my closest high school friends - we all became - we all came out to each other. So we didn't know that when we were in high school and when we were away, they kept - they started going to the gay bars, but they didn't tell me. And then when I came back home, they all little by little came out, and one of our friends went to Michigan, and she came back and she was a lesbian, too. [Laughs.] And there was a - so all the women became lesbians and we had one gay friend, male friend. He was doing drag - [laughs] - and all that sort of stuff.

And it was like, why did you keep all this from - but I think again, in hindsight, we figured out and said, well we hung with each other because we could seek these things. We talked about having crushes on that teacher and that was a woman teacher, and though we didn't trash each other or make fun each other, we just thought that was cool and you're going to give her flowers, that's cool. [Laughs.] And you open up your locker you have all these women in images of Hollywood inside. I was like, that's cool - we didn't know, right, and in the - what was it - when I graduated, Anita Bryant in '78 and high school was a big anti-gay person and I remember standing in band formation and having to fight one of my Chicana Baptist friends who just was totally anti-gay, and just - again, just that sense of justice and what was right and what was wrong. I just could be firm about it without having any identify towards being gay just knowing that was wrong to just be attacking gay people.

So that was what I knew - and San Antonio is just closeted anyway that everybody comes out in their own way but just hides it from everybody else, but at some point, when I came back, then I found out that they were all going to bars, and I said, well, let me go. So then I just kind of went with my friends and it was - and mom was like, well, why are you going out? Where are you going? [Laughter.] And then I got involved with this woman, and then it was an abusive relationship, so that wasn't any good.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was about 1982, '83, or somewhere in there.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: '83 to like early - till '85 - sometime in '85.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's a long time to be in that relationship.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was a year-and-a-half. And that for me - it was like a year-in-a-half - that was really horrible. And when I think - and the only thing that - at that point, it was just the worst thing because I had wasted such a long time in a relationship and - I mean the time that - I lived with her probably a year and I lived with her because of the pressures of you need to come live with me.

I hadn't been involved in any relationship. So again, I didn't know boundaries and I hadn't had those experiences, so it was kind of the worst sort of situation - [laughs] - to be in your first relations, and be abusive, and not know - like where I would have said to a man, you don't abuse me, you don't hit me, you don't scream at me, and all that stuff - I knew that I could say that to a man, but it's like, well, here's a woman. She's telling me her story, and her story was that she was abused, and she was hurt, and so I feel empathy, sympathy, or whatever, and want to take care, which is again that whole we've been raised to take of.

So that is what I found myself ending up doing and then when I tried to talk to people about the abusive relationship, nobody wanted to listen. I mean I didn't tell my parents, I didn't tell my sister - my sister was in college. So maybe if she had been home I would have been able to talk to her. But when I told some of my high school friends who were queer, they didn't want to hear it. So it was - so I was a little confused about, like, where to go, what to do.

MS. CORDOVA: Why didn't they want to hear it - your friends?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, because I found out that the one when I did tell very directly was also in an abusive relationship. And so I think there's just a lot of abuse going on - straight and gay. So maybe that was part of it.

MS. CORDOVA: So what was - that must have been a huge moment for you or a very important time to finally come out and admit - or were you admitting that you were a lesbian, or was this sort of an experiment, or how were you dealing with this experience?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, when I came out, I finally came out and I placed all the blame on my being gay to the theory I was reading. So I had just read - [laughter] - *Compulsory Heterosexuality* [London: Onlywomen Press, 1981] by what's her name - a real famous, white feminist. I can't think of her name. Adrienne Rich.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, right, okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And it was within a book called *Compulsory Heterosexuality* and - [inaudible] - fantastic - [inaudible] - because - [inaudible] - what it was that I was reading. And I think it was in the book - I think I bought it in one of the bookstores. Again, I came back and I wanted the same - it was just really active in college and just what - everything I had there and over here it was like there was so much missing. And so I went to those - I was getting paid, so I actually didn't have to go to a library, I could actually buy books and that's the place, that moment, I probably bought more books than ever in my life.

And then when I stopped working and I just hated going to bookstores because I couldn't buy a book anymore, but at that point - so I just thought, I didn't know - just felt like, let me read it and I was able to read that it was like, it justified. It was like well, of course, if men are this way and it's just horrible world with the men, and I've never really gotten along with these men because of these same situations - they don't listen to me when I speak, they kind of do this, and this, and this - And then later on well, maybe I did have a crush on - I think I was doing that in college, too - my junior, senior year - kind of really questioning that. But then here it was just kind like more politically I can totally acknowledge that this is the place that I should go, and okay, then, it's all right - so kind of going there in that direction.

So that was my rationalizing, but then it was okay because all my friends were gay also, but again, we didn't talk. It was just about going out and dancing. [Laughs.]

[End of tape one.]

And I - my girlfriend kind of said, you know, you need to move out of the house, and you should tell your mom you're going out, you're leaving. And so in a very bad way, you know, it's like I ended up coming out to my mom because, you know, my friend at that time was driving me, and my mom was sitting up front with my friend at that time and I was in the back and we were having this conversation that was really a hard conversation. And my mom starts crying and then I come out to her and she's not wanting to hear it. And it was really ugly. And I think, again, I wasn't having - I don't think I had any problems telling her, but maybe the way I was, you know, pushed to do that that didn't work well. And so my mom just said, "Don't tell your father; that would be the worst thing. Just promise me that." So I did. And I just never told him for a long time even though, you know, when I started doing the work at the Esperanza years later it was just all over the place, so - and I ended up telling him as well.

So I was pressured, you know, to do a lot of stuff, you know, I was - like when I quit my job at Southwest Voter Registration, one of the things I had wanted to do was go to Nicaragua and I had saved money and, the reason I wanted to go was because everybody that was organizing here was very white and I was really working hard to get the Chicano community or all the Latino community to be more engaged in what was going on in international level - especially in Central America, but just in general. And again, it's just who had the privilege to go over there and what everybody that was going there was just really excited about, you know, going to

exotic lands – [inaudible] – and learning. Yeah, they were really committed to the struggle there, but it just didn't feel right. But everybody that went, you know, had the money to do that. So I wanted to – and they all came back with slides, slide shows, and I wanted to come back with something that was more – you know, that you could see those people talk to themselves rather than me being the person that spoke for them.

So I was planning to go and my partner and friend at that time, Betty, you know, wasn't going to go. She was ROTC – a scholarship to go into college, so she was studying to be a nurse. She is a nurse and she ended up joining the military. She went to Nicaragua with me even though I didn't want her to go because it was like, okay, good, I can be away from her for this moment, and she said she didn't want to go but then she ended up going because she was – and, I mean, on some level it was good to have another person there to help with the filming because one of us had to carry all the stuff and the other one would do the camera; one had to interview while the other one did the camera. And it's just, you know – it is just easier to travel with another person, but the abuse continued over there, too. I mean, and I was always just more, like, shamed all the time, like from this apartment that we lived in, in San Antonio to places we stayed in Nicaragua. I mean, it's like, there was – like, the apartment here was a duplex and I was, like, these people next door can hear this. [Laughs.] It's like, you know, it was like – I was ashamed, you know.

And yet, you know, also it was, "Can't you hear and why aren't you calling?" I didn't have a phone in that place either because there was – I just never did and I didn't know about living really, and I somehow didn't need the phone. But then, in those moments of crisis it was like, why don't I have a phone here? And maybe that was a conscious effort on this other person's part not to let me – not to think about the phone or whatever. And we were very isolated, and yet I did continue to work on Central America stuff, so that was kind of finally out, besides work, you know. And what was good for her was I was making money, right? So economically I could provide for whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: Was she physically hurting you?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes. Yes. And then – but in hindsight, it's like all the emotional and psychological stuff was just crazier for me, right? But, yeah, I mean – and I could defend myself but I never, hit back. And I was, again, in that moment was like, where is there help for this person? I need to get help for this person. This person needs to get counseling – you know, talking to a lot of people but not finding the hope. There was no community to reach out to. And the saving grace was just friendships with other – and again, I kept on organizing.

So I finally, in '84, met one of the women, Susan Guerra, who ended up helping to – you know, dream with me the Esperanza. And she was a straight woman, married with two kids, and – or one kid at that time. And so we just clicked, you know. She had gone to Norway and she was coming back, and so she had an experience of going away, of coming back, of being radical, of looking for a place. And she had been looking for me. They called me once. I didn't return that call. [Laughs.] And then she didn't call me back for another year because she was organizing around the International Women's Day. And so when I did talk to her, we just clicked and we became really good friends.

And so she's the person that I was able to confide in about the abuse, the relationship I was in, little by little. And then I was also getting a crush on her, she was getting a crush on me, but that never went anywhere. [Laughter.] Because I think, you know, that was like, okay, this is my limit; I'm not going to do that. But I mean – but someone that, you know – I mean, she was seven years older than me but was really able to just kind of pull me away from that, just to be able to say, "This is wrong; you don't have to be involved." And then, again, it just happens that, you know, if I probably hadn't had a crush on her I wouldn't have been able to pull up on another level, you know. But the – you know – What happened?

I mean, I know that – at some point I just ran off, you know, and she helped to take me out of the house. And she had set it up for me to stay with some friend of hers for a week and stuff like that. And my brother – my second-oldest brother is gay, and so – I hadn't, again, told him, and he and I weren't really out to each other. And because of your – when you're in an abusive relationship you're still not talking to anybody; you see your family less and all your friends, right? So she was able to talk to him and let him know what was going on, so he kind of got involved. And again, all hidden from my family because it's not the best way to come out or to – you know, it's like, I've come out and now I've been beat up.

MS. CORDOVA: Around this time did you also start taking film classes? I mean, I know you took some equipment down to Nicaragua. Were you studying film?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No. I think it was – no, I was just – video was also just coming out as something new, and so that's why, when I went to Nicaragua, I just knew I was going buy video equipment and a camera and just go and do it. So it was just in the weeks before when I purchased the equipment and went to Nicaragua that I practiced and that sort of thing and just took that down there. And then when I came back and did the – you know, made the documentary, it was kind of dorky and all that stuff. But –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] What was it like? What was that documentary like?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, it was called *Testimonios de Nicaragua* and so it was really stories of men and women, young and old and everywhere in between, telling their stories of what the struggles were down there, and kind of just trying to take as many interviews. So I mean, I think the stories were fun. I just – you know, I didn't know the technique of the edit in the same way I knew what the language was that I wanted to do, but I didn't know the technology of what you could do. And so when I – you know, when I see it it's like, it would be nice to have done this and this and this, but I didn't know that.

And I worked with a film editor in Houston later on. I mean, so I came back having made that film – I mean, so I had all this footage. And it's like, oh, now it costs money. You know, so I had money to buy it but I didn't have money to edit it. Well, being, again, in the community, it's like, "Will you edit, or, can you edit and how cheaply can you edit, or, can you edit for free?" There was cable access, but cable access was so hard. You know, you only had four hours a week to be able to go in. And so it was like, no, I have to do better than that.

So with footage of, you know, interviews that I liked, I was able to at least start going and showing people that had been organizing with some of the films. And at one point I was in – [inaudible] – one of these places and some people from El Paso saw some of the stuff, and they were like, "Oh, you need to get a grant for this and let's help you write a grant." And so they were able to help me write a grant. That got \$5,000, and so we ended up being able – then we had to find the editor, who ended up being with Southwest Alternative Media Project in Houston, and they helped edit. So they just, you know, did the basic stuff. You know, throughout the year that I was looking to edit it, people were helping to transcribe hours and hours of, you know, stuff.

But – so different people in the community also participated, because I think everybody was excited about this idea. And then – so it got done and it turned out to be like about 55 minutes or something, because I think that editor at least knew that it had to be about that long or shorter.

And then I took that video – and the idea, again, was to use it to educate, not to keep it and become a star, whatever, but just to take it around. And so I went from, you know, Nacogdoches, Texas, to the NAACS Conference in El Paso and, you know, just different places that they would – you know, in the community.

MS. CORDOVA: And so from – what year was your trip and then what year were you touring the film?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So this film – like the trip was '84. The film was either – you know, it was about a year later, like '85 or '86 or something like that, you know. For me it seemed ages, but for like other filmmakers, you know, one of them, a local friend here, said, you know, it's because you didn't know how hard it was that you did it. Otherwise, you would have never done it, you know. [Laughs.] And I was like, okay, whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: But I had to do it. I had gone and I had done all this – so I just toured around and then I also learned about criticism and stuff like that – too many talking heads, you know. That was the NAACS Conference. It was like all these people older than me making, you know, criticism. But that's where I met up with Luz Calvo, at that NAACS Conference, and that's where we came out to each other. And we danced together at the NAACS Conference. And it was like, who are all these people? Why don't they dance – I mean, just like women dancing together, isn't it cool? In '84 – I guess that was '85 or '86, whenever that was, in El Paso. But in '84 they had it in Austin and there was just like one or two – probably just one workshop on queer identities. And I was real quiet, and I know that I went and probably met some people that, you know, I can't remember, you know, years later that probably I met there for the first time.

And Sandra Cisneros also presented that time, and she had just moved to San Antonio. So we became friends there and continue to this day. I mean, not real super-close friends because she's so busy and I'm always busy, but with those places that like her relationship was – she was known in '84, but not – she became more famous. And so, you know, to be able to support her as she was kind of needing to be supported – that's the reason I think she continues to be friends because, you know, nobody was – again, women's voices, right? And that was constantly something that was important to the Esperanza and continues to be important.

MS. CORDOVA: And so after – let's see. So you left Southwest Voter Education Project in –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: In '84.

MS. CORDOVA: – '84.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: You went to Nicaragua –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Eighty-four. So I probably took like May, June and went away for two months.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And then you came back, and what kind of work did you start doing?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Anything.

MS. CORDOVA: Anything? [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was so much fun. It was like I didn't have a job. I didn't want a job. I just wanted to, you know - what I was hoping to do was just to, like, work at H.E.B. or something like that and have, you know, enough money just to get me around but not - but I guess I wanted to do the film and I guess I wanted to do some other stuff.

Oh, and between - no, Southwest - I quit - oh, and I came back - oh, no. I went to MALDEF afterwards, because MALDEF -

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. After Nicaragua.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I think so, yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And I was there for a while and then I quit because of the abuse.

MS. CORDOVA: How long were you there in -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Like three months.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. Because I was - and I came out to my boss and it was like, this is just what's happening in my life and I can't stay here. You know, like I did things that I'd think nobody else is going to do that. I could have just said I have to leave; I have some problems at home, you know. But it was like, I'm in an abusive relationship; this person is beating me up; this is happening. And I was like - and I'm not being a good worker, you know. And that was what it was. And I just wasn't able to keep up with the work.

And it was interesting because, you know, I don't know, like, while I was in me desk, you know, which again I was there three months so there wasn't too much stuff, but I remember opening one of these drawers and there was a book about abuse. And I was like - and I just thought it was coincidental because I wasn't telling anybody about anything. And so either the person who had been in that place before was in an abusive relationship, too - it was like that was so perfect because I was able to read that this was, you know, something going on all the places, you know, and these were the exact sort of, you know - what was the word? I'm tired. [Laughs.] You know, practices, you know, whatever, you know - I mean, jealousy to this and to this and that. And so I was like okay.

So then I quit there and then I actually went to Nicaragua. Or no - no, that's when I had already come back. And then I left that relationship, and then when I just - I guess I was just trying to - I moved from there. I mean, even though I escaped I had to come back and pick up stuff, and like I had all my films from Nicaragua, right? They were at the house and I had all these things I just wanted to take. And so I snuck into the house one day and got caught, you know - [laughs] - and got beat up really bad, like the worst beating I got was, you know - I slammed accidentally, probably, against one of the doors and couldn't hear, and all that sort of stuff. So it was pretty bad.

And then she took me from there to - she was going to take an exam at the nursing program so she took me, and I went with her and basically stayed and then when she was taking the exam then I ran away. So I was able to run to the local restaurant and then call my friend Susan, and then she came and picked me up. And you know, my fear was like she's going to find me; she was going to find me. It's like I was so far away, I could have gone in any direction; there was no way - but I - she was definitely searching, you know, around neighborhoods and stuff like that.

And so then what happened was Sandra Cisneros was moving away from her house and Susan knew about that, so she said, you should rent this place, you know. So it was further away and in a different side of town, which is the side of town I still live in. So I kind of connected to that neighborhood.

MS. CORDOVA: Which side of town?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It's in lower King William, and now I live in La Vaca, which is a little bit close by to it. But I liked it a lot because there were a lot of Chicanos in the community, more middle class, but there was a sense of

neighbors and the community, people around you. And so I think it was just kind of low-key there for a while.

And so I would take a job, you know. I guess I like probably worked with Lalo Valdez. He was doing some research. I think he was looking at stuff in the west side and he needed somebody for a month or two, and so I would get paid like \$500 to do that. And then I would live off of that for another month or so. And then I got to travel. So I – a brother of mine, Hernando, got married so I went over there.

And I was doing research – I think I was getting ready for the Esperanza and so I was looking for similar institutions. I was looking to see just what cultural programming was happening in these other places and, you know, picking up literature at every bookstore I could to see what sort of way people programmed their groups or individuals, or what was out there.

So, you know, so I would get myself to a town like San Francisco or New York or D.C. and knock on doors, you know, okay, LAMBDA Legal Defense, okay – you know, without any, you know, setting up appointments or anything like that I'd just show up. And then they met with me – they would meet with me or they'd – sometimes I'd just sit in on this meeting. And I just – like the whole thing about gay marriage; I'm totally against it but I remember being at one of those early meetings 20 years ago where people – where it was the men versus women; the gay men wanted to push this marriage thing and all the lesbian lawyers are like, no, you know, it's just really dumb. And I kind of still stayed firm to being anti-marriage – a marriage abolitionist or something like that.

MS. CARDOVA: Maybe as a marriage abolitionist but not commitment? I mean, you went through a commitment ceremony of some kind, right?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that was more because friends asked me to do that. [Laughs.] Yeah, sometimes I don't think these things through, because that was in Austin and there was sort of the Texas push to try to – recognizing sex partners through – I don't even know what it was called. And I got a call from I guess the lesbian and gay rights lobby and they needed people to go to Austin. And it was one of those last-minute things; I was like, I don't want to go – I don't – you know, but I'll just show up. And I was in Austin – that's what it was. My partner at that time was from Austin, so we would go every once in a while. So we were there and it was like, okay, get up – got up late, went over there, and then the camera shot and there we were on TV. And I think we were on the "700 Club" also. [Laughs.] And so people locally saw it on the "700 Club" and wrote about it in the paper, and somebody else said they caught it in *Ms.* Magazine, or something like that.

So – yeah, but it was more to just kind of support of what was being said at that time. And now that the marriage issue has really become, you know, just a big push, I've really kind of questioned it and challenged it and kind of – and I just see a lot of organizing going around, especially by young people who just think it's – well, this is the issue. I go, why is it the issue? It's not anything that's passionate for me. I'm not – you know, you have to be strategic when you think of what issue you're going to go after. And, I mean, I think there are a lot of people that are definitely interested, but it's not like the stuff that's causing people, you know, to march up and down the streets, you know. I mean – and the issues are, oh, because you get healthcare benefits and you get all the benefits, you know, of having a spouse. But, again, most people – especially when you think of Texas, who has insurance, you know? There should be insurance for everybody, not just because you're married. That shouldn't be a privilege just because you're married; it should just be a right for every human being, punto, like, well, but still, you know, at least it gives people a choice.

But I've seen a lot of – you know, so there's that kind of like you get these privileges for being married. And then everybody – then a larger part might be like, well, you know, it's about assimilating, being like everybody else. My mom, my dad, they want to go to a wedding, you know. So they accept me this much; let's have a wedding. So it's more of that assimilationist sort of ideal. And you know, and that – I mean, for me it's like being gay. It's, again, about being different. Why do you want to be like everybody else?

MS. CORDOVA: It's not just that you're against marriage for gay people; it's for everyone?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes, for sure.

MS. CORDOVA: I just wanted to be clear.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. No, for sure.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, and again, would I have been married? But it's just really surprising when I think of, again, how the younger generation's coming up, you know, it's - who's teaching? They're all going to college but who's teaching any feminist ideology/thinking? You know, what are they - or is it just being taught in a way that it's just, you know, a way to think but not a way to act, you know?

I mean, all the people I know that are in their - women that are in their 50s and 60s who married who were going to - at that time, in the '70s and the '60s - to colleges, they maintained their names. Right now everybody has a slash, you know, and it's like it's cool. Not that everybody I know, but it's just like, you know, whereas the younger people coming through it's like, you know, they just haven't really done some sort of examination about those things and so it's just kind of accepted. And I guess that's what's - you know, again, it's what's in the world. You read about it, you watch it on TV and everyone just kind of accepted it. There's got to be a more critical - [laughs] - way to think about things.

And so - I mean, a week ago I probably had my hardest conversation with somebody I hadn't seen for about 20 years. Just ran into them at a restaurant. And yeah, she was like, well, it's a choice. You have a choice if you want, I think. I said, "People don't have choices." [Laughs.] [Inaudible]. You know, and I just - and her - and she was just determined because, you know, that's what it was. And her partner of two years wasn't necessarily interested in it either but I think felt supported finally when she heard me and my partner talking about it. And it was like, yeah, that's right, da-da-da-da. And it's like the problem even in her relationship; she just kind of keeps a little quiet about it because this other one seems to be just really into it. So again, it's just kind of going into it just because everybody else is. And, well, there was a marriage procession and everybody went, you know. So it was, like, probably what I did that one moment, but I really did it just to support this other Chicana who was a lesbian/gay rights lobbyist, the director at that point, and she really wanted me to do that. So -

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It's not a belief for me, so -

MS. CORDOVA: And how long did that commitment last?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: That was 13 years.

MS. CORDOVA: Thirteen years.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: But I think, again, it's like - I mean, a good person and all that sort of stuff but she's just - and very much involved in my life still to this day. But -

MS. CORDOVA: Right, because she works here, correct? Or -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: She doesn't. Well, she's on the board.

MS. CORDOVA: The board.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: She does not work for Esperanza.

So I mean, there's a lot of traveling and all that sort of stuff. But again, it's just -

MS. CORDOVA: And these were kind of informational interviews, right, that you were doing while you were traveling?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Well, I wanted to know, and I had the flexibility, I think, to be able to just, you know, again, work a month, and then all of a sudden, oh, there's something going on over there; let's go, you know, there's this going on in this other place so let's just go.

And I traveled by myself. My sister graduated in '84, so I went with my partner at that time. And that was, again, a bad situation just because everywhere she went - you know. And again, it's always funny because people see that you might be in a bad situation but nobody knows how to kind of deal with that, and so most people just tend to keep quiet and not get involved. I know that when I saw there were abusive relationships in front of me going on or, you know, could see it, I took to the person that I thought was probably being abused.

And my - Gloria, my second partner's ex-girlfriend, was in an abusive relationship, and I, like, went to her and I said, "You know, you need to get out of this relationship." And it was like, get the hell out of my life. I said, "Well, I was just trying to help you." Okay. So it was like, you know, you can get that sort of response. And I didn't kind of let up, you know. And I also found that I got real angry that, again, there was nobody there for support. Then I really got involved more in gay organizing. And again, there was nothing happening in town, but it was like, how come you we don't know what's happening - oh, when I had left here I also went to New Haven for about a couple of weeks off to get away from San Antonio. And so within New Haven, my ex-roommate was able to come

and put me in contact with all these nonprofit social service agencies that were dealing with abuse in gay relationships and all. And so I was like, why isn't that here? You know, that should be back in San Antonio. That should be around.

And I finally found a gay man who was a counselor who kind of gave me contact with a white lesbian. And also – and I guess when I was with Susan Guerra, she was also trying to help me out. And so the only people she knew was through St. Mary's University, and they have the graduate students going counseling sessions and stuff like that. It was free – [laughs] – but it was like the young Latina-Puertorriqueña thing. It was like, you know, "Why don't you want to be straight?" So that sort of moving me, trying to get me to be straight. And it was just more interesting, just probably as a subject, to kind of question me and my gayness. And it was like that wasn't working, so, you know, trying to say, okay, how do we create programs, projects that really help support, because I'm not the only one in these relationships. And there were only gay men that seemed to have some sort of programs going on, but nothing for lesbians.

MS. CORDOVA: And did they have an organization?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, there wasn't – I mean, I think the gay organizing in San Antonio had its ups and downs, so I think in the '70s there was stuff going on. And there were different projects that I was able to connect to. There was like a Gay Pride fest that was just starting up, and so I was like, okay, let me find out what they're doing. And there were probably some more political types. I can't remember what their names were. I remember going to one of those meetings and Maria Berriozabal, who was a city councilwoman remembers – she just told me recently, she said, "I remember when you came up to me." She said, "I went to speak at that thing." And I said, "Yeah, I remember. You were there and I didn't know you were speaking." And she said, "Yeah, you were real active."

And so, I mean, I was just kind of engaged with those, but again, they were all just small and just kind of – I mean, in the same way that they still are, you know, 20-plus years later, not much organizing, political organizing and power sort of thing. And it's all very gay-identity. So I think, again, for what I've done and maybe – [inaudible] – your little bit of, you know, okay, you're a Chicano identity, you're a woman and you've got this identity, and then try to be able to say it's all these things, right? And kind of that's the way I look at things and I just can't – you know, I couldn't just be a gay activist. It's like – and this is the point I – I mean, I'm real scared of gay organizing, too, because – or any single-issue identity politics.

But at that time I was able to at least kind of know and learn on my own what was going on besides just the bars, right? So there was a newspaper in town, and I got to know the newspaper editor, who was a professor at UTSA and in political science. He was a white man, and I don't think anybody with that sort of educational background has ever run a newspaper since that time. So at least I was able to kind of get involved with him, so it wasn't just, as they call, the rag and just a lot of bar talk or whatever; it had some issues, not super – whatever. And he wanted writers, and it was, like, start writing and go do this and do that. And so I just kind of did that on the side as well. So I was doing that work as well and kind of exposing myself. I was reading the paper and saying, oh, this – so when I would go to New York, I would know what sort of national organizations to kind of hit up on and just kind of looking them up and just – and that's how I got to know New York a lot better, too, just walking up and down a lot – and again, doing things because I didn't know you weren't supposed to do them. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: How long was this process going on that you did this, this sort of investigating and researching?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I started – I finally got – in '85 I started working again, so probably just a year, but I mean, two – a year where I really was flexible with the time. And then by some time in '85, I got a job with Chicano Health Policy Development. So that year was the most flexible. And it was because that '84 to '85 – because I left Betty in '85. So, because of my lack of jobs, the security wasn't the same, and that's where the abuse also expands, because, as you know if you study it, it says, you know, part of that is that security. And so, I mean, again, I wasn't making that much – \$16,000, \$17,000. I guess that was a lot because, you know, 20 years later, people still make that amount of money. And then, you know, when I quit then I go back and get this other job.

MS. CORDOVA: And what were you doing with Chicano Health –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I was more of a counselor, counseling to get kids into higher ed, but focused within the medical field, or whatever. They were all about health policy, but they were really – they had some people working just to get college age kids into – to be doctors rather than just, you know, practitioners or PAs, or whatever, so we were kind pushing and helping in that. And I guess it was just another friend of mine that was there and said there's a job, and I was there for less than a year and then we all got fired because we were – again, it was just challenging the staff – the director who wanted to change the name from Chicano to Center for Health Policy Development, which is what it's called now, so getting rid of the whole Chicano or Latino or Hispanic – you know, nothing to that extent. And so many of us, you know, came with that, and it's like, "No, it's got to stay." And we had no right and we couldn't speak to him, and he just didn't want to. So he laid us all off – or he fired – no, I



guess he laid us all off and claimed that it was because there was no money. So like eight or nine of us were let go. Since I was the last one hired, I was definitely the first one out of there.

But I think part of that was, you know, I was probably instigating a lot of the frustration, and I wouldn't appreciate anybody coming in here and changing this organization either. But I think, unlike that organization, like everybody knows who the board of directors is here; they're friends of people who are on the board of directors. The board of director folks work, again, as editors, as carpenters, as, you know, curators of art exhibits. They're here, you know, where over there it was just like - it was very much hierarchical; we never saw them. They only had meetings every once in a while. And the director - I mean, everybody really talked to me and there was a lack of respect because I am one of their equals, and so they're going to kind of get a sense of like the 20-plus years of experiencing doing this sort of work that I have, and so they think - you know, again, because sometimes it's just, again, commonsense sort of work.

But, you know, I mean, I had to learn how to write a press release. You know, when I used to - before there was an Esperanza I had never written a press release. I don't know who the press - I mean, I read the paper but I don't know the process. Over here, one of the first things they all learn how to do, and it's just kind of - it's real simple, yeah, but to write a good press release is not as easy, either. And so, you know, I have another person, Barbara Renaud Gonzalez, and she's more focused on the - the writer and the communicator here, and she'll kind of make fun of some of their writing and say, what is this; who wrote this, you know? [Laughs.] But again, even just that process - you know, that we have a list of hundreds of names of media contacts locally as well as nationally.

You know, when I was doing that in '84, '85, '86, you know, doing the work around Central America organizing, it was me trying to do it all by myself. So it's those experiences that I brought here and that, you know, again, people then take for granted. You know, it's not - you know, it's like how you are with people, how you treat people, how you - so again, it's like, well, I'm just working here and it's my job and I don't have to cheat anybody - you know, they're in my way. And I say, no what does it mean to organize you have to build relationships. It's all about relationship-building. And they're like - [laughs].

MS. CARDOVA: So let's see, when you left - or when you were laid off from Chicano Health Policy, did you get unemployment?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Mm-hmm. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: I am familiar with that scenario.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was more of that and traveling and just more of that. That's what happened to me. But that -

MS. CORDOVA: So you had time and you had income, so you could organize.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and then that time specifically was focused on the Esperanza, just landing that one out. And it was like, okay, that's it; I - you know. Because when I got hired for that job I remember the interviewer saying, "I am going to challenge and I will take initiative. You know, if you have any problems, please don't hire me." You know - oh, no, that sounds great. So all of that sort of stuff that I made very clear. And so - and there was another Latino man I was working with, right, so I just didn't want to find myself in that same situation. So when it happened, I was like, okay, I can't do this any more - you know, we'd been dreaming something - this other project. We'd been talking about it. We keep on talking about it. I had just gotten fired, you know. Susan's over here, Carol's over here, this person's over here - you know, like different people. It's like somebody's got to just kind of focus on it.

So, yeah, I went away again and picked up more information and then just kind of - somebody was able - you know, it was me just able to push the other ones to say, okay, let's do it; okay, now let's meet about this. Okay, here's the information. Okay. Now we want a space. Okay, let's go and look for spaces. Okay, well, I'll call up and I'll set up meetings. So then from - you know, for six to eight months, I guess, was doing a lot of research and writing things down, putting it on paper and finding a place, which was the place at 1305 North Flores. And, you know, and then fixing it up, and also then finding out that night that there was this film school that had started up in Cuba.

So that happened, in fact, at the same time as we were starting the Esperanza. And so then I had to make a decision. Well, I applied to the film school. Eduardo Diaz was the director for the film program at the Guadalupe [Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, San Antonio, Texas], and he had seen the film and he was part of the board of directors of the Nuevo Cine Latino Americano. And so, as a Chicano representative, you know, he was going to be allowed to accept one student. And so we all had to take an exam. It was all in Spanish. And I don't know why I was accepted but, you know, they accepted me. And so it was just a choice, like, you know - and this happened - like, I found out in December and the Esperanza was opening up in January. Like, we had - and so I had to make a decision, and it was real hard and it was real easy. You know, it's like, well, I don't know if I'll have

another chance to go to Cuba so I'd better do it. And we hadn't really started with the Esperanza, so -

MS. CORDOVA: Did you just delay the Esperanza, or -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No. Susan ended up being the first director.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Maybe we would have been - maybe we would have been co-chairs; maybe she would have always been the director. But she was a volunteer director. And I probably would have been a volunteer director, but instead I went away for the next year and a half. And within that -

MS. CORDOVA: And that was over nineteen-eighty- -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Seven.

MS. CORDOVA: - seven, up to '88.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Mid-'88.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Right - yeah. I started working at the Esperanza in September of '88.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Yes, and, right, and the Esperanza opened in January of -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Eighty-seven.

MS. CORDOVA: Eighty-seven.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: All right. Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So yeah, all the - most of '86 is, yeah, doing the research about the Esperanza and - or other organizations, right. So again, there's that whole political - like so La Peña in Berkeley is, you know - it's like, wow, look at all these films that they're doing, or they're doing presentations; maybe I should go - they're doing this. And it's all got a real political stance on - you know, progressive stance on all of that, you know.

And then I heard about the one in Austin. So then I remember from the Chicana Health Policy Development calling up, looking for Cynthia Perez and trying to talk to her, and see what she - and going to visit her. So I wasn't just being national; I was trying to also make contact. And you know, she had to check me out. Apparently she called her contacts here before she got back to me.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I remember I was always looking up, you know, Angela Davis's numbers - like she could be a good speaker, you know, just thinking those ways and just kind of finding contacts for future programming. We never brought Angela, but - [laughs] - I had her number, name and -

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I still have a new number, so -

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Well, you know, I think that's actually a really good breaking point for us.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: A good place to stop, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So I'm going to stop right here.

[Break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right, we are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution. Today is July 2nd, 2004, and this is my second session with Graciela Sánchez at her offices at the Esperanza. And this is disc one.

And, Graciela, so we're coming back to our interview, and you had mentioned that maybe there were some things that you had been thinking about that we had skipped over on our last session, maybe about your

mother. So do you want to -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, I guess I just - when you asked, like, what my parents had passed on culturally, I just wanted to basically - I must have mentioned that my mom gave me everything, but I think on some levels she's the keeper of the story. So she's the storyteller. And within those stories, besides the history, especially on her mom's side and, you know, the women of her side, the values of being buena gente [good people] I think are the concepts that were very much ingrained in myself and in all her children, I guess, and, I guess, whoever she runs into. So I think that's just critical - again, just trying to be good people, and how do you become a good person? Well, part of it was in the stories that she offered. It also was in the actions, as I guess I mentioned. And again, as an 81-year-old, she still continues to take care of people who are younger and older than she is, because that's her job, is to take care of people. And usually, again, it's taking care of the old people, but you know, it's like, Mom, you know, they're all dying around you, and they're people that are younger.

So it's just that. I mean, I don't think - and she tells on both sides of the - you know, both sides of the family. So she gets - I get to know my aunts and uncles on both sides of the family and always with this real good sense of who they are. And it's - you know, rather than just kind of coming down on people and saying, "Oh, they were ugly to me, or they were this and that." There was just always kind of an affirming way to look at all the people in the family.

And I think one of the things that she was concerned was is when people die, there's always the fight between the siblings or the family about who's going to own this or that. And she said over and over she's seen families fall apart, and the one thing she wants her children to do is continue to see each other and love each other after she's gone. So that's - her job is just to make sure those relationships are positive.

And as I've seen, you know, when I was 13 my grandmother, who lived next door to us, died. You know, all her siblings kind of came in and picked up everything that they had thought their mother - and just took things away, even though it was my mom who took care of her, even - it was our family who - you know, the kids who played with all that stuff. We were liking seeing things go in. It was like, "Mom, don't you get to keep any of this, Mom?" She said, "It's not important," you know. If they want to take it, let them take it. I'm not going to fight them. I'm not going to have these arguments or anything like that.

So that's just been a way that she's maintained her relationships with her siblings, even though like for me it hurts to see, you know, things that I'd like to, you know, keep. And what I've also found out is like some of my cousins have ended up having garage sales and given away things from, you know, my uncles or grandparents, you know, without even letting us know about it. And so it's like, "Well, if you're going to sell it, let your family know so they can try getting first dibs." But I know, you know, friends of mine who were at the estate sale of an uncle of mine who was one of the first, like, jewelers in this town, and, you know, from his drawings and his work itself, you know - none of us found out about it except through these friends who went to the estate sale.

So anyway, it's not a place that we get angry and have fights about. So I think, you know, those are the - that's one of the important roles my mom has played is, again, this storyteller and the values that those stories have.

MS. CORDOVA: And do you also do a lot of writing? I'm just wondering, have you written down a lot of these stories? I know you produced an article not too long ago in the *Women's Studies Journal* sort of talking about the importance of oral history. Do you also try to archive it at all?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Because I don't have a lot of time, I haven't been able to do much of anything, so that article was basically speeches coming together and kind of formulating several of those together and then adding different things. Anzaldúa had died, and that was actually a response. When I heard about it I was in an airplane, so I had three hours, and so I was able to just sit there and reflect. And it was about Anzaldúa but it was also about, you know, what it means to be growing up and to struggle with younger Chicanas and, you know, just all of those frustrations that I was having, but it was because I had that chunk of time on an airplane.

For my family, I think I'm trying to grab that camera as much as possible and turn it on, cameras being something more obtrusive than, say, this audiotape, but I also want to see. And so, after a while, you know, sometimes people calm down. But I also forget to bring the camera as much as I should. But for the Casa de Cuentos program that we had here at the Esperanza, I pulled the camera out and tried to document elders from the community, and my parents sometimes are within that mix, so at least those stories are kind of being documented somewhere.

The event that we had - [inaudible] - we just documented, and we had young people going around videotaping and audio taping. But again, we need to train them to do it better because it's a skill and it's something that - or even if they don't have the practice - or the teaching, at least if they do it enough times I think they learn the skill themselves. And so far it's kind of been funny watching the mediocre sort of videotaping that they're working on - but at least we're trying to document something, and sometimes that's the only thing you have, and a few years later it might mean something to someone. We don't do anything with it.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, just because you mentioned Anzaldúa, would you like to maybe talk about her relationship to the Esperanza or what she meant to you? I know one of the things that I was surprised at is how little there was in the general media in terms of announcing her recent death. And I thought that was a gaping hole. So maybe you could just sort of talk about her. I mean, she spoke here -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, I actually met her in '82.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, and we mentioned that you read -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Right. And so we it's a 20-plus year history with her, I guess. And maybe because I met her at this place where, you know, her name was just kind of starting to get known, there wasn't that fear that I think people have when it's like, oh, this is a great person. Although I think, again, sometimes it's that sense of, you know, I need to meet that person or that person needs to come to the Esperanza that kind of plays more of an important role than how I personally might be nervous or anxious about dealing with them.

So with Anzaldúa - I mean, because I knew her work, I thought it was really important for her to come to San Antonio. And somehow I found her phone number - you know, I guess we have enough contacts. And I remember the first time I invited her to come to San Antonio, and she said, "Well, how much can you pay me?" And I'm like - you know, I hadn't paid a fee to - I mean, I think this is before Esperanza was even receiving arts funding, so it was a difficult thing to answer. And I said, "Well, how much do you want me to pay you?" And they never offer that. And then - so I said the horrible number of \$500, which in '88 or '89, the Esperanza was just a couple years old. And you know, she said, "Well, normally I'd get \$5,000, but, you know, I'll do that for you all," you know. And so, like, oh, okay, you know. So it was new to me, and then I felt like I had insulted her. And you know, I'm sure she knew better than to feel - you know, she accepted for the \$500. And she must have been traveling around because it was - I didn't have to worry about other things.

And then trying to get the Latina lesbian organization Ellas to cosponsor, to help out, and they were a little resistant. Some people knew who she was; some people didn't know who she was. And so I was also saying, can you help put the money together, you know, even if it's a hundred bucks, and we can do something very specifically that's related to the Latina lesbians. It doesn't have to happen at the Esperanza - just something more intimate. And they finally did, and we had a really sweet, nice, educational time. But I think it was just more in line with being with friends.

And then we brought her again - well, and what she said at that time was the Esperanza was the first place in San Antonio that had brought her and invited her, and paid her fee, right, because before that when she was here, I guess in the '70s, when she was trying to read, the only place that would accept her was the gay bar. And so, she just wanted to say times were changing, and at least she was accepted. And she repeated that story over and over.

Of course, she finally got invited by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. We went out with her afterwards and she said the same thing: It's like now I have come - [laughs] - around. Now they've accepted me. And it was packed crowd at the Guadalupe somewhere in the '90s.

And then - you know, but she always made time to hang out with the Latina lesbians that she had met, so she consistently, followed - I mean, worked with us and gave us time. And she had gone to the NACCS - I mean, to the Latina Texas Lesbian Conference in '89 in Houston. So, we went over there. So again, it was wherever she was, if it was in the state of Texas, we were there, just to say hello and just to keep up.

And then in '98 she came through Our Lady of the Lake University, and they let us have her for one night. And so we had three poets and a lawyer. And it kind of revolved around the arts funding and the defunding of the Esperanza. And I know the staff sat around and tried to really think through, how do we do this so that communities will be involved? And so we had Sharon Bridgforth, Anzaldúa, and Yolanda Leyva ended up being the facilitator, Liliana Wilson Grez, I think, and "La Chola con Chelo," María Elena Gaitán.

And then the lawyer was Amy Kastely, who was the lawyer for our case. And so that's why there were three poets and a lawyer. [Laughs.] And again, there was this image where it really just jumps onto - you know, afterwards, because people were really excited about the event.

But my frustration of course was that all of the speakers really wanted to hear the community speak, so they only really spoke for a couple of minutes each. And all of us, you know, in the audience were like, "Tell us more, tell us more; we want to hear more from your voices because you have to teach us." And for me, it was like, I want to hear that person speak or whatever, because, you know, because we're a community. But, I mean, that is the point to their work, is the - that community - the community has the answers; the community knows. And I think that was what Anzaldúa did over and over again really well, is just - and the fact that she did anthologies was because other people had a story to tell, and she was just, about bringing all those voices together and acknowledging them and, I guess knowing - getting everybody's story then gives you the answers or whatever.

So rather than doing just all her own personal stuff, she was about doing a lot more.

With the anthology she had so many pieces, you know – books that she was still working on. And – you know, and those always seem to be put in the back. I got to – when she came back in 2002, that was something we brought her only, you know, so – because we knew that other people had brought her since 2000 – we – *This Bridge We Call Home*, that – oh, I went in February of 2002 to the 20th anniversary of Berkeley. And so because that was the 20th anniversary I was excited about seeing what was going to happen there. And I was disappointed that – I was expecting something else. I mean, they were, pushing the book, but I guess, from the opening session when the university officials came on and talked about – and the publisher came on and talked about the importance of that moment, the word “lesbian” was never used or, and I thought, they’ve already made it invisible. And where the book was so transparent and, out there in ‘81, 20 years later people were hiding it. And there was a panel of – another moment where all these Latinas sat on the panel. There were like 12 of them in the panel, and they were reading from this new book, and none of them read any queer – there was no queer voice within the panel even though I knew a couple of them were lesbians. But they decided not to select those pieces.

So I remember raising my hand and was like, this is what was great about *This Bridge Called We Call Home* – [inaudible] – and, you know, what’s happened? And then they say, well, I’m a lesbian. And I said, “Well, why didn’t you read?” And then others just came – remained closeted. And again, what’s the role of the university – because I think most of them are connected to the university, and again, they – to maintain a job, I guess they have to step away. And I guess when *This Bridge* – most of them may not have been at the university. They were just writing for themselves in the struggle of the ‘70s and the ‘80s. So I guess just that difference.

And I know that, you know, someone like Cherríe Moraga has talked about, again, the importance of *This Bridge* being at the – people who were in the fields reading that book, and she says, now no one is writing anything that is accessible. I mean, I was glad to hear Cherríe say that because I know that I feel that, I pick them up but I don’t necessarily read them in the same way. And it’s not the book that I’d hand over to the 16-year-old – that I hand over and I’d give *This Bridge* to a – and it’s not that they can’t read it or anything like that.

So from that moment I thought, you know, it would be good to have something similar to that in San Antonio, so we invited her and she took six months or whatever, and we brought her in November of 2002. But as people found out she was coming, you know, she was able to have one of those nights be for people who – you know, from her co-editor, AnaLouise Keating, who was in Denton, who came down; and Susan Guerra, who is, again, one of the co-founders, was visiting from Norway and so she got to be in it; and another woman of color who found out she was going to be in San Antonio and drove from New York to San Antonio just to be on that, you know, panel reading. And Anzaldúa just kind of read five minutes and then left it open to Q&A with everybody else.

Fortunately, I’d already scheduled something where she would read alone and do her little doodles and just give a lecture. And I know that I’d seen her give readings, and her tendency was just to read, and most people see that as pretty boring. But I also saw her do lectures a couple of times, and she’d took out the overhead and she would just doodle and talk about Nepantla and – especially Nepantla; she was doing a lot more talking about that. And so it was just fun just to sit there and have, you know, 200 people just basically, you know, have a class with her. And I had only seen her, you know, within the classroom of, Trinity University or, a lot of white students, or just students, but this group of students was community. And so that was, for me, exciting.

And she also got to spend time – I had her come to visit with the women of Mujer Artes, who are women who are third-grade educated, fifth-grade educated, no education, but she worked with them around storytelling and how they could do it within the clay. And we also collaborated there with Fuerza Unida, who were other displaced workers. So she had that with them, and then she had a little session with the staff, and then she had a session with Latina – with queer people of color writers. So, you know, she gave us four days, which I knew was really sacred – well, it was her sacred time but she offered it to us.

And then we got to drive her back home. And so that was a good trip. You know, I actually invited a lot of people, but I really wanted to keep her to myself and just, you know, take her one on one. But, you know, that’s where I got to hear the stories of, you know, *La Prieta*, that novel that she didn’t finish up, and another anthology and another book of – I guess she calls it – *Auto Theories* and stuff like that. So there were at least three books that she was working on. I guess all of us will be curious how they get published or if they get published and when they get published.

So it was special because I got to visit her mother and her sister and got to see her in her environment. And she and her family gave us Toronjas and oranges and chiles, and we took pictures with her and then we came back and then that was it. And a year and a half she’s gone.

MS. CORDOVA: In listening to you talk, I think of the anthologies and the many voices, and I really think, well, of

course, that was sort of a model for Esperanza sort of trying to assemble many different voices and establish a community. And I'm wondering, one, was there a specific mission or a specific agenda that you really hoped to also follow with that community in building Esperanza?

And two, what challenges did you have in trying to work out decisions when you're trying to also collaborate? Like, what are the problems that also come up when you need to make a decision but you also want to be respectful of diverse voices?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Going back to – I think *This Bridge* – and *Borderland* [*Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco : Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987] is another book – I think Anzaldúa basically speaks to another Latina lesbian as she speaks, you know, to Latinas in general, but then the element of also being, you know, of working class or poor community. I mean, I think the rural/urban is the only difference really that I see between myself and her – and Anzaldúa, but everything else is just like – clicks with my life. And so, you know, and again, Cherríe putting that other stuff, so kind of reading those stories, informing and trying to basically say, okay, this is the theory; we're the action of it. We're the – let's try to create what that world would look like. And so it is trying to bring all those voices together. It is trying to acknowledge that there is no higher – hierarchy – but it is about acknowledging and respecting that we come with all these identities and no one of those identities makes us – we all have to come together whole.

I know when the staff, a year ago, was being asked – we were doing a little workshop and, why do they work with the Esperanza, all of them except myself talked about how they personally felt comfortable, at ease and whole, and that was what they needed to come and work in a place. So for them it was really about the self coming in. For me it was like, this is what we're about giving to the community, and this is why I like working at the Esperanza because of what we are helping to do; to create those futures, as we're helping to move forward, you know, the social justice and, you know, a movement of social, economic and environmental justice. So for me it was everyone else, and for them it was bringing – you know, being whole. And, you know, I was really frustrated with their answer, but on the other hand I understood, again, how safety, in the workplace is really important. And so from the very young, who have never worked anywhere else, to some people in their mid-30s, having struggled in other workplaces, to say, well, this is what I need to be good.

But I think – in general, it is, for me, what we're doing and helping to create for others. So that one's ego has to just kind of disappear in this place. And that's a struggle here because here's where you bring in the thinking – you know, the theory thinking, the academic element; you have the artistic, creative element, and you have the activist, and all three should be working together. And I think that artists and maybe the academic world, a lot of the individuals kind of have to – I mean, you're still working within the larger context but, especially in an artist; you're writing for yourself or you're performing and you're performing usually your own stuff, especially nowadays with performance art. Or, you're making a film and it's your work even though you collaborate with others. You know, academia makes you write, write, write, so you have to write your own stuff.

And then I guess movement-building is about the larger community. And so there are clashes, right? And I've seen so many of the staff come through here and be really angry and frustrated after a while because from within their – you know, the society we live in, which is each year becoming more and more individualistic and more prone to go in that direction rather than, community – the world pushes them to say, your voice is being lost here. And people come from the outside and say, you're wasting your time here. Especially because if it's seen as an activist-based organization, most people's experience with activism is in high school and college, and then you grow up and then you get a real life; you don't continue to do activism. And it's – you know, I mean, yeah, you kind of do it but it's not – you know.

I mean, I've have so many people say, okay, you know, you went to study film in Cuba, so when are you going to get a real life and go back and make films? And I was like, well, I am, you know, still living. And so I've had to talk about being an installation artist, you know, because installation artists are about putting things together and making – And you're always installing, right? So it's like, okay, how does this person come together with this person, or how do these groups of people come together and how do they create that – you know. And, you know. So, you know, like buy a building – help buy a building or do I not? So all of those decisions are, you know, installing.

When I came back from Cuba, what I found was that I was one of the few Latinas – puntos making you know, having had any experience doing film, and then add to that the lesbian part, and being out, you know, we know the Latino lesbians that are making films but they're not necessarily out as lesbians. So it's like, wow, you're really unique. Well, I didn't like that feeling. And it's like – or, you know, it makes you feel good but it's like, well, wait a minute; my job then is to see, how can we create a whole bunch of other young Chicanitas and Chicanitos or people from this community that can make the films? And the struggle that I've had is that I can't be the teacher because I've got to do other stuff. I would love to be the teacher, but then somebody has to write the grants or somebody has to, you know, do the PR for all of that.

So then I said, okay, let's find other teachers; there are other people that know how to make film, so let's just bring them and pull them together with the young people. But nobody really wanted to stick around for a couple of years to work with young people to make films. So you can get them for six months and then you try it again and everybody's having to learn and they're gone, so who suffers the most is the program and the youth connected to that. Or just any - it didn't have to be young people; it could have been people in their 30s or their 70s making films, about their stories. But nobody wanted to just work with young people - or to take the time to teach that because it's like, well, I want to make films, and I'm just here in San Antonio for a while before I go to San Francisco, before I go to New York. And that's what's happened, you know.

So again, it's how do you just say, well, maybe my job is to do something else. And I think when you go into communities like New York, and San Francisco, and L.A., and Chicago, where you have a lot of people doing media art, then you find yourself, you know, well, I don't have to be the only person that directs a film; you know, maybe I can teach. But here, where there are very few folks, you know, that - you know, when you're a filmmaker, then that's what you are, you're the filmmaker, not a teacher of film.

So all of that, I guess, to say the ego then has to kind of take a secondary role in the work here - you know I've had to think as I go - oh, yeah, it's about service; well, we talked about service and it was at a church, you know? Like, who does it just for the sake of doing it, you know? People who are just - you know, give up their lives to God, or whatever, and it's like, well, you give up your life to the larger community. And that's kind of hard, you know. But I think -

MS. CORDOVA: Do you feel like you've missed filmmaking opportunities for yourself? Like, are there films you regret not making?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, I regret that no one else is making them. I regret that there are more people, 20 years later, after I've come back from film school, who have learned to make films and they're still not making a film. But there are so many stories in San Antonio and no one's making them because they're working to get themselves, you know, on PBS or in Hollywood. So again, the story - you know, 20 years later, I can still do the job, I can, you know, do the oral history programming that we're doing right now. Maybe someone will tell the story of - there's no story of San Antonio Chicanos that's really positive and good, that just is this - and again, there are a million stories. You know, every day I read the paper and I see the obituaries and I'm like, ah, she was born in 1899, or, she was born in 1911, or, he was born - and you just see the picture and it's like you want to know what that story was. And that's the sad part. But it's like, somebody should be doing it so where are the people ready to do it?

And I know so many of us aren't educated, in general, in the larger population. But again, it's not about who goes to college. It's like if you just give the camera to people and, first of all, tell them that it's okay for them to tell that story, right, because that's the first place you have to get out of that whole, you know, the cultural genocide and its effects, basically, that makes us feel like we're stupid and ugly and our stories aren't worth telling. So you have to have them around, you know, struggle with individuals for enough times and so they're like - they get it and then they're ready to do the story. And again, what usually happens here within the Esperanza is they get it and they get excited; then they move on also. And that's okay, you know. Even if they're doing it in California or they're doing it now in school, you know, hopefully we'll see the effects, you know, in five years, in 10 years, you know, what they're creating and helping other communities, you know, see themselves and do that.

But right now, you know, that is - you know, so I don't regret - I mean, like I said, I'm still videotaping, and I haven't created anything per se. And then, it's even hard to do them here. But there are little stories, you know, like we just did a film on La Gloria that's three minutes long. And you know, there's something just on the Esperanza. All the films on the Esperanza, it's like, you know, I've grabbed cameras; I've interviewed people. The only part I haven't done is edit, but I might tell people, "Well, this is what we need to do, or this is the idea." So on some level, I'm helping to create some of that, and there it is, you know. But part of this work is - and then I don't get credit for it, and that's, you know, okay. But if people see, you know, that La Gloria, you know - because I know - I spoke to the guy that ended up talking to the editor, and he said, "What do I do? How do I direct it" - you know, Vicki wrote this poem. It's a great poem. We just did X, Y and Z, you know, last week, where we did that poetry and we had the film of La Gloria, circa 1930s. So take some of that and - you know, we have this videotape of us demonstrating, and grab some of that and intersperse this and this and this, and do it, right?

And so they ended up doing it. And you know, I said - well, you know, he came to me saying, I don't know what to do. I gave him some parameters and they moved forward, you know. And so from - you know, again, from videotaping people to, you know - because we could have gone to that demonstration without a camera, right? And people do that all the time. I mean, I go to a lot of events and I see there's no camera. This is an important event; somebody should be taping it, even if it's just for the sake of taping it. And they don't do that.

So you know, as – you know – and that’s a pain just to grab that camera, because, you know, unless I’m doing that, you know, or can find someone else, then it’s really me, you know. So you’ll see many times, you know, that I’m not in any of the shots but that’s because, you know, I’m behind it. Unfortunately, I’ve got another person also videotaping. He’s gotten really excited, and he goes, now I want to learn how to edit. And so, you know, because he’s been behind the camera – so you know, we’re just both, you know – because of the whole digital world, everything’s changed. And so it’s – I can’t teach anybody the stuff I know and they can’t – they are not here to teach us how to do that.

So – but we’re still creating it, again. I mean, I’m still writing, but I’m writing grants. But to the extent – like some of the writings that I, you know, challenge myself to say, you know, I don’t want to write it the way a grant gets written. So I’ve been – you know, it’s like how do I just play around with the language and, say to the Rockefeller Foundation, this is my grant. And then it’s like, wow, I like that, and I don’t care if we can get funded or not but that’s the way I’m writing right now.

But again, I don’t sign my name at the end, you know, this was written by Graciela, because, again, I think the work here is also very communal, right? So I do a lot but I don’t do it alone. And so for me to take the credit – and again, that comes into conflict with some people – like I took the picture, so therefore – it’s like, don’t give me credit; I took this because that was part of my job, or I know that people really want it, or – you know, it’s like, oh, that was a great – that’s a great image. You know, it’s like – and so some people are saying, yeah, I get to do it, and it’s like, come on, you know, I remember seeing the first one that you turned in and we hated it. [Laughs.] And we all sat there and said, “Why don’t you try this, or why don’t do this color? Why don’t you try this sort of font, and why don’t you move this around?” And then, two or three days later, it’s a different thing. And their skills were able to move it around, but other – several people put together an idea.

And so, there shouldn’t be somebody’s byline on the site, you know. And again, some people want it and need it, and I’ve seen ex-staff people leave and say, you know – because here nobody – I have a title as executive director on some level but I resisted it, but mainly it’s because I have to sign a piece of paper that says who’s the director, who’s the person in charge. So I have to sign that. And it’s just kind of come, but everybody else is supposed to be staff of the Esperanza, or what we’ve been saying a lot is we’re the Buena gente in the Esperanza.

And so, you know, when they leave, though, they – like I was the assistant director too – and I did X, Y and Z, and it’s like, well, that’s good. They can do it. I mean, it’s not going to – that’s what they need to do if they move up to the world. But it was things that weren’t really – existing in this environment.

So I think all of that – just say, yeah, it follows with Anzaldúa kind of, you know, putting everybody else ahead and kind of sharing that information, and then just the connections of race, class, gender and sexuality. And that’s still a struggle, I think, because I think so much of, you know, the people who we work with are still – we get erased, so we’ll be doing work around immigration just as much as anybody else, but when they bring together a group of people, they’ll exclude us because they see us as queer or they see us as cultural workers and they don’t understand how culture has to do with social justice organizing. And yet many – most of the time, you know, we’re organizing most of that work.

One time I asked a 50-something-year-old, why do you come – a straight man, why do you come to the Esperanza? Why do the other ones not come? Is it because of homophobia? And he said, “No.” He said, “The reason they don’t come is because you all do the work and you do that much better than they do.” I do think that it’s homophobia, actually, in addition to that. [Laughter.] But it was nice to hear it in that context, because, you know, we do so much of – you know, just a lot of work – just requires a lot of work.

So – but they continue just to see race and class, race and class, and not gender and not sexuality, none of that other sort of stuff. And you know, I don’t see much organizing within the white women’s community right now at all, or the lesbian/gay community of San Antonio at all. Again, they’ve become – it’s more about assimilation and they don’t really want it to be part of coming out; they don’t want really do the stuff with connecting to other issues. And that’s where we’ve been attacked. The gay conservative community in ‘97 and all, just attacked the

MS. CORDOVA: I did want to talk about Cuba. And I know that you went there and you did this film, *No Porque lo Diga Fidel Castro* [1988, *Not Because Fidel Castro Says So*]. And, one, I guess I’d just love to hear about the process of making that film. And then, two, maybe you could talk about the community of gays and lesbians there in Cuba versus your experience here in San Antonio.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, there are a couple of films. I mean, again, we all worked on each other’s films. The first year was making a three-minute film, black and white. It was a real, you know, 16-millimeter film, so – how to work in film. And then the second year was working and doing a 13-minute documentary in whatever. And all of those were just choices, right?



And in the first year – again, the school itself was, you know, one student from the United States and basically six kids from each of these other respective communities. So the Colombianos, the – Puerto Ricanos – the Chileanos and all that, you know, could have up to six students. So we came in with a class of about 86 students. And so they came from 38 different countries, and they accepted also kids from Vietnam and from Africa. They had people from Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique – so the lefty-leaning countries, some of those places. [Laughs.] And communities that were in struggle and in war.

And what was interesting in that grouping, we self-selected to have smaller crews, so I ended up being in a crew with four other women of color. Well, we were all people of color. So I had somebody from El Salvador, a woman from Mozambique, a woman from India, and a Colombian and myself, and we were the only group of women that worked together. So that was a struggle, too, because I was – I mean, on some level I was kind of pushing that because of my need for safety, but they also needed it.

And it was really good because we could see the changes as the women were – we were in a group of five, but we also helped in a group of 10 with five other men, and so that was like a section. And when those women were with men, they really stepped away from, you know, picking up cameras and doing what everybody else was doing, but when we broke up into the smaller groups, then they had to pick up the cameras and do the lights and do the editing. And so it was just good to see that transformation.

Again, I was 26, so I was one of the older students. Most of the kids that came in were between 18 and 24, I guess, because they were coming to that school as an undergraduate sort of program. And for me, they just knew that I was interested in film, so it's like, well, you're interested. Because that was the first entering class, they didn't have a kind of age range. So there were the 18-year olds, and I wasn't the oldest person; there were some people in their 30s that were coming from El Salvador, in war-torn El Salvador, who were there for six months just to learn the skill and to be able to go back. And that program was you can be here for six months, you can be here for a year and a half, you can be here for two years or three years; it just depends on what it is you want to make for yourself. So some people just came in for those six months and then went back. I stayed for a year and a half. And so again, the age, kind of I was a little more seasoned and so, again, just to be able to say, well, I want to work with this group of other women. And so we all made films of women within our respective communities.

And I ended up essentially pulling Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango* and probably a couple of other little stories – or sentences from Anzaldúa, I think, and then, I was just saying to someone, even one of the images of – and I act in it, right, because there was no other Chicana around. [Laughs.] And I had somebody else kind of help me co-direct my own film. And I think all of us kind of had to play that because that was, you know, what we ended up doing, so it was a little more difficult.

But as I'm reading some of – as I'm portraying this young woman, there's an image of me walking a tight wire, and that comes from Anzaldúa language of it's like being on a tight wire, on balance, and all that sort of stuff. So I know that – you know, I remember pulling a lot of books because, again, it's like, well, I can tell my own story, but here's all this other language that's here, so how do we create that? And I think most people don't know about that film, but when people see it, it's another three-minute thing. It's just a little more – it's more fun. And it belongs to – all of those films belong to the school, but the school never gave me an updated version. And I think it actually has been translated and gotten used. But that's one that I really liked a lot.

MS. CORDOVA: Which section did you pick of the book?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I think it was just pulling different elements, because it could only be three minutes, but it's about coming back home, that whole sense of, you know – and being a wild woman like my grandmother, all that sort of stuff. And I translated it, so it's all in Spanish. So what's not translated is going back to the English. And I had nothing to do with the credits. But I told Sandra, you know, I used your language, and I told Anzaldúa. But, you know, it's not there within the credits for anybody because somebody else did the credits for us.

So that was the first film, and within that first year, within that year and a half, basically, I came out to everybody in Cuba. I challenged the Cuban – the Cine Latino Americano, because the films that I got to see at the 10th anniversary of the film festival, you know, I mean, is an amazing you know, two weeks worth of film screenings, but, you know, the best works of Latin America, and my sense of, okay, this is where the revolution is happening, not only Cuba, but these are Nuevo Cine Latino Americano, right?

So I challenged that if it's Nuevo Cine Latino Americano, why are we also being homophobic and racist and sexist? And it was just kind of going to that, seeing film after film after film, and the film that won that year was from Argentina, called *La Peticular del Rey*, and it was, you know, just a comedy of someone making a film, but it was super-homophobic; it was just a whole bunch of stereotypes, and people liked it. And so I was really upset.

So I kind of – given my fear of speaking and because Spanish was still just something I was really practicing, although I grew up with it – by this time, of course, I had been in Cuba for a year so I felt strong enough, but I

had to write it, and probably the last day, I kind of said, you know, and “As a lesbian, blah, blah, blah, blah,” you know. And some people from the film school, some of my classmates, were really upset that I had come out, and why should I have – why did I come out? That wasn’t important, and I just thought that I didn’t have a sense of humor, you know, because that film was funny so don’t I have a sense of that?

And I remember Canadian films also were highlighted that year, and I said, “Look, there’s another film” – I said, “This other film that’s from Canada is just really beautiful, and it talks about all these different things, and it’s funny, but it’s sensitive and it doesn’t play off of homophobia.” And they were like, yeah, okay. But I remember lots of students stopped talking to me after that, and other people just came up and were really excited about what I had to put out there.

And I don’t know how it gets written up in the history books, because I know that year I had also done the film by that time, *No Porque lo Diga, Fidel Castro*, and they showed it early in the morning. But they screened it, and they showed it when people really couldn’t see it, so I was a little upset. But I knew years before – because some of the research I had to do was kind of going back – this was before Internet and all that sort of stuff, so I was reading whatever I could read within Cuban files, and just hearing people’s stories that once upon a time, maybe five or 10 years before that, some other filmmakers from the United States had gone in to do research on gays in Cuba, and how people within the film industry were upset because – I guess that’s a big conference and then the film festival happened, so lots of people asked a lot of questions that they probably shouldn’t ask, or should be asked but, you know, it just kind of makes people a little crazy. So my coming out at that point kind of becomes another moment of, you know, dealing with the homophobia – not, again, of Cuba, but of all of Latin America, you know, for me. And when I made the film about gays in Cuba, it was also to counter – [inaudible] – Mendoza’s film.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh. Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. Or to question it, because I know that I didn’t want to see it because I knew he was anti-Cuba and anti-Castro, so part of it’s like, well, let’s see what that reality is; is it really any more homophobic than any place else? You know, is Castro pushing and promoting a law or a whole – go ahead.

MS. CORDOVA: That was the documentary that was sort of about – I think it featured, like Reynaldo Arenas [*Tupac Amaru*, 1984]? Am I thinking of the correct film?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah. It was a documentary, and I can’t think of the name of it right now.

MS. CORDOVA: I can’t either.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Yeah, but very negative about how Cuba was dealing with gays and lesbians, or if even lesbians were featured in the film.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] I think – so you were partly responding to that.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes, very much so. And I hadn’t seen the film when I was – you know, I guess I had to see it, and I found the film in Cuba, so friends in Cuba had a copy of it so I got to see that. And I don’t know that I succeeded in telling the story that I wanted to tell, because again, it could only be 13 minutes long and I had shot a lot of other film – I mean a lot of other hours. And I always wanted to continue to make a bigger piece, but then somebody else did something focusing on Cuba, so –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: But I mean, I guess I got to be there a year and a half. So what I – it was that experience that kind of made me say, you know what, it’s not any different in San Antonio. As a matter of fact, I saw more people out in Havana than I saw in San Antonio, and to this day, you know, 20 years later – I mean, the way I was able to approach people was, you know, there were – they didn’t have gay bars but they had teahouses, and they still – I don’t know if you know – so that’s where you go. The Coppelia, which is where – the big ice cream parlor in central Havana is – you know, everybody gets ice cream. But, you know, after 10:00 it becomes the gay scene, right, on any day of the week, but especially on weekends. So there – you know, if you looked you would see it. And people who were, you know, out there cruising – they’re cruising, and it was up and down, the Coppelia to another teahouse that people would walk up and down, and you would find other groups of people just hanging, and it’s not like, you know, anything different than, say, a gay bar. And they knew each other and they talk to each other and it’s a place to hang out.

But I would be catching a bus, and I remember once catching a bus to try to go and visit somebody and I saw a lesbian couple holding hands. And one was very, you know, butch and the other was real femme, and you know – so they weren't hiding at all, you know. And you know, they jumped off this bus and I jumped out after them, and they were holding hands as they walked down the street, and I thought, this didn't happen in San Antonio. This was 1987, '88, you know, and that wouldn't happen in San Antonio. Maybe now it's happening, but I still don't see it just downtown in San Antonio, and that's where they were.

And that's how I jumped on the bus, that's how I jumped off the bus, and that's how I just kind of went up to them and said, "Can I tell your story?" They ended up not – this one couple ended up just not doing that, but, you know, again, I was able to find other couples. And there were certain sections within the, the beach where gay men hung out and lesbians, you know. And there were just people within the community that kind of told their story. And everybody was afraid, to be on camera, so I kind of had to take care of that – because there is a history. I mean, so that's not to say that there wasn't the history. And so I wasn't about denying that. But at that moment, you know, it seemed like people were at least open about talking.

And nobody – I know that's where one of the women said, you know, yeah – there's "No Porque lo Diga, Fidel Castro." It's like, he's not dictating this. It's just because we're – you know, were raised in a Catholic, you know, Latino country that has this, you know – that's how we're socialized, you know, but not because of Fidel Castro, you know? And that they were just real clear, you know, about it. And I think several people that I spoke to said that. I mean, I'm sure, again, I probably could have talked to a lot of other people who might have said, well, it's all Fidel. But I saw that in general like people that were 30 years and younger who were more – less connected to the revolution were just going to be blaming Fidel in general about all their economic problems. I mean, and that was really – it hurt the economy more so than, you know, their sexuality because, again, the economy just didn't allow them to also have a home of their own. So you know, that's how, therefore, you couldn't necessarily go – there's already people – you know, have a place for their own, you know, loving and all that sort of stuff.

But you know – but again, I was seeing the economy changing while I was there, because the Soviets pulled out, because the U.S. invaded Panama. And I was – you know, it was the worst place to live because you could – for me, having been raised in the U.S. – to be in Cuba – you know, just seeing nothing. And you know, I mean, again, seeing all the luxuries that we live off of here and then going to this country that, you know, barely has anything and then, you know, especially the war on Panama. Then – I mean, at least Cuba had relationships with Panama. And then once that got cut off by the U.S., you know, they couldn't access – you know, all of a sudden as film students we had less access to videos, we had less access to just all – you know, so it's a great idea to have this film school, but if you can't access anything – so friends of ours were, you know, shipping in videos from the U.S., you know, through the consulates and stuff like that. But, you know, everybody was struggling, you know – what to eat, you know, people were starting to get sick. And I left and it got worse, you know, in Cuba. But it was basically somebody – another friend of mind has, like, talked about, you know, "If you're bad, you know, and you don't go to hell, you go to Cuba" – [laughs] – because – so you've got to be a good kid. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Have you been back?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, I haven't had a chance. This job just keeps me – because I want to go back for more than like a week. And usually I want to stay – let me go back for the film festival because that's a good time to go. But December is when it happens, and every part of the year's always hard for me but if it had been December, right around the holidays, then that's easier. But December – early December's just hard for me to get away. So I just never have.

And now I know – with the new policies of the Bush administration, I know people that were planning to go from Global Exchange and other places who were just having it really hard, and so we have – you know, but I think you can still go in as a visitor, as a tourist, through Mexico and stuff like that.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you have any trouble getting to Cuba back home?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, and it was funny because I also didn't hide that I was going. And I remember somebody said – maybe it was my mom said, "You know, just write to the congressman, Henry B. Gonzalez, and let him know you're going so in case you have any problems, you know, he knows." So I wrote him a note. And, you know, he probably went to visit also, yeah, with my mother. I don't think I met with him but I did get to meet with his secretary.

And then when I was going, you know, then I had loans to pay up, and so I remember writing to, you know, the different, you know, departments of the Treasury or something because they were loans from the government, and saying – and there were two loans. And one of the government loans like this accepted a defer because I was going back to school in Cuba, and the other one didn't accept it. And so when I came back I had to deal with the one that had gone bad, but the other one was, you know, right on. [Laughs.] So it was really funny, so I didn't hide that, you know.

And – but when I came back from the film school – I came back twice, and the time I was just coming back I remember getting a red folder when I got into the San Antonio airport. It was like everybody else got, you know, another – didn't get a folder or whatever, but I got the red folder. And –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And so I was set aside and –

MS. CORDOVA: Red. [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: – and dragged all this stuff. I was pushed aside. And I thought – again, not knowing – it's not as sophisticated as it is now. That's, what, 17 years ago, but they knew enough to have tracked me just to – held and asked a lot of questions. And the way I kind of talked myself out of it was I had put some stuff out – you know, like Robert Redford had gone to the film school, and all these other filmmakers had but recently Robert Redford had been there. And so the Mexican newspaper that I had had a story of Robert Redford being in there, so I kind of pulled out that article –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: – and said, well, you know, I was just here, and that's, you know, Robert Redford. And so the local immigration people just kind of let me go. But, you know – but I was also probably, you know, walking in with Cuban cigars, which I shouldn't have. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So that was really my concern – one of many. [Laughs.] But I do remember the red folder, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And so what was it like to come back to San Antonio after all that time in Cuba?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I think what people remember me having the most fun at was going to the supermarket –

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: – and kind of had so many choices. And I went, coffee? Can I – it was like just one brand, it's like, oh, my god, I could have this or this or – you know. So I was just overwhelmed by the choices I had, I mean, because, again, over there I had dollars, unlike everybody else, and of course we aren't supposed to spend dollars, but I – you know, we also had pesos, so I could spend the pesos to do – you know, get whatever, but the dollars I could go to the diplomatic store, and I bought my bran. You know, I bought really old – you know, whatever they had in terms of raisin bran or whatever, but that was going to help my digestion in Cuba, because it was just – you know, there wasn't enough – you know, there was never lettuce. There was, you know – you know, the apples really looked sickly, you know. And I was so used to those prime red apples. And, you know, I just remember at the end just eating a lot of rice and beans and ice cream. Like I ate a lot of ice cream because I had – you know, I couldn't eat some of that food. So coming back, it was like, wow, all this food that I have choices with.

But on the other hand, it was like, when I was in Cuba, I had all the health care I wanted, right? So I would visit the doctor on a weekly basis, all preventive sort of stuff. You know, I remember walking in and always checking my weight, you know. I was only 105 pounds – thin, but, you know, it was like, oh, I need a massage, and they would give me a massage. Oh, can I check my eyes? And it wasn't just me. And I was picking it up because all my other friends were going to the doctor. But they were coming from countries that had less, right? And so everybody would go to Cuba. I would hear about so many people from Venezuela and from Colombia and [End of Tape 2] – go to Cuba, I would hear about so many people from Venezuela and from Colombia and places like that going to Cuba to get the best health care. And so – because they were all going to see the doctors, I thought, well, I'm going to see the doctors too, but it's like, again, checking how he's doing massage, things that were all preventative, not for any sort of relief and then coming back here saying, oh, I don't have any healthcare again and I didn't have healthcare for another 15 years probably, or so. And so, I remember talking to the doctor about AIDS because I know that Cuba was being attacked for their homophobic stance on AIDS and their keeping the AIDS population in a section of the island, and the doctor sitting with me. So I could go up to that same doctor at the school and say, what's up, and he's like, well, let's understand this: this is our policy and it's not just about AIDS. When we've had other diseases that could wipe out the island we've done this. And he talked about different moments in their history where the same sort of isolation happened, and then he also said, besides, we've been trying to get to these conferences in New York and the U.S. won't give us visas so we can go to the World Health Organization, the conference on AIDS, and they were denied visas. So it's like, how can we be sensitive if the U.S. is also denying us the right to be there?

But ultimately there's a sense of an island that I hadn't really thought about, and that he took it within that

context. Again, did homophobia play a part in it? Possibly, but also I could just understand the politics of you don't want to wipe out your whole community.

MS. CORDOVA: And in terms of – what was San Antonio's response to AIDS? What was the – how did the city respond? Was there any sense –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I know that when I – it must have been right after that, yeah, coming back and there was a lot of work being done around AIDS and I know that a group of us went to visit with the mayor at that time, and part of my interest was to say, it's going to affect women of color – straight women of color in particular. "You have to do something about it." And the mayor saying, are you crazy? This is a gay man's disease. I'm here sitting with you is gay people so that's what it is. I said, don't you understand, though, that straight men also have sex with men and other people, and not just the sex workers that are women but with men, and then they come back home and then they have relations with their wives? And he just laughed at me and he laughed at all of us.

So we were – and I remember talking to a lot of the PR companies because San Antonio had national money to dole out and preventative stuff around AIDS, and we talked to them and said, it's not just a white gay man's disease. There are gay men that are Latinos and you have to talk about it. So we were doing a lot of that sort of – trying to prevent and trying to teach people, and they basically ignored us.

So, again, who's homophobia? So all kept on doing is saying, well, is it any different in Cuba than in San Antonio? I mean, and who has the highest proportion 20 years later of AIDS in San Antonio? Straight Latina women, Chicana women, which is what we said once upon a time. And I know that there was one woman, a straight woman, who ended up doing a lot of work around AIDS and finding herself dealing with her own homophobia and dealing with gay white men who didn't want her to get monies for Latina women, and she was really pissed off at them, but also then living within the Latino community – they're trying to ignore that situation, and so frustrated.

Just within the last four or five months I got a call from a person that lives in the next-door – the community right next door, which is called Five Points, and she was wanting support and contacts for it because they were trying to fill homes for some women that had AIDS – some Latina women that had AIDS, and there was a big push from other Latina women who said, no, they didn't want those houses built in the community because their kids were going to have to play with the kids whose mothers were infected with AIDS, and so they were going to – so they were already acting out, they were not letting their kids play with the kids whose mothers had AIDS, and they were just being ugly and mean – and she just wanted help. So they were fortunate there was another group of women that were – you know, Latina women who headed con SIDA or contra SIDA [Mujeres con SIDA o contra SIDA, Women With AIDS or Against AIDS], I'm not sure which, and the woman in charge of that was in my high school. She was about seven or eight years older but I was able to make contact with her and then put them together.

But it was sad. You know, here it is 2004 and that was the call that I was getting from a neighbor, and she was just really frustrated, and I said, whatever we can do to help you, but here are the experts.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you start working with the Esperanza right when you came back? Was that just an immediate thing?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, again, I left it – it should have kind of gotten started and I never knew what position I would have except just to work, and so when I came back, what had happened was Susan Guerra – had split town and gone off to Norway because she just wanted her kids – her – yeah, I guess she had two kids by then – to grow up in a better environment than the United States, again, under the Reagan-Bush administration, which did not seem good for her kids, she thought it was very volatile and her husband at that time was – the housing industry had gone down and he was a foreman for one of the housing – so it was just bad economically for them so they left. And then another board member, Carol Rodriguez, had taken over for about six months and was getting paid a small stipend and then just kind of said maybe it was too hard for her. So I came back in September of '88 and nobody was ready to take it on, so it was just like, well, I guess it's my turn or it's going to die. So people – for the history people just assumed I was the only director, and I said, no, actually there was a year and a half of two other people. They kind of felt that I'd been the one that stuck with it.

And so I wanted to do it; I wanted to work here before I went to Cuba. And basically there was a budget of nothing and then Gloria was able to write that first grant to Genevieve Vaughn [Foundation for a Compassionate Society] out of Austin and get \$6,000. And so that was the second year that we had \$6,000, and that paid partly for my work and partly for whatever else we did, and then I just started learning how to write grants, I started learning how to do everything that it means to run an organization, and kind of looking back at what Carol and what Susan had done to see what I needed to learn, but just learning as I went along, asking everybody for help.

MS. CORDOVA: What was your first major project, or what was your first goal?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, I remember even from Cuba talking to Gloria, and there was an all-women's band, and she said, well, they're coming through town and they're going to be in Austin. Should we - and I said, bring them. They're important. You can't say no to them. And so I know those sorts of things were kind of happening.

But like a project - I know that people just wanted a mural and so we did the children's mural by December of '88, I guess. That's enough to do in December in terms of a project per se. I know that, again, I was just trying to - within the first few months I was just trying to figure out what had gone on before. We didn't have a newsletter but within that timeframe I think the Interchange Network, which had been the umbrella for the Esperanza, was ready to fold.

MS. CORDOVA: What was the - not to throw you off track of the mural project, but what was the Interchange?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: The Interchange Network was a group of social, environmental, economic, justice organizations that basically created a 501[c][3] and it was essentially very white with a few people of color organizations, and it was a project - I think Cindy Duda [ph], who was a teacher in the local high school and also was teaching classes at Incarnate Word maybe in the Peace studies graduate program. That probably had to start as a project, so we kind of did the newsletter called *The Interchange*. And they were meeting in different places but I know that there was also a headquarters with St. Paul's Square. There was one of the board members of the Esperanza who was a board member of Interchange named Judy Wade. Her husband was a doctor and so he had his office in another little restaurant, so that was a place I think that I also found, when we would go there to eat, that we'd find this one-page newsletter, front and back, and they'd talk about different things going on in the community. So for someone like myself to be able to say, oh, here are some like-minded people doing work on Central America and women's issues and anti-war. You could find it in this one-page newsletter.

So the Interchange was that network of people but they only met like a couple of times a year as a group but they put out this newsletter. And then so we went to them as - Susan and I to ask them to umbrella us because they had a 501[c][3], so it started the project, and they agreed to that. And so here were two Latinos going to basically a white organization to ask them to umbrella us. And then they did and then they basically stepped away and said, here's our 501[c][3], and then a few months later, or six months later it was like, we're not going to do a newsletter anymore - do you want it? And so we did that but then we changed it to *La Voz de Esperanza*.

So, in hindsight I don't think we really talked to them about it and I know people got upset. I try to remember that history and let people know that history because I don't want that history to disappear, and I think we've tried to keep whatever newsletters we had of theirs, and we have their applying - 501[c][3] so we have all that paperwork, and then just little by little everything that was Interchange became Esperanza because we didn't have to apply for our own 501[c][3]. So people come to me years later and say, how do you apply for a 501[c][3] and it's like, you know what, I never did it.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] And also there was another group, Ellas. What was Ellas?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, Ellas became a statewide Latina Lesbian organization that I helped kind of start but then I went to Cuba so never - so Gloria and other Latina lesbians put it together. What had happened in '86 and '85 - again, because, as I mentioned, I did a lot of queer organizing, and after my bad relationship I'm wanting to kind of learn as much as I could, and so I went - there was a Tejano gay conference. And it had happened maybe once before, but there was one in Houston so I went to that and there were only six Latinas within that conference and the rest were men. And so of course I challenged the fact where were the women and I was one of their voices from San Antonio, so they kind of respected the concerns that I had. So one of the things they did was give me some money from their conference to go to Los Angeles where we knew that the Latina lesbians in L.A. - or in California were having gatherings and retreats.

So I went there and ran into friends again and like Luz - now I'm just remembering - and just kind of saw what they were doing. And so then I came back and called Gloria and Leti Gomez, who were both here in San Antonio, about - and Gloria was my partner at that time - oh, maybe she wasn't my partner. I don't know.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And then - I'm kind of stuck, I want to go to Cuba, but somebody has to move this forward, will you move this forward, and then Gloria really got Leti Gomez to support her on that, and then I went away for a year and a half. And again, only through phone conversations or whatever, but they basically did a lot of organizing and it came on a statewide level.

So it was an important organization because they also were able to find in Houston a woman - I forget her name, but she ended up being the lead plaintiff for the sodomy case - Morales - Linda Morales out of Houston - Leti Gomez, who then goes out to be the first executive director of - [inaudible] - a national organization. People like Dina Flores, who was Gloria's ex-partner and was living in San Antonio but they got involved and now she's partners with Cynthia Perez out of Las Manitas. And so they all got involved - Liliana Wilson Grez, who is a

Chilean. So all of these people, they were really interested in making sure Dallas had a contact and then - [inaudible] - but I know at least Houston and San Antonio, Austin and Dallas were a little bit better. And so they kept together and they had the first statewide retreat in Stonehaven [Stonehaven Ranch, San Marcos, Texas] through Gen [Genevieve Vaughn] who - gave us the space.

And when I came back from Cuba I got to attend that first conference, and it was hard for me because it was like, oh, it was my - somehow it had been my idea or my push to get some people to do that and then when I was there it was like I was nobody. [Laughs.] They knew who I was on some level. So I remember crying a little bit at that first meeting. It was like, okay, it's okay. And then they had a second year and maybe a third year, I don't know, but I know that the white lesbians got really envious and said, you know, these Latino lesbians are having - one so that's when the Texas lesbian conference happened so they need to have a statewide conference for white women. Well, they didn't say for white women, just for lesbians in general, but their first conference in Dallas was, again, less than 10 women of color.

MS. CORDOVA: But you guys set the precedent.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yes we had sent the precedent - and I think part of that struggle was that some of the Latino lesbians have white lovers, so it was also like - and the women - the Latino lesbians basically said, it's exclusive to Latinas, and I think that maybe they might have had some little reception or gathering one day for the white - [inaudible] - but it was only like two or three; it wasn't a whole bunch of people but that struggled there.

And so, unfortunately what happened there, again, everybody moves on, so Leti went on to D.C. and did the Sodomy case. So everybody kind of went back to their local organizing, and when Gloria gave up and gave it to other people locally, then they just kind of took it onto the social level and it was a struggle. That's why, again, when I was trying to bring up Anzaldúa - it was like, okay, here's this political figure or this important writer, and they were like, we just want to have fun. [Laughter.] You can have fun with her. And then they ultimately just kind of let go of that project after four or five years or something like that. Ellas kind of died down as a statewide and then - but I know that in San Francisco pulls and it becomes Ellas San Francisco. And Ella, again is "una de ellas" is "one of them" type. And I think somebody wrote it within a poem or something that - Marcia [sp] Gomez was also involved with that, and I know Marcia creates the logo that has an indigenous mestiza - image with - [inaudible] - again somebody wants to erase that.

The Ellas ends up going to the march on Washington in '87 and we have photographs and I know some of those slides got lost, and there are a few slides left that - like I videotaped some of the proceedings from that conference as well, so there's images there that nobody really kind of looked at it, again, because tapes warp and all that sort of stuff. I think those sorts of things - how can they all get digitized at least and not lost. So they're around here somewhere in Esperanza and I know people say, oh, these are a whole bunch of video tapes. I don't know who they belong to. I'm just like leave them alone. They're like - it says LLRC - Latino lesbian retreat.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, with that I'm going to stop you because I need to change out this tape, so we'll take a little break. [Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right, we're recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Graciela Sánchez on July 2nd, 2004. This is session two and disc two.

And, Graciela, you were just also - had just been mentioning about the children's mural and I guess how was that received in the community or what was the process of creating that?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I guess the reason we did the mural wasn't necessarily like my idea. It was just people in the community were really interested in doing that and one of the first things I did was walk up and down the street - Flores Street - a few blocks away from here and just asking for permission because I think some people don't like murals and part of it is they think, again, it's the imposition of whatever the image is onto the community.

So everybody was really fine about it and - except for our next-door neighbors who are restaurant owners and that's because he's just a - he was just the mean man I think. He's just a Scrooge sort of character and he always was the cause of problems for a lot of programs that we did while we were there.

And working - again, it's how I've learned a lot of - to do a lot of work is other people's experiences, so the muralist that we worked with -

MS. CORDOVA: Who was that?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was a community - Community Cultural Arts or something like that. It doesn't exist anymore, but they did all the murals in the '70s in the Casiano Homes, in that area. And a lot of those murals have been destroyed because a lot of those buildings got torn down because they were public housing. Those two

individuals, Tache Torres and Juan Hernandez now work for the department – for the Office of Cultural Affairs, and I went to school with Juan, so I know him from first grade on, and Tache is a few years older.

So it was – I guess when I found out Juan was working there and they were interested in putting murals that we said, okay, let's do it. And they would provide the paint, they would provide just all the materials and so we had to provide the youth, but working with Gloria and I think the board of directors of the Esperanza has always had educators in it. I mean, how are we to define educators, but these were actually people working within schools from – like again Judy Wade who started in an alternative school called the New Age School, which is now known as the Circle School and a lot of – you know, like Susan Guerra had sent her kid there, so people looking for alternative schools and people like Gloria and Laura Codina and just other board members were working within the Edgewood school district and they were board members of ours, so they were always working with children, so they were challenged by the fact that the muralist wanted to just, you know, basically put up their own image and then the kids would draw that. Right?

And so the first encounter was to say we want to create the imagery – let the youth create the imagery and then you help us – and then they'll also draw back up on the border or whatever it needs to do, so essentially was – I guess out theme was peace. What does peace mean, you know. Something like that. And then, again, the struggle became talking to the different districts or principals and the principals said it has to be a district policy. If the district says yes, then we'll go ahead and – you know, and writing to the district who never paid attention to us or writing to principals that – you know, so it was just like leave that alone and just go to the teachers we know, so it was going to these teachers that we had in a different schools who then we talked to and said can you present this project to the young kids?

And so we had from – I guess the youngest person was probably two years old and then the oldest was 12, so it was just elementary school. And most of them worked with their teachers and then Gloria and I'm not sure what other person besides myself worked – who kind of defined some images that were going to be selected. And then the muralist kind of – with their experience – kind of then put it all – you know, flows right. So for Gloria's classes – you know, their answers were like, you know, peace means that children can have homes or that candies would fall from the sky so they could be eaten and be happy and the types of homes – you know, she always was challenged that the kids would always draw homes that had little triangular roofs and all that sort of stuff and they were living in the projects that had flat roofs, so she challenged them to draw flat roofs and so – and what she – and this is where I also noticed how great of a teacher she was because we also were getting – and that art – her interest in them being creative and drawing and water coloring was really important because in the schools that had been kind of wiped out, but she made it part of her work so that she worked with three, four, five-year-olds. You know, no older than six years old because she only worked early childhood.

And we were getting stuff from fourth and fifth graders whose work was less pronounced or whatever, so you could see kids as fourth graders doing stick figures, but her kids were younger and doing things that were more elaborate just because she was pushing them to do that.

However, we worked with the East Side Boys and Girls Club and so we were able just to create this big mural and then we were able to find – like one of our big finds was this guy named Vincent Valdez, who was one of the 12-year-olds and his best friend was the son of one of our board members at that time, so that's how – and they all knew he was really interested in art, so he came in and on his own he created basically the – then they were all into little balloons I guess. I guess these were ideas of kids, right, so the balloons floated around on the walls and so one of the balloons that's what he created was just like an environmental scene with a giraffe and just very three-dimensional where everything else was more two-dimensional, and so his kind of stuck out and we just – and he made – you know, and we were able to get him then in to direct – contact with some of the muralists themselves and one of them just continued to guide him and he ended up going to a really important school and now he's been bought you know, by people like – well, just big Hollywood stars and he's been so –

MS. CORDOVA: Was he in that Cheech Marin show?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: The Cheech Marin.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, okay. Yeah.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So we knew him as a 12-year-old and some people – I mean, again, when they say –

MS. CORDOVA: That's a great story.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and that he acknowledges that that was when – that that connection connected into the larger community – I mean, I think that's what we do. A lot of the emerging artist is if we can't just work with them it's – just connect, you know, to other people in the community. I guess Barbara Renaud-Gonzalez was just saying – because we were challenged by the funding this past year and our low scores and people saying we have to act more like businesses and we're saying we are very much a business, but we – you know, the people



in the community – the leaders don't understand that you have long-term effects on people and how do they know, like myself, the fact that you are – that I work for you – that I'm also – it gives me the luxury to get some money and write and so I – you know, who knows what this piece will mean when I finish writing my novel and how it will – you know, that it will have had an impact on Sandra before Sandra was big. You all supported her and nobody has a sense of what you all did for her and how that affects the larger San Antonio community and we're like yeah, because tourists come to visit her house and that's their big push. It's tourism, tourism, tourism.

But so, you know, we kind of quietly just savored those moments that seem that people have succeeded. We hope that some of these artists kind of – or not just artists, just people who lead – again, if they become scholars or they become just other activists or they just raise their kids a certain way that what they've learned is having some impact on the larger society, but maybe, you know, somewhere down the line it would be nice to hear, "Oh, the Esperanza helped me here."

I know one artist – what's his name? Mondini – Franco Mondini-Ruiz – yeah. He – when he was in the first show – it was our first gay show, and he was Italian. You know, Mondini. And he was working as a lawyer for USAA and he – so this was an important moment because he was coming out and he was doing his artwork and years later he becomes selected to the Whitney biennial and does that sort of work, and within his interview for the local paper he does talk about the Esperanza, but I remember challenging him. It was like you're not Italian, you're Mexicano. You have Italian and Mexican – again, but at that point he was there and so you just see that transformation on their own. They get to be – you know, because we're all – you know, we're Spanish, we're Italian. We're anything but Mexicanos.

And so he did a major transformation and he's got a long way to go. Sometimes I have to make sure to challenge myself to say, you know, people can move. You know, don't remember them just as – but because they also get angry when you challenge them too, and sometimes – you know, it's not nice the way it comes back and so, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Would that have been – I think I had that you – there was a 1989 lesbian-gay art show. That was the one?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and I ended up fighting with David Zamora Casas also because he was the curator and he walked in saying I want to do a human rights exhibit and we had just done a human rights exhibit that dealt with Central America's struggle and so I said, are you talking about human rights or, you know, are you wanting to do something else? Because we had just done the first AIDS art show in the city of Santa Fe, also in '89.

Nobody would do a show on AIDS in San Antonio in '89, and so this artist who happened to be a white Jewish woman had gone from different gallery to gallery to see if somebody would show her work and we weren't really doing a lot of exhibits at that time. We were just starting to pick up on them and so we had at least the luxury of having this space available, but I think what she found was we were the only ones that were willing to deal with this taboo subject and so a lot of people came to that and of course the media, the newspapers just didn't want calendar announcements, and then again it's because of the taboo subject, but also because the – the Esperanza promoted it because once something happened, Blue Star, then it started and got a bigger write up and, you know, that's more of a white-centered organization.

And so he came into the space because of that AIDS exhibit and then wanted this human rights. I said, well, let's be honest. Are you wanting a lesbian-gay art exhibit because we just had that human rights exhibit and it wasn't about Central American human rights. It was this big thing, so call it what it is and if it's going to be lesbian-gay, let's do it. And people have to be out and I just kind of gave him parameters of the majority should be women of color, the majority should be people of color and those sorts of things that were important to the Esperanza.

And I know that he was struggling finding women and so he even kind of cheated and had his alter ego become one of the women and later on telling me and I was just not happy, but at least they learned. And I know years later there was a statewide exhibit of the – within the queer community and the artists working from San Antonio challenged other artists in Texas as far as the queer voice of color, you know, and where are the women's voices also? And that San Antonio was able to bring in a larger community of women and men of color into those statewide exhibits in Houston, Dallas, and all those things just being white gay men.

And so they say that and they were able to say, well, this is important so they could understand. I also had some people that didn't realize that they were going to be out and maybe – again, so I told the story to the curator. The curator then has to impart that information to those artists who I didn't actually know because I said, you know, we'll have to put their names and all that sort of stuff on invitations and put it out in the newspaper and so sure enough one of the persons saw their name and was really upset and to this day they still don't talk to

me, but everybody knows he's gay.

But it's just - you know, and I get how does misogyny also play into that because I know he's been very pleasant with other people associated with that exhibit that Graciela, you know, to hate her all the rest of my life and I remember running into him in the store and saying let's talk and - "I'm not going to talk to you." Little things like that, but - and those are the struggles again. Those are the places. It's like you can't just be gay and understand.

You have to understand what it means to - you know, how does sexism and misogyny affect you as a gay man? You can't do this to me as a woman when you're being attacked for being too much like a woman and people, society, the patriarchy hates woman, you know. And as you are aligned with women, you too - you know, that's why they hate queer and gay, right? So understand that, but if people don't want to talk we can't do that, and it's not just about talking. It's like how do we have the programs? How do we have the classes? How do we have whatever that teaches people to get to that understanding because - and I guess that's been the struggle.

It's like we have so much work to do in the community that - you know, again, I'd love to teach a class on all these different things that I have learned. I would like to work with some of the young people that would come through the space, and usually, again, it's finding someone else to do that and yet I have all these experiences that they don't have, so they're never necessarily teaching what I want to teach, but I don't have the opportunity to do that either.

So if I had a chance, it's like I want somebody else to write the grants. I want somebody else to administer this space. I want somebody else to take care of the building. It's falling apart. But those are the things nobody wants to do, so that's the place that they're - like, I want to work with the artists. I'll help create the exhibit. I'll help do this other stuff. Well, everybody wants to do that. That's fun, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: And did sort of - was the film festival a natural outgrowth of these exhibits or how did the film festival emerge and when exactly?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: We - because of my interest in film, we were always showing films before there was any film festival, so we started showing films just on our own and then collaborating, say, with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. At that time there was a film programmer named Yvette [Yvette Nieves-Cruz], and he had a - [inaudible] - and part of her vision was to have other institutions collaborating showing programs, so she said, look, here's some films about Latinas in Central and South America and dealing with these issues around social justice and show them and then one time she said, oh, we have this opportunity to show from by Marlon Riggs called *Tongues Untied* and would you be willing to collaborate because you know the lesbian-gay community and it's going to be a - you know, it's going to be shown in Texas and we're working with Southwest Media Project and I said, okay, let's do it.

So it was wonderful, right. We - the 1991 Gulf War started that same day that we showed the film, so we only had 75 people show up to the Guadalupe, but what we were told by the people in Houston was that that was the largest crowd that showed up anywhere in the state of Texas. It was really sad for us because we would have probably had that place filled, but so many of our people - I mean, if I had been somewhere to see the film - you know, what was going on on TV, I might have stayed home too, but because I was programming, I didn't have an idea the war had started.

And Marlon Riggs showed up, you know, so it was not only the showing his film, but he was here, so - you know, and it was, again bringing in people like my parents to see that film, right, but we also showed *Ethnic Notions*, which is the stereotypes of black - you know, and so a lot within the black community and some Latino members wanted to see that. And then *Tongues Untied* on top of that was - some people walked away. Some people stayed, but like that was a tremendous gift for us to collaborate with the Guadalupe and again the film programmer wanted to do that. Later on, the director of the organization said he didn't want any of those collaborations, so we had to stop it.

But what also happened was because we showed that film in San Antonio publicly when the national broadcast was going forward, most cities pulled away and didn't show that film. We were able to go to the local PBS station and say we've seen it. We like it, you know. We'll be willing to bring you community members who can - so we had this ongoing discussion and they showed it in San Antonio. So Austin didn't show it, Dallas didn't show it. Like we were the only city that originally broadcast it on its national air date, and then maybe later on people showed it, but so again that - we were able to influence that and that was really tremendous.

And it's one of those great films also. You know, Marlon Riggs is one of those people like - Anzaldúa - and all these people that connect race, class, and sexuality in a really profound way and he's a Texas boy too and nobody knew that, so when he died we were still - this red space was still not painted so when we did a - [inaudible] - for him and painted onto the walls and I think if you go - you know, we were able to still kind of honor him.

So we were showing that and a lot of, again, the programming for us was what was important was how these films – how these artists of any – you know, how these writers, these thinkers, these academics – whoever is out there, these activists can connect all these issues together, so it can't just be a Chicano from the '60s and '70s coming in and telling his struggle, because that's what it would be – a he – a straight man, right? Talking about that – how do we bring in someone that can talk about these multiple issues and really challenge.

And it also allowed us to bring in those diverse audiences, right, so *Ethnic Notions* did bring in the straight black community, but then the queer community got to come in because they were interested and so all of a sudden Latinos and whites could also come in. So that show we showed strawberries – *Fresas y Chocolate*. We showed films on *La Peor de Todas* about Sor Juana Ines and so there were a lot of people interested in her literature, interested in women, interested in Latinos, so you get these multiple communities coming together. We brought in people like Margaret – I'm forgetting her name. Who was the one that wrote *Cuban Women* – Margaret Randall.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, right.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: You know, white woman. Why would we bring her? Well, because she had just done something on – I mean, again, her Central American and South – and Cuban – life – her work around as a lesbian, as a writer, as an incest survivor. You know, and that was one of the earlier things and somebody – the wife of the editor of the newspaper at that time – [inaudible] – was her last name, she was a friend of hers and she said, I'll pay for her to stay. I'll pay – but for us it wasn't just accepted, it's to say how does it connect to all these issues, and that was like, again, '88, '89, somewhere there.

But it was a good way to start thinking of who we program and how we bring people out there, and so – I mean, we didn't have a space at that time. I know we had to use our space at the Esperanza – the old Esperanza was just – you know, only allowed for 60 people so we had to rent out or try to do it as cheaply as possible in these other places, but sure enough we were always able to fill the space. It was like 200 people. Okay, we're going to fill it out, and we did. And that's always been important to me too because so much of my time I would go to see the Guadalupe Film Festival, or anywhere else go into a room and there are four people and two of them are the filmmakers and two of them are people in the community and it was like – or go to the Carver [sp] and see a mainly white audience of 20 people seeing John O'Neal and his work around the South and storytellers and it was like, you know, if people aren't going to pay then give away the tickets. If people aren't going to come into the institution, then have it outside.

So we – because we were showing a lot of these films, we actually started with the other American film festival – films made by and about the "Other America," which weren't racist, sexist, and homophobic. Because, again, I was seeing films from the Cuban experience to the ones that I've seen here – it's like it wasn't enough to see Latino films if they were continuing to promote stereotypes and hateful language and whatever, and a lot of this was anti-woman and a lot of this was anti-other people of color and I saw that within – I remember being at the film festival at the Guadalupe once and all these women came up to me and said, do something about this – one of these films – it's horrible, it needs to stop. And it was actually a Latino comedy group that was there kind of subtitled imagery of Asian – of an Asian film, so as they were saying something, they were translating and they were translating in a really horrible way, and people laughed, right?

And I hated that, and so I hated it. I was basically not watching it and that's why people came to me, but it's like I don't work at the Guadalupe. I can't do this for you, but I'm willing to go with you as a group to stop the film from screening, but so many times it's like you do something or sour grapes. It's like Graciela, there are grapes. Let's get rid of the grapes. It's like why don't you get rid of some grapes or else I'll stand with you and we'll all go and get grapes. And I know I've done at least the communal grabbing of grapes and dumping them in the trash, you know, at conferences and stuff like that. But, you know, it's like do it. I said, okay, no, let's do it.

And so anyway, just the films being – so when we did "Other America" we said no. And again, it was like looking to the stars also. It was like they're doing films; we can do it. And we – I had just seen *City of Hope*, which is a film by John Sayles, and at the bottom at the credits it said, you know, an Esperanza production. And I'm like, oh, let's bring him and he had done *Liliana*. He had done so many films and I had seen, I guess, *Brother from Another Planet* and it was a little older then, but kind of showed *Brother* and *City of Hope* at that time, not knowing that he was working on *Lonestar*, okay? Which I didn't like all that much compared to other films. Maybe, again, because it's so much closer you know the real stories.

But calling up whoever was finding *City of Hope*, finding that Esperanza productions – calling up and saying, do you want to come to San Antonio and him saying yes. You know, it was like you can't say – [laughter] – and then my first staff person still works for him basically and she lives out of Austin unless she's in Mexico, but I developed, again, the relationship and then when they come through it's like, okay, somebody else has to kind of really deal day in and day out with them, and so what was smart about her was that she maintained that relationship and continued.

And he's - when he came out with *Men with Guns*, we were able to show that and do it as a fundraiser as well, but what he would - I think he was coming to his interest in Texas was because he was doing this film screening - doing film research for *Lonestar*, but - which he never told us about. I mean, I think while he was here was when we found out, but he - what he told us he did appreciate was that we wanted to show the films like out in the basketball courts. You know, let the sun come down and then pull out the screens and have the kids that were playing basketball sit around as audience and have people within the projects come out, so that's what we did for the Wheatley courts; that's what we did at the Alazan courts.

And with the Alazan, which were like two blocks away from the Guadalupe, it was also about saying you're in the community, you don't go to the Guadalupe. Let us give you free tickets to get you from - you know, you come to the Alazan to see these films, now in the next three days there will be films in this institution that's yours. Use it. Go there.

But again, we forget, as people who run these institutions, that people become afraid of spaces because they don't feel they belong and so it's always about trying to tear down those divisions amongst ourselves and also to acknowledge that those realities happen, and that it happens here in the space too. I mean, my friends from high school - I get upset because they know I do this work, but they don't always come here and I'm always like you'll really like this, but it's not about not wanting to do that. It's just maybe how comfortable do they feel in this space. So then I'm trying to figure out ways for people to feel comfortable and so that was what we were trying to do to support the Guadalupe. Not to damn the Guadalupe as much as to support them, but also to challenge ourselves.

And it's hard. It's not easy just doing - I mean, we almost had a riot at the Alazan because we didn't realize that the housing authority put us there without telling us that they were having problems as the housing authority with the community, so when they saw that the Esperanza was collaborating with the housing authority to put the films, their parents kind of shoved kids onto us and the kids basically were just causing a lot of problems, so it wasn't a necessarily good moment. Of course, at the Wheatley courts that moment was really nice.

And, again, we showed *Brother from Another Planet* there, but we also showed an animated piece on the making of tortillas, right? It was a fun kids' film, but - and we know that, again, everybody says east side is black. Well, the majority of the people that live on the east side are Chicanos actually now, because, again, the population - how do you have 60 percent Chicanos and 6 percent black people even in the largest population of the east side with - you know, blacks only comprise probably 40 percent and Chicanos the other 60 percent.

And there's a lot of tension between blacks and Latinos still and we're trying to always bridge those divides. So then within the "Other America" film festival we were also showing queer films, so for instance *Fresas y Chocolate* comes out of the "Other America," not "Out at the Movies." Sort of Buena and all those films, you know, and for me I was like if that's queer programming we're showing, there's "Other America," but we - Esperanza was also collaborating with other people within the gay community who become my friends. You know, Dennis Poplin, who ends up basically organizing "Out at the Movies" and he's - he, along with myself and Gloria and Michael Martinez and Steve Bailey and a couple of other - [inaudible] - and Martha Prentiss and, you know, half of us are white, or half of them are white and half of us are people of color, but our politics are progressive to lefty compared to everybody else and we helped organize the lesbian-gay media project.

So I'm part of that, but also at the same time I'm not the curator of that film festival. They do "Out at the Movies" and the Esperanza collaborates to do "Out at the Movies" with them, so - because there is no full-time staff. It's just the group of volunteers and we like the - and again, as Esperanza pushed that the films - you know, how do you find queer films made by people of color - you know, made with focus of people of color also, so when you compare it to, say, the programming of "Out at the Movies" compared to other LGBT film festivals, we had the majority of people of color or majority of women, or we try, you know, even if we didn't reach the majority it was always looking for those films, and if - you know, around Asian films we didn't find them - except the films made in China and Taiwan and all these other places and just trying to do that, but then looking for Chicano-made films usually as well from California and things like that.

So it's nice to, you know, again have those influences amongst other people we've worked with and so, yeah, it was a collaboration and "Other America" was totally ours. "Out at the Movies" was a collaboration.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, and then was - how did the idea for *Mujer Artes* start? How did -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: *Mujer Artes* and the youth media project come to be because - well, especially *Mujer Artes* I think we were - again, what's a long term? How do we do long-term work, you know? These moments of people coming together and identifying and seeing again people who present something. It lasts for two hours and if you come over and over you have some sort of effect, but again who is also coming to these programs? You know, even if they're working class and poor they film have had some exposure to something else and then how do we have a deeper effect on a group of women that might not participate in the process at the Esperanza, so

while we were thinking the long-term effect – and so we were also thinking that for young people, so we were showing films, but how do we teach people to make films?

We're showing women, but how are we really making either new women artists and with this consciousness, so that happened, and I guess the Texas Commission on the Arts was looking to do minority economic development, so we applied – didn't get funded. Then the City of San Antonio applied – had something about let's do specific projects with inner-city communities and so we applied there and we were able to – you know, I mean, I think we were dreaming.

It's like, okay, we'll do some sort of Cooperativa, but what's the discipline? And so talking to Michael and talking to Gloria and talking to Magda Shillay [ph], it's like our new head is – [inaudible] – maybe clay and Michael has done – is like the visual artist on the board of directors and so – one of them, but he's the one that's been most integrated as a board member and so he really kind of said let's let them work with clay and so then we were able to find Marta Shell – Magda McChesney who is now Shellay, but is Mexicana originally, born and raised in Mexico and we were interested in having a Latina.

And that became the first problem was like who were the Latina women who were in pottery and we really saw that in San Antonio most people who work in pottery are white men – not even white women; white men. [Laughs.] And so at least we found – [inaudible] – who took the first year women through and then just – again, she's a working artist, so she didn't want to give up too much time, so then she just kind of left the program.

We were also doing the peace market – the Mercado de Paz – since '88 or '89, so we – and part of our work was not just having other people sell the works of people from third world countries, but to actually have some of those artists come in, so in '94 we had three different artists from Mexico: Veronica Castillo, from Puebla who was at that time probably 24, and then two other – one other potter from Oaxaca and another – and somebody who worked in wood from Oaxaca. So they came up and our relationship continued with Veronica and so we – once we lost her, we said, you know, do you want to come up? And she was in this midst of her life of like I can go fight with the Zapatistas, I could go to Germany, or I could come to San Antonio, and so her mom liked the San Antonio bit better. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: I bet.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And she seemed to like it too, so she came and she just came for months at a time and then she was – continued to be the main – our artist in residence I guess for about six or seven years, and she's just recently – this is the first year that the women of Mujer Artes – haven't had any artists outside that just comes and stays with them for a while.

And I think it's a good time – I mean, so Veronica was ready to move on and now she's going to start a school to teach young kids from Mexico, and maybe from Puebla, themselves who are out on the street – street kids, right – to learn something and so she's going to teach that, so based on her experience here she's actually teaching in Kingsville this semester because she made contact with Santa Barraza and of course – I mean, my struggle with Mexicano artists or any internationalists is that usually they're well known. The big museums, the big universities can bring them up and so they can pay them a lot and I remember Veronica was paid \$500 to basically be a little – you know, brown little woman sculpting at the museum, like museums do really well until they pay \$500 for one or two hours worth of work and her turning around saying, well, they paid me \$500. You can pay me.

And it was like, no, and then having to explain what a Chicana, a Chicano is, what community-based organizations are like versus the white, European-centered institutions – how they have money. And that's taken a long time for her to understand, right? And for her even to understand what it means to work with Chicanas because Mujer Artes has been a mixture of women born and raised in Mexico and coming here and then Chicanas, right, and she, as a very well grounded Mexicana – you know, not understanding that they don't – you know, they don't know where Las Vegas is, you know. Like I know where Las Vegas is. Why don't they know? It's like education, you know, or like – and being real frustrated with their lack of desire and passion that she would expect. It was like, well, they want to, but – I mean, they transform and it's not the same group of women, but they're – but there's a core group that has now been together in about four years and she was instrumental in working with all of them.

And now having taught one semester this summer in Kingsville, she – yes, last Sunday she went by my parents and she said that the kids at Kingsville are worse than the women in Mujer Artes. You know, she goes they don't even know if they're Mexican or American or what they are and they don't want me to speak in Spanish and when I try to explain to them what a tree of life was and then they all start yawning and – you know, so for me it was good. It's like, good, you have this experience. It's not just the women of Mujer Artes. Now you understand the struggle we have with Chicanos and for her to kind of – again, it's that experience because they just feel like it's that group of women or the Esperanza doesn't get what I'm trying to get. Now she's seen them.

And she thought she was going to teach a class of advanced kids working in clay, and what she found out was that most of the kids were just taking an easy A sort of class, you know. It's an art appreciation sort of class and she only found that there were two kids that had - that were actually art majors and even those two had never done work in clay, so she said she had to do real sort of basic things with them, but just the struggle she had with them.

So it was - again, for her to compare that to the Esperanza experience was, I think, good because she was burned out by the time she left because she just felt frustration and - you know, and again that it is hard - I mean, but on some level it was Veronica, unlike some of my Chicano - [inaudible] - that continue to come back year in and year out who work with these women who are, again, with the media having found somebody that comes back to work with a group of young people or anybody, right, to teach those skills.

So now we have at least a really good project with Mujer Artes which I think is kind of also a secret, you know, like people know about it, but they don't know about it. And nobody funds it either, right. I mean, we've applied like from friends of folk art out of New Mexico, but the first struggle I have to deal with is their racist understanding of what folk art is, right, so Chicanas don't fit and so - you know, and so their understanding of indigenous culture through Hopi, Navajo, whatever, all that whole Southwest, they understand it and we can - they can see that, you know, there have been 10 generations of mothers passing it down and then they're like, well, how does Veronica Castillo from Puebla have anything to do with Chicanas in San Antonio? You know, what does Puebla have to do with San Antonio? I was like, uh, mole, Cinco de Mayo. [Laughter.]

You know, do you want me to be that - it's just like - and really struggling and trying to write about that and talking to people like Antonia and saying this is constant, you know, and so they would - they never funded Mujer Artes. The Ms. Foundation who wants to do stuff around business don't get art, right? So they'll give me money to teach women to get trained to open up a daycare and it's like, well, we're trying to give women another alternative to being secretaries or being caretakers. You know, can they be creative? And so they turned us down. And they're also about capitalism too, and ours is like we don't want to teach these women to just - you know, to make money and they can't make it anyway. You know, we can't get enough money just to say here's you're \$1,000 salary and everything in addition to that. I mean, we always said can there be a stipend that goes to them and then they make the rest of their work in that - and so after like five or six years we were finally able to get some stipends given to them. Actually, after we started getting city funding again this past year.

MS. CORDOVA: And we - yeah, we have to touch on that topic I think. It's just so important and I want to include it. Did you have any indication prior to - I guess there was a little bit of defunding in 1994, but did you have any sense of the mass defunding that was to happen in 1997?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No. I mean, I think I mentioned how, yeah, the attacks were anti-affirmative action in '94, '95 - anti-inner city focused work and again it was Mujer Artes and the youth program that got cut. But as I think I mentioned also, that as - there was a lot of work being done by these gay conservatives towards us, mainly one or two people and a lot of faxing going on without us being anywhere - having any idea that this was happening.

And I think allies just thought, you know, these are a bunch of crazy people. Let's just put them away and we don't even have to bother to tell the Esperanza or Graciela, but what happened was those gay conservative boys aligned themselves with the right wing and that's where the power came and so - and that they work on homophobia to attack the Esperanza even though I think politically it's where the gay conservatives - you know, these are lefties, these are Cuban - based - you know, they're Castro's arm to cinematography of - you know, whatever, because the films we show and all that sort of stuff they weren't getting anywhere. These are Marxist - I mean, we've got lots and lots of language.

MS. CORDOVA: You were accused of being pro-Castro.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Pro-Castro, pro-Marxist, post-structuralist - French post-structuralist. [Laughter.] All this sort of language. You know, I was pro-graffiti, and so I was just a bad influence. Me - again, I become the target but there are all these other people associated with the Esperanza that they hate, but it's not until they align themselves with the gay - with the anti-gay that they -

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: - strike from that. And what also happens is there's a radio announcer that moves from North Carolina, Jessie Helms' community, to San Antonio: Adam McManus [AM-630 KSLR]. And he, even though he - it's a small radio program with a small listenership - probably no more than 300 people, but he's able to rile up those 300 people to write letters to the city council, to call, to do that. And those 200 or 300 voices made enough of a difference to cut back the arts.

And we also had one councilmember, Robert Marbut, who was working against us and against the arts in general

unless they could prove that they brought in tourists and so that was his big push with his conflict of interest is that he also is promoting the sports foundation. He is on their board or a staff person and the sports foundation is bringing in like the NCAA and wanting to bring in the Pan-Am games and for them it's tourists. It's like we're bringing in tourists, so we should be able to get - have access to this money. You can't prove that you're bringing in tourists, so you should get no money.

And so he was getting extra money and giving it to his foundation and pushing the agenda of tourism and the hotel and motel tax that funds the arts organizations as we understand initially written was written to actually maintain local, authentic culture as a way to, you know, challenge what can happen when tourism really plays - and I think it's because people living in communities of color helped to define that language, but then there's the lobbying interests of the hotel community that says it has to be connected to the tourism because we want to bring in more - you know, so show us the heads and beds and then we'll give you money.

And we've run into some of these lobbyists and challenged them with our attorneys to say, no, you're wrong and - but at that time within two weeks basically we got defunded. We first found out - we received a little flyer from one of our board members who is a - who was working as a nurse practitioner and so I guess one of the members of the San Antonio pro-life association is also working in the hospital, so handed her - and it's like, you know, defund the Esperanza, call this number, do this and this and this.

And this board member - we had just gotten done with a major fundraiser and so we were having a celebration thanking the 15 people who helped us and so just kind of like, oh, here's an aside. You know, here's this little flyer and it's like, oh, my God. When did you get this and how come you haven't told us about it? It was like, oh, it's nothing, you know, because they didn't think that it was going to turn out to be what it was and so then we start making phone calls, getting people to say they will help collaborate to try to stop it and, again, I think the homophobic has played a big part, so a lot of people who should have spoken didn't speak and everybody just assumed that nothing drastic was going to happen and so we're all at city hall and we're waiting to speak. We're all signed up and we had - actually, what happened was before they have the final decision they have meetings -

MS. : I'm sorry. It's your mom. Do you want me to take a message?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I hope she doesn't need me. [Laughter.] That -

MS. CORDOVA: Do you want to pause the tape at all?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: No, that's okay.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I mean, if they do - she'll knock again. That we went to - what was happening was they were attacking public arts funding too, right. And there was a whole big national article - New York *Times* writes an article about what's happening around the nation in the arts in general and then they talk about in San Antonio they were attacking the public - percept - for arts and so we knew - again, this is why I wish people would remember the histories for themselves, you know.

It's like Eduardo Diaz, who is the guy who gets me to Cuba who really doesn't - who loves the Esperanza initially and then gets scared because we are in your face. You know, we can't - like he would go - I remember one year in '90 we showed films - or '91 - and he wrote an article as the executive director for the Office of Cultural Affairs and said, you know, I went to this film festival in San Francisco and gay films are - you know, there's nothing bad about it, right.

But like two years later it's like why are you showing those films? Because we were - you know, we as well as others probably were causing him a lot of pain and we don't have a sense of all the attacks that he's getting, but when he's getting attacked in '97 around the public - percept - for art, it was like how can we help you? We're going to go here. We will just speak on behalf of all the arts organizations. And we did and nobody else necessarily in the community because, again, we're not just about ourselves; we're about the larger community, so the media - the Lesbian and Gay Media Project goes, Jump Start goes, and Esperanza goes to speak on behalf of all the arts organizations and that's when we hear Jack Finger, who is one of the right-wingers who goes off and spews - and the Esperanza should be completely defunded because of their film festival. And that's his big push is - you know, Jack Finger, who is still around and who works with us on some issues and doesn't on some.

Anyway, and so that's when we were really alerted and then add that to the flyer and so we really started organizing and then we'd come to the city council meeting. Oh, and at that first event, you know, the city council members are not listening and it's citizens to be heard, and I know that I kind of stopped my conversation and say, please, council members, I'm speaking and so is the rest of the community. Listen to me. And like I won't speak anymore until they paid attention to me and then I said the rest of my speech and then afterwards people

from Eduardo Diaz to his wife to – you know, these are people who are good friends of mine – you know, it's like tell Dennis Poplin, who is the guy in charge of Media Project, he says keep yourself away from the Esperanza. The Esperanza – you know, talk about gays, talk about how we bring in tourism from the film festival around gays, but dissociate yourself from the Esperanza. The Esperanza and Graciela are the problem, and so – you know, and then I had one of the council members, Flores, say, you know, you should never talk to us that way. That was very disrespectful.

And I, you know, for like three or four years or five years or six years I never watched that video because we taped that video – we bought that video, and – because I was feeling so bad about what I said, and then when I finally watched it, it was like I didn't say anything wrong. You know, I was very respectful, but I just held them accountable, and I remember Sandra Cisneros and María Elena Gaitán and other people two weeks later go before the council and they were speaking and it was like Mr. Mayor, pay attention to us. And I'm like, they're getting to do it. And so it was good that they did it, and who were the people challenging the council were women of color, right, and Latina women specifically and so we get defunded and there's no notice publically why we got defunded.

I actually had that same councilmember, Flores, come up to me and tap me and so to the back of the council chambers and he said, look, here's the piece of paper you're going to be defunded. You're not going to get any money and that's it. I'm like, well, when did this decision get made and it's like it just got done. So all of this information becomes really good information for us because we filed a lawsuit because what they did was they made a decision behind closed doors the night before and as I talked to each one of the different allies that we have on the council, who still aren't strong enough to at least vote against the policy – it was an 11 to zero vote to cut the Esperanza 100 percent, to cut all the arts organizations 15 percent – was – you know, at least they told us well, we met here. We did this. You know, there was a six-signature memo and yours was to eliminate the arts funding and of course the money goes to the sports foundation and all these other entities. And many of the men of color on the board basically say poor people and people of color don't support the arts because it's an elitist form and we don't have money, so we have to take what money we do have and give it to streets and drainage and that's the important thing that the community has.

The only – there was an African-American council member who was an old – who had just written in *La Voz de Esperanza* probably in April as he was running for office saying he wanted our vote and how great of an activist he was. Months later in August he's denouncing the Esperanza and the film festival "Out at the Movies," and he can't support something like this because his church and his leaders and his constituency doesn't allow for that.

And then the conservative right-wing religious types have a few people speak, but mainly it's a lot of us packing the place, but even here some of the arts organizations said something supporting the Esperanza and many others just like again pushed away from the Esperanza and didn't – you know, and so again those are places where you hurt but – you know, it's not – you know, again, they're not ready to lose funding to stand in support of us.

MS. CORDOVA: So what were the immediate decisions that you made and what was the sort of longer process of leading up to your lawsuit I guess?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Well, not having – I mean, we didn't even know how much – you know, people would say, well, what percentage of the funding did you lose and how's it going to affect you? I mean, immediately we still had an event on that Friday and Saturday, which is called *Mujer Canto* and so it was an all-woman salsa band and so we danced in a very – you know, we were all sad, but we were kind of trying to say this isn't going to bring us down. Eduardo Diaz was here with his family, too, and so – and again, these people – they alerted other people, again, what was coming down and they would never call us up to say anything like that and so it was hard for us to plan and organize and part of my struggle was to trust my own instincts.

Like I went to some Latino leaders and I said – and we were also organizing with Sandra at that same time when she was bringing the MacArthur geniuses that happened in November, so we were meeting with these people and I was saying, can you all come together and speak on behalf of the Esperanza, and one of those women said, no, let's just – let us talk to them one on one – that publicly it might not make a difference, and my gut instinct was waiting to be – we need to see them in public denounced. The possibility of defunding the Esperanza and it's not going to happen, and because they were 20 years older than I was, it was like, okay, I'm going to trust them on this one.

And they didn't, right. They didn't have those meetings one on one with them and we – and I never got supported, because I would have helped to coordinate that public gathering, right. I would have just asked them to stand. So I trusted some of those people and then we lost. And then afterwards another group of all men – male – Latino leaders, including the director of – MALDEF – and some other Latino inner-city groups that I had been working with met with the mayor and said, you know, let's give back the money, but it was already a done deal.



So – but at least they tried. It was – I wanted them to do it beforehand and again I wanted them to do it publicly, so at least I learned to trust my own instincts a lot more. I mean, I was 37 at that point, but again a lot of the way I’ve learned and I’ve led is to get everybody’s input and then make decisions that way, and as I get older and wiser I’m just like trust your instincts some of these times, or I have enough experience now to know that this will work, so it’s not just based on instinct, it’s actually based on experience.

So I’ve learned to do that a little bit more, and then – so after we get done with Mujer Canto and we had planned though and celebrated, or didn’t celebrate –

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: – then it was about, okay, what programming can we and can we not do and so we were going to bring some youth from Houston so we just – you know, had to cancel programming that we had already set up for October and November and December and basically just say no more programming for this year, and yet people continue to say, well, we have to do this and we have to do this and so we did a couple of different things and so we didn’t stop programming, but it was just more selective at the first, you know, six months and then as time went on there was – you know, people started – you know, again, this is where the women of color and queer women of color tend to come in and not charge us for their fee, so, again, if Cherríe was going to change \$2,000 or like \$5,000, it’s like I’m going to be in San Antonio, let me do something and you all do the program, so we still had to pay for printing, for postage, but then we didn’t have to cover an artist’s fee.

So we did that in terms of programming. In terms of the community, the community wanted to do something. It’s like, what are we going to do? We just got defunded. You can’t just do that. And so well, let’s get together, so we ended up having monthly or bimonthly meetings at the Esperanza on weekends to say what do you want to do, and so kind of getting a sense of what needed to happen. Do – you know, because people say sue, and I was like, well, I wanted to sue, but I was talking to two attorneys since 1994 about suing them and people said there’s no case. There’s no case. You have nothing. It’s like, really? We have nothing?

And I just was really frustrated and in ‘96 Amy [Kastely] gets onto the board, so ‘94, ‘95 she has nothing and in ‘96 she gets on the board. By ‘97 she’s very much engaged as a board member, so she’s coming to these meetings and she’s able to say there are issues that we can really look at, and then she brings together some other attorneys. She invites men and women and the only ones that come to the table are the women – white and Chicana – from here as well as Austin, and it really is the women from San Antonio that end up staying.

She invited like – [inaudible] – who was at UT law school and then doesn’t get tenure there, so now she moves out, so that’s why we lost her. I think we would have had someone like her on the – and basically what’s good about – and then again because they’re board members of Esperanza, they already have a different sense of how the world works, so we’ll file a law suit, but you may lose. And it’s like, that’s fine, as long as we say it’s an educational tool, so the lawsuit as an educational tool to talk about integration of issues, about race, class, gender, sexuality, to talk about how this happened not just to the Esperanza, but to all poor people and working class people and so we can file the lawsuit and we can talk about the issues in the same ways that we could do something to connect the community then we’ll do it.

So that takes a year’s worth of conversation, so by August of ‘98, a whole year after we get defunded, we have a – we file a lawsuit because I think we had up to two years, but we did it after the first year. And we’ve talked to hundreds of people by that time because nobody – the same group of people don’t necessarily show up. What’s good about that – I mean, some people who show up to every meeting would say, well, I already heard it – you know, but you will hear things differently. So for those like myself, I learned what the issues were for the community because I went to all the meetings, but I also learned the law in a really profound way because it’s – and so do other people, right.

And so, again, how do we talk about the issues because NEA Four had just happened also and the law came down maybe in ‘98 and they lost their case essentially, and they talked about censorship, and so for us it was like, again, censorship is not the issue for the Esperanza because as people of color, as people we’ve all be censored, and as poor people, as working class people, you know, and so that doesn’t jive with our community, so that the phrase became “respecto es basico.” I mean, we tried a lot of different ideas, but ultimately it was respect is basic – “respecto es basico.” It goes back to a value that we thought we could launch our project that way.

Also in ‘98 – January of ‘98 we do the Arte es Vida campaign because we challenge the notion that the council members had talked about – art is only for the wealthy, and so that’s happening. So all these things are allowing us to basically talk to the community about what they see – if they see art and culture as an important element in their lives. And, over and over – you know, 9,000 signatures in four to five months we’re collecting – basically the community said, yes, it’s important to us. It is as important as streets and drainage, but we want both. We don’t have to – want to choose, and I guess if they’re given the choice to choose, everybody says whatever, but

nobody – the council members were making those decisions on their own or, you know, when we talked to them they'd talk about streets and drainage. Yeah, well, nobody goes around saying, you know, I went to this theater, because our community doesn't get it, but they were saying we understand that concepts of culture are connected to English as a second language. I mean, we understand that it's connected to the policies of immigration.

These were conversations they were giving to us, right? We weren't imposing that idea. It's like, will you sign this, and this is – you know, this program that you're at is something funded by the project, you know, like the Cojunta festival. Like the Low-rider festival, like the Martin Luther King march, which wasn't funded, but – you know, the International Women's Day, the Earth Day. We were going to places where lots of people were going to be and having those conversations. And that was – you know, and it was a challenge I had two cultural arts organizations. Do we have conversations with our constituencies about why we do – and what – how they're affected by it, right?

I mean, I know that for me the – and I don't do it as much, when I go up and I introduce the program, it's the podium. It's where you get to be the – you know, to put out the issues. And so when I get to do that, I talk about all the things that are going on as I let other staff people do it. You know, they're more afraid or – so they just announce whatever's coming up, but it's like – for me it's like the lecture or whatever. [Laughter.] And so it was good for me to be able to do that, especially around '97, '98, '99, and throughout the entire four years of this lawsuit to be able to just connect things and – as we're doing right now around the Patriot Act.

It's like, this moment you being here is – you know, would be seen as a terrorist act. It's like, well, let's sign up, you know. So we wanted – so we did Arte es Vida, we did Respecto es basico. Hundreds of people show up at whatever lunch hour we have the press conference. We're able to – I guess we have the national ACLU and the national Lesbian-Gay – LAMBDA legal defense looking to us to see if they can collaborate and be attorneys. And we go and interview them and select ACLU because ACLU is kind of broader and the LAMBDA legal defense is just focused on queer issues and we're saying, no, it's broader than that.

And then ultimately we lose the ACLU, right, because they were just focused on being the big national people and knowing everything and not wanting to work in the community with us, so they disrespect our process and they're ready to – you know, they figure we're going to lose the case anyway and they want to win and so they're ready to go to settlement and whatever and so they quit on us before we get to fire them. And then we're nervous. It's like, oh, they quit on us. What is that going to have on the national level because they're connected to funders and we don't want to be seen as the bad little brown people like wouldn't support the national ACLU and – but it didn't ultimately affect us at all.

And we win and so I think their surprised with the win and I think because – we win because it's always what we said: it was going to be an educational tool. It's always going to be talking to the community. I mean, again, the experiences we had what we wanted to do was just like these house parties which we ended up calling cafecitos, you know, again playing – you know, it wasn't called a house party. It wasn't called whatever other café whatever, but it was just like cafecito, pan dulce and café, or whatever and you just keep it simple and we'll come to your event – to your little gathering and you get to participate and speak to it as much as anybody else.

And initially everybody wanted the attorney or attorneys to go, and – but again as we learned this stuff we were able to speak with the same strength as any – of the attorneys and it was – you know, we just had to create those different sorts of things that people could do, so cafés – cafecitos were one things. Somebody else said, well, how about other things? You know, Fuerza Unida was also working with us and so they are seamstress, so it was like how do we create some sort of quilt, so there was a quilt that was created – you know, that they didn't do alone, but like when we were at the Earth day we had a little booth that was set up and we had cut up, you know, 12 by 12 inch pieces that were going to be sewn onto this quilt, but then the imagery was theirs to select – you know, to do whatever it was. And so we found ourselves in different places and we did have things like, I guess, from the milagro del Corazon – you know, whatever, but we've got that somewhere stored upstairs and didn't – you know, it wasn't super big, but it was another way that we were able to get people involved in it.

People started doing street theater. You know, for a whole year I had a group of people saying let's do street theater, let's do street theater, let's do street theater, let's do street theater. And it's like, well, do it, do it, do it. And then finally I had an intern that came in and she was also interested in theater, so she was able to find somebody in the community that had done street theater in Mexico with the Mascarones and came and did two classes and within that first class, you know, divided up the group and they all did skits and one of those skits was something that we really liked, but then when we kind of put that out there, it was like – I guess *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* was just brand new at that time, so they did, "Who Wants to Be a City-Funded Organization?" and it was just a play on that and it was just a great 10-minute piece and then we incorporated – or long and I know we incorporated – we had some young people drumming, so they introduced that and we had Vicki Gris, who was a staff person then, who did some of her own poetry, you know, so it became like a 30-minute sort of thing.

And then we moved it, right? So again it was from first Friday at the Blue Star event, which was successful to – okay, people hang out at churches. Let’s go to these where, again, we have a contact person in the church who is willing to introduce us or we’ll be willing to talk to the priest that let’s us – you know, as the people come out of church we’re out there and we’re presenting and they’re just hanging out there and having them sign again or just know what the issues are, so we went to lots of churches that way, so it was just incorporating what people’s desires were and saying, okay, let’s do it, but again also letting them do it rather than imposing it on us to do everything, and the cafecitos were the best place where I think people really learn.

And I remember the first one that we did was at the group – it was a family’s house – you know, about eight or 10 people and it was all in Spanish and it was church-based, right, so we basically had to go to their mass. And I took with me another staff person who is a 50 year-old man, but who is mainly English dominant, so there we were. And we left them – at that time we had made the ads and the postcards and maybe we had already come up with the “Todos Somos” bumper stickers and yard signs, so – yeah, we had, so we were able to leave them with those things, and next day they call up and say the yard signs are up. You know, they’re over here. If you drive by Culebra [ph] Road, you’ll see a few of them, so it was – you know, we went to the King William area, which is a very wealthy area, but we had people who supported us there and then we went to Rotary Club because people told us they belonged to this Rotary club and somebody said we belong to La Vaca association, so those places weren’t necessarily places that our allies – that we knew we were going to find allies, but because – like for some conservative Republicans that were in the audience, they’d say, well, we believe in the Constitution and your First and Fourteenth Amendments were violated and we don’t believe anybody should be having these violations, so give us a sign.

So it just depended on – you know, because we were able to just speak to those communities. They’d ask the questions, we’d respond in that way, so before you knew it, there were 1,000 of those yard signs all over the place – many more bumper stickers on people’s cars and then one of the other things I thought of was like the big banners that could go. You know, and they’d cost about \$500 each. You know, \$100 – like \$300 or \$400 to make, but then \$100 to put up and we just said, okay, let’s find six locations. You know, again, let’s do the research because we could have put the big ones on the big sign, but that was just too expensive, but it’s like nobody had done – they had those yard signs that just go over there because you’re really promoting a festival, and it’s like, well, this was going to say “Todos Somos Esperanza.” Right, and it doesn’t say support the Esperanza people – you know, it’s just “Todos Somos Esperanza,” so we found six different sites throughout the city so that it would affect everybody. Just the places I thought would help – and others – and those come out just as were going to court so we think that that helped the judge just saying there’s a lot of support.

And then we also asked friends that we knew that were friends of the judge. It was like, you’re friends of the Esperanza, you know, just show your face. And then we also put people in as witnesses, too, that – and we also had a mock trial, so it was a practice for the attorneys, but it was also that the community could come and could critique the process. And again, it became an idea – somebody from the community maybe, and some – one attorney was too freaked out. It’s like, no, because then people would find out and then they’re going to know our – you know, and Amy’s thing was like everybody should know everything. We’re not hiding anything from them and this is a good way to have people critique it.

And we created a whole jury over there. I mean, a whole courtroom and one of our staff members who is now in law school wanted to be – wants to be a judge one of these days, so she said I’ll be the judge and she got herself something and stood – I mean, and sat the entire time and one of our other staff people who has done theaters set up the stage for that and we had some of our young people videotaping it as well as drawing images of what was going on and then the community that showed up, basically we would stop the process and critique – you know, okay, you just finished doing this witness and I didn’t understand that thing. Can you ask him in a different way, or your answer was – you know, as you’re practicing you might have to do this and this and that, so – you know, and we videotaped all of that as well, so – so it’s just all these different things.

And then right before – the day before we go to court, somebody says we have to have a vigil. It has to be with candles and it has to be a blessing and all that sort of stuff, so we packed – you know, outside of the space in front of the courthouse. You know, everybody’s got their candles and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, who ends up being our expert witness – you know, gets to speak and you know, the Antonia [Antonia Castaneda] and the Josie Mendez – and just the community and everybody’s just with flowers and candles and the next day when we come in it’s like it’s gotten – we’ve got all this wax here. I’m like, oh, no. We’re going to get in trouble because we had just left our markings and probably we could go there today you’d still have the oil that – but, you know, we did things that nobody had done, but it was a way, again, everybody got connected and then the community showed up, so the place was always packed and that, I think, also had an effect. Not just who was there, but the who was there was the children, you know, so parents took their kids out of school so they would witness that and say this is going to be – this is more important than you going to classes and – then you had Viejitos.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that’s just great. I have to say. I’d like to keep you talking for just a little bit more, Graciela. I know we’re sort of getting over time, but I’m going to change out this disc, give us a break, and –

[End of tape three.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right, we are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Graciela Sánchez on July 2, 2004. This is session two and disk three.

And, Graciela, what I was thinking about as you were talking about this whole process, this amazing process, one, not only was the lawsuit giving you this sort of higher profile in the community maybe, but also a national profile. Was there also – I mean, despite having lost of all of this funding, at the same time did you find yourself having a larger support network nationally? Did that happen at all?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: What's interesting is where within the community the national support came from. I think – we definitely saw the change from the press to the foundations to just, you know, people working on First Amendment rights and such. But The New York *Times* had to do this story on the Esperanza before the local press would do it because the local press is so used to just hiding us and making us invisible.

So because, thank goodness, they had done that story two weeks before the de-funding on the de-funding of the arts and the attacks on the arts – that was a New York *Times* writer – when we got de-funded, or as we were getting de-funded we looked for that same person and said, watch what's happening right now; something's going to happen. And so she wrote the story the day before the – or the day of the de-funding and the day after. The *Express News* didn't write about until after The New York *Times*, because you know that they check each other out, so they have to do the story.

And so that helped, although trying to get national stories, again, from anybody was really hard. We had to hire Barbara Renaud to see if she could help pitch those stories. She writes one story, like "Remember the Alamo," in *The Nation*, and from that, three people send in donations totaling \$10,000, which – [laughs] – you know. But so, for me, it was like, wow, look at the effect of a national – a story in this progressive newspaper. But we can't usually get those stories. I mean, we've been trying to get stories about many things and they see it as very local and it has no connection. But again, it's the racism of it being in Texas, the racism of it being a small town. But New York City – what happens in New York City when Giuliani does the same thing, it's no longer local; it's a national story because it's in New York City. Or if it happens – so again, which cities are recognized and acknowledged as important and which ones aren't, and again, how does racism come across, and all that other stuff kind of plays into it.

Within the gay community, the National Gay Task Force, the national – just the national groups, throughout – from '94 to '97, were not playing along, didn't want to deal with these issues that were complicated that talk about gay, on gay, right, except for the national, like the foundation – the Estrella Foundation and the Funding Exchange. So these are foundations but they're activist foundations. They're smaller, but they're very activist based. And so the Estrella Foundation brings together national progressive gay people to try to help figure out how to help us and support us. And for me, the best part was just that – [background noise] –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, let's pause for a second.

All right. We're back to recording. So the Estrella Foundation –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So, yeah, so what they do more than anything else at least makes me know that they're supportive of us, because I remember, again, the attacks between '94 and '97 were pretty immense. They were threatening, they were scary, and I remember saying, what does it mean for us? You need to meet some of these guys who come and shoot us down and be dead before you come in and take over –

MS. CORDOVA: You were receiving personal threats, right? Very frightening –

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. And if I would speak, I had some of these gay men just always there and asking questions or taking the information and rewriting what I said and kind of making – demonizing – there was a constant demonization – of me personally, but also the Esperanza.

And so, you know, and as a group of people in San Antonio who were just trying to stick together and not make us go crazy and not make us feel like – suspect of everything and everybody, but by them coming together and talking with us – and I had just seen Scott – [inaudible] – and Suzanne Pharr and Carmen Vasquez and Ivy Young, all these people who had done lots of work and had worked over on the Colorado issue and the Washington State organizing. So at least I knew we weren't alone and that really was supportive.

And then when we filed lawsuit, it was a lot of First Amendment people and the artists from across – I mean, we had from South Africa to everywhere else in the country sending letters that supported the Esperanza and challenging the city. And of course the city's response was, you see the only people who care are not even San Antonio; it's all national, so ignore them because they're just national people. So our local folks, the powers – the local – the powerful leadership just continued to downplay the significance, I think, of what had just happened.

And then, because we got cut, we were able to access some funding, say, from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, who had really funded a lot of national organizations, but they heard about it, and this African American program officer within the arts made sure to give us some money, and the Rockefeller, which we had just gotten some monies and allowed me to turn in my grant two weeks late. [Laughs.] I said, look this is happening, and usually founders don't allow for that. But I don't - but still, between my own - I mean, I think there were other people who played the game a lot more so than I did, because I know the Alaska folks were also being de-funded the same time and they were getting bigger - but again, theirs was more gay and we wanted to complicate things. What we found out was it was the mayor who was the lead person in trying de-fund the Esperanza, and he's the one that said that it was our politics that he didn't like. You know and so his - it was -

MS. CORDOVA: Howard Peak.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Howard Peak, and part of his testimony is such that they asked him, well what about Latina - do you think the Latina Women's Arts Cooperative is political, speaking of Mujer Artes, right? And he says, well, it depends on what type of people are making the work.

And so, a certain - so it wasn't just to say no. And he was also somebody that told - as people met with him at one of these citywide meetings it's like keep yourself way from the Esperanza. The Esperanza is bad. He told women who of Mujer Artes, why can't you do your own project without the Esperanza? And the women went to talk to him and they were appalled by his response. But, again, we kept on thinking it was Marbut or somebody else that had instigated, but after all the testimony, we found out that lead guy was the mayor himself. So that's why they needed to continue to downplay the significance of the lawsuit, and so -

MS. CORDOVA: And the trial was very quick, right? It was only four days?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Two days.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, okay.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: We expected it to be a whole week. And the judge said, it will be done in two days. So we had to jam-pack everything. But even, again, the process - if you read my testimony, I speak in Spanish as well and go back and forth, and we consciously did that because I remember having to practice with another attorney the Q&A, right, and I started falling apart because we weren't hitting it. It was like, I can't answer that, or I can't answer it in the same way, or you're not getting what I'm saying. And then turning to Amy it was like, this isn't going to work, and then her being more experienced than the other attorneys, just kind of talking her through this stuff and then allowing me to do that in Spanish, and anybody else. And I know Eduardo Diaz got to speak and he was talking about the Quinceañera and he says, you know, the 50th anniversary, and the judge turns around and says, excuse me, this is San Antonio; what do you think? We know all know what that is; don't bother to check.

And when I spoke in Spanish it seems like people noticed within the audience, like, people were smiling, people were happy. So it was just challenging, all those new places. And I think, again, that's what - especially if someone were really to kind of study this case. And, again, why haven't people really commented on the studies of it? And I know, again, some graduate or undergraduate students have done a real quick, like I said, over-the-Internet response in writing their grade, rather than like come and sit with the people. You know, there are many people; I'm just one. But they wouldn't even talk to me, much less - it was just all Internet-based research, and then reading and seeing all the wrong assumptions that they make, or to continue to say it's just all about us being gay. Well, that's where they want to portray that story when it's more complicated than that.

So, yes, we have this national impact and get national recognition in some major way that I don't think anybody expected, and that's good, especially since we get to survive because of the national foundation support, but that's all kind of disappeared now also. And people's position is, well, you're still getting that funding and you're still doing good and we don't need to worry about you, and you've gotten all this money - because we got half-a-million dollars, but we had to spend it out paying back some of the attorneys and then some of the costs. And then essentially everything we had has gone to the upkeep, because what we didn't do in the entire time was keep the upkeep of the building. So we lost an elevator and now we had to put in a new elevator. The elevator alone was \$150,000. So community helped raise \$50,000, but again, this is not a wealthy community, so that extra \$100,000 came from the lawsuit and now we're having so we have some money left but it's all been allocated for the upkeep up the building because there's no monies for that sort of programming in general.

MS. CORDOVA: I was sort of thinking about that myself, but when I saw you, that seemed like so much money initially to me when I was thinking about it, and then I thought, well, you were without funding from 1997 to at least 2001, right?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Mm-hmm.

MS. CORDOVA: And they had basically withheld \$76,000 from you a year, so then of course it made sense – you were probably on the downside, ultimately.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Oh, yeah. I think we were trying – when we started negotiations – like the judge didn't give a dollar amount. His response was, here's my ruling but now you have to negotiate with the city, and I'm going to have somebody come and mediate that. And it was another horrible experience because city staff just kept on saying, we don't have any money, we don't have any money; we're not going to give you – So they were at zero and we were at, like, 1.5. And so the first session we had with one mediator, we came out with – nobody agreed to anything.

So the judge got really upset and brought in somebody else to mediate. And so they went from zero to 100, 200 – and we went from 1.5 to – and because what we wanted was the \$76,000 plus – times those numbers of years plus – then the attorneys fees. And the attorneys fees were half-a-million dollars alone, so it should have been that sort of place, so we just basically either got the attorney's fees or got whatever it was –

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So, yeah, it seemed like a lot and everybody was like, wow. And to this day people just think we're wealthy because I think in their heads also, half-a-million dollars is a lot of money that we can use for – as an organization we should – essentially we're like a half-a-million dollar organization just per year, right, so that's one year's budget now. But this year and – the numbers just keep on going down right now because the economy is so bad that locally people aren't giving, foundations have just pulled back. 911 also happened, but 911 is affecting us more today than it did then because it's just – the economy has just – again, people don't have the jobs; they're letting go of people. And the foundation role has just really pulled back a lot. So once upon a time they were looking at the South and they were going to give all the money, and then all of a sudden they've just taken it away. So just all this post-911, a year or two later.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, what did you do to sort of celebrate winning that case? That must have been a tremendous moment.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: We had a big a press conference upstairs and it was, I guess – because we didn't know when the ruling was going to come down. So it was hard. But we also had a – I mean, it was August and it wasn't until May of the following year that the case, you know – he ruled on it in – normally I guess it's two, three, four months later, but we were just like, when is he going to come down? And for whatever reason, again, instinct or insight, it's like, it's going to come down now. And so we pulled out those activist – [inaudible] – put them all over town again, and so I thought, in my head I guess, if he's not ready, he should. Now he knows that we're ready so come on out.

And I don't know, again, if we caused him to turn in the paper on time now – [laughter] – because we were like, we're waiting. So we had them and then the decision came down. So we went to court, because he did call us in within 24 hours and then he ruled, and so then we came back and then called the press and just had a spontaneous press conference, and ordered carnitas, and ordered whatever, and a couple hundred people showed up, you know, again, just at the drop of a hat.

And really that was it; it was it, because we didn't really have time to plan anything else. But what I did notice, I mean, for me, between filing the lawsuit and winning lawsuit, there were – what I saw was I finally saw hope in people's faces, like, you could just see that. I mean, I could never describe it but there was this sense of hope that you could just see in their eyes or in the way they spoke, and really that was – the final victory was just how people just – it's like, oh, you did it and you won. And so, that there was this sense from the community just to start saying, we're going to challenge back; we're not just going to give up, we're now going to go forward.

We've been doing all this work around PGA and we lost – going – four or five months going to the city council saying, no, no, no, and then city council still rejecting us, and then we're like, okay, let's go out into the streets, and collecting a hundred-thousand signatures, right? So would that same energy have been there if we hadn't won the lawsuit? And so there's just this attitude and change in the community that just we feel helped give us more, not only hope but just courage with the council, and then that city council, half of those people were kicked out, like six or seven of them were removed because of that decision, and people just knew that, and it's like, wow, we did that.

And the council, like the mayor right now, who was one of the people who helped to de-fund the Esperanza a Chicano, who really doesn't identify that way, his attitude is – like right now there are some elections that are coming up and he says, our community gets confused when you have more than one initiative there, so we're just going to keep to this one thing because when we've have four or five, they get confused; their brain gets muddled. This is how he's talking about community.

If you look at how the community has voted, they voted – like this last election, they said no to their city

amendments, which would have paid them money, which would have extended their most limited time – term limits in the country, and yet they voted up the ethics policy and they said yes to paying workers a certain amount of money. They've said yes to buying land and taxing themselves to buy land over the aquifer. They've said very clearly no to the city council and yes to things that support the quality of life in San Antonio. And yet the council – him, just last week and the week before, he's just been saying, they get muddled, they don't – it's unclear so let's just keep to one issue. So the November election will have one thing that the community has to vote for because they don't want to muddle them.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. ESPERANZA: So people get angry, and I think it's just a good response.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Yeah, it seems like one thing is consistent with Esperanza, that you don't talk down to the community, that it's very much in the opposite to the mayor's action.

If I could – you brought up PGA, and that was just one other issue that I really wanted to address because it seems like Esperanza has taken the initiative to deal with urban planning right now, and not just urban planning like the PGA project but also demolition of important historical sites, especially here on the west side. And I know the case of La Gloria was important here, and one of the things that I found really moving in learning about that story was that you actually, on the day it was to be demolished, offered the owner a check of \$239,000, which he rejected on the spot. And can you just maybe just elaborate on that whole story of what happened and – but also how this project has been part of a larger movement.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: I mean, I think if you read some of the rants – that I've written, which it basically then turns out to be some of the language was to talk about cultural genocide. And when I – the work and the understanding of who becomes an activist, who goes on to study more, who goes on to perform, or people that seem somehow grounded and have a sense of who they are, so it's because they went to college and they ran into some MEChA group or some queer group or whatever, they have this better sense of identifying themselves and kind of going there and feeling good about themselves, right? And who doesn't?

And just again, looking at my mom and my dad, the fact that my father comes really strong to the United States and identifies as Mexicano – he also identifies as an American too, but it's okay to be a west-sider, it's okay – that's the concept that I get all along: it didn't matter. All my cousins moved to the north side with their families but we stayed in the west side. And the constance that it's okay; it's okay to be poor, it's okay to – but we're clean, we're smart, we don't steal. Those are all stereotypes. To hear that, not in the same language, the use of stereotype but to be able to say that's what they say of us and that's not what we're like. And my parents – they're just being clear, right.

So, you need that clarity to be able to then act, I think, and many people aren't clear because they don't feel good about who they are, they hate themselves. How can you ask them to be people who are civic leaders or even interested in voting when they don't believe that their vote counts or that they have an opinion on anything. And we see the transformation. I think, again, professors see it in – and they can when they move the kids in this direction and they see them just kind of get excited and we see them doing whatever. Well, we see that's where the transformation. We've seen people who wear blue contacts lenses and married to a white man, who then call themselves by their white last names, and all of this. And after a few years, they're saying I am – [inaudible] – da, da, da, da and I need to wear that. And it's from the young kids to the 50-year-olds to the 70-year-olds, to have an Emma Tenayuca production, and hundreds of people, the thousands of people that show up because they want to see themselves, to see those families who hated themselves because they were told that Emma was a commie and bad, to kind of come together, 50, 60, 70 years later and say it's okay, and to be able to release. So it's a sense of cultural grounding that's been important.

La Gloria, I had heard, was coming down, and I grew up half-a-mile away from that place so I knew exactly what it was and where it was, and I called up people I knew who were helping to organize to try to save it. And some of these folks were from San Antonio Cultural Center that wanted to fix it up and make it their own cultural center. And I think, unfortunately, that was the cause for – part of the reason it might have fallen apart because they – again, when we work by ourselves, we tend to lose, right? So for him, he was afraid that people were going to come and take it over, and he wanted to save it for himself. Then there was the granddaughter that wanted to save it for posterity and for the history, whatever, and they kind of came together, but they weren't necessarily – and then there was the historic preservation community that wanted to save it because they should save it but understood that most Mexicans didn't care about historical preservation because of her past experience with that, so probably didn't fight too hard or didn't let people know about it.

And I call up and I say, what do you need? Do you not want us to go city council? We can start organizing people we can send. And he's like, it's okay; maybe somebody can write something. I remember calling Antonia Castaneda and saying, can you write something about why a building like La Gloria is important? So I think she

sent that, but that was November, and then we don't hear anything else about it for a while. And then I come from a trip maybe in Chicago or somewhere - I was out of town - and I turn on the TV and it's 10:00 and they're talking about people preparing to demolish it, and people are protesting. And it's 10:00 at night, so they're there and they're live, and so I just call up somebody and say I'm going to be there. And so - because this is my neighborhood, right, so for myself I went. And I said, I'll stand guard here too, right. And so then I start talking to people who are there, and there are only like 10 of us, or whatever, and I stay the entire night, and people come and go and they bring pizza, and I've missed the weekend, and they talk a little bit about that.

But then, I'm still there in the morning at 7:00, at 8:00 in the morning, and then I call Amy and say, look, this all coming down. And so she somehow connects with some people - they have better attorneys to do an injunction to stop the wrecking ball from coming through. I call staff and say, I'm over here, and so they all - people who want to just all race over there and bring themselves there, and it's like, what are you doing? We're just standing firm.

So we stand the whole day at that point to save it and were able to get an injunction and basically have two weeks worth of time to figure out how to save it. And then those two weeks are just working with that community, saying, come on, let's expand it; it can't just be about you all. We've helped to figure out how to run those meetings because, again, they've mainly been male-based; they've been without agendas. And so, kind of some of the skills that some of our staff has to teach, to kind of help do that together: knocking doors, talking to people and helping to raise monies and all that sort of stuff, and then going to court. And again, unfortunately, like everybody knew Amy's skills - Amy would have taken it to a Federal Court, but this other person that was the lead lawyers said, it's state, because in state it's who you know and how you talk to them. So she was just following their lead.

Her thing was also about equal protection, to say that this building needed to be protected just as the King William and the Monte Vista in these areas, and this is in the west side so that's an historically poor Mexican side of town, so there has to be equal protection for that. They didn't want to argue that argument either as lawyers, and then the judge didn't want to even include it. And so, like, he was excluding equal protection.

And we have even good text there - and this also becomes our friendship with the person in charge of the Historical Preservation Office in San Antonio, that Amy - finally Amy gets a chance to get on there and she challenges that she's not supposed to talk about equal protection, and she asks the head, Anna Glom [sp], who's a white woman, show me where the historical areas are. Is there anything on the west side? No. Why not? Well, there's little section - well, why not? Well, because we didn't think anybody was interested. Well, do you think there's racism?

And then the judge is like, stop; you can't answer that question. And he huddles them and they whisper between themselves, and she's - and within that - but, Your Honor, there is racism. And so he allows the question and so she says, well, are you saying you've been racist in your decision? And then the woman says, yes, yeah, I have, because I just didn't think people were interested or whatever. And we're like - [gasp] -but still, he never allows for - the city attorneys are also not wanting for any of that discussion on equal protection coming out, and so the judge doesn't get to rule on any of that and rules on whatever other sort of thing and just says, you have until 48 hours and you can bring the wrecking ball in.

So, the wrecking ball shows up and people are ready to tie themselves up and all that sort of stuff, and do - and there's that - the half-million dollars, so we write the check because - and again, it was really sad because the Guadalupe also gets involved and they want to save it for their own building, and so, like their working with conservationists so they get \$50,000. And it's a city councilman that's a Chicana that says, it's about economic development and we need to tear this down, and there's graffiti, and it's just a waste, and it's going to fall on people so let's tear it down. But I'm like, there are thousands of people that are wanting to save it. And then the politic of the city is like, if it's in your district, you get to define yes or no and the rest of the council gets to support your decision and doesn't challenge it. It's like, when did that become the way, right, he you could do that? So they honored him and gave him the right to tear it down even though the community has gone to city council, has shown this footage from the 1930s that we found that was from that La Gloria and all the other Glorias because, again, he was a wealthy Chicano, Mexicano owner, so he could do video - film his own or hire somebody.

And so we have all these images that we're showing to the community and taking it to the streets, demonstrating. But ultimately it's like, let's just get a check, and one of the - that's where Gloria and one of our young people go before - and here, also imagine, we're there from all night long, some of us - I'm there with one other person, a Susanna, and we start - there's nothing there, it's absolutely silent, and then all of the sudden you start seeing the police come in with their cones, and then you started seeing the big machines coming through. So we're calling everybody and it's like, this is it, this is the day, because we didn't really know what day it was going to happen, so it was the Monday after Easter, and - which I think is April Fools Day of that year.



MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. SÁNCHEZ: So we're like, oh, god. And then, we're cut off, right, so we're not allowed - we're pushed out from where we are so we can only be on the opposite side. And then it's not just traffic police; the SWAT team comes out, right. So these are really taller guys, mainly white, who are there. And it's like, why do we have the SWAT team? And what you have on the other side are mainly women, all women of color. There are a few men but the men who were interested in the building didn't show - so many men that were organizing just disappeared. But, the women - again, it's like, why do women just play that part of - they know they need to witness this. So they were the ones that were there. So there were 30 or 40 women. And like I turned totally red because of the sun beating really bad and all that sort of stuff, but we stayed there. And it took them two days to tear it down because it was such a strong and sturdy building. Even though people said it could fall apart, it took them two days to tear it down. So we were there the entire time and then they weren't done, and then afterwards we raced in when the cops disappeared and took little pieces of - bricks and whatever, and they were still trying to keep us out.

But, yeah, so you have the SWAT team - and this is what when they race off with the check, it's like here's the check, stop, don't, and they're just - they never were going to accept that money. It was just an excuse.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you even assemble that amount?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It was the lawsuit.

MS. CORDOVA: It was the lawsuit money. I wondered.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: And it was a risk, too, because we were just assuming, okay, well, we'll give it up to save it, but will people help to give it back to us or were we going to become owners? Because we weren't necessarily interested in owning it but we were interested in saving it, and so it was just one of those things - and, okay, call up the board. Can the board agree to do that? And it's like nobody thought twice about it. It's like, so they just gave me a blank check. I wrote it out and then just sent it to Gloria and she raced off there and they just, yeah, rejected it. And there's a front-page photo of them being dragged by the cops and everything like that and then they got all these bruises. But it was the SWAT team; it wasn't the traffic police. The traffic police had only one or two cops and then the SWAT team had like 15 of them and that's what it was. So it was just like you think of Chiapas, right, and the women and the army; well this is the same sort of thing: who was right there and who was challenging.

MS. CORDOVA: And so did the La Gloria event cause the Cuentos Project? Is that where it started or -

MS. SÁNCHEZ: It's - solidified that project. We had just - we were - Mujer Artes was struggling in the space and we thought we would - I saw a building come up a couple of blocks away from that on New Year's Eve when driving to my parents' or whatever, and I stopped and saw it and I thought, oh, this is a neat house; maybe we can move Mujer Artes there. But the women of Mujer Artes weren't interested - [laughs] - in moving there, yes and no, and so anyway, we ended up saying, okay, we're going to buy this and we're also going to become owners of this building, and it's going to allow us to then have a say in what happens in this community, which, historically, again, is the neighborhood that every single one of us had some connection to, right? So I grew up in it and I lived in it. Other people's parents or grandparents lived in it, so, René, his grandparents were the ones that started the Memorial Funeral Home. So everybody has a connection to that. As somebody else said, it's the Ellis Island for the Chicanos of San Antonio, or just of the Chicano community as they moved away from the border. And so, this is like the first big stop from the border.

So then it just becomes the place, yeah, that's it's like okay, well, let's just make this the place that - Mujer Artes can stay there and we'll just have a second project on the west side, and it's been bringing the elders together. And initially it was a lot more not the elders - you couldn't - it was just like everybody that was interested in knowing the history, so it was the 40- and 50-year-old and younger kind of talking. And then, most recently it's like, well, let's bring in the elders and the young people and let the young - let them tell their stories and let the rest of us learn.

And we've done different projects. Like this year, we did the Posadas because they were interested - they were saying this is something that's dying, nobody is doing Posadas any more. And in general just like how the church was the cultural carrier once upon a time. Maybe it was through church traditions, but from the Posadas to the crowning of the Virgin and all those things. I remember - there's this image of me and my sister as - my sister at least looks brown - [laughter] - but my parents dressing us up as little ingitas, right, with the little thing. And I remember that moment it was the Virgin's - I don't know the specific date, but the church did that and we would all go out and we - that tradition doesn't happen any more. Those celebrations don't happen. The fact that you never celebrate the Dia de San Antonio and yet I go to Little Italy in New York and it's always celebrated every June. It's like, why is it celebrated there but not here?

So they said, Las Posadas are disappearing so let's find out. So we did research and then we found out that the church still is doing it but it's not as elaborate, and so we worked with the church and then said, let's expand it. You go from this - the church across the street to the senior center, even if it's just within that same block, and you connect - Pati Radle, the city councilwoman's office is right across the church, and right next to her is Mujer Artes, so that you stop at three places rather than just one place. And that we able to, with funding, get - spend 150 bucks to bring in a Mariachi, little things like that that then made it a little bit bigger and just better for everybody in general.

Now I'm trying to think, for next year, it's like, how do we get a banda, because bandas have disappeared, and yet when I was in Oaxaca that's what I saw is a whole bunch of bandas. And I said, well, all of us - I mean, I was in the band, my brothers were in the band. I don't have to be that but how do we find the people that were at the Lanier high school band and just say - because that's what it is. Somebody learned a little bit and just learned some songs and then it'll sound like a real banda - [laughter] - kind of a little off -

But just add those sorts of things, and then again, get people to give back what little they have or what they know and then feel part - again, so you integrate them in a better way, and in the stories, just having them - the elders have this - at first they are afraid to speak and then, like, they're the ones that are demanding if we don't show up on a Saturday that we're supposed to show up, they're like, well, what happened? And that's the place that I wanted to go. It's like, you all have keys; open up the place and invite people in.

And they're not interested in scanning, they're not interested in any - they're interested in telling their stories. And they've now met each other, even though they don't know each other, and some people - and now they're inviting other people, right. So now we're hearing from the community. It's like, oh, I heard about it through - I'm in the VFW Post and my friends go to it, so when are you having this next one because I want to go.

And then again, expanding that just to do these - like Rita Vidaurri. We did something in 2001 with Lydia Mendoza, again, the book - I mean, I think that was kind of a major place, and so Lydia Mendoza was 2001, La Gloria gets torn down in 2002, so it's kind of a culmination. And, again, for Yolanda Broyles-González, it's promoting the book. For us, it's promoting Lydia, right, and it's like, you'll sell the books if we promote Lydia. [Laughter.] And so we did an homenaje to Lydia. You know, 500 people showed up; we did it at the Plaza del Zacate because that's where she had performed in that area with the "chili queens" and all that sort of stuff.

We called it Plaza del Zacate rather than Milam Square, so a lot of the young people who helped distribute the posters and the flyers and the stuff like that only know it as Plaza del Zacate. And they videotaped it and all that sort of stuff. And again these 500-plus people show up, and it wasn't - we got more promotion for this one because I guess we just learned, again, how the media's not going to help us. And Lydia, who's even better known, got lost a little bit more.

But we ordered 200 books; 180 books got sold and they were \$30 each. And we kind of just said, book signing, whatever; we didn't say bring \$30 for the book. People just bought the book, and with it came the CD, and then an artist - what's her name, Ester Hernandez - was there to sell her stuff, so she sold a lot of stuff. And that's where Rita Vidaurri, who we were looking for, pops up from the audience and then sings to her friend a couple of songs and belts out *Los Laureles* and then disappears in the audience. So many people disappeared, like the man that was in love with Lydia Mendoza forever and was still in love with her, and we got him but then he disappeared.

And our video that night got stolen. Somebody walked off with all of the stuff, so we don't have any of our original - we had somebody right there and it disappeared. And some people that do have video won't give it up. So, again, like for us, it's like La Gloria; like these things that we're doing, it's like we'll create something but then it's like, how does it just go out? Maybe people can pay five bucks or 10 bucks to get a copy, but it shouldn't be - it should be accessible, basically, so it just goes out and it shouldn't be who gets copyrights? Just let it out. So that's like really important to us.

But this past May we did this one and we took her into that west side rather than the Plaza del Zacate because she grew up like two blocks away from there.

MS. CORDOVA: This is that Rita?

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Rita, right - Rita Vidaurri. And she's really honored, and she says - of course I want to do it in the neighborhood. She now lives in the Jefferson area, and her sister, who used to be accompanying her, named Queta, is like, you're going in the west side, and how horrible. You know, it's that same struggle that we've had. You know, it's you don't go back to that neighborhood; it's a bad neighborhood. It's where the drugs happen; it's where people steal. And it's just all false, right. But that's what I grew up always being told about the west side. That's what my cousins said of me, that's what the students from other schools said of that, and that's what they're still saying. It's like if you go into that neighborhood, yeah, just poor and leave it though.

And now they live in the – they’ve torn down most of that neighborhood and put in all these ugly homes, and that’s the thing. So what’s left, especially on Guadalupe Street and a couple of blocks in different directions that didn’t get torn by urban renewal in the ‘70s is what we’re trying to see that we can save, and yet trying to work with the different partners, right – so the historic preservation woman, Anna Glom, calls us all the time now. It’s like, they’re going to tear this one down; can you come and save it?

So she did that last October or September – September, and she said, they’re going to tear this down; it’s the Avenida Guadalupe, which is a neighborhood association supposedly there to build whatever, but their process has been to tear down. My father sits on that board and I fight him. I say, you taught me all this stuff. But his inclination is to trust the executive director. I said, he’s a bad guy – [laughter] – get rid of him. And he’s anti-woman, and so – I remember rather than finding ourselves in the same situation as La Gloria, waiting until it’s too late, was to talk about it amongst ourselves, and somebody said, well, one of the other board members, who’s the community liaison, I know her; let’s go meet with her.

And so she opened it up, brought in their executive director, brought my mom and my dad, and we showed them La Gloria. And this person who works for the diabetes center is the vice president and on the board of Avenidas that was just, we can’t take this down, and now let’s bring it to the fuller board. So the full board also saw the video and said, okay, we can’t tear it down, but they don’t know what to do with it.

And it’s like, well, I don’t know – it was like, Graciela, what do you want to do with it? It like, it’s not up to us; it’s about the community. We will help you put up posters, put up flyers, bring – convene people in the community and ask the community to come up with the ideas. But we can’t ask the Esperanza, because we have ideas but it really needs to be the community. And they said, well, we’ve heard this in effect – well, those are all good ideas; ask the community. [Laughs.] And they’ve never had that meeting yet.

But then the – but we saved it so it’s still there, but what to do with it hasn’t been decided. And then she called again, Anna Glom, to say, there’s another building that’s going to tear down. Can you come and save that one? So we, again, last week, we painted and all that sort of stuff, and we were like, we need a strategy, so convene Avenida, the city councilwoman, elders, whatever; let’s come together and define a strategy. And it’s hard because everybody is so busy and nobody wants to do that, and the city councilwoman is like, well, let’s make it a historical district. It’s like, well, what does it mean to make it a historical district? Are we going to be gentrifying the area; what does that mean? We don’t want gentrify and kick our own community out, so what other things can we do? Can it be kind of a mixed sort of thing? What have other communities done? But somebody needs to do the research, so it becomes me, but I don’t have time, and so I’m trying to get all these young people getting involved.

So like last week, before we went to paint, it’s like we created a little fire, and I said, go out there and fire and the get the – we can’t be the ones painting that building. Well, we can help, but they should be there too, the community should – or at least know about it right? And so, like René took a couple of other – René, the 24-year-old, took the 15-year-old and the 17-year-old with him and they walked around, and so he said, I was able to teach them what the project was.

And then we all learned from the people that we spoke to, right. So we heard – so I was saying that it was a zapateria, which translates into a shoe store, and the woman told me, no, it’s not a shoe store; it’s a shoe repair place, and it’s like, oh, yes, I didn’t think of it. [Laughter.] And then the woman told me about this building and this building, and she told me who was there. And I said, well, that’s good. Of course, would have been good to have a camera. But it’s about engaging other people.

So the project could be really big, and yet it’s just another project which we have no staff for or – [laughs]. And, again, we don’t need the staff as long as we have somebody helping. And I guess, ultimately, it’s just like everything else. Like when I think of the – as I described what happened with the lawsuit, and people who were engaged and people who became staff after that, people who had been volunteering throughout the entire process, and were really excited about the community coming together and doing that. And they wanted that moment to continue to be relived over and over because that was such an exciting moment, and I said, well, but that took a lot of time, and it was a culmination of four years that happened before that for you to come in in 2001 – from 1997 to that time – you came in right at the tail end so you got to see, you got to perform in the street theater, but you didn’t get – they’re like [claps] it has to happen now [claps] – why aren’t the war stuff – it takes time. So I’m trying to teach patience. [Laughs.]

And then, hours – it’s like, well, you want us to be here all the time, but I want you to be here for the type of work this requires. That lawsuit, you don’t think there weren’t many 80-hour-weeks and 90-hour-weeks. They did. And for us to come up with that Respecto es Basico and to write that press release, we didn’t go home at 6:00; we were here until one, two, three in the morning. And we were trying to get other people to help us and to do it, but it cost \$20,000 for them to do it if we go to a PR firm. So we had to do it ourselves, so – [laughs].

But it was the long hours. And so this stuff that's going to happen in the west side, and knocking on doors, for me, is the fun stuff. It is in community, it is in working – that's where I want to be; I want to be participating in those conversations. I want to have the camera, I want to be able to ask – and I do those on my own for myself, but I want that to be the larger community. And I'm like, well, but it's Saturday night, and we're only here from Monday through Friday, so do I get paid for those extra hours?

It's like, if you work at the Esperanza, you want to be able to do that. You will see that as fun and you won't be counting the hours. If you count the hours, then you shouldn't be here because it's going to kill you. It is going to – you're going to hate it. So I try to tell people, if you don't – just go away – go away now before you start hating the organization, before you start hating me, because it can't be about that. It has to be just your passion and your love. That has to drive you, your desire to see these stories.

So, yeah, it's videotaped; it has to be transcribed. It's videotaped. How can you write the poetry to it? Or how can you work with someone to do that? How do you enable them to do that themselves? There may be some elders that want to scan; there may be some that don't want to.

But – so hopefully we can find enough – I mean, I just called up a 40 years – 40- 50- year-old somebody, you know, who was one of those that ended up videotaping there, and she had come to on or two of the pláticas that – and so, she's just – we see the 30- to 50-year olds as the in-betweens, the ones that have to connect the elders to the youth. So I called her up, and I knew she didn't have email – I just suspected, and everybody's already, well, give me all the addresses on email, and I'm like not everybody's there. And I said, you seem to be interested, you did some good videotaping – I mean, asking of questions, and do you still want to participate?

And she goes, yeah, I want to know. And I actually showed up one of those Saturdays and nobody was there, so I was curious. I said, well, that's the thing. You need to come and you need to tell, and I know you're working so – are you going to be available during the week? And she goes, well, I work well. Then you need to be able to tell them that Saturdays are better for you, or after five, because of your work. And you need to say it, not just me, because they're going to fight me. But if the community is saying that then – okay, well, I'll do that, and I'm really interested, and what if people come and train? Would you liked to be trained to do some oral history? And she goes, yeah, I would love that because I need that. And she has an idea. She's been collecting her own photographs. She wants to maybe do a book or something. It's like that's – we should give her the skills to do whatever it is that they want to do, but –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, Graciela, I really like sort of closing with that because I think that's just a wonderful – you talked about all these possibilities that are here, and what a good note to end on. [Laughter.] But is there anything else that you think, I mean, for this Archives of American Art document – is there anything that you think maybe we should mention or anything sort of in closing, just to sort of give you your own voice and not have me asking you any questions of you.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Again, I mean, I think part of the passion for me is that I am homegrown, born and raised here, right, and I'm doing my work at home. So there is some of that, and I think that's what makes the Esperanza really special, that most people are from this community.

And so when people say, can there be an Esperanza in L.A. or San Francisco or other places – it can, but I'm supposed to help them duplicate that. The only way to duplicate that is if they're from their respective communities or from that area. And so they may not be from L.A. but if they grew up 20 miles away from there and now live in L.A. but they're really interested in saying, this is for me – I mean, it's the whole self-determination.

When I lived in Cuba, people said, why aren't you organizing the gay Cubans? It's like, because that's not my home and I can't determine for that – my needs and my desires for them there because that's not my reality. I can come back home and struggle here for gay rights for my community but I can't do it for the Cubanos. And how dare I be just as oppressive a missionary or – to come. And I remember fighting people for going to Cuba and saying how horrible it was. And to see how it changes, right, that South Africa has the constitution that does say that gay people are equal and all that sort of stuff, but that what wraps around their imagery is the rainbow flag that comes out of the United States. That is not their own imagery, that they're not looking to see what South Africa queer history is. So that in the same thing that is – lesbians are – that we can – when I'm in Palenque, that I can be talking to people that are telling me about pre-classical matriarchal society that is X, Y, and Z, and it's like, ah, that's where – and again – [inaudible] – what Anzaldúa does it so well when she's looking for her own community.

And I guess that's it to the extent that the reason I might have patience, the reason that I have love and desire, and that I hope other people come in to the struggle is because somehow there is that self-determination; it is that, again, Chiapas, and autonomy. What Chiapanecos also say is that you have to do it in your own homes, and you have struggle here, and that's – but it's so much easier to go somewhere else and do it for other

people, or where it's really exciting, so it's, let's go to visit and fight with the Zapatistas or the Sandanistas or the - when it's not as - it hasn't - it's not the Hollywood, it's not exciting, nobody comes here and gives us any - give us - mainly it's a lot of hard stuff and mainly it's struggling with each other and all of this shit that we've learned, that it's real damaging.

I mean, and people come to this space very damaged and then we lash out at each other. And I can't - and it's hard. Again, I don't know why. I think when people hear all those stories of how hard it is and if I really were to tell the places where I hurt, most people wouldn't stick around, but the reality is that we all - and wherever we find ourselves, with our own lovers, with our children, with our best friends, we're all damaged and we come, and sometimes it's hard, but it is that place that we have to go to so that way we can release ourselves of that shit to be able to deal with each other's sexism, racism, and homophobia.

What does it mean to work with a woman of color in a position of power? What hurts me the most is that I am suddenly seen as this person that has a lot of power and they want to just - ah, well you're the executive director, you have a title, and it's like, not because I want it, but if you pay attention to the way I do leadership, you'll notice that you're sitting right there next to me as we're speaking to people from another country, and you're 22, and I'm 42, and so, do you see that I don't take power and hierarchy in the same way that when you start disliking what's happening here, you can't use the same story. It's not the same story.

What does it mean? And you're a middle-class Chicana who has even more education than I do, and I grew up in working-class, so even the difference between class, and how you feel comfortable in this space and the world, and how you speak with the language versus me. And I kind of mumble and stumble, or you write better than I do. What does that mean? Or the fact that you don't have me leading you like the way you want me to lead you because you want to me to be clear, and it's taken me this long to be clear. I still mumble, I still struggle, and again, my leadership is still bringing everybody else together.

So you can't then just say, I'm like the white man that rules the city. I'm not one of those 17 white men. There is no way. So be more critical. If you've been learning the language, and learn and study to do analysis in a critical way, then you've got to do it for this institution too, and I think so many people go to those same places of just creating a hierarchy here in the Esperanza, and the director, and some of the elder board members that suddenly have all this power, and whatever, and the young people - and it's like, young people have been here, young people are now coming back in their 30s and their 40s and saying, I get it now.

But in the meantime, what's hurtful and harmful is that the anger, the isms, the places that we have hurt, take us back to places where we want to destroy institutions. So there are people that are wanting to hurt the Esperanza and are willing to see that. And I see that happening with other organizations. Like I just said it to somebody - it's like, well, I'm going to do research on the Guadalupe, and I'm going to do the same thing. Why? What is the - I think it's fine, but where is it going to - are you going to share that with the Guadalupe board of directors and their staff or are you going to put it out there to the local newspaper?

Because if it's going to the newspaper, then go after the Witte Museum, go after the McNay, go after San Antonio Museum of Art, because the same stuff is happening there, but we never read about it, we never hear about; they keep it quiet. They just fired their director - they just fired their director, so the Guadalupe may have let go of their director but we're ready to criticize their own. That's fine, I love the criticism, I don't mind it, but it's not the same thing, and we're always ready to - what will the injury be to the Guadalupe, not just the Guadalupe, but then to the larger community?

So that's that challenge that I ask people to always - it's more complicated, it's more complex, and when we do and look at these organizations, these institutions, it's not so simple to say, she's just a bad person, or she's holding on to power or whatever. So that's all, I guess.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, there's a lot of work to do. [Laughter.] We'll stop it there and I'll just say thank you so much.

MS. SÁNCHEZ: Okay. Let me find that videotape and I'll show it to you.

[END]

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