

TEMPE HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #: OH-321
NARRATOR: Cecilia Denogean Esquer
INTERVIEWER: Charlene Shovic
DATE: March 30, 2009

CE = Cecilia Esquer
INT = Interviewer
_____ = Unintelligible
(*Italics*) = Transcriber's notes

Tape 1, Side A

INT: Interview with Mrs. Cecilia Denogean Esquer on March 30, 2009 with Charlene Shovic, volunteer oral historian for the Tempe Historical Museum at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Esquer.

My name is Charlene Shovic. I am here with Mrs. Cecilia Esquer at her home here in Tempe. This is an interview for the Tempe Historical Museum. I'm a volunteer oral historian, sitting here with Mrs. Esquer on March 30, 2009.

Mrs. Esquer, when and where and in what town were you born? We'll start with the basics.

CE: I was born in Superior, Arizona, on May 18, 1942.

INT: How old were you when you came out here to Tempe?

CE: First my family moved to Phoenix in 1954, as I went into eighth grade. Then when I came to ASU in 1959, I moved to Tempe, and I've been here ever since, except for two years.

INT: So you moved out to Phoenix in eighth grade; that was roughly what year?

CE: 1954.

INT: Where in Phoenix were you living?

CE: The inner city, and I went to Lowell Elementary School, that they used to call "the Blackboard Jungle school," and it was supposed to be a really tough school. And then

from there, I went to Phoenix Union High School, and at the time, there were 5,000 students in the high school, and I graduated from there and then went to ASU.

INT: What motivated your family to move out here, when you were in eighth grade?

CE: Actually, my mother moved the family. I'm one of seven children, and my father was a miner; he worked underground for seventeen years. And he also worked as a mechanic on the side; he had his little garage. And my mother didn't want her kids to be miners, because it's such hard work, and we have relatives that have died in accidents in the mine. And she didn't want us to marry miners. So she just decided that there was more opportunity in Phoenix, and she moved. One of her sisters had just bought a house, and they agreed to rent us their old house. And she just moved the family one day, and she told my dad, "Come if you want."

INT: Wow.

CE: Yeah, that was very brave of her. So that's how we got to Phoenix.

INT: Did your dad eventually come on over here?

CE: Yeah, but he didn't think that he could get a job that paid like the mine did, 'cause the mines paid pretty well, they were very high-paying. So he commuted back and forth for, let's see, we moved in '54, 'til 1959, he commuted. Then there was a fire at the mine and they closed the mine for a year, so he had to find a job. And it turned out that he eventually found a job as a master mechanic for the City of Phoenix. He was 55 years old, and he must have been pretty good, 'cause it's tough to get a job at that age, and he retired at 70. And he didn't want to quit, but he had to.

INT: What are your parent's stories? How did they end up in Superior? Were they from there?

CE: My mother was born in Sonora, Arizona. That's no longer around; it's part of the open pit mine near Kearny. My father was born in Gleeson, Arizona, which is by Tombstone, in 1913. And they moved for jobs. In my father's family, it was the mine, there were jobs at the mine, so his parents moved over here. And my mother, I don't remember why she moved out of Sonora. I don't know if her family . . . yeah, they lived in Superior for a little bit, and that's when she met my dad. And she went through eleventh grade, I guess, and then she got married. My dad started the fifth grade, and decided he didn't like school, and dropped out.

INT: And your dad's family, you said, was from Gleeson?

CE: He was born in Gleeson, but my grandmother, his mother, was born in Mexico, on the border, in Fronteras, which is right near Cananea, it's south of, I think near, further west from Douglas, south of the border. And her husband, my grandfather, I actually don't remember where my dad's father was born. I didn't know the great-grandparents,

because they had passed away, when I was born they were already gone. And I didn't know my grandfather, 'cause he passed away when I was an infant.

INT: And then your mom's home town is an open pit mine. How old was she when she saw that go? That must have been really . . .

CE: She didn't, because it didn't go until 1964 or 1965.

I taught at Ray High school, actually, one year, and I lived in Ray, which is They had sister cities in Arizona, because they had segregated towns. So Sonora was the Mexican town, and Ray was the Anglo town. And when I graduated from ASU here, I couldn't find a job in the Valley, they were not hiring minorities. So I wound up getting a job at Ray High School, and I lived in this little house on the edge of the open pit. They were working, 'cause they needed to finish so they could knock down all the homes and all that, so they had 24-hour shifts and they would blast around the clock, and it would shake the house. The first week, I couldn't even sleep, but after that, you just get used to it. And every weekend, you straighten out everything on the walls and put the furniture back. It was a neat place to teach, I liked it.

INT: Wow. When you moved out here to Tempe, you said you were a freshman at ASU. so you spent from eighth grade to your freshman year in college in the Phoenix area. What traditions or special holidays, as you were growing up, did your family celebrate?

CE: Lots of them. My mother always believed in celebrating each of our birthdays, 'cause they were special. And we didn't have a lot of money growing up, but there was always a cake, at least. Maybe not birthday presents, but each of us was recognized that way.

And then at Christmas, we made tamales, all of us. Even now, we still make tamales. I make tamales with my kids, and some of my friends and my sisters make tamales, and our brothers sometimes come in.

For New Year's, we made buñuelos, which is like a fried tortilla with syrup on it. We made those, and menudo. My husband now, Elias, makes menudo, he became the menudo guy.

And around Christmas, we also make a Christmas cookie that we call biscochitos, and they're anise-flavored cookies, and they look like little doughnuts, but they're anise-flavored cookies, and they look like little doughnuts, but they're kind of hard, and they look like very thin doughnuts. They're really good.

So, what else? We celebrated the regular American holidays, like Thanksgiving, my mom loved Thanksgiving. I loved Halloween, so we really liked Halloween. In Superior, it was a blast, because the boys would go and knock down the outhouses for Halloween. (laughter)

INT: Hopefully no one was in them at the time.

CE: I hope not. And Easter, we always celebrated. When we lived in Superior, the Arboretum is right outside of Superior, and it belonged to the university then and it wasn't so enclosed. Boyce Thompson Arboretum, it's a wonderful place; we go there a lot, still. But for Easter, there's an area on the other side, where the creek or the river runs, and at Easter time, there was always a lot of nice green grasses, so we would go there for picnics at Easter time.

We also celebrated Day of the Dead, Día de Los Muertos. My mom taught us how to make wreaths, for us to take to the cemetery, and we made the flowers with crepe paper, and we would make the wreaths.

INT: Would you go to any graves in particular?

CE: Oh, yeah, our family's; the tradition is, you go to clean your family's graves. Now, like my mother's buried in Phoenix, so they keep the graves clean there, but we still go. I haven't made a wreath in a long time. She liked roses, so we take her roses.

Besides that, in the summer, Fourth of July. In Superior, they made a big deal out of Fourth of July. There's a fireworks display every year, and we used to go. And in Phoenix, when the kids were little, we used to go watch the fireworks, but now, we don't go all the time. I like to watch the lighted boat parade at the (*Tempe*) Town Lake.

What other holidays are there?

INT: It sounds like you had an interesting mix of different cultural holidays.

CE: Yeah, we were pretty much bilingual, bicultural from the beginning. I always spoke English, and I always spoke Spanish, and we celebrated both traditions.

INT: Interesting. Was that a choice that your parents made, that they wanted to make sure that their kids were both fluent in English and Spanish?

CE: Probably, because when I went to school in Superior, I went to a segregated elementary school—Mexicans were not allowed at Roosevelt Elementary School. And we would be punished if we spoke Spanish at school. So our parents were convinced by the teachers there that it would be better for them to speak English to us. And I almost lost my language, but my grandmother always refused to speak English. We always lived near her until we moved to Phoenix, and so we kept our Spanish, 'cause we liked to talk to her. She was in our lives a lot, my dad's mother was.

So that's where it started, and at school, a small school, everybody knows everybody. And the school reminds you of the different holidays that are coming up.

INT: You mom, what did she do out here, when she came out here to Phoenix?

CE: My mother never worked, until, I think, she worked part-time at what is now Dillard's, it used to be Diamond's, and she worked at Park Central part-time, when she was already like 60-some, and she just worked a few hours a week, for about a year or two. But that's the only time she worked out of the house. There were seven of us, and my dad didn't want her out of the house. But she was very wise, and she really believed in education.

INT: What did she look like?

CE: Like me, except she wasn't as chubby. (laughter) I thought she was, but now I see myself, and But she was a little bit shorter, maybe an inch or two shorter. But, yeah, that was my mom.

INT: And what about your dad, how would you express or explain to someone your dad?

CE: What he looks like?

INT: Um-hmm, or even just in general, his personality and such?

CE: Oh, he's a very . . . he was . . . he just passed away last year, at 93 years old. But he was a very charming individual in public. And I used to say that he was tri-lingual, because he could never finish a sentence in one language or another—he would start out in Spanish, then add a swear word, and go to English, and back to swearing, and back to Spanish—so I always used to say that he was tri-lingual. And he was actually very entertaining, people liked to hear him, he was a good storyteller, and he could tell a joke. And he played the guitar, and he just loved music. In our family, most of us have some kind of musical interest.

That's another thing. When we lived in Superior, my grandmother had like the main house, the biggest house, and we all lived near her, and on Christmas Eve, we would all go to her house. And my uncles played guitar, and one of my aunts played the piano, and everybody would sing. We would sing Christmas carols in English, and lots of songs in Spanish. Then they would send us to bed—you know the big double beds with the iron head posts?—there would maybe be five of us in a bed, 'cause we would sleep sideways. It was really fun, I really liked that, that was a great tradition.

INT: It sounds like you had a lot of close family in Superior.

CE: Oh, yeah. My dad was the oldest of eleven. My grandmother, his mother, was widowed in 1940, so he had to help with his younger siblings. And I actually have one aunt that is just three years older than I, and she's younger than my two older brothers, and about a year older than my older sister. So we have two aunts that are about our age. Big family.

INT: You said your mom was wise and . . . ?

CE: She believed in education and really encouraged us. And she believed in fairness.

INT: And you were the oldest, or the youngest, or right in the middle?

CE: Right in the middle, with very sharp elbows. (laughter) I had to get my attention some way, so I was able to.

INT: When you were a child growing up, what games would you play, or how would you play?

CE: In Superior, we would play—we didn't have many toys, 'cause with such a large family, there wasn't a lot of money for stuff—so we used to play a lot of games out in the street. One was called "matta lile lile lile" (*sp?*), and it's kind of like "Red Rover, Red Rover, let somebody come over." So we would play that a lot, and we would play kick the can, and hide and seek.

Superior was a small town, and we used to be outdoors a lot. We could go anywhere by ourselves, and there's hills and little mountains around there, and we would all go play out there. My mother and my grandmother taught us about which plants you can eat, so sometimes we'd go and we'd pick a root thing out of the ground and start eating it, or pick fruit off of some of the branches, some of the bushes—some were poisonous and we knew not to eat that.

Just a lot of original-type things. There were no sidewalks in Superior, except downtown, which was several blocks, so we never learned to skate. The roller rink would come once a year, and the doctor would make a lot of money, because everybody had broken bones. (laughter)

INT: What do you mean, they would come once a year?

CE: They'd bring a tent, with a roller skating thing, like they do here in Tempe, they bring the ice thing, it was kind of like that. And everybody would go skate, you'd rent the skates, and nobody really knew how to skate very well. So there was that.

When we came to Phoenix in eighth grade, it was mainly just school. I read a lot, I always liked to read.

INT: Was it easy transitioning from Superior to Phoenix?

CE: It was very different, because Harding School (*in Superior*) had about 300 students and there was just one classroom of each grade level. And when we came to Lowell School, in eighth grade alone, there were 200 students; there were five different eighth grades. And a lot of the time, the students (*in Phoenix*) would not speak English, and they mainly spoke English when they spoke to a teacher. Well, my sister and I were afraid that we would get in trouble if we spoke Spanish at school, so they thought we were snobs, because we wouldn't speak Spanish at school. (laughter)

And then in '54, gangs were in vogue a lot, and girls, too, the girls had gangs. And on Monday mornings in the classroom, there'd be some empty seats, and it'd be kids that got in trouble over the weekend and they were at juvie. And for the first couple of weeks, the girls would follow us home and ask us which gang we were going to join, and that just scared the heck out of us. And finally they just decided we were such nerds, they just left us alone.

INT: Interesting. You don't hear many people talk about You hear a lot of people talk about gangs today, . . .

CE: But they were there. And the main difference is, they didn't have guns. But they had knives and they had chains, they would beat each other up with chains and knives. And, in fact, one of my friend's brothers was a year behind us, he was a seventh-grader, and he had been elected student body president. And graduation night, when he was walking home, a gang beat him up and left him unconscious, and he was in the hospital for about a month, in a coma, and I don't know what happened to him longterm-wise. There was some serious stuff, but not like you have today, because the guns are a big difference, and the drugs were not like they are today.

INT: Were the gangs, did it begin, it sounds like, even at sixth grade or younger?

CE: I really don't know, I really don't know. But I know like today, there's generations of gang members—parents whose parents were gang members, whose grandparents were gang members. But it wasn't quite so violent as it is today. But there was a lot of problems, like at the CYO, the Catholic Youth Organization, they used to have dances on weekends, and we would go, and you'd have to be very careful. We just lived two blocks away from the church, so you'd have to be very careful walking home, 'cause you might get beat up. More the boys—all of a sudden, you would hear a mad dash, and somebody would be just running for their life, with about six or seven kids after him.

INT: So, we were talking about games that you played as a child growing up. It sounds like you also participated in a lot of other activities. Dances?

CE: Yeah, and I used to play the violin. It was kind of funny. In fourth grade, I started playing the violin, and the high school kids, they didn't like to play violin a lot, because people made fun of them. So a group of us, both from Roosevelt School and Harding School, we used to play in the high school orchestra, from fourth to seventh grade. And my oldest brother was in band and orchestra, he played trumpet, and it was really pretty exciting, because I would get to go, the fourth graders would get to go on trips to the music festival in Eloy. And my brother would get one of his girlfriends to take care of us, and they would take us to the swings. Can you imagine? And then we would be in the high school annual, and you could tell who the elementary school kids, 'cause our feet didn't touch the ground. (laughter) But it was pretty neat, because everybody knows everybody, and so I used to play at people's graduations; they were a lot older than I, and I still remember them. It was fun, it was fun.

INT: What about extracurriculars once you got out here to Phoenix?

CE: Oh, that's another thing. At Lowell School, they actually had clubs. I forgot the names of the clubs, but my sister and I were joiners. And then at Phoenix Union, we joined clubs, also; I think they had like Friendship Club.

Then in freshman year, we were in Choir, and then on the Oratorical Society. And every year we would sing The Messiah, on the radio actually. There were about 200 of us in the Oratorical Society, and we just loved that.

When I came to ASU, I actually sang with the ASU Chorale for a couple of years, for a few years, 'cause I really like music.

INT: Do you still sing?

CE: No, very badly. We sing with our friends and stuff like that. But I really always wanted to go back, because they have the community concert, the choir, at ASU, and I've just never had time.

I've always wanted to pick up the violin again, 'cause my folks couldn't afford to buy me a larger violin, and when we moved to Phoenix, the violin just disappeared from my life. And I always thought at some point in time I would pick it up, and I didn't.

I picked up the guitar. We lived in Tacoma, Washington, for a couple of years, and we met a group of Cubans, and one of them, Kiki Ramos, taught guitar. So the guitar I learned, I learned Cuban rhythms, and she was very good. She had a TV program for the school district, for the elementary and high school students, and we used to hang out with her a lot. They had great parties, so we learned a lot of Cuban songs.

INT: Here's an interesting question. Please tell me an interesting or unusual story someone in your family has told you.

CE: Unusual? Well, I think my dad has the most interesting stories. Some of them are very scary, because they actually happened, and they had to do with accidents at the mine.

He said that one time he was working, and all of a sudden, they dumped some material from the mine that was like sand, and it covered him, it totally covered him. And he thought he was gone, he was a goner. But one of his people from his crew noticed that he was gone and they started looking for him, and then one of them figured out that he was under that pile of stuff, so they dug him out. When he tells the story, there's just all this drama. So that's very interesting, very different.

I still remember when his first cousin, my Uncle Freddie, fell over 500 feet to his death in the mine. So that's pretty unusual.

The other thing, when we lived in Superior, one of my uncle's wives, she was from Mexico, and during the summertime, we would actually sleep outside my grandma's house, in the big beds, because we didn't have air conditioning and it was hot. So we would burn fertilizer to keep the mosquitoes away. And she liked to tell ghost stories, so when it was dark, she would be telling the ghost stories and just have us scared out of our wits. So that was really fun, too, lots of story-telling.

INT: I like your family; it sounds like you have a neat family.

So you went to Roosevelt in Superior . . .

CE: No, Harding.

INT: Harding; okay, Roosevelt was the other school. And you mentioned that there was a division, you were segregated.

CE: We were segregated, legally, 'cause Arizona had legal segregation of students; they had a law that allowed segregation of students by race. And we came to Phoenix in 1954, and that was the year of *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, where the Supreme Court said it was unconstitutional, so they threw out all of those laws. And I remember hearing that they had integrated the schools, and some of us thought, "Oh, my gosh, you mean they're gonna let the Anglos come to our school?" We just couldn't see that. But, anyway, they did, and now Harding is closed, well, so is Roosevelt, and they've built new schools on the other side of town.

INT: What did that look like, in 1954, coming here to Lowell School, how did it desegregate?

CE: Lowell was actually de facto segregated. There were very few Anglo students, and it was mainly Mexican Americans and Blacks, and a majority were Mexican Americans. And it was right next to the two largest public housing projects in Phoenix—we just lived about five blocks away from the Marcos de Niza, which was a housing project, and then the Matthew Henson project was a little bit further west. So there was not a lot of difference, except the behavior of the students was very different from Harding. We were pretty disciplined at Harding School, people kept a real close eye on us.

INT: Is the house that you moved into (*in Phoenix*) still there?

CE: Yeah, actually I pass by there, it's a shack. We lived there for two years, and then we moved to a house right south of McDowell, on Culver Street. And at that time, the "brown line" was probably around Jefferson, and there were not many Mexicans north of that.

INT: The "brown line," I've never heard that term.

CE: Oh, yeah. The brown line now doesn't exist. They really have had, maybe not official discrimination in housing, but minorities—Blacks or Mexicans—could not find housing

north of McDowell, or even north of Van Buren, let's say, unless it was the extreme west side (*of Phoenix*). The realtors would just not sell to Mexicans or Blacks.

So we moved, in 1955 or '56, my parents bought their first home, 'cause they had always rented before. We moved into a house, and I was already in high school, but my younger brother and two younger sisters went to Whittier Elementary School, which was right north of McDowell and 16th Street. And they were some of the first minority students to go there, and they were ridiculed a lot and called names, and it was not very pleasant at first, but after a while, they got used to it.

INT: How did your brother and sisters deal with that?

CE: Well, my brother kind of joked about it, and they used to call him Pancho. And my sisters, I'm trying to figure out I have two younger sisters, and the older of the two is very fair-skinned. In my family, many of us, my grandfather was kind of blond and blue-eyed, my dad's father, so my dad's very fair. So my younger sister Irene is pretty fair, so she didn't have a lot of problems, 'cause she was more fair-skinned. And Carmen, she was so young, she was just starting school at Whittier, and I don't know if she really understood a lot of the stuff that was happening.

Except, that's another funny story. One time, the nurse came to visit my mother. And that's very unusual, because in Phoenix, they don't make house calls. In Superior, the teachers had no problem going to our house. (laughter) And the nurse came over and she brought—what were they, the seven, the pyramid of healthy foods? Well, my mother was very conscious of all that, she really made sure she always served us a balanced diet. And the nurse said, "We're very concerned about your daughter, Carmen." That's my youngest sister. And she says, "Yeah?" "Well, you know, Mrs. Denogean, you need to understand that they need vegetables and fruits and all of this." And she said, "Yes, I know that." And she said, "Well, when the teacher asked Carmen what her favorite food was for breakfast, she said, 'Beans.' And what her favorite food was for lunch, 'Beans.' And for dinner, 'Beans.'" And my mother just started laughing, 'cause she thought that's all we ate, and so she came to tell my mom about the basic foods. (laughter) So she assured the nurse that Carmen ate other things than beans.

INT: So, when you say I'm really interested how you just said "brown line." It sounds like that was just kind of an understood thing.

CE: Well, yeah, it was very conscious on the Anglo part. I mean, you were out of your territory when you were north of McDowell.

INT: Where is that now, and how did it get from the point it was then?

CE: Well, one was the Fair Housing Act that was passed that made it illegal to discriminate. There used to be, the contracts for sale of a home, used to have a clause that said you cannot sell this to Mexicans, Blacks, or Asians. And in fact, in Tempe, my parents-in-law, my husband's parents, when they got the deed to their house in Victory Acres, their

deed has that provision in it. So when the Fair Housing laws were passed, not until 1960, that's when things kind of eased up. And the realtors had to be more careful—they're still doing it, they still do it today—and they had to be more careful.

And the people started being able to afford homes, to buy homes north. And I think when I graduated from college, the “brown line” was up to almost maybe Indian School Road. And what happened is the influx of immigration, with the economic cycles that go, lots of immigrants from Mexico, they always go where they can survive the best, and it's usually in the barrios, where people speak their language and they can go to the store and buy stuff in Spanish and get around in Spanish. But families started moving, as they became more affluent.

And one of the other things that tells you where the brown line used to be is that you would see signs in Spanish, and then north of a certain place, you wouldn't see signs in Spanish. But now they're all over, because of the huge immigration, the huge influx of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries, now they're all over. There's no real defined line. There's neighborhoods that are predominantly White, but there's no line.

INT: When did that transition happen, to pierce the line _____?

CE: Not too long ago. Let's see, we're in 2009. I can't really pick a date, but maybe in the '80s, maybe around the '80s, I think it pretty much disappeared.

But I know when we got married, we were looking for a place to live, and there was a house that was listed for rent, and it sounded ideal—it was small, it was near the university, 'cause we were both still in school. And we called, and they said, “Oh, yeah, come right over.” We were there in five minutes. And when the owner saw us, she said, “Oh, we just rented it out, I'm sorry.” Well, they didn't want to rent to Mexicans.

And then, even later than that, we were already living here, we moved here in 1971, and it must have been around 1980. I've always wanted to live in downtown Tempe. I love some of those old homes in Tempe. And there was a house on the corner of 10th Street and Maple, I think that's where it was, that was up for sale. It had a full basement, and it had a porch, the old-fashioned porch outside. And we went to see the realtor, and he took us, and he said, “Well, you know you can't afford this kind of a house, and I don't think the owner would want me to sell the house to you.” Just like that. Well, it had so much work that had to be done that my husband said, “No, it's not worth doing it.” And it would have more commercial value later on, 'cause they built apartments and stuff like that. But that house is still there, and whoever bought it refurbished it, and it's very nice. But he made it very clear that he wasn't gonna sell that house to Mexicans.

INT: I find it fascinating that you say “to Mexicans,” because your family sounds like they might have been here longer than the realtor's family.

CE: But that's what we're called, and we're told to go back to Mexico where we came from, a lot.

Funny thing, though. I went, through the State Department, to Mexico City, when President Carter had been elected, and they called me a Yankee, a "gringa." So I don't belong here, and I don't belong there.

INT: That must have been a weird feeling.

CE: It was, it really was. But it was an interesting experience.

INT: I want to ask you more about that, but I first also want to get the tape to understand the progression, too, from once you graduated Phoenix Union High School, and then you decided to I guess, what was your thought process? You went on to ASU, I know.

CE: Yes, straight on. My mother encouraged us, and the only dilemma I had was that I didn't want to continue living at home, 'cause the house was pretty crowded. My two older brothers were in the military, but everybody else—that's five of us—in a three-bedroom home, five kids, it was pretty crowded. And I decided I wanted to go to ASU and I wanted to live on campus.

And I was real lucky to get a small scholarship, and then I knew I could find a job, 'cause I was pretty good with clerical skills. That's what they would tell us at Phoenix Union—take all the secretarial programs, 'cause I was gonna make a great secretary and a great mother. And despite the fact that I used to score in the 90-middle-to-high percentile on the standardized tests, no one ever suggested that I should think about going to college. So, anyway . . . I forgot what I was going to tell you about that. What was your question?

INT: What was your thought process, what was in your mind as you transitioned?

CE: Oh. My sister and I—I caught up with her in second grade in Superior. At Harding School, I think I did three grades in one year, I got to the second grade in one year. Mainly because I could speak English, and my older brother had taught me to write my name and the alphabet and numbers and stuff like that, so I got promoted up. I wound up in second grade, I'm not sure exactly how. But my sister is about two years older than I am, and I wound up in the same class; from second grade on, she had to put up with me.

So when we graduated from high school, we both decided—well, our senior year—we decided we wanted to go to college. She wanted to go to Phoenix College, and I wanted to go to ASU. And I wound up getting a scholarship to ASU, so I asked my mom if I could live on campus. And she said, "Yeah, can you afford it?" "Well, yeah, I can." And I had a part-time job, 20 hours a week.

So I moved on campus, and my dad was outraged. Because in his family, the women stayed home until they were married or buried. And he didn't talk to me for about three months. And I knew that was gonna happen, but he was working. He used to work

swing shift, from three o'clock to midnight, so I didn't have to face him. But he was very upset. And his mother, my grandmother, was very upset. And he told me one time, "You know, you make me look bad with my mother." And I said, "Yeah?" "Yeah, when she comes to visit, she says, 'And where is Cecilia?' like, 'You let her go.'" And I was just seventeen when I went to ASU.

INT: It must have taken a lot of guts.

CE: I guess. I never really think much about that. I decide to do something, and I figure out how to get it, and I do it. I don't really get scared, I don't know why.

So my sister went to Phoenix College. And my dad even said—that's right, when he found out that I was gonna live on campus—he said, "Look, I'll buy you a car," because he's a mechanic, "I'll buy you a car if you stay." And I said, "No, 'cause you're just gonna fix the car enough so I can get to school and back, it's gonna break half the time, and I can't afford insurance and I can't afford gas." I said no. And my sister, being the older sister, she was the obedient one, and he bought her a car, and sure enough, a lot of mornings she would get up for her 7:30 class and the car wouldn't run. And she really had a tough time, she really did, it was awful. But she stayed at home, and then she commuted to ASU after she graduated from Phoenix College.

But I had a great time living on campus. It was a great experience.

INT: Where did you live on campus?

CE: The first year, I lived in North Hall, which is across, right where Hayden Library is, the newer part that's down below. It was right next to Dixie Gammage Hall. It's not there anymore. But I lived in North Hall.

And it was interesting, because they kind of segregated their students, too. The Native American students—the Indian students—and the Mexican students predominantly lived in that dorm. And it was pretty good, because I got to meet a lot of kids from the mining towns. And then I got to meet Navajo and Apache students, and much later I became very interested in Indian law, and I remembered some of the stuff from the kids that I'd met in undergrad.

So then, from there, I lived in McClintock A, and then I lived in the honor dorm in McClintock B 'til I graduated.

INT: And those are still there.

CE: Yeah, they are. Mac B was the honor dorm. So I liked living on campus, 'cause I had a job on campus. In the summer, I would move home, and I would find a fulltime job and take a night class every summer, in undergrad.

INT: It sounds like your mom's belief in education really was inside of you, as well.

CE: Yeah, all of us have done pretty well. The younger kids, though, they didn't go to college, because they said we looked so awful, with bags under our eyes, they didn't think it was worth it. And they've done all right.

INT: Where did you work while you were at ASU?

CE: I worked in the Marketing Department. That's kind of interesting, how I got hired. They didn't really know what kind of clerical skills we had, but when they got all the student workers that'd been approved—I wasn't under a loan or anything, but I wanted a job—so they got us all, we were all women, and just about all of us were freshman, and they put us up in front, and the profs were all men, and they were told to pick who they wanted to work with.

INT: Are you serious?

CE: I'm serious. I was the last one picked. And that really blew my mind, because everybody else was Anglo.

INT: Wow. And what year was that?

CE: '59. But it was a really good stroke of luck that I got to work for the Marketing Department, because the Chair was a guy that traveled worldwide, and he was very well-respected in the marketing area, and he would give a lot of speeches, and he was just overwhelmed that I could do shorthand and typing and all the office equipment. And when he finally got enough money to hire a fulltime person, he had me supervise that fulltime person. And I learned a lot from him, I really learned a lot from him.

And one of them is how racism is so pervasive. But I didn't know that there was such strong anti-Semitism at ASU. 'Cause at one point in time, I was working, and Bill Nelander, that was his name, he comes running, and the Dean of the College of Business is running after him, and he slams the door in the Dean's face and says, "Go to hell!" And the Dean's knocking on the door, "Tell him that we can pay him anything that he wants," or that we can't, or whatever. So then the Dean left, because Bill was not going to open the door for him, Dr. Nelander was not going to open the door for him. And when the Dean left, all of a sudden he said, "Cecilia!" And I thought, "Oh, my god, I don't want to go in there, I don't know what's going on." I was just freaking out. So I go in there. "You know what that was all about?" They recruited, and they got the most competent guy, he had an international reputation in marketing, and he was from New York University, and he was already a full professor at NYU. But they had a 10-year-old son that had such bad asthma, that the doctors told him that they needed to come to Arizona if their son was going to have any quality of life. So he knew Bill from all of the conferences, they had met, so he said, "I'm willing to come as anything, I'll come as an assistant professor, whatever the salary is, nothing matters." And he (*Nelander*) said, "He's Jewish, and that's why they won't hire him."

INT: So the Dean found out that he was Jewish?

CE: Um-hmm, and they weren't hiring Jews. That year, or the next year, the Faculty Senate, they would have an annual retreat or something like that, that was over a weekend, and that time, they reserved the Camelback Inn. And the Camelback Inn said, "Yes, you can have it here, but no Jews can stay here overnight; they can come during the day, but we will not let them have a room." They got so upset, they picketed the Camelback Inn, and they didn't meet there. And then ultimately, I think, a Jewish group bought the Camelback Inn. (laughter)

So that really surprised me, because I had always seen that the color of my skin was a problem
(*end of recording*)

Tape 1, Side B

INT: All right, we should be good.

CE: So, anyway, that was really quite an eye-opener, and I really liked the way Dr. Nelander dealt with it. He just stood up to the Dean and told him to go to hell. (laughter) And he says, "I'm not gonna lie to him; I'm gonna tell him why you won't hire him." So I really learned a lot from him.

INT: Whatever happened with that issue? Did he ever come out here?

CE: He didn't come; he didn't have a job. I'm sure he wound up somewhere, but I don't know where. You didn't have Google, you didn't have computers then. (laughter)

INT: So, when you got to ASU, what did you think you might want to study?

CE: Oh, I already knew, because my counselor had told me I wasn't gonna make it, 'cause she thought I needed to be a secretary and a housewife.

INT: Your high school counselor?

CE: Uh-huh (*yes*). And she was Black. And my sister went to her counselor, who also was Black, and she told her not to go to college, that she wasn't college material, that she was setting herself up for failure. And my sister, she retired as an elementary school teacher, she graduated with honors. So that was kind of astounding. And in fact, my counselor said she would not even They had applications, admission forms, she said she would not give it to me, because she wouldn't be part of my failure. And I didn't drive then, so I had to get a friend—I didn't know you could call and they would mail you one—but I had a friend drive me to ASU to pick up an application for admission.

INT: Why do you think, looking back, that those two counselors said what they did, especially with their background?

CE: That's how they grew up thinking, that Mexicans were stupid. And an educated person would look at my scores—97%, 95%—and they would think, “Wow, this must be” No, they never connected; they just saw Mexican.

INT: So they were, themselves, discriminated against, but they also learned discrimination, as well.

CE: And the system kind of has set it up. When you lived in the inner city, in south Phoenix, during those years, the Black community and the Chicano community always had to fight over the same scraps of grants and whatever it was. It was set up so there would always be this conflict, and we wouldn't unite to get rid of all this discrimination. So that was interesting.

INT: Did you see that reflected even in friendships, or even the gangs in the high schools?

CE: Oh, yeah, in my classrooms. In the classrooms, and in the dorm. Like, in high school, even though we belonged to two or three clubs every year, and we had really good friends that were Anglo, we never got invited to their parties on the weekends, and to their homes, because their parents probably would not allow them to have us over. But I wasn't really conscious of that during all that time. I just think that my mother kept saying, “Oh, you can be anything you want to be,” and “You have opportunities,” and all that.

But when we were seniors, both my sister and I were part of this cooperative ed program, where we would get jobs for pay in the summertime. Somebody called into the co-op teacher and said, “Look, I don't want to interview a bunch of people; just send me your best student.” It was a realty company, Bob Bruce Realty. And she sent me. She said, “You should go, 'cause I know they'll hire you.” I said, “Okay.” I needed a job. And then they didn't give me an offer, so when I came back, she said, “Oh, there's better jobs for you somewhere else.” And I did, I wound up with a really good job, but she didn't tell me why I didn't get the job.

She took off for the summer, and my sister hadn't been able to find a job. And one day, about the second week of the summer, she gets a call from the teacher that's in charge of the program over the summer, Mrs. Jordan, and she asked my sister if she had a job. “No.” “Oh, good, 'cause you need to go, they're looking for someone,” 'cause they had hired poor Rosie Russell, she was the best person, she was a majorette, but she was dumber than a rock. (laughter) She was just very nice, but she didn't have the skills, but she was blond and blue-eyed, and they hired her, and they threw her out two weeks later, she didn't last two weeks. So she said, “They need somebody at Bob Bruce Realty.” Well, I never thought anything of it, that I hadn't been hired; I just figured they wanted somebody else. So she goes, and her last name is D-e-n-o-g-e-a-n, and at school they told us to pronounce it “den-o-jeen” instead of “den-o-hian.” So Connie started working, and she said that this man kept looking at her, the one who hired her. And when the

phone rang, she answered it, and they were speaking Spanish, so she responded in Spanish. And when she hung up, they told her her services were not needed.

So when she called Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Jordan just couldn't understand what was happening, so she called Mrs. Garres (*sp?*), who was somewhere in the Midwest, and oh, she just felt awful, because they had told her, when Mrs. Garres sent me over and they didn't hire me, the guy called her and said, "Look, don't send us any Mexicans or Blacks, 'cause it's bad for business." And my sister is very fair-skinned, she has kind of like hazel eyes, and they couldn't tell right away; with me, you could tell, there's no question that I'm Indian or Mexican or something. So that was very hard on her, because Mrs. Garres called her from wherever she was.

And you would think that I would get a clue, but I didn't really pay much attention to it, because my mother always had us pointed in a positive direction and to just always do your best, and I figured, "Well, there must be a reason," and I just kept going.

INT: Wow. So here you are at ASU . . .

CE: Oh, and I decided to—you asked me how I decided what to major in, since everybody was telling me I wasn't gonna make it—I thought well, I better get a major where I know I can get a job if I flunk out. So that's how I wound up in Business Education, to teach typing, shorthand, all of that, since I was good at it. And really, what I would have preferred was to major in Music.

INT: Really? So if you were to go back today, it would be Music?

CE: Well, maybe not today, because my brain is not fast enough. But, yeah, if I had had an opportunity to do it, I would have gone into Music. I really liked the violin, classical, I really like it.

So I wound up, and I didn't know, you're not even conscious of stuff. Some of the other Chicano students in my Spanish classes—'cause I minored in Spanish—they would say, "Wow! You got in the College of Business!" I didn't even know that it was hard to get into. And I remember Manny Dominguez that I went to high school with, he also was in the College of Business, and we were the only two Chicanos in the freshman class in the College of Business. He wound up working for Governor Castro, when he was elected governor. And I still know him, he's still a friend. But we were the only two.

INT: Were you aware of this at the time?

CE: I didn't pay a lot of attention. I was taking seventeen-and-a-half credits and working twenty hours a week, and putting up with my parents not liking the guy I was dating and telling me they were gonna write me off, so I said, "Go ahead, I don't need your money," and I never took money from them.

So anyway, I graduated, and I was president of the Honorary, and I got the Outstanding Business Education Student award, but I couldn't find a teaching job in the Valley. I had student-taught at Tempe High, and that's where I met my husband. He was a freshman at ASU, and he was a campus cop. He had been in the Air Force, and out working, and then decided to go to college; he was a bit older than I. But I met him there. And I thought I did a pretty good job student-teaching there, and it was a small district then, there was just one school; the next year, I think, they were opening McClintock. Yeah, 'cause I graduated in '64, and McClintock opened in '65.

And I couldn't find a job, and I ran into the Superintendent, 'cause all the offices were there, and he said, "Oh, we could not hire you"—and there were openings in Business Ed.—he said, "We couldn't hire you, because all the other teachers would always look at you as a student teacher." But they hired all the Anglo student teachers.

And I don't know if I ever put it all together at that time, but I was just happy to have a job (*in Ray*). And in the mining towns, they paid a lot more than they did in the Valley. And I really liked the small town, the classes, and they were integrated over there in the high schools, and it was just a lot of fun. I was just a couple of years older than many of students, and I really enjoyed it. But then I was still single, and I finally decided no, I needed to go back to school, so I came back.

They had had me teach a History class, and I had six credits in History, but I had enough credits in Social Studies from other subjects, so you teach whatever they tell you. So I taught a World History class at Ray High School, and I was like a chapter ahead of the students. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is awesome!" 'Cause in Business, each year, your focus gets narrower, it's only Business, it's only Business. It's not like today, with the international aspects of it, so it was very dry. And the History thing was so challenging and so interesting, I came down to see if I could major in History. They said, "Yeah, but you have to do all the forty-seven credits of undergrad."

Well, I didn't think I had time for that, so I went to the Spanish Department, 'cause I figured literature has a lot of history in it, and I had minored in Spanish. And they were desperate for grad students, so they said, "Well, we'll let you in, but it's sink or swim, you're on your own." So I did, I finished in a year and a summer.

INT: Oh, my goodness. Your Master's?

CE: Yeah. We didn't have to write a thesis then, and we took comps, and we had to write major papers in a couple of the classes. But, yeah, I took fifteen credits each semester, and I worked also, part-time.

INT: Because it spoke to you, that history aspect?

CE: Yeah, I really liked it. And I was just used to studying all the time, too. So I finished, and I actually was awarded a Fulbright (*award*), but they let me know so late. That was kind of funny. Professor Fisher, Margaret Fisher, was the faculty member that was the

Fulbright sponsor, the advisor. And they had told me I would be hearing, one way or another, after I had gone to an interview in New Mexico, and they told me I'd be hearing. Well, I never heard, and in the meantime, we'd decided, well, we might as well get married. We decided to get married.

INT: So you were dating for a while now?

CE: Yeah. Not all that long, but I had known him; he had to give me rides in high school, 'cause I didn't have a car. But we didn't date then, and we didn't date while I was in Ray, either. Somewhere along the line, it started, and when I got to grad school, then it got pretty serious, 'cause I was here all the time. But we were always at parties together, and I don't know why one day we decided that it might be good to date, I guess. And then we decided to get married. So we got married the day after finals, and then we both went to summer session, 'cause he was going into his junior year at ASU—no, he had just finished his junior year, and he was going into his senior year, I think. So he still had schooling to go, and I needed to finish my Master's, I had six credits to go.

INT: So you went to an interview in New Mexico?

CE: For the Fulbright. During grad school, I met Dr. Fisher, and one of my Spanish professors said I should apply for this Fulbright, 'cause it was for Latin American countries and that I was perfect for it. And he said, "I'll help you," so I did, I applied. But then I never heard, and they had told me I would hear, so I said, "There's no sense in waiting." So we decided to get married, and the day that I got my wedding dress and the day that we ordered our invitations, I got home and there was a letter that I had gotten a Fulbright. And I thought, "Well, I guess I'm not going," so I didn't accept it.

Dr. Fisher was so upset ' "You're going to regret this." He had his wife come with him, and they took me to Daly Park, 'cause we were living on 14th Street at the time, and she was telling me, "This is an opportunity of a lifetime. When you get married, you're gonna have to stay home, and you're gonna have a bunch of kids, you'll never have this opportunity again." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, it's too late now, we've already committed, and it's just too late." And I still see him; in fact, he's retired, and she passed away about three years ago, so he's really very lonely, 'cause she was a pretty neat lady.

I reminded him a while back about the Fulbright thing, and he said, "I guess we were wrong about that," because we've done a lot of travel. Elias did his sabbatical in Spain, so we had two kids then and we went to Spain, we were there for a semester. Then he started a program in Central Mexico, a summer session, so we know Mexico really well. Then I got a sabbatical when I was at Phoenix College, and I did a sabbatical in Guanajuato in Mexico. So we've traveled a lot, to Europe, and we really enjoyed that. So who knows? If I had gone the Fulbright way, I might not have had a boyfriend when I returned, you never know. (laughter) So it turned out to be a very good decision, not to take the Fulbright.

So when I got my Master's degree, McClintock was opened, and I applied to McClintock. Elias went to Tempe High, 'cause he went to elementary school in Tempe and high school, and he knew the principal.

But they still didn't want to hire minorities. But LULAC—I don't know if you're familiar with LULAC? They're the League of United Latin American Citizens, and they're very active in civil rights, and they particularly advocate for the Mexican-American community. So they had been—and I didn't even know that it was going on, 'cause we were not political at that time—so they had been to the Board, and apparently there had been newspaper articles where they accused the Board of not hiring minorities. So they basically had to agree to hire minorities, so that's when I applied. And that seems to be the story of any success that I've had, is that I seem to come up at the right time. So they offered me a contract, and I went to teach at McClintock. Then I got pregnant, so I taught 'til about a week before our daughter was born.

And so everything was great. There were just two high schools in Tempe then, and the kids from Guadalupe were bused to McClintock, 'cause they said Mr. Boyle could handle these students. So you had the kids from Guadalupe, and then you had the kids from Shalimar Country Club. And I don't know if you're familiar with Guadalupe, but that's extremes, in economic and social, cultural things. So it was not a very easy thing. And they were teaching some classes for bilingual students in Spanish, but he would not let me teach one of those classes; I could only teach the regular Spanish classes. So everything went great, I really liked teaching, and I really liked the high school atmosphere. So then I left, right before Andrea was born, then Elias graduated, he got his B.A.

INT: In what?

CE: In Spanish Literature. And he's the one that really gets the travel bug, so he said, "Well, we can't afford to travel, so let's look for a job out of state." I said, "Well, you need to look, 'cause I don't know if I'm gonna be able to work next year," because I was pregnant. And he came home one day and he said, "We have jobs in Tacoma, Washington." I said, "We?" He said, "Yeah, they say you're hired, too." I said, "They haven't seen my résumé, they didn't interview me." "No, they really need Spanish teachers." And they were big into native speakers then. So I said, "I know I don't want to teach full-time." He said, "Whatever you want to teach, they'll hire you, they want you."

So we went to Tacoma, Washington, with our daughter, and we had a great time. It was really amazing, we met this whole group of Cubans, they were exiles, because when Fidel Castro came and took over Cuba in 1959, many of these families were connected with the government that they had thrown out, so they had to flee for their lives, really. And they were professionals. Some of them were attorneys, architects, lawyers, but they couldn't practice their professions here. And everybody was going to Miami, Florida, but there weren't enough jobs there, too many Cubans. So the government came up with this

grant to train the Cubans to be Spanish teachers, and that's how we all hooked up. So they just adopted us, we were part of their family, and it was amazing.

That's kind of where I began to be more conscious of cultural stuff. 'Cause like you noticed that we were both American and Mexican, but really, in a great sense, my mother really pushed the American part. Maybe that was the reason I was able to get through all this stuff, too. But, anyway, we met them, and then one time somebody told Kiki, my guitar teacher, "Oh, man, your English is getting so good, you don't even have that accent anymore!" And she was horrified. "Oh, no! Oh, my goodness. I never want to lose my accent. I always want people to know that I'm Cuban." They were just so proud of being Cuban, and we learned a lot about their culture. Then I took guitar lessons from her, and I learned a lot more.

So we were there just two years, because our families were both very upset with us that we took their granddaughter away. And then Elias wanted to go to grad school, to get his Master's, and they offered him a T.A. (*teaching assistant*) here at ASU.

So we came back, and I was hired back at McClintock, 'cause everybody thought I was a really good teacher and the students really liked me. But now, this time, the one Spanish teacher that taught the bilingual classes, there was one extra class that they couldn't fit into her schedule, so that's when I picked up the class. And most of the kids in that class were from Guadalupe.

INT: And they did not know how to speak English, is that why it was bilingual?

CE: No, they spoke both English and Spanish, they were bilingual. And trilingual in some respects; some of them also spoke Yaqui.

But what I found out real quickly is that they couldn't read, they didn't know how to read. So our principal had told us at the back-to-school meeting that we had this brand-new Title I reading program, and that the reading teacher would be more than happy to help us with any problems our students had with reading. So I went over there and I told her, "Look, I've got a bunch of kids from Guadalupe, and they apparently don't know how to read," and I said, "I wonder what you can do to help me." And she got this kind of panicked look on her face, and she said, "Excuse me, I forgot that I have a meeting with Mr. Boyle," and she went out. The next thing I knew, I'm getting called to the office—what was I doing over there, demanding rights for my students?

INT: Oh, my goodness!

CE: That's what I told him. And I said, "What?" So I told him what I was doing, and he said, "Oh, she's very nervous." That's when I found out that LULAC had been on their backs, both about the reading scores and about their hiring practices. I was the third minority person hired in the Tempe Union High School District, ever, and I think they became a district in either 1920 or 1908, something like that. And they had a very conscious exclusionary policy.

So anyway, that's what started things out, and all of a sudden, I started asking questions. I never was afraid of, I don't know why I'm not afraid to ask, and I would go ask him. And I couldn't believe the answers that I got from him.

At one point, Sue Chilton, she's Anglo, and she was the other Spanish teacher that taught the kids from Guadalupe. She'd been there from the beginning, and they just loved her, she was incredible. And the funny part is that I thought, "Oh, wow, I've got these students, and I'm Chicana, and I can really help them!" They wouldn't even talk to me, the kids from Guadalupe. The Anglo kids warmed up to me right away, but they would just keep their distance. And I thought, "What the heck?" So I would ask Sue, and Sue says, "Well, you know, they don't trust anybody, and you have to gain their trust." She says, "What I did, and what I still do, is I go make house visits to meet the families, and I go to church over there, and I go to—the Yaquis, they still have their ceremonials—and I go to all of that. Maybe you could try that out."

So the first house call I made, when I came to class the next day—Guadalupe's a small community, and everybody knew I had been there—and everything changed in the classroom. Then I continued, and the more I learned about these students, the more I learned what a raw deal they had gotten, from the elementary school on up.

And then they would come with some of their problems. Like this one girl—she wasn't my student, but her sister was my student—and Concha comes in crying. I said, "What's the matter?" They had advanced classes then, not honors, and she was in an advanced Science class. That day, NASA had launched a missile, and her teacher said that "he would rather see a hundred moon shots than all these lazy Mexicans on welfare." And her mother was on welfare, because her father had abandoned them. And she said that she just felt that all the other kids, 'cause she was the only minority in the classroom, that they all turned around to look at her.

So I went to see Mr. Boyle, and I said, "Look, you might want to talk to this teacher, because of this." And he said, "First of all, I don't believe that he would say that. And anyway, even if he did, there's nothing I can do about it." Just like that. And so as I kept finding out more things like that, I would go and ask him, and I would get the weirdest things.

So when I sponsored the Spanish Club—and the clubs met either before school or right after class, 'cause the kids were bused all over—so the kids from Guadalupe would get to school in the morning ten minutes before class started, and they had to leave ten minutes after the last class period, 'cause that's when the buses went. And it's six miles from McClintock, so they couldn't walk, and they didn't have cars, even their parents didn't have cars, that ran, anyway. So Sue and I went to see him, to see if they could change the bus schedule so these kids could belong to Spanish Club, 'cause it was the thing to do that year. And he says, "No. We've made it that way intentionally, because we don't want them around. We have enough problems with them being here." I said, "What? But they can't participate in activities." He said, "Well, that's too bad; anyway, this isn't

their school.” I said, “Well, whose school is it?” And he looks at me, and Sue and I are just—because Sue told me he’s not gonna do it, ‘cause she already had had other encounters with him, and I told her we have to try—and I said, “Well, Mr. Boyle, these kids’ parents pay taxes.” And he didn’t think they did, because you think of all these people as just lazy Mexicans on welfare, but many of them worked, a lot of them for Salt River Project, cleaning out the canals, and doing farm work. So anyway, “They don’t belong here, this isn’t their school.” And those kinds of things kept coming up all the time.

And there was a dilemma again with Title I, and I wound up having to go to a meeting to explain why I called my husband’s sister-in-law to ask about the Title I program, ‘cause Mr. Boyle told the English teacher that I knew what was happening. This English teacher came to see me, and she said, “Cecilia, how could you have approved this?” I said, “What?” They were afraid that they would lose their Title I funds, and this professor at ASU was their consultant, he was a Black professor, and he advised Mr. Boyle that what they should do is The kids from Guadalupe, the tests bottomed out at fourth grade, and 90% of them read below the sixth-grade level, but we don’t know how much lower than fourth grade because the test bottomed out. So Dr. Edwards suggested that they change the enrollment in the Title I classes, and put in students that were half a grade level below. Like, if they were ninth-graders, they would put kids that were 8.5, ‘cause they would be able to make progress. They hadn’t shown any progress with the students from Guadalupe, like 90-some percent of them had not improved at all in their reading, and they were afraid to lose their funding.

So they went to Barbara Shepherd, she was the counselor, the chair for the counseling department, they handled the schedules for students, and they told her to do that. She said, “I’m not gonna do that; that’s illegal, I’m not gonna do it.” So they said, “Okay; then get out of here,” and they went into the records and they changed the students. So the students from Guadalupe wound up in regular-level reading classes, when they couldn’t even read. And then this English teacher that had taught regular-level classes comes and says, “My students can’t read. There’s no way they’re gonna be successful here. How could you approve that?” I said, “I have nothing to do with the reading program.” “Well, Mr. Boyle said that you had approved it.” I said, “Well, let me look into it.”

And after she left, I went to Barbara Shepherd, and she told me what had happened. And I said, “Why would Mr. Boyle tell Carolyn that I knew about it?” “Oh, isn’t Lupe Esquer your sister-in-law?” I said, “Oh, she’s my husband’s sister-in-law.” “She was on the Title I committee.” And another prof from ASU, Dr. Podlick, was the chair, but he was gone for the summer, ‘cause he normally went somewhere in the world over the summer. So Lupe was left, she was the vice-chair, so Dr. Edwards called her at home, apparently. And I called Lupe then, I said, “Did you know about this thing with the Title I program?” She said, “Well, I know in the summer, Dr. Edwards called and said, ‘We want to make some small changes with our Reading program so that the kids that really can benefit from this class will be in the classes, and I was wondering if you could just approve that without having to call a special meeting of the whole committee?’” Well, she said it

sounded so good, and they really liked Dr. Edwards, he really is a very nice-sounding guy, so she said, "Sure; I don't think we need to have a meeting, I'll talk to Bill when he gets back."

And when I called and told her what had happened, she was furious. So Dr. Podlick was back then, so she called him, and he was fit to be tied. So he called Mr. Boyle and he said, "You need to send out a meeting notice, that we're having an emergency meeting of the Title I committee." So then I get called into the office. Mr. Boyle said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "What did I do?" "Why did you tell the Title I committee what was happening here?" I said, "Because you told Carolyn that I had approved it." "I did not! I told her that Mrs. Esquer had approved it." I said, "Well, she understood that it was me, so I just called Lupe, and she told me what had happened." And he said, "Well, you need to be at this meeting, and I'm not gonna be able to be there," 'cause he was gonna be recruiting at Annapolis, "but you have to be at that meeting."

It was on a Friday after school, and I walk in, and the secretary reminded me over the intercom, "Mrs. Esquer, make sure you go to the meeting." I said, "Yeah, I'm on my way." I go in, I open the door, and all the district administrators are sitting there—the superintendent, the associate superintendent, even the athletic director was there—and they all had angry looks on their faces. And then the Title I committee was there. And Dr. Edwards was leading the discussion. And I don't know if you've ever seen those reel-to-reel tape recorders, the Wollensak, that's what they had.

INT: They had a tape recorder in there?

CE: Yeah. And he (*Dr. Edwards*) says, "We need to tape this meeting so that Mr. Boyle can hear what happens at the meeting. He's very concerned, he wanted to be here, but he already had commitments to be in Annapolis, so we're gonna tape it." And everybody said fine. He says, "And the purpose of the meeting today is to catch the culprit who tipped off the advisory committee." And I'm thinking, "Oh, my gosh, it's about me!" And Dr. Podlick says, "Dr. Edwards, I hate to disagree with you, but the purpose of this meeting is to find out whether this school is violating federal law, and if it is, what it's going to do to get it back in shape, or we're going to notify the authorities about this." So then Dr. Edwards swallows, and he starts explaining what had happened. And then they talked to me, they asked me to tell how I got into it, and I explained that. And then I decided to tell them about the Reading teacher, how they were not really helping students, and that if we went to ask for help, they would give us a lot of hassle. So then Mr. Benedict, the superintendent, said he didn't want any more discussion. He said, "Dr. Podlick, I can assure you that if there is a problem, it will be taken care of today, it will be taken care of immediately, and so I don't think that we need to go any further with this meeting." So the meeting was adjourned.

Monday, Mr. Boyle was back from Annapolis, and I get called into the office. By now, I was in his office about every other week, I think, for something that he thought I did, or whatever. And he asked me why I did that, and I told him, I said, "It's because of what you said." And then he said, "Well, why did you tell them about the Reading program?"

Because he had told me I couldn't go over to talk to the Reading teacher without his permission. And I said, "Does everybody have to get your permission to go over there?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, why do I?" He said, "Oh, no, I guess you don't have to," 'cause he didn't want to belabor that. But he actually was going to insist on that, but he knew now that I spoke up.

So anyway, what happened I didn't know what was happening, 'cause I had nothing to do with the English classes, or with the Reading classes. But the same English teacher came to me, Carolyn came to me towards the end of the day, and she said, "I don't know what you did, but everything is straightened out!" Apparently, that whole day, they were shifting students back, their schedules, and classes had already started, and they had to re-do everybody's schedules that they had messed up, with Title I. So when Mr. Boyle brought me in, he said, "You know, you could be fired for what you did." And I said, "Well, I think that's kind of strange, 'cause you're the one that's violating federal law; I think you're the one that would lose his job." (laughter) Oh, he just couldn't believe it.

I don't know where I got that, 'cause I was very shy, but somewhere, I think from my mom. She had a strong sense of fairness, and she really did some interesting things as we were growing up, that I thought, "Wow, how could she do that?" So anyway, he always had to back off, and that was the end of that.

And about that time, my husband and I had started volunteering with the farm workers, with César Chavez, because they were organizing them. And that's when I met this guy, Ed Pastor, he's a Congressman now, but he was a law student. And we were all very active; by that time, we started getting active. And I asked him, I said, "What's law school like?" 'Cause César said we need more Mexican American lawyers, our people need lawyers to help them out and we don't have enough. So I asked Ed, "Is law school hard?" And he says, "Nah! It's not." He says, "Why? Are you thinking of going?" I said, "Well, I was thinking about it." And he said, "Well, you talk to Elias, and if you decide to go, you call me and I'll help you get in." And so we talked about it, and I can't believe that he agreed to put up with me for three years in law school, because we had two kids.

So he said yes, and I went and took the LSAT. I didn't have time to study for it or anything, so I went and checked out something from the Law Library that was a little pamphlet about what the LSAT was like. So I looked at that over the weekend, then I went to take the LSAT. Then I called Ed and I told him, "Well, I took the LSAT." "Okay," he says. So then he called me a few days later, "I'm picking you up, you be ready, we're going to the law school. I have an appointment for you with the Dean." I said, "Oh, okay." So we go in, and Ed says, "Dean Pedrick, meet Cecilia Esquer; she's going to be one of your first-year law students." (laughter) And I really liked the Dean, and he said, "Oh?" And we talked for a little bit, and then he told us we had to go somewhere else, so we go

The Chicano law students had an organization, which they still do, and at that time, all the minority students had been pushing for having a voice in who got admitted to the law

school, 'cause there hadn't been many minority students admitted, and ASU was a fairly new law school. So each of the organizations had representation on the admissions committee, so he took me there. They had a meeting—they used to be called El Grupo, The Group—and they had a meeting, and Ed says, “Look, you guys, this is Cecilia, and you need to make sure that she gets admitted, you need to support her for admission.” And I got admitted. My LSAT score was not too bad. I think a big reason that I got admitted was all the community service stuff that I had done, and I had become pretty active, and especially with Mr. Boyle, my favorite guy. (laughter)

And then, around that time, Elias ran for the school board, and he was elected. He was the first Mexican American ever elected to the school board, and he won by eight votes. And no one was ever elected again, until—there's a Councilman, Ben Arredondo—his niece, Robin, who is half Mexican American and half Anglo, she got elected about eight years ago. Elias got elected in 1970, and his term was up in '76, and from that year until Robin Savage was elected, no Mexican American had been elected. Because Tempe is a very racist town, even today. And the Special Ed. teacher that had a classroom down the hall from me, when Elias was running, she says, “You know, they knocked on my apartment door and they said, ‘You have to go vote, 'cause the Mexicans are trying to get in! The Mexicans are trying to take over! You better go vote!’”

INT: That was here in Tempe?

CE: Yeah, here in Tempe. So you start getting an idea. Well, I was totally shocked by all of that, 'cause I'd never—even though I went to a segregated school, even though I had the experience I had with Bob Bruce Realty—I'd never thought that there was that kind of discrimination around. But my husband grew up here, and he knew, and he had learned how to deal with it, so he didn't go bonkers like I did, and wind up going to law school and all that.

So that's how I wound up going to law school. And he took over everything here the first couple of years, everything, the cooking and And we went from two incomes to one, and he had to teach a couple of night classes. And he headed a task force for the National Education Association, so he was traveling with that a few times a year. And then he would clean house, and go grocery shopping, and take care of any babysitting problems, and I really don't know how he did it, for two years. Then going into the third year, he said, “You know, I don't think you're gonna flunk out; you better start taking over some of this stuff, I need some help.” So I said, “Okay,” so sometime later that week, I think, I fixed dinner, 'cause he would even cook. So we were sitting around and Marcos, our son, says, “Mom, is it okay if Dad keeps doing the cooking?” (laughter) So, oh, man, you talk about hurt feelings! I thought, “Wow! I can't even cook?” And then when I would get home from school, I would try to step in to help, see what I could do. Well, they had adjusted, they had their routine from the two years that I was gone, that they were used to taking care of everything, so I was kind of in the way, and I just really had to elbow my way back into the routine. It was really interesting. I did go to all their stuff, like their plays, and they were both in sports, and I was able to make—except when I was traveling out of town—I was able to make most of their activities.

‘Cause during that time, I got elected to the Democratic National Committee as a member-at-large, and we had no money, and they didn’t pay your way, and the committee met about three or four times a year. And a friend of mine, Rick DeGraw, he formed this thing called Roots, and right before each trip, he would send out a letter, “Cecilia needs help with the plane ticket.” And some of them are judges now or big-name lawyers or whatever, big politicians. We got checks like \$2.50, we were all broke. And normally I would get enough money for a one-way ticket to D.C., and I’d have to put the rest on my credit card. And I could never reserve a hotel room, because I didn’t have any money to pay for it. And there was a woman from California who was on the executive committee, Mary Ledesma, and the Committee paid for her room. So the other three Latinas, they couldn’t afford it either, we were all just rag-tag poor. So Mary said, “Oh, you can stay with me,” so it was like at my grandmother’s house—she would get a room with a king-sized bed, and as many of us as could would get on the bed, and then the rest of us would sleep on the floor. And then Elias would never know where I was until I got there, he wouldn’t know what hotel or what room I was in. And I’d have to call—we didn’t have cell phones—and I’d have to call to let him know that I was there okay, and here’s where I am and this is how you can reach me. It was just crazy. I don’t see how I I just said okay, we would do these things, and we did. It was crazy.

So you have more questions?

INT: I do. My goodness.

CE: And already it’s almost eight o’clock.

INT: And this tape is just about to run out. I think I might stop it here.

(end of recording)

Tape 2, Side A

INT: My name is Charlene Shovic, and I’m a volunteer oral historian with the Tempe Historical Museum. This is tape number two, interview with Mrs. Cecilia D. Esquer on March 30, 2009.

In what ways have certain ethnic groups been included or excluded from various neighborhoods or activities here in Tempe?

CE: I think I told you earlier about the rental, the discrimination in the real property. And then also in the school. When the city was smaller and there were just two high schools, there was always unrest between the majority and the minority groups. And basically, the administration was not fair in treating them.

And then with the City of Tempe, they had a long history. My husband went to the elementary schools here and the high school, Tempe High, and he has friends that when they graduated from Tempe High, they went to work for the City of Tempe. And he still

is in touch with kids, the people he went to elementary school with, we go to his class reunions, and I've gotten to know them really well. And as I was getting to know them, they would talk about how great it was to have a job with the City, 'cause it had great benefits and a good salary, but that they were treated very awful. And the things that they would talk about, how they were treated, I couldn't believe. "Why don't you complain?" "Oh, we do, but they don't do anything." And then they would be looked over for promotion, and they would wind up having to train the person that got the job, because that person generally was not qualified to do the job, and then they would be under that person's supervision. And there was a lot of name-calling.

And one year, Johnny Martinez—the new Water Utilities building is named after him—Johnny was very active with the employee group, and they were trying to form, not exactly a union, but an employee-rights group, and they were going to the City Manager to talk about the treatment of minorities. And he was telling me about one of the years when he went, when he was on his way home, somebody shot at him; they missed him, but they shot at him, to scare him. And that's how much of a threat it was, that in the City of Tempe, in the administration, they never saw Mexican Americans as equal, and they felt free to allow other employees and their supervisors to mistreat them and call them names.

I felt that, from the things that I had experienced teaching at McClintock and the fact that when I started raising concerns, the faculty basically ostracized me. Most of them would not talk to me, or they would call me a troublemaker, and that I should just stop what I was doing. So I didn't see Tempe as a city that was amenable to any changes.

And we were a minority here in Tempe, and at that time, we were trying to get a lot of change in the State of Arizona. So my volunteer activities were in South Phoenix, that had a large Chicano population, and where we had successes—we were able to elect people to office, we were able to influence changes—and I always saw Tempe as hopeless, that it was always going to be racist. And my husband grew up here, he went to a de facto segregated elementary school, and that's the way it always was.

So, at any rate, I just ignored Tempe politics, and I really regret that. I think that if maybe we had gotten more active at that time, that maybe things would not be as bad as they are today. Because today they are still bad. I don't know if you're aware that nine City of Tempe employees won a \$4.1 million judgment against the City of Tempe for employment discrimination. They went through a jury trial and got that award three years ago, I think.

So as a result of that, I had gotten to know all these people now, and I got to know some of the employees because we started getting involved in the City elections. We got very involved in Ben Arredondo's campaign the first time he ran, and every time since. So we became even more aware of some of the hassles that he had as a Councilman, to try to get the Council to look at the discriminatory practices they have. And he couldn't get much done until this lawsuit.

So when the lawsuit was over and these guys got their money, a couple of them approached me, and they said, “Look, all those things that we were complaining of—the name-calling, being looked over for promotions, the rotten jobs that we had”—Like the guys that pick the trash, that’s actually a very coveted position, because it pays well and it’s a steady job and it has benefits. And there’s two kinds of trash that they pick: what they call “contained trash,” which they pick from the bins directly into the garbage truck, and then there’s what they call “uncontained trash,” where they actually come with a trailer, and they have to load it, so they’re exposed to dust and chemicals and all of that— Well, he says, “They always have us do that; the Anglos don’t have to do that. And we ask why not, and they tell us, ‘You want to keep your job?’” And they didn’t think that it was fair to have that kind of stuff go on. At any rate, they said, “All those things that we were complaining of, they’re still going on.”

INT: Even after the lawsuit?

CE: Even after the lawsuit. So they wondered if I could help. And I said, “Look, I just don’t have that much time. I’m willing to coach you, so that you can learn how to make change within the City.” Because by then, I’d been in a bunch of different things—I was a lawyer, I’d been a lawyer for school districts, and stuff like that. And I said, “I’m willing to coach you, but you guys have to do the work. I just don’t have time for this, and I really don’t like to deal with issues like this anymore, it’s too raw.”

So we formed a group, it was an ad hoc group, we wound up calling ourselves Grupo Acción, the Action Group, and we went to the Mayor. And there were about fifteen of us that were the core group, and then we had a larger community that we reported to, and they were all really long-time Tempe residents and all this. So we went to the Mayor, Hugh Hallman had been elected, and they thought that he would be helpful, because when they were asking the Council people to meet with them before the lawsuit, he and Ben Arredondo, they were the only ones that actually took the time to go and hear their stories. But Hugh heard, and he expressed outrage, but never did anything.

So anyway, we went to him, and I told him Well, I wasn’t the spokesperson; I insisted that someone else be the spokesperson. But we set up the agenda, and we told him that we would like to know what was going on. So he said, “Well, here’s what we can do. I’ll ask”—his assistant, I forgot his name—“to set up meetings with each of my senior staff, and you meet with them and you ask them your questions and you get the information you need from them, and then come back to me and we’ll see what we can do.” So we were really excited. And we did, we met with the heads of each of the different departments, and we found out that nothing had changed.

Like, we met with the Human Resources person, and they said, “Oh, everything was great.” Well, how come this young man that I knew from the City of Phoenix wanted to come and get a higher-level job here, and he had had eleven years’ experience in the Public Works area, he never even got an interview? So when I asked Ben, Ben looked into it, and they told him he didn’t apply. He was in the head of that department’s office when he called me, and I said, “You stay there; I’m gonna call him and find out.” And he

told me, “Cecilia, I can tell you, I delivered it personally, and I can tell you the name of the person that I delivered it to.” So I called Ben back, and they said, “Oh, well, I guess maybe he did apply, but we were looking for someone who had done the job, like the trash pickup.” Well, Greg has a college degree and a Master’s, and he started in supervisory positions, but he had a lot of experience, he could manage that area. And the guy that they wanted to hire had worked in the City of Mesa, and they recently in the City of Mesa, ‘cause they all know each other, they put him in a supervisory position, and he had three months’ experience in that, and they said he was more qualified than this guy. So Ben was really upset, so they stopped the hiring process.

So I said, “Okay, from that, how do you track the applications? When you receive them, do you have a log? How do you review the applications, to know who gets interviewed?” Well, they don’t have a consistent process. And a lot of times, the department head will call and tell them, “This is who we want to interview,” ‘cause they’ve already picked the person. And they don’t have a record of when the screening committee would meet, they don’t have a record of how they decided to send the names up for interviews. And almost every large institution, they have rating sheets, where each of the people rates the person, and you sign the form at the bottom, so if there’s any question about the hiring. Well, they don’t do anything like that. So they said, “Oh, but we’re working at it.”

Then they started, as a result of the lawsuit, they started what they call the Diversity Department, which is a whole department of three people, and they were going to deal with these issues. And they have what they call, they created, “safe havens,” so that if people didn’t feel comfortable going to file a complaint, they could go talk to the Diversity person. And this person is in City Hall, and for people to go in, they have to sign in downstairs, and they say, “Oh, it’s anonymous, nobody will know.” Well, no; they have to sign in. And if they come in during their working hours and they’ve just finished picking up trash, they don’t feel like coming up to the third floor where the Mayor is and all of that. Well, they wouldn’t budge on that one.

But when we met with that department head, we asked her, “What do you think of the program?” “Oh, it’s very successful.” So we said, “How many complaints have you had, how many people have come to see you, and what kinds of complaints do they have? Is it a particular type, is it in a particular department, is it against a particular person?” “Oh, we don’t keep track of that.” I said, “Well, then how are you saying that it’s successful?” “Well, we haven’t had any complaints filed recently.” And what these guys told us is that the reason they don’t go there, is that nothing’s confidential; that they will go there, and by the time they get back to their job site, their supervisor already knew that they had been there, and then they got into more trouble.

So we uncovered that, and everywhere we went, there was a problem. So we wrote a report, actually, and delivered it to the Mayor, about a year later, it took us about a year to get through all of those meetings. And instead of thanking us The Mayor thought it was gonna be like praising the City and all the reforms he had brought. We said, “These are all cosmetic, and we really want real change.”

Because the Council had called—mainly because Ben pushed it—they had called outside groups to come in and evaluate their programs, and they all told them the same thing: that they didn't have proper procedures, they needed to change this, they really needed to clean out their departments. And they said, "Oh, but we've replaced just about all the managers." What they did, they laterally-transferred them somewhere else, so they could do more harm, and then they moved up people that had been trained to act just like they were acting, and they were acting the same way.

So when we gave the Mayor our report, he started looking through it—and he's kind of a real emotional guy, I really like him—but his face just turned red, and just got so upset about our report. How could we do that? He thought they were doing a good job, and all of this. Well, that was the end of it. He didn't want anything more to do with us, 'cause he thought he was gonna get some brownie points, some kudos. We pointed out what things had worked, and his assistant, Mike Kruse (*sp?*) was his assistant, when we were in that meeting, he said, "Did you hire a consultant to write this? Who helped you with this?"

INT: It was you?

CE: I didn't write it, no. We all wrote it together. So I didn't say anything, 'cause I had met Mike many years ago when he worked for Senator DeConcini, and I had worked real closely with him when I was on the Legal Services board. So I didn't say anything, but I was seething, with that question. And we were leaving for Guanajuato, because my husband was teaching in a summer session, but before I left, I sent him an email, and I said, "Look, Mike, you and I have to have coffee as soon as I get back from Guanajuato. I can't tell you how shocked I was when we asked if you had any questions, that all you could ask was who helped us write the report. So you're assuming we're all a bunch of dumb idiots, and you should know that between the fifteen of us, there's at least six college degrees. And you asked if a professional helped us; well, yes, there's this one woman, that's her work that she does on a professional basis, and somebody else, they do this, so, yeah." So he first wrote back and said, "Okay, yeah, we need to have coffee." Then when I got to Guanajuato a week later, he writes, "Well, I've decided that we don't need to have coffee, because you misinterpreted what I said." And that was it; he doesn't talk to me anymore.

So that's why I say that things have not changed. And being a lawyer, I have had people that work for the City come, and I don't do employment law, and the things that they complain of are pretty much the same thing that was in the lawsuit: that they've been passed over for promotion, they were better-qualified than the person that was hired, they have to train that person, 'cause that person has no clue.

INT: So was there any I guess, what's the result of the work that you all did and presented to the Mayor?

CE: Well, once we presented our report, my part of it was done. 'Cause I have to learn to not get over-involved, and I got over-involved in that. It was about a year-and-a-half, and I

had been wanting to work on my research. I retired a couple of years early so I could start working on my writing. And I told them, “I’ve taken you as far as I can, and you guys have learned how to do it.” So they’ve continued. They don’t meet like we used to meet, and then we lost one of our members; he developed a real serious fast-growing cancer and he died—from the time he was diagnosed, I think it was three months later he passed away. He was amazing, he’s the one that was our spokesperson, and everybody just adored this guy, and he was very effective.

INT: What was his name?

CE: Arnold Ruiz. He worked for the Tempe Elementary School District in their Financial Department, so he knew about budgets and all of that, he knew how to read that. And he had known the Mayor for a long time, and the Mayor really respected him a lot. And they really deferred to him quite a bit.

But anyway, I told them I was done, I was done, and that I just couldn’t continue anymore, that I had fulfilled my commitment to them. So there’s a group called Los Vecinos of Tempe that was formed many years ago, and they meet to exchange information, and they invite the City officials to come and talk with them, so they’ve kind of continued raising their issues there. But for the most part, they’re not an action group; they just share information and get it to their communities. So they say, “Well, you know, we still need to do this.” “Yes, you do, “ I tell them, “and you know how to do it now.”

INT: But there still is a lot of . . .

CE: But the biggest thing is I did get involved in the City Council elections, and I co-chaired Corey Woods’ committee, he’s African American, 29 years old, this kid gets elected to the Council! And he’s only lived here not even ten years, and just the brightest kid ever. And he came and asked me if I could co-chair his committee with one of my friends, Cecil Patterson, who retired from being a Court of Appeals judge, and he’s African American, and I’ve known him forever. But anyway, we were just so thrilled. And then Joel Navarro was elected.

So now the power in the Council has changed. Now there’s four, probably five, Council members that are more open to resolving these issues. So, to me, that’s institutional change. And that was worth giving Corey all my time; he’s just exceptional. And they seem to be doing well on the budget cuts. What the City Manager proposed, basically when you look all across the board, he’s cutting all the diversity positions that were created after the lawsuit. Well, could he do that? No. At the Council meeting, they said, “Look, what’s this? You’re just giving us one option? You need to give us different options, and we don’t want employees laid off, if we can help it.” And so Charlie (*Meyer*) had to go back, and this Thursday, I think, they have another look at the budget. But I don’t go to their meetings; I just kind of sit in on TV and watch a few minutes, just to see.

And I'm so proud of all these guys, that they're asking the tough questions, and they're not afraid. I think through them we'll see some change. And these guys, they worked on the campaign, from our group, they supported Corey and Joel. And then Mark Mitchell, of course, he was gonna get re-elected, his dad's a Congressman, and my husband went to high school with him. So Mark really is on his own two feet now, not relying on his dad, and so he's really coming through.

I think things are going to change in the City, but not overnight. It's gonna take time, 'cause these guys are smart, you just can't revolutionize things. So I think all of us are more hopeful now about changing.

But I've always had a problem with the racism in Tempe. And they say, "Well, how can you say that? You're so successful" and all that. Well, not too long ago, about two or three years ago, we went, because one of our friends—who had been a teacher at Tempe High and a really good friend of Elias', 'cause they've been on several boards and commissions together—she was getting this Don Carlos Award, where they honor people for their community service. And we don't go to those kinds of things, but because it was Gail (*Fisher*), we decided to go. And it was at the State Museum, up there on College Avenue. So when we walked in, people were like (*facial expression*), like "You don't belong here." So it's the same feeling. So to me, things have not changed, the core of the racism has not changed, because these are all respectable people that do community service, but there's limits—Mexicans are not equal, and they let you know, one way or another, they let you know. So that's why people say that I'm wrong to dwell in the past, and I say, "Well, let's do now; this just happened."

And I got tired, that every time I got some position, kind of important positions, like a Presidential appointment, it's "Oh, you just got that 'cause you're a Mexican," and you get tired of hearing that, that they don't recognize I don't need them to recognize what I've achieved, 'cause I know what I've done.

And the last job that I had, with Terry Goddard (*Arizona Attorney General*), was really very satisfying, because almost every job that I've had offered to me that I've turned down, it has to do with just dealing with minorities, and those are basically token positions. And Terry asked me to be a Chief Counsel for one of his divisions, the division that handles the stuff that he wants to make changes in, and that was in Consumer Protection and Environmental Enforcement, and I was responsible for about a hundred-and-some people. And I thought, "Wow!" I went to law school with him, and through the different campaigns we've had a good look at each other, and I really like him, and he's just really a good person. But I was really shocked that he offered me that job, and I told him, "You must be nuts! I've never done anything like that! Why are you asking me?" "Because I need your help." So I went and worked with him for a couple of years, and it was really a great job. It was a great way to end I don't think I've had a career, 'cause I've just jumped around and taken advantage of some pretty neat opportunities that just happened to come by. Then my daughter wound up being his Press Secretary for just under five years, and she liked it so much that now she's a first-year law student.

INT: Wow. What a full circle that represents.

CE: So, anyway, Tempe still has a lot of work to do. And you talk to the gay and lesbian community, oh my goodness, there's a lot of work that has to be done in Tempe, within the city to begin with, and then the City structure, with their employees, and then the city as a whole. People think that this is such a progressive university community, and the core of Tempe is still small-town, with their head in their butts, you know? But there's more and more people that are active, like James and all these other people. I just think they're doing wonders. I am just real happy to be associated with them. So that's it.

INT: Wow. Looks like we've got one more question that you circled. Let me know if you feel like you've already answered this. Describe a time in Tempe when you felt excluded or marginalized.

CE: Oh, it's that one at the Don Carlos Award thing. These are people we've known for years, and we've seen them out here, and then when we go there, it's like "You don't belong here."

INT: You really felt that look?

CE: Oh, yeah, I really did, and you get to know it after a while, you get to know it. Very artificial greetings, the limp handshakes. (laughter) But so what? So we haven't gone again, to those awards, we don't need to go. So we just send notes whenever somebody we know gets that award, 'cause they're always very well-deserved, the person that gets recognized.

INT: Why was it at that event that you felt that feeling?

CE: Just the way they look at you, like, "Oh, you came?" And just the way they don't talk to you. They say that, and then they turn their back on you. Where normally, if you run into them downtown or at the grocery store or at a meeting, they stand and talk to you. And we couldn't get anybody to connect with.

INT: What about that event. . . . Was it just because everyone was together, do you think, that they just kind of . . . ?

CE: No, it was a mix After the awards, there's refreshments, and before the awards, there's refreshments, and everybody's talking to each other. No, it was very flagrant, it was very obvious. We just did not feel comfortable. And we go to a lot of things with Anglos and with the larger community, 'cause we have a lot of really good friends. And we're involved not just in Chicano issues, we're involved in general issues, especially Elias. So we know, we know.

INT: I'm very curious about this last question, for my sake. I've heard you say the term "Chicana/Chicano" and "Mexican American," and I'm just curious what the differences are?

CE: Well, it depends who you talk to. But to me, a Chicana I call myself Chicana, because to me Chicano or Chicana means someone that believes in the cause, and it's a political term for me, and I identify myself as a political activist by using that. Other people don't like it, because the larger community doesn't like the term, they look down on the term.

And then Mexican American, that became the neutral term for awhile, but now there's "Latino" and "Hispanic." I really don't care what people call themselves, 'cause I can deal with any of the words, but I call myself a Chicana, even though the term is kind of outmoded, apparently. And I'm proud to be one.

INT: Anything else you want to add?

CE: No, I'm tired.

INT: All right.

(end of recording)

Transcribed by Susan Jensen

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