Interview of Lydia Lopez
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles
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Transcript

SESSION ONE (April 23, 2013)

00:00:22

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is April 23rd (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California, and I want to thank you so much for taking the time to interview with me. I'd like to start with what you can tell me about your early family history, what you know about even your grandparents, possibly.

00:02:41

LOPEZ:

Okay. Let me see. I don't remember the town that my grandparents were from. I only know my maternal grandparents. I never met my paternal grandparents. My father came from Chihuahua, my mother from Durango. As my grandparents came north, some of his brothers stayed in Mexico in the north part, some stayed in Ensenada, some stayed in Tijuana, and their life is very different than the life of my grandparents, who became more successful in certain parts and certain areas, but their life was still a struggle. My grandfather, his name was SimÃ³n Hinojosa Sandoval. He had this old car. I think it was like one of those Model-As, or I don't know. It was one of those cars. I remember sitting in the back with him. He would go out to Stanton, out in that area, and pick fruit, and that was what he did, and there was always fruit and vegetables at home. My Grandmother Cruz was a wonderful homebody, and they lived in--well, where the freeway is now, near Arizona, the freeway came, they had to move, and they ended up buying a house on Mednik near Floral in Maravilla. They had the house in front. They built another house in back, and the front house was going to be for one of my aunts to live, but she liked the house in the back because it was modern, and that was supposed to be for grandma and grandpa to live as they got older.

They had thirteen children, and what they would do is they would follow the crops going north. And Mother tells the story, with some bitterness, about having to leave. She was going to Garfield High School and having to leave high school and the fun that high school was to follow and to go with the family as they went north. She was an excellent cook, and she said, "I'd make a pile of tortillas for the family when the boys were out." She says she didn't work in the fields;

she had to do the scrubbing of the jeans by hand. And she said they were so dirty. And all that hard, hard work. And she would cook, then she'd come back. So that was the early time. She never finished high school. She met my father--let me just say that my Uncle Joe went to a local Baptist church. It was called Bethany Baptist Church, and I have a book about the development of the Protestant Church among Latinos somewhere, which has a picture of the church and one of the pastors--

ESPINO:

And that's here in Los Angeles.

LOPEZ:

It was.

ESPINO:

Or was that when they migrated?

00:04:42

LOPEZ:

It was East Los Angeles, but it's no longer there because of the freeway. So Bethany Baptist is gone. My Uncle Joe met my father there, and he said, "Aha!" So he said, "I'm going to introduce you to my sister." So he introduced him to Mom and they fell in love and they were married in that church.

Then Dad had been doing some work--well, he also came here. When he came here, he was also doing farm work, and he was living in Whittier, in West Whittier, as like a janitor, fix-it person for the friend's church. So when he and Mom got married, they went back across the river, the Rio Hondo. (Interruption)

00:07:33

LOPEZ:

And that's where we were raised, and I have some pictures of our home. Dad was also a church planter. He was very dedicated to his faith, and he had the front part of our house as a meeting place for people at church, a little church that he developed in Jim Town. We were odd people out because we were the Protestants in the community. So he bought that piece of land, then he bought another piece of property right next to it, and a third. And in the third piece of property he built--years later, I'm about nine or ten--his what I call dream house. It was a house with arches and patios, and it was just kind of reminiscent of something out of Mexico. But he built it. He was a furniture-maker back home and made a lot of the furniture that we had in our home. He could do everything, and people in the neighborhood always counted on him to come and fix their plumbing or their electricity. He did all of that. The middle property was never built, but we had chickens and rabbits in it, and then when the grass would grow tall, my brother would make trails and hide. I mean, it was just kind of a magical little--our own little play area. The streets were not paved, so when it rained, it was a muddy mess. There were no light standards because it was in between Pico, at that time, and Whittier, and this is where so many Mexicans lived, so it was really kind of an ignored area.

When it was time for me to go to school--well, my brother went across the street. He went to elementary school for the first three years right there in Jim Town. I'm trying to remember the name of the school, and I can't at this moment, but we'll get you the name.

ESPINO:

Okay.

LOPEZ:

When I came around and get ready to go to school, there was a woman that came to our church from the big Baptist church in Whittier, and she says, "Well, the church is starting a school, and perhaps we could have your kids go there." So in 1947, I started kindergarten at the Whittier Christian Elementary School, and that was started by the Calvary Baptist Church of Uptown Whittier. So I went to kindergarten there. My brother was at that time in third grade, and we were the only Mexican Americans in the school. We went there, I did, from kinder all the way through eighth grade. So I stayed with essentially the same twenty-six kids, and it was wonderful

in that it was like everybody knew everybody, it was safe. And I had a babysitter who would take care of me because Mother went to work to be able to afford the tuition.

00:09:29

ESPINO:

So she did pay the tuition?

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm. And by this time, Dad had stopped working in the citrus groves and going all the way up to Washington State with the apple crop. And he had three children. The first one died, so there were just two of us, and he decided he needed a full-time job, something steady, and so he went and started working at a steel mill in Southeast Los Angeles, became a part of the union, and worked there till he retired. Then he retires, and then a few years later, he dies. We were the object of the politics of the United Steel Workers when they went on--I remember a couple of really big strikes. Things were a little tight then, but it afforded us a life that we wouldn't have had otherwise with the traveling back and forth of the crops, following the crops. So Mother was working at some of these factories in Los Angeles, doing sewing, and she was a very, very good seamstress. All of my clothes were made by her up until I was about maybe twelve or thirteen, and many of them in the early days were made out of the flower sacks. We used to get these big flower sacks, and she would just save them. I'll show you some pictures of my clothes in flower sacks.

ESPINO:

Oh, wow.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, it's very touching and very simple, nothing fancy. Today, you'd say, "Oh, isn't that cute? It looks like Laura Ashley." But, you know, it was just plain, simple cotton flowers.

00:11:44

ESPINO:

So it wasn't like a burlap.

LOPEZ:

No, no, no. It was cotton.

ESPINO:

Because I'm imagining a burlap.

LOPEZ:

No, it was cotton.

ESPINO:

It was cotton. So it was like 100 percent soft cotton?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, cotton with flowers on it. You can still buy them in some places.

ESPINO:

Oh, I didn't know that. So they had design--it was just a plain--they actually had a design on the sack?

LOPEZ:

They had flowers on it, uh-huh, yeah, and that was Mother's work. And then I have other things that she made, little felt hats and vests and things. So all of my clothes were made by Mom. And when it rained, I'd have to go through the rain, didn't have a raincoat, but go through my street, and then up two blocks to where the streets were paved to go further to the bus stop where the city bus would come. So I could brag to my son, "I went through the mud in order to get to school."

ESPINO:

Right. (Laughs)

LOPEZ:

But it was a good school when I went there. I knew very little English. I remember I had some very, very kind teachers. We learned how to print in kindergarten and read. I mean, it was a very structured school and demanding, but felt that we were part of a community. That was great.

00:13:35

ESPINO:

You weren't treated as different as far as your race?

LOPEZ:

I couldn't tell. I mean, I've really thought about it. But I had such good friends that--I don't know if I felt protected by my friends. Because my brother was ahead of me and he was such an all-star, it kind of paved the way for me. Later in high school, because he's also a cartoonist, so he wrote for the high school paper--and we have pictures up there in the annuals--he was outstanding and got what is called the Cardinal Key, which goes to a very, very elite group of leaders in the high school. He was also an athlete; he ran cross country. And he did these drawings and he is very talented. So when I came around, because he had made his reputation, then when I came into high school, the girls' sororities invited me to rushes, and I go, "Well, isn't this interesting." I didn't even know what a rush was. So, finally, somebody explained it to me, and it was because Ben, my brother, had kind of paved the way, and they thought that I was going to be as much an all-star as he was. My path was a little different in high school. But that was Whittier Christian Elementary School. It was very, very connected to the Baptist church, and our graduations were at the Baptist church. All our big events obviously were at the Baptist church because it was right next to the church building.

00:15:45

ESPINO:

Well, can you tell me, if you know, of your grandparents' religion? Was your family always Protestant?

LOPEZ:

My grandfather--let me see--was a Methodist, and he was buried out of what was then Trinity Methodist Church. It was on Brooklyn just up the street from Soledad Parish. It's no longer a church. I think it's a funeral parlor or something. But I don't know how that transition was made. If they were ever Roman Catholics, I don't know that. But part of me is thankful for how I was raised, because I didn't have to deconstruct all that stuff. I did have a lot of challenges with my own church as I'm growing older because it was such a conservative church, but we can talk about that.

ESPINO:

So your mom, her religion was--

LOPEZ:

She never--the only thing I know is of her as a Baptist, as a wife of my dad. When Dad dies, then she starts going to another kind of church, which was like Assemblies of God, Foursquare kind of church. So she stayed in kind of the Protestant pew. And when they got married, they got married in the Baptist church.

ESPINO:

Was your father then a regular attendee of church?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah.

ESPINO:

He went every Sunday?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, he was very faithful.

00:17:45

ESPINO:

Did he do other things like during the week?

00:20:47

LOPEZ:

Yes. Oh, my goodness. Our life was centered around the church. On Sundays, go to church on Sunday, and then in the evening, go to Sunday evening service. And then on Wednesdays we'd go to prayer meetings. On Fridays, the kids, the youth group would get together. My entire social life revolved around the youth group and our church. It was hayrides, camp in the summer, and that was difficult because I'd never been away from home, and for my parents to let us go away to camp was a big deal. And I didn't have all the clothes that everybody else had, so my clothes were very simple. But had lots of fun, but I remember feeling awkward about not having the right clothes. Sunday, there would be the service in the morning, Sunday school. In the evening, we'd come back. The youth group would meet at six o'clock, then there was a seven-o'clock worship service with everybody. Then the youth would get together at somebody's house for something we called a sing, and we would sing songs, and then somebody would give a little meditation, a devotional of some sort, and then we would have refreshments. Then that was Sunday, and we'd get back to the week. Dad would go to work in the morning, early in the morning, and he had to wear shoes that had the steel toes for his protection. He'd come home with all his clothes encrusted with the stuff from the steel mill, and he would take his bath, he would have his dinner, and he would sit at his rocking chair and read his Bible and read his books on theology. He was self-taught. He had gone through maybe a year or two of school as a child, and everything else he taught himself. He became a--the best way to say it is a lay preacher, a deacon in his church later on. He helped--he was a patron of what was then called the Spanish American Baptist Seminary, which was on Indiana in Los Angeles, and that was the training ground for a lot of Baptist ministers. He helped there, and I remember playing, as a child, in the dormitories.

One of the fellows that lives here was a student there, and I showed him some pictures I have of 1946. I said, "There I am. That's my family. That's our pastor." And we look, it's the youth convention of the Baptists, and it was in La Primera on Gage and First, I think, and hundreds of people. I had a magnifying glass and he's looking around, and he found his wife and he found the president of the seminary. We looked, and it was just how things happened. I mean, I would not have anticipated that. I had my brother come over one time and we met with Cesar, is his name, and they were talking about names of people and pastors, and all of a sudden, my brother said, "I

don't know where these names came from." I mean, ancient memory. We were talking about somebody and he says, "Ah, si, el flaco. Yeah, I remember him." So it was kind of wonderful to make that connection. There was a group called Inter-D, Interdenominational. It was an organization of all of the Protestant churches in East Los Angeles that would gather their kids, because in one youth group there may be four kids and in another youth group there may be seven, because there were limited amount of Protestants. So they would gather them ever so often and we'd have a big party, and it was great because then there was strength in numbers.

00:22:45

ESPINO:

Was it multiethnic as well?

LOPEZ:

No, it was mostly Mexican American kids, yeah.

ESPINO:

You said that your father was a member, a patron, or a teacher at the Spanish American--what was he?

LOPEZ:

He was still working at the steel mill, but he was helping support the seminary. We didn't have a lot of money, but he made his money stretch. He helped support that seminary and then he helped start another one in La Puente. And he helped there by literally building it, physically building it with some of the other--with the help. But a man of deep, deep faith, didn't quite understand his kids. I remember many years later during the CatÃ³licos time, I get arrested, and he said, "But, mija, that's not even your pew." You know, it was kind of like, "Well, it's our family. It's my husband and me." It's kind of that kind of thing. But he was a very kind man. He didn't like me wearing short skirts. Very conservative. Always kept his eye out on the kids. We

had that house, those properties in Jim Town, until the mid fifties, when the state bought the property to build the 605 Freeway, and it broke my dad's heart because that was before fair market value for homes. So he got his money and he bought a house on the other side of the freeway, on Redman in Whittier near Whittier Boulevard, and that's where he lived until he died. Well, not he; them, us, all of us. But he was able to buy the house with the money that he had had from the sale of his properties.

00:25:17

ESPINO:

And I also wanted to ask you about the use of "Spanish American." Was that common at that time? Is that what you considered yourself?

LOPEZ:

It was. It was common, yeah. I get into giggles with so many of my friends. I had dinner with friends last night. They know that I hate the word "Hispanic." I will not use it to self-identify, and I've explained to them, I've gone through the whole thing and used Richard Rodriguez as my reference. When he talks about Hispanics, that comes from Nixon, and he's the father of Hispanicity, because he needed something to call them for the census. So he gathered all kinds of Cubans and people from Dominican Republic, Mexican Americans, I mean all the Spaniards. And Leo Estrada, the demographer at UCLA, was in the meeting, and he talks about that. But the least offensive was "Hispanic," and so I'll never use it to identify myself. So my friends last night, they came in, they said, "Hey, is this the house of the Hispanic leader?" (Laughter)

ESPINO:

That's funny.

LOPEZ:

And then there was an article in The New York Times this week that Hispanics are the new Italians.

ESPINO:

I saw that, but I didn't read it.

LOPEZ:

And I go, "Wow, look at that. We're no longer at the bottom of the heap." Anyway, we giggled about that last night because they know how I feel about the word. But in those days, it was "Spanish American," and "Mexican" was not a kind word. Then later, "Mexican American" became tolerable, and then, of course, when we started identifying as Chicanos, well, my goodness, that was outrageous. Outrageous.

00:27:39

ESPINO:

So when you were called Spanish American, did you associate that with language, with country, with your skin color, do you recall?

LOPEZ:

All of it. I identified that with skin color and with language more than country of origin or Mexico, because I didn't know, growing up, a whole lot of history, I didn't know a lot of geography initially, and so it was easier just to go with the flow, as it were. It wasn't until many, many years later, many years later that I become comfortable in my own skin, and then proud of who I am. There was a priest at one of our churches who said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, those bloodthirsty Aztecs and Mayans," blah, blah, blah. We had had at our Church of the Epiphany the Aztec dancers and the fire, all of that, and he didn't want to follow in any of that because he said they were bloodthirsty. And I should have come back to him and said, "Well, what about the

bloodthirsty British that were killing each other for the throne?" But you don't know how to fight back until you know the history.

ESPINO:

Right, right. So you said that "Mexican" was derogatory at that time. Mexico the country or being--

LOPEZ:

Being called Mexican.

00:29:17

ESPINO:

What did it imply?

00:32:46

LOPEZ:

It implied somebody of not as much worth. But I think that part of us, part of our life, part of my life as a child and my brother's were shielded by the people that we hung out with and the stories that came out of Sunday school and the religious training that we have. So that helped balance off what is happening to a lot of other people. I have more of a recollection of the class differences than I do of color because I'm raised essentially--I go to this school, and most of the kids are middle-class, upper-middle-class white kids, and then there's us. And I get to visit with them in their homes, and if they live up in the hills of Whittier, you think, "Oh, my. Life is different up here." So I could see very, very clearly the class differences. My parents always taught us that no matter--well, Mother would say, "As long as your dress is washed, starched, and ironed, you're fine." Because I had all these little cotton dresses. I had long hair, so she would put my hair in curls. I had ribbons. So that was one thing. The other thing is that they would say, "This is your home. What we have is what we have, and we need to be proud of what we have and grateful for what we have." Nothing fancy. There was really very little fancy about

our house, and you'll see them in the pictures. Mother's--the birthday parties that she would have for us were magnificent. She would make our piÃ±ata out of shopping bags and paint them and do the makeup and the whole thing. Wonderful piÃ±atas. We would invite the kids from Uptown Whittier to come. So here are these people coming into Jim Town, and I remember one of my dear friends, Teresa Parker, I'll never forget, she was the adopted daughter of a woman named Sadie Burkett (phonetic), who was one of the grande dames of Whittier. Sadie Burkett owned the Sadie Burkett Nursing Home, and that was where I was scheduled to be born.

I think that--not what I think. What I know that happened is we came to visit my grandmother and Mother went into labor, so I was born at County General Hospital. And I told Mother many years later, I said, "I'm so glad I was--." I mean, can you imagine me telling people I was born at the Sadie Burkett Home? I said it sounded like I was a little orphan. But I said, "No, I was born in East L.A.," and all of this. But Sadie had a big old Cadillac, and I remember her coming to my birthday party. It was western theme. We always had a theme. It was a western. So I had a very simple little skirt with a little bit of fringe and probably a little too tight, but here comes Teresa Parker in the Cadillac on the bumpy dirt road in to our home, and she comes out of the car and she's wearing the entire costume of William Boyd, "Hopalong" Cassidy, the hat, the gloves, the guns, the boots, the whole thing. And I go, "Wow, look at that." And she comes in, and she gets dirty and plays with everybody else, but I'll always remember the kind of--

00:34:10

ESPINO:

Contrast.

LOPEZ:

The feeling of the difference. But people wanted to come to our parties because my Mother's food was so good. When my brother goes away to college, he brings back the basketball team, because he was playing basketball, and I remember, "Oh, they're coming. These gorgeous men are coming." And Mother made the most incredible meal, and they ate, and here we were in this simple home in Jim Town, but they were having the best party because, again, hospitality was such an important thing. But I'll never forget Teresa Parker. Many years later, she went to work as a general counsel for Denmark, and she was at a market and she saw Mother, and she said, "Aren't you Angelina Rodriguez?" She says, "Yes." "Aren't you so-and-so's mother?" "Yes." She says, "Well, I'm Teresa Parker." Mother says, "Teresa Parker!" Mother remembered. So that was the last I heard of Teresa. But there were people around there that became lasting friends. One of them--and I regret I don't have that picture anymore, but one of them was at one of these parties, a little towhead with glasses. He was a neighbor. He lived up the street out of the barrio up into Whittier near Norwalk Boulevard. Anyway, he became a lasting friend, and when I got married--

this takes us in a different twist, but when I got married, he's the one that gave me away, because my family did not come to my wedding. But that's another story. We can get to that later.

00:36:15

ESPINO:

Okay.

LOPEZ:

But here we have this picture, this little towhead, and we're probably six years, nine years old. And there's the piÃ±ata that Mother has made hanging on the clothesline, and we're ready to punch it out. He had two brothers and they were twins. One is a Roman Catholic priest in a nearby city. We were all raised Baptist, but one became a Roman Catholic.

ESPINO:

Interesting.

LOPEZ:

But that was our growing-up years.

ESPINO:

So in that neighborhood, were there other Mexican kids?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, all of them were.

ESPINO:

But they didn't go to the school?

LOPEZ:

No, they went to the public schools.

ESPINO:

So how did you negotiate friends and that kind of thing when you were--

LOPEZ:

Not very well. I had a friend, her name was Kinky. She lived up the road. My parents were always warning me about the "bad girls," and to have friends of value and all of that. And Kinky gets into trouble and gets pregnant and later on has a very difficult life, but she was one of my pals. The twins that lived across the street, her name was Frenchie and her brother. They were pals.

00:37:58

ESPINO:

You're talking about the Mexican kids?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. But for the most part, we didn't see each other. I mean, I spent a lot of my early years in books, and I'd go down the other way to the library. We had a reading group there. My brother had a lot of pals, but I couldn't play with them because they were boys and they were playing cowboys and they'd ride around on brooms and things. They didn't want anything to do with girls. So I had very few friends in the neighborhood.

ESPINO:

So those two girls, the ones that you hung out with or played with, did you continue to play with them on into junior high school?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. Kinky, yes. Frenchie and her brother, they moved away. Most of my life and most of my social circle were kids at church, not so much in the neighborhood.

ESPINO:

Did your parents, did they not want you to play with the neighborhood kids or were these two just two cases of kids who were getting into trouble?

LOPEZ:

I think that there was a certain reluctance on the part of my father, kind of this overprotectiveness, so I think that's where that came from.

ESPINO:

And when your friend got pregnant, what did you think about that?

LOPEZ:

Well, that's a good question. I remember how regretful I was, but it was kind of a caution, you know, be careful, although those kinds of things were never issues with me because I didn't have dates. I didn't go out.

ESPINO:

You didn't have boyfriends?

LOPEZ:

No.

00:40:08

ESPINO:

Boys that you liked?

LOPEZ:

No. But she was considered a little wild, and that I would become her friend was kind of interesting, too, because I was such a different person than she was.

ESPINO:

Well, how did you view her?

LOPEZ:

I viewed her as--well, I can say this today--a little outrageous, a little free. She could do almost anything she wanted to, and did. I'm trying to think of the neighborhood.

ESPINO:

Do you think that she was ahead of her time? I mean, today would she be considered wild and--

LOPEZ:

No, I don't think so. I think that today she would be viewed as many other girls who have already made their way into having sexual relations with boys. There was a certain excitement about her because she was so different. I was kept on a short leash.

ESPINO:

Yeah, that sounds like it would be a reason to be drawn to somebody like that who doesn't have a leash at all. Did she talk to you about her relationships?

LOPEZ:

No, no.

ESPINO:

Do you remember what you two did together?

LOPEZ:

We played. We just spent time together. I learned how to smoke because of her. I think I was maybe about ten or eleven. Well, in those days, you could get cigarettes. But you can't smoke and not have it in your clothes.

00:42:34

ESPINO:

Even just once?

LOPEZ:

Well, it wasn't just once. And I had a drawer in the closet where I kept my cigarettes, and my parents found them, and I got a scolding. Oh, my goodness, I got a scolding.

ESPINO:

Sure.

LOPEZ:

And then I decided I was going to run away. I had just had it with all these limitations. I don't remember who I was going to run away with or if she was involved. I remember putting together a little suitcase. I didn't get very far, but I was really upset. We moved out of there in about '56 and over to Redman Avenue, lived there until--well, my brother went off to school. He went off to school for two years, met his future wife there. They got married. Then he went into the army, ended up in Germany. They had a baby, came back, and lived with my parents at that house.

ESPINO:

With his wife, or girlfriend?

LOPEZ:

With his wife and baby, yeah.

ESPINO:

Do you want to take a minute and look at some of those pictures?

LOPEZ:

Sure.

00:44:34

ESPINO:

Let me pause it. (Recorder turned off)

ESPINO:

Okay, we're back. We just went through some incredible photographs, brought up some questions for me, and that is you mentioned that religion was such a huge part of your upbringing. Do you remember what it felt like for you, though, having to spend all that time in church? Was it something that you enjoyed?

LOPEZ:

Sometimes. It was my entire world. It was really my social world. But it wasn't until like the end of high school that it really becomes--we all start to chafe. Our youth group, I think, was very progressive for a Baptist church, and that little towhead and I organized a series of religious leaders coming to our church to talk to the youth. We invited a Mormon, we invited a Roman Catholic, and I'm not sure which one went first now, but we invited one, then we invited the second. I think the second was the Roman Catholic. We were told that he could not come, that we could not invite him in, that somebody had to call him and cancel. We didn't like that very much, but many of us about that time, friends were going to Peace Corps, going off to college, and it's kind of like, "All right. I don't give a care. If this is the way they want to be, if they want to be this small-minded, then--." And so that's what happened. A lot of us left the church

altogether and had very little to do with the church for many, many years, although there were some really kind of unusual things. I mean, like one of the fellows becomes an Episcopal priest, one of them becomes a Roman Catholic priest, one of them becomes a Christian Scientist. So it's like people go to another place, but not that place.

00:48:02

ESPINO:

What were some of the values that you remember learning in the Baptist religion? Were they values to live by or values that affected how you lived in your family or community or larger world?

LOPEZ:

Well, the teachings of the church centered around the life of Jesus and what he taught, and he taught us to love our neighbors. The stricter interpretation of what we were taught was that Jesus died for our sins, and according to what the Bible says, it says Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me," which many conservative churches use to say the only way to heaven or the only way to Christ is through--I mean the only way to salvation is through Christ. We see now in our adulthood, and hopefully in our maturity and our openness and understanding of our brothers and sisters, that the way is open to anybody, that it's not just this strict one gate, although that's what we were taught, and that God loves my Muslim brothers and sisters as much as God loves me, and what an arrogance to think that it would be any other way. So that is an understanding I have. It's not necessarily an understanding that my brother shares, as an example. His family, all of them have stayed in that other way, and they still, some of them, go to some conservative churches.

ESPINO:

Baptist?

00:50:3900:53:01

LOPEZ:

No. One of them, I think, goes to like a Calvary Chapel or a Calvary Assembly, one of them goes to Saddleback, which is the big megachurch down in Orange County. I think that's where they go. But they think that, you know, I'm--I'd say "heretic" is a strong word, but they think, "Oh, there goes Aunt Lil. There she goes again." It's just kind of like, "Oh, yeah."

I would go back for holidays. I was living in East L.A. at the time, and I'd go back for family holidays. I remember once being at my brother's house, and he was still living in Pico Rivera. I was telling him about all the stuff we were doing with La Raza and Cesar Chavez and all this, and my brother, he says, "Don't talk about that stuff. It upsets Mom." And I said, "Okay." So I'd go to the corner, play with the kids, not realizing that for Mother, the organizing of the farm workers was not a pleasant memory. I mean, the life for the farm worker was not a pleasant memory, that for her, it was being taken out of being a teenager and then having to make tortillas and wash all the jeans and the cooking, while the boys did all the work in the fields, and then come home. But she was never able to have a teenage life. And I was going, "Yeah, Cesar Chavez!" and all this kind of stuff. It wasn't until later on that I was able to tone down how I talked about that to be able to have a conversation with her, that we were able to, in fact, have a conversation. I have a wonderful picture somewhere--I'll have to dig it out--a wonderful picture of Mom and Cesar Chavez shaking hands at our church. Mother was so excited about coming to meet him, and she and her group of friends had raised money and food to take to the farm workers. It's a lovely picture. I made copies for all the kids so they could have a copy of it. It was just a very precious memory, but it was like after a while, I had to learn how to talk to Mom about it before things kind of settled into a place where we could have a decent conversation about it.

ESPINO:

I want to go back to that when we get to that point, but what about, for example, your father's values? Did they reflect his own personal, individual cultural values or were they religious Baptist kinds of values that he instilled in your family?

LOPEZ:

Dad didn't--well, none of us did--we didn't smoke, we didn't drink, we didn't dance, except when we got together with my grandmother and her family, meaning her children, my uncles. Then we'd have family parties and there'd be-- (Recorder turned off)

ESPINO:

Okay, here we go.

00:55:21

LOPEZ:

When we gathered as a family, the big family, the uncles were over here drinking, but Dad was not. He was visiting with people and so forth. So, I mean, he loved his family, he just didn't like all that drinking and stuff. The interesting thing that happens, when my oldest aunt dies, she lived in Indio and we all went out there for the--no, my brother and I went out there for the service, and my sister-in-law. What had happened in her family is that her children had become very Protestant and were going to this big Protestant church, so that there was a service at a Roman church. Then we had an event at the girls' church, which is this huge Protestant church in town, and the church fed everybody. I mean, we had a couple hundred people, and you looked around the room and everybody was related to everybody, different colors, some of us had blonde hair, some of us white. It's all what had happened in our families, and it was this wonderful hospitality of this church that provided the food for everybody. It was the most amazing thing.

The gravesite--because my aunt was the oldest, she had five generations. So the first balloons that went up were the children, then they called the grandchildren, then they called the great-grandchildren, then they called the great-great-children, and then they said, "We want the great-great-grands to come." They were little wee ones; they were going to the balloons. But it was such an interesting mix of all that our family had become. It was pretty impressive to know that this particular church had gone out of his way to do all of that for our family, and we were in their Parish Hall or their Church Hall, Social Hall, whatever it's called. And you look around and, "Boy, I'm related to everybody in this room." I mean, it was wonderful, wonderful.

ESPINO:

So do you think that the culture--okay. Your father's family, they were not Catholics. You're saying that they were also Baptist.

LOPEZ:

My father's family I never knew.

ESPINO:

Like your uncles, is this your--

LOPEZ:

I'm talking about my uncle now.

00:56:46

ESPINO:

Okay, so the parties that you would go to were--

LOPEZ:

It was in the backyard of Grandma's house.

ESPINO:

Was that your mom's side of the family?

LOPEZ:

My mother's side of the family, and those were the boys. At this point, they're adults, some of them come back from the war, and so they rule, and Grandma's over in the corner. Everyone once in a while, she and Grandpa would get out on the dance floor and have a dance, and that was kind of cute. I remember their doing a little polka.

ESPINO:

But it was like a foreign culture to you, because you grew up in a very--

LOPEZ:

Very different. We didn't have any of that stuff in our parties.

ESPINO:

Did you ever feel envious?

00:59:10

LOPEZ:

No, no. Maybe more snooty, because I felt that maybe our life was a better way, because what happens--it was always this way, almost always this way--my uncles would start drinking. They loved each other, and they would always drink their beers, and by the end of the evening, they're fighting with one another, you know, and they're just being irrational, and the wives are separating them and all that sort of stuff. What I didn't miss is the camaraderie of my girl cousins, because our worlds were so different. I didn't have that, and even to this day--and I miss

it--my peers, my girl cousins gather once a year. Around about January, they go off for a weekend, and they've been doing this for like thirty years. We reconnected at one of the funerals and they told me about it, and so what I did is I invited them all for lunch, and I had a big lunch for them at La (unclear), and we caught up on all the gossip and all the news and the children. I listened to their lives and I go, "Well, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm happy to know about their lives, but I'm not envious. I have a good life, and it's okay."

So recently, I got a call from the ringleader, Delia (phonetic), and she said, "Oh, how are you? Haven't seen you in ages." And I said, "Well, gather the cousins up and come on over, and I'll host you to lunch or I'll take you out," blah, blah, blah. I said, "I'm living in a retirement community," told them the whole thing, and they said that they would. They haven't called back. I think they will. But I was the first divorce in our family. Mother was very embarrassed about that, but now there are several. One of their kids is gay. Big deal, you know. Years ago, that would have been--but I had gay friends growing up.

ESPINO:

In Whittier? In Jim Town?

01:00:52

LOPEZ:

The little towhead, yeah, and he was my dearest friend until he died. It was very poignant. I hadn't seen him for a while, and he was my dearest friend. He invited me to dinner. He wanted me to meet his friend, and I'm going, "This friend looks just like me, only he's a boy. He's Puerto Rican." So we had a great time. Then Tony would call me. He says, "Lydia, how do you--?" Earl travels so much. He'd travel all over the world with his work. He says, "He travels so much. How do you--? He doesn't (unclear)." I said, "Well, you just have to take care of him."

Then Earl got very sick, and I called him. I didn't know what the illness was other than he was sick. He said, "Well, I thought I told you I have AIDS." "No, you didn't." And, I mean, my heart just broke. And he dies shortly thereafter. He adored my son. As I said, he gave me away at my wedding. He and I would go to the opera. My ex-husband didn't like the opera, so I would go to the opera with Earl. His brother, who is a Roman Catholic priest, called me one day and says, "Hi, this is so-and-so?" "Yes." He said, "Well, I need your son's address." I said, "Okay. Well, it's--," blah, blah, blah. And he said, "Well, Earl left him a lot of money." And I go, "Oh, my god." I mean, it still makes me want to cry. I said, "Well, thank you." He was the executor of Earl's will, and he sent Alejandro a lot of money. I mean, the constant love that he had for our family, and I wouldn't say just me, but the family, because we essentially grew up together. I mean, it was just such a nice way of saying I love you.

01:02:44

ESPINO:

Oh, it's beautiful. Did your parents know that he was--I mean, was it obvious to the community that he was--

LOPEZ:

No, it was never obvious to anybody, and I have a picture of him. We used to bring him to all our family events, and he was Uncle Earl. When he dies, I had to tell my brother what had happened, and Earl did not want me to see him when he was ill, nor did he want us at his funeral. He was cremated up at Rosefield's (phonetic). But I told my brother, and my brother just kind of took it all in. He didn't rant or rave or critique in any way. But that was a very touching thing for Earl to do.

ESPINO:

That must have been hard growing up in those times in a community like that. So he was not Mexican American, Earl?

LOPEZ:

No, he was an Anglo.

ESPINO:

He was Anglo who grew up in the Baptist Church and went to that church with you and that community. Because when you look at that community and then you move later on to East Los

Angeles, how would you describe the differences, if you could? Because you were small growing up there, but if you can note any cultural differences or value system or anything like that that you could contrast with what it would have been like to grow up in a different part of the city. Seems like it was also remote, far away from everything.

01:04:52

LOPEZ:

Yeah. Whittier was another world away. And after Dad died and house is sold, Mother moves to the wine gardens area, so she's far away from me. My brother and his family are even further south.

But what I ended up then doing--because I think Earl was the only friend I had left from Baptist days in Whittier, and we would always invite him to our family things. And, of course, it wasn't very different for him because it was still the good food and it was still this family that he'd known ever since he was five or six or whatever it was. But what I ended up having to do with Earl is interpret what I was doing. Now, Earl was also a Republican and he was brilliant. He went through UCLA in no time at all and was doing some very interesting research, medical research, and would travel all over the world with his doctor that he was working with. I remember when Nixon was elected, I was fuming. I was so upset, because I said, "This is the beginning of the revolution." (Laughs) And he said, "Of course I'm going to vote for Nixon." And I go, "I can't believe it." I was going on and on. It was kind of a time to--but I feel that for my church, not so much Epiphany, but All Saints Pasadena--I have this problem with my--

ESPINO:

Are you hungry? That's not your stomach growling?

LOPEZ:

No, I just had a piece of cheese. I think that was the problem. The Episcopal Church as such, not so much All Saints Pasadena or Epiphany, but the diocese and the work in the church, I always felt like I was a translator, not English to Spanish, but the interpreter of what--

01:07:01

ESPINO:

Ideas.

LOPEZ:

Ideas or culture or history, the things that give life to us. Where's that picture? We have another picture. But there's a picture I have when the Archbishop of Canterbury comes. In 1981, he comes to visit Los Angeles, and he sends Terry Waite, his staff, to come and do the advance work. He meets with the bishop, and we had this imperial bishop in those days. Terry Waite had done his homework, and he said, "The archbishop wants to go there," meaning Epiphany. And, oh, the bishop said, "Oh, no, no, no. No, we want to go to All Saints Beverly Hills." He says, "No, he wants to go--." Of course, Terry is right over there. There's a picture of him. He's six-foot-five, and he rules. (Laughs) So he came to East Los Angeles, and because of that, the bishop puts me on the committee along with Father Wood to organize the visit. The service had the papel picado and the mariachis. This was Cinco de Mayo, eight o'clock in the morning. The night before, I'd gotten a call. He says, "Lydia, this is Tom." And I said, "Tom who?" "Tom Bradley." I said, "Oh, Mr. Mayor," because, I mean, he's the mayor.

01:08:47

ESPINO:

He says Tom. (Laughs)

LOPEZ:

"Mr. Mayor." He says, "Yes. Well, Lydia, Ethel and I have been in Las Vegas celebrating our thirty-fourth anniversary, but I've been told that you're the person I need to talk to because I'd like to see the Archbishop of Canterbury. Is there any time left for me to have a few minutes with him privately?" And I said, "Well, let me look at the schedule." I said, "The only time we've got left is seven-fifteen tomorrow morning." He says, "I'll take it." Well, sure enough, we were at the rectory and here comes Tom Bradley in the beautiful car, the limo, and he comes in. We put him in the sitting room, and he has his fifteen minutes with him. We have some wonderful pictures of Tom and his visit when he came to Epiphany. I escorted him, and we went into the procession. I

sat next to Tom, and then the British consul general was there, and so forth and so on. Father Luce came in from New York because that was such a big deal. But the entire place looked like it would have been decorated for a party, because it is. It's a party. We're celebrating the life that we have as people of faith, and it's supposed to be happy. And the mariachis, oh, my goodness. At eight o'clock in the morning, that was a lot. But all the priests in the diocese wanted to come, and we had to give tickets out, standing-room only. It was a wonderful event. On the dais--and it's in that picture--is the bishop, Tom Bradley, the archbishop, and myself, and then Terry's over to the corner. It was a pretty grand event. But almost always having to interpret to my church the needs of our community and how to celebrate.

01:11:07

ESPINO:

You're growing up in Whittier. So your neighborhood when you were growing up, was that segregated?

LOPEZ:

It was all Mexican Americans, Mexicans, mostly Mexicans.

ESPINO:

So how did you reconcile your identity? You're growing up in an all-Mexican neighborhood, but you're going to school and you're as smart as, smarter than probably some, too, white kids.

LOPEZ:

It was hard to reconcile my color with my classmates, with my church, with my life. I know that I was loved a lot because I was cared for. I felt that that community protected me. It was like living in Mayberry, you know. I mean, it just really had a feeling of comfort and safety. My other good friend, Marilyn Beesie (phonetic), and I used to walk from school up three blocks to the local bus station, and we thought were such hot stuff. We would have a Cherry Coke and maybe

eat a bran muffin and sit there and giggle, and she'd go up, and she lived right next door to Teresa Parker. I would get the bus and come back home, and she would walk up the hill to their house. I remember going to their home, and her mother for church would dress up and wear her fur stole. I mean, it was pretty fancy. It was a very different world, obviously, than mine, but always felt that I was okay. Marilyn did something that I found very, very--

ESPINO:

That was me. (Laughs)

LOPEZ:

--different. Now it's your turn. (Laughs)

01:13:04

ESPINO:

But I'm hungry.

LOPEZ:

Very different. And that is that she, as a high-schooler, starts putting and buying her china for when she gets married. And I go, "Isn't this interesting." Her chest and her china, she shows me the things that--and I go, "Well, maybe this is what they do." (Laughs)

ESPINO:

Oh, interesting.

LOPEZ:

I go, "How interesting."

ESPINO:

Where did that tradition--because that's not a tradition that--well, I don't know. I would have to ask. I know my mom had a hope chest, but she didn't come to the United States until she was twelve. So is she getting that from the white girls that she's socializing with or was it something--

LOPEZ:

Well, I had a hope chest. My mother buys me one later. Mother had one where she had her wedding dress and where she had beautiful linens and beautiful lingerie that she wanted to keep in the cedar chest. Then many years later, I had one until it didn't go with anything I had, so I don't know what I did with it. But I go, "My goodness." It was obviously that Marilyn was getting ready to get--thinking about getting married and gathering all the things. And then later on, I found out through the mill that she married a fellow that was much older, and then she very quickly started to have babies very soon. But that was her life. I've lost contact.

01:15:03

ESPINO:

But it wasn't something you--when you saw her in that role, were you drawn to that, too, or was that the expectation your family and just the society, in general, put on you that you were going to get married after high school?

LOPEZ:

Let me see. I haven't thought about what I thought about marriage--let me see--in ages. What did I think? Well, I thought her choices were lovely. Then when I got mine, in those days, the style that I liked was milk glass and maple. I wanted something very colonial. So I don't know if I was given these, but I was given these dessert plates with the teacup and milk glass, and they went into the chest. I don't think I ever used them. I don't know what happened to them. But Mother had made some towels that she'd embroidered, and they went into the chest. Later on, those towels I did use, but I don't know what happened to the dishes, because certainly my taste changed. And then when I moved to the retirement and I had to close down my big house, all the furniture went with the kids, everything except a few things. And then most of what you see here, except for that chair, are things that I bought at our basement downstairs. (Interruption)

ESPINO:

I'm sorry, I interrupted you. So the chest, you don't know what happened to it.

LOPEZ:

Nope.

ESPINO:

But do you remember how old you were when your mom--your mom bought it for you, you said.

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh.

01:17:04

ESPINO:

Were you still in high school?

LOPEZ:

I don't remember. I think so.

ESPINO:

Let's back up just a little bit. And I still want to get a better sense of how the religion affected your upbringing, and then maybe compare that with how your culture affected your upbringing as Mexican, because when I was in middle school, I went to a Christian school, like a foursquare type. I just remember the fear that was instilled in me about if you don't walk the straight line, you're going to wind up in hell, that kind of thing. So what messages were you getting from--

01:19:2701:21:2301:22:2701:25:25

LOPEZ:

Yeah, there were those, there were those, absolutely, because you had to toe this line in order to get to heaven, and that was absolutely clear. When we had guest preachers or revivals, then you'd get the fire-and-brimstone stuff. We had Bible quizzes. Instead of doing like a television show where you ask questions and you're competing, "Tell us where this Bible verse is," or, "What is this one?" We'd have those and we'd have drills. Before I could come to dinner, I'd have to memorize my Bible verse for the day, and Dad would have the little box there on the table. Obviously, I'm a big girl and I never wanted for any meal, so I learned my Bible verses. But there was all that. We had a lot of Bible studies, we had workbooks, we had a lot of stuff that took us right back to the Bible, and the teaching was of a kind. Today, as an adult, I would say that had its value, but I would never want to do that for my children because it's so limiting.

As an example, my son married a Roman Catholic girl, and when they were going to get married, they wanted to get married in San Juan Batista at the Roman church. The family is very, very, very, very religious. Her mother and father go to church every morning at seven. Every morning she drags them out of bed, they go. So my son says, "Mom, can you find us a priest?" I said, "Sure, honey. Who do you want?" Because I have all these Roman Catholic priests from

(unclear). I said, "Who do you want?" I said, "What do you need?" He said, "Well, we need a priest to marry us." And I said, "Well, okay." I said, "Well, what about the priest at the family's?" "Well, he's not available." And I go, "Well, that's really odd. All right. Who do you want?" So we got Father Richard. He says, "Well, here's what Father has to do. He has to send a letter to the people at San Juan Batista saying who he is and can he have permission to do the wedding." So I wrote the letter. I made a pretend letterhead and I had Richard sign it, and we sent it. We got permission. We had the wedding. Richard did the wedding along with Father Wood and Father Will, who were both at Epiphany. Father Wood baptized Alejandro. So up there in the church, nobody could tell who was Roman or who was not. They all thought it was Roman. So I just wanted the kids to be happy, to have a wonderful wedding, and it was. It was the best I've ever been to.

But when we were preparing the wedding, the family came to my office, and I was still working for the bishop. And there's a picture of Michael Madre (phonetic), this picture right there, as she's being ordained. I gave them my card, and it says "Canon Lydia Lopez." So Maria, who's from Nayarit, married Pat, who is an Irish Catholic Anglo, she talks to her priest the next day and she says, "Do we have canons in our church?" And the priest says, "No, of course not." "Do we have women priests?" "Of course not." So she calls Alejandro. She says, "I don't want any of those at our wedding." And he says, "Mom, I'm going to tell you this. It's going to hurt, but I want you to know what we're facing." And I said, "Okay." I said, "Well, I understand, sweetheart. I understand. Yeah, it is hurtful, but I understand where they're coming from. Their world is very different than mine and yours."

So when they came to baptize the baby, I got the call. (Laughs) So I said, "Who do you want?" I said, "Well, let's just have Father Richard do the baptism, and let's have him do it in the old Baptist (unclear)," the historic one, the old copper one in the back. And I said, "We'll make it special, and Richard will do it for us." So sure enough, Richard did it for us, and the family, oh, they though it was great because this historic church, right, La Placita. They go, "Hmm." I go, "Hmm." I said, "Okay. Live with your limitations." To me, one's faith should open you to the world, not close you off from it. We're supposed to love people, we're supposed to listen to people, all of this sort of stuff, and try to do away with judgment. There was a lot, a lot, a lot of rigidity, a lot of conforming, a lot of "These are our standards by which you must live," growing up. And I think that for Mom and Dad, it was probably also a way, a solace, because they knew that with their lives as busy as they were trying to keep a roof over our heads and all of that sort of stuff, it was a comfort to know that we were in a safe place and to know that we were going to be driven home by one of the pastors or we were going to be driven home by the parents of one of the kids. So it was what it was. I don't have any regrets of being raised that way, because it helps me make the leap to what I consider a more mature understanding of what the gospel is, and to me, the gospel is you believe this way, you believe in God, but God says, "This way is how we live." I mean, it's in Matthew 25. He says, "When I was in prison, did you visit me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was hungry, did you feed me?" Then the disciples say, "Well, Jesus, we never saw you hungry or naked." And he said, "When you've done it to the least of my brethren, you've done it to me."

And this is the way my dad lived his life. People would come to him because they knew he had the little mission church, that he was a person of faith, he was a generous man, and people would

come to the house begging for food or money, and Dad always give them something, always, always, always. I mean, we didn't have that much, but he always gave them something. He never sent them away, and that's how we are. I mean, I don't want to brag, but when I go--I'm being driven by somebody and I see somebody begging in the street, I always take a dollar out. And people say, "Why are you doing that?" Well, Robert Bellah (phonetic), the writer, says, "We make a mistake when we give a beggar money and when we don't give a beggar money. We make a mistake because we don't know how they're going to use the money, buy their next drink." I mean, that's their responsibility, not yours. If you don't give them the money, then you're doing your heart a bad thing because you're closing it up from generosity, you're closing it up from being helpful. So mine is to be helpful, and that's a lesson that comes from those days, refigured a little bit. The faith that I have today is more open, more tolerant, and I can go to a Roman Catholic service and feel comfortable. I mean, it's the same thing. I have more trouble going here to our service with the Baptists. (Laughs)

01:27:24

ESPINO:

Here in this complex?

LOPEZ:

Because I go, "Oh, this is such a throwback, these hymns." I remember all those hymns. So it's funny. I remember during the (unclear) days, we used to go every year and report to the cardinal. This was Timothy Manning, whom I adored. I remember the first time I met him, I was sitting there and I said, "Lydia Lopez, Church of the Epiphany, the Episcopal Church," blah, blah, blah. He would sit in his chair, a very self-contained man. He was a man of prayer, just wonderful man. He came up to me after the meeting was over, and he put his hand here and he said to me, "I'm going to check your family tree and find out where you lost the faith." And I thought, "What a cute thing to say." Some people would have taken offense at that, but I think, "What a cute--maybe he was trying to relate to me. That's okay." And probably way down several generations, we decided to go to a different pew. It's okay. It's okay. But that was Timothy Manning.

ESPINO:

Wow. That's really sweet. And you don't know, you have no sense of--like you mentioned earlier that you don't know of any relatives that were Roman Catholics.

LOPEZ:

My Uncle Joe is still very active in his Protestant church, and his kids, they live in La Mirada. The kids, they don't go to church anymore.

01:29:22

ESPINO:

These are your mother's brothers?

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh. Those are the only relatives I know.

ESPINO:

Have you ever done any genealogy on your--

LOPEZ:

No, I wouldn't know where to start, because how do you trace back to Mexico? I mean, I'd love to, yeah, I'd love to know.

ESPINO:

I haven't done any either, but apparently there are some incredible databases now that you can--I think the Mexican Consulate has digitized a lot of their old records.

LOPEZ:

Oh, that's good to know.

ESPINO:

People are finding--and I'm trying to remember. Someone found--oh, Deborah Webber (phonetic) found some IDs--I think they're immigration IDs--from these old activists from the forties and fifties on Ancestry.com. But it's true, they were here in the United States.

LOPEZ:

I have a copy of my father's--my son has it, a copy of my dad's Green Card when he came here.

01:30:27

ESPINO:

Nice.

LOPEZ:

And I have a copy of Dad's ID when he worked at the steelcasting company.

ESPINO:

Oh, excellent. Well, were there any values that stand out? Like, for example, when I interview people who had some connection with the Methodist religion, they mention leaving your community better than you found it or leaving the situation or whatever it is that you do. Where there any teachings like that that stand out in your mind from the Baptist experience?

LOPEZ:

In the Baptist Church, we would send a lot of money to what was then considered foreign missions. So we would send missionaries to the Belgian Congo at that time, or some other country. But the Congo stands out because these people would come in every two years and have a big session, series of sessions with us to tell us about their work and all the "heathen" that they brought to light. So the money was going there. The money was going--let's just say Africa. But when the first African, or the first black family, the first Negro family, in those days, moved into Whittier, the pastor at our church goes ballistic, and he joins all the other racists who are talking about property values, just the typical stuff. The Troop (phonetic) family was one of my peers. He was my age, the oldest sibling, and he became a star athlete at our high school. He's got a Ph.D. today, and he's been an enormous, wonderful educator, a lot of promise. The sister was the first--now we can say African American--cheerleader. Now, the cheerleaders were always the white little girls with the blonde hair and the blue eyes and the dimples. And she became the first cheerleader of her group, and that was a big deal. But to me, that seemed like such a contradiction.

01:33:07

ESPINO:

Even at that time?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah, because we talked about it quietly among ourselves, my pals, and we didn't get it.

Then the last straw was when John Kennedy is running for president in 1959, all that noise about his running and he's a Roman Catholic. Again, our pastor, from the pulpit, goes on about that. And that was it. We'd had enough. Friends like Earl had already left and was spending some time in Europe, and other people were going into Peace Corps and other people were going off to school, and all that sort of stuff. So it was like enough.

ESPINO:

Did you talk to your parents about your decision to leave the church?

01:38:48

LOPEZ:

No, no, and Dad never asked. Mother came to Epiphany a couple of times, and certainly that one time to meet Cesar. My nieces and nephews, these children whose pictures you've seen, who were beautiful children and I adore them, they visited me at Epiphany one time, and they looked around. And they're looking at the church--it's so different from theirs--and they say, "Aunt Lil, is this a Christian church?" And I said, "Listen, you little bastards. When you know something, you can ask me a question." (Laughter) (unclear). But today one of my nephews said--not today, but as an adult, he said to me, "You know, Aunt Lil, if I had a choice, I would go to the Episcopal Church, but my wife likes this other church." I said, "Well, you need to be happy. You need to be happy." So they are where they are.

Christmas Eve service in our church is a very beautiful service and it's got candlelight and wonderful music. So my brother had invited me to go down with him. They live in Rancho Santa Margarita in a gated community, a cute little condo. So I went down there, and I said, "Well, you know, I'd really like to go to New Year's Eve. Let me call my friend who has a church nearby, the Episcopal Church, and ask when the services are and so forth." So my brother said, "Well, I'll go with you." And then my sister-in-law, "Well, I'll go with you too." So they went with me. They all got dressed up because they know what Episcopalians do, and we went. The priest there is a good friend of mine who, in fact, was on the staff of Richard Nixon before, and he ran the Nixon Library before he became a priest. Anyway, John gave his sermon, and he's very outgoing. He's wonderful. We agree on very little other than we love Jesus. And he welcomes Canon Lydia Lopez and her family, and how nice.

So the next day, Christmas morning, I go with my brother and sister-in-law to their church, which is Saddleback Church, which has maybe 30,000 there on a Sunday. It's one of these megachurches. Rick Warren's son just committed suicide. Did you hear about that? Anyway, Rick Warren has written a book called The Purpose Driven Life, and out of the book, he's made millions, because it's published in ninety different languages or something. So he doesn't get paid

by the church anymore. As people of faith, we're supposed to give 10 percent of our income back to the church. Well, he gives 90 percent and takes 10, and now he doesn't take any at all because he's made so much money. But I was there, and Rick walks around. He has bodyguards, and he walks around in jeans and a Bahamas shirt and he's greeting everybody. And I sit there and I'm watching all of this. And they have a band, and it's happy music, and it's, "La, la, la," happy music. Well, afterwards, I took them out to lunch, and I said to them, "You know, I guess I'm a traditionalist. I like a hymn that I can remember. I mean, â€˜O, Little Town of--â€˜Silent Night.' But I mean, can you remember the music today? I remember, â€˜La, la, la, la.'" (Laughs) And they go, "There she goes again. There she goes again." But it's their church. It makes them happy. It gives them a lot to do.

My brother is part of a ministry there that is called PICS, Photographers in Christ's Service. He's a photographer. So they go all over the world, photographing the ministries of this church all over the world.

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

Then they put it in their bulletin, they put it in their newsletter. Before you become--you have to sign a paper, the statement of faith, and you have to go through a training. Then they give you a polo shirt and the blazer and a whole thing, and you walk around. And that's what my brother does in his retirement, but he loves it, loves it, loves it.

01:39:44

ESPINO:

It's fascinating that you're both very much involved in your churches.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, in different ways and different places. Different pews, as we say.

ESPINO:

Yes, very different, starkly different, but that commitment to faith is something that's still with you and him today. Well, I think we'll stop it here, and then we'll continue next time. (End of April 23, 2013 interview)

SESSION TWO (April 30, 2013)

00:00:40

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino. I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California, and today's date is April 31st--April 30th (2013). That's right, there's no thirty-one. Tomorrow's May Day. I want to start today with going back a bit to your childhood and looking at your experiences in your elementary school. When you first started there, you mentioned that you and your brother were two Mexicans. Did that occur throughout your whole education in that Christian school?

LOPEZ:

I was there through eighth grade. Yes, we were the only two.

ESPINO:

The whole time?

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

ESPINO:

Do you know if there's any specific reason other than--well, you didn't really explain how it was that this woman invited you to come to this school.

LOPEZ:

She was one of our Sunday school teachers at the little mission in Jim Town and told Mother about it, and that's how we ended up going there. By that time, my brother was already in third grade or was about to start third grade.

00:01:47

ESPINO:

But do you think it was a special invitation? Were they good friends or do you think she saw something in your family? Because considering that it was a school that primarily Latinos didn't attend, or Mexicans didn't attend, why was it that your mom was--

LOPEZ:

There were two things about the school. It was obviously Baptist, but it was expensive. It was new, started in '47. I think this is just an extension--I don't know, because I can only guess at this point that it was an extension of what they saw as their--I was going to say missionary outreach, but their Christian duty. "There's this family, they're very active in the development of this little mission. They have these two kids. Why don't we think about having them go." And then it was at that point that Mother then goes to work at a sewing factory and is able to then help in the

paying of the tuition. But I can't begin--I mean, but there was just a lot of interaction between some of the people at the big church and our little mission.

ESPINO:

There was a lot--did you say a lot of interaction?

LOPEZ:

Yes, they would come and do classes and events with the children, yeah.

ESPINO:

So the little mission, the parishioners there were primarily the Mexican community, or was it mixed?

00:04:12

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm, mostly Mexican Americans and Mexican from the neighborhood, and it was small. It was small. And everybody knew that Mom and Dad--everybody knew that our family was not Roman Catholic. For me, it was an interesting world because we were so separated from everybody else who had a lot of other activities together because they experienced their own church, and the church nearby was, I think, St. Mary's. Obviously, it's no longer there.

But I remember as a child--and this is a typical Protestant reaction--I would see them doing their Posadas and their white robes and things, and I'd think it was awfully mysterious. And I go, "What are they doing? This is so--." And the songs, and they'd walk around the neighborhood. I don't ever remember going inside the Roman church. Let me see. Was there another church nearby? The only other church was up further out maybe three miles, where my father had, before he went to work at this steel mill, worked as a janitor and handyman. He did everything. It was the West Whittier Friends Church. Again, this church was different than the East Whittier

Friends Church, because that's where the Nixon family went. So that world was very upper-class white or middle-class white, and, of course, this world over here, East Whittier Friends Church, was mostly Mexican, Mexican American. The minister there, Reverend Enrique Covos (phonetic), became a very, very dear friend of my father's, and he was like my grandfather. He was this wonderful old soul. He always smelled of his shaving, and he wore those shoes all the way up. He was always immaculately dressed, and a wonderful man. His family lived on Percy Street in East Los Angeles, and we used to go there and we used to enjoy being with the family. Years later when Dad dies, we've had--well, just before he died, Enrique Covos dies, and so, of course, we go there. The girls loved Dad, Enrique Covos' daughters. We had been at Rose Hills, and the service and all that was wonderful. And on the way home, we went by to see Dad, and Dad said--he was at the Whittier Presbyterian Hospital, the place next door. He said, "Oh, I've had such a busy day today. I had so many visitors." Well, who'd come see Dad? He says, "Yeah, Enrique Covos was just here." We're looking at each other. Well, he's been dead several days. "Yeah, he was here, and he told me that we'd see each other in a few days." Well, several days later, just a few days later, Dad dies.

00:07:42

ESPINO:

Oh, my goodness.

LOPEZ:

I mean, it was chilling. And I go, "Wow." I mean, they were so close. I mean, it was the most wonderful relationship, to watch the two. They loved each other and they had such respect for one another. It was lovely. The West Whittier Friends Church then moved over to like the Pico Rivera area somewhere when it moved closer to Jim Town. But I don't remember another church nearby in the barrio.

ESPINO:

Was your family considered different than the other families?

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

Not only the religious aspect but in other ways, do you think?

00:09:47

LOPEZ:

Yeah, several ways. Dad--when anybody came, because they knew he had a heart, because they knew he was who he was, a person of faith, when people had a need, they would come. We'd have people, homeless. We didn't call them homeless in those days. But they would come and they would need something. Dad always gave them something, a little bit of money, some food. We didn't have a lot, but we didn't consider ourselves poor. We just didn't have what everybody else had, because it seemed like our life was okay. Mother was this fabulous cook, the house was a sturdy one, the first stucco house in the neighborhood, because Dad had built it. But people would come to the house for help, so there was that thing.

Dad was a handyman. He did plumbing, electrical, carpentry, all of that, so when anybody needed any help, they would come to Dad, and he would make a little extra money that way. Sometimes he would get paid, sometimes he wouldn't get paid. And I'd get angry because people were exploiting my dad. But he'd said, "No, no, no, mija, it's okay, it's okay." So it was his faith, his generosity, and the ability to be helpful. So this family, my family, we were different, and there wasn't--as I've said before, there weren't a lot of--I had the two friends on the street that I could--Kinky lived up, and then Frenchie lived across the street, and those were the ones I played with. Frenchie and her family were very close. So my parents didn't like us going too far away.

00:11:39

ESPINO:

I guess even when I was growing up, you'd hear things like--like my family moved out of Highland Park into South Pasadena in the seventies, the late seventies. They wouldn't tell me as much as my younger sister, who was growing up more in that culture, she was younger, they

would say things like, "Well, you're not like the other Mexicans." Was that the kind of thing that you got in your school, your Christian school?

LOPEZ:

I didn't get that from the school; I got that from my parents. I don't know if you would call it--what kind of difference they were trying to--what they were trying to define, or if it was their own form of, "Our world is a little better than some of our neighbors." (Interruption)

LOPEZ:

We always had a standard, expectations. I mean, my world revolved around books and my little space that I called my little office. It was like a crate and little things on top, and I had all my little books lined up. But we were different, and not only self-identified in family, but neighbors. Oh, those are the (unclear). Those are them. Then they'd fill in whatever. So there was that.

ESPINO:

And your brother is older than you.

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm.

ESPINO:

Well, I'm wondering what kind of expectations your parents put on you growing up and attending this school. What kind of values did they place on, well, behavior and maybe dress and those kinds of things?

00:14:35

LOPEZ:

I look forward to the pictures, where you can see my dresses that Mother made. But I have a memory of--I think I was about ten or twelve. For one Easter Sunday--we always dressed up for Easter Sunday, and Mother had put my hair in curls. She loved the Shirley Temple look. And I had a real suit bought at a store. It was a red jacket and a plaid skirt, pleated. I thought it was the cat's pajamas. I mean, I really thought--and it's the family, the four of us. Mother has her hat on and her gloves and she looks elegant. We're right there in front of the street of the house, and you can see that the street is not paved, but here's the four of us, and we looked swell.

My brother had more mobility than I did because he was a boy, and when my parents were not at home, he ruled, and, of course, that grated on me sometimes. (Recorder turned off)

00:17:36

LOPEZ:

Ben had more mobility than I did, and, of course, he was the boss when family was not home. But the family had some very clear expectations of us that we would be good, we would behave. There were girls--like I mentioned to you before, Kinky got into trouble. There were parties, and noisy parties, in the neighborhood, drinking and all that. None of that happened in our home, so it was kind of like, "Oh, look what they're doing," kind of thing. So there was that. But one of the things they always stressed was education, and this was the expectation. So when my brother graduated from high school, he graduated in the top percentage of his class, got this major award and a lot of recognition because he'd been an athlete and done all this work in the school paper. But when I graduated from high school, I got actual scholarship money. (Laughs) So even though my brother got all these prizes, I got the money. But it was funny, because I always joke constantly in our family life when we all get together, "Oh, yeah, my brother was an only child, and Mother always liked you best." Well, Mother had a very special connection to her son, her firstborn--well, not the firstborn, the second child. The first one died. I always felt that she favored him, so that for years, maybe thirty years, that cardinal key, which is a beautiful key--it's not a key, but it's a beautiful thing--Mother wore it on a necklace. He gave it to her, and then when she died, he got it back. So she was always very, very proud. Lydia's education was not as significant as his.

But she gets very sick, and she got--I think it's dementia or Alzheimer's. I don't know the difference. I'd go visit her every afternoon and sit with her. Then I'd leave, and she'd say to the

nurses, "Who is that nice lady that was just here? Because I don't know where she was." And then my brother would come in while I was there, she'd say, "Oh, mijo, how are you?" All this stuff. And I go, "Oh, there she goes again."

ESPINO:

That must have been hard growing up.

00:19:19

LOPEZ:

It was very hard because he did not pay as much attention to her as she would have liked. So we had my uncle, her youngest brother, and I had to really pick up the pieces as she was--I mean, we are the ones that did all the funeral arrangements and the service booklet and went to the mortuary. I called my sister-in-law and asked where my brother was, and she said, "Oh, he had to go away so he could mourn." I said, "Mourn?" I said, "Okay." He had not been as present, but he's a very kind of self-contained person. You don't see his emotions other than when he's telling his kids what to do. But there was always a bit of competition between us.

ESPINO:

I'm sure, I'm sure. And also it seems like he experienced the other school, the public school, for several years before--you never had that. I wonder what kind of impact that had on him--

LOPEZ:

I don't know. That's a good question.

ESPINO:

--changing over.

00:21:43

LOPEZ:

The school was right across the street from the house where I had a babysitter, and the house burned. It was a wood house. My brother could see it from the school, and he insisted on leaving school to see about his sister. Of course, they brought him over, and I was fine. But in all the pictures you will see, I'm sitting at our little car, our little toys, he's always there, he's always kind of in a protective mode--it feels that way--of his sister. What had happened is that the first sister had died when she was a baby, and so he was the second child. I don't know how much of that comes through in his own memory, but so many of those pictures I go, "There he is again, there he is, and there he is." I mean, they're the cutest things. But I think that for him, he had such talent. I mean, he was an athlete, he was an artist, he was a cartoonist for the school newspaper, and he was just seen as the big man on campus. Now, at Whittier High School in those times, we were not the only Mexican Americans. There were lots, because we went from a school of twenty-six to a school of, oh, my goodness, more than five hundred or more. I don't remember. So it was a very different world. But he did so well in that. He really did well.

ESPINO:

You mentioned earlier today but also in our previous interview that your neighbor friend, someone very close to you--well, you said got in trouble.

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm.

ESPINO:

So how were those kinds of things dealt with, like pregnancy and girlfriends and boyfriends and all that, the values at that time?

00:24:1600:27:0000:28:4900:30:45

LOPEZ:

I never had "the talk" with Mother or Dad. As an example, I didn't even know what a period was until the day, and I was at church on a Sunday afternoon with Dad and Mom. We had gone to visit another friend of his who was a Pentecostal minister, and they're very happy and they speak in tongues, and the music is loud, and bands, and so forth. To me, hearing somebody speak in tongues, I didn't know what it was, and it was very frightening to me as a--I guess I was ten, twelve. I was holding onto my mother's hand, and then on the way home, I have this accident, and Mother then says--it was very quick, hardly any explanation at all what was happening to me. And I don't think I knew about babies and where they came from till many, many years later, and I think a lot of that had to do with my own finding out, my own reading. The girl up the street that had a baby, well, she was a bad girl, you know. It was like they say today, "Well, she got into trouble. She shouldn't have done that." Later on, she ends up--I think she ends up in prison. Her life was very, very difficult. So partly my parents didn't like me playing with her, but she was a good pal, and there was this resistance on the part of my family, my father, for me not to play with her.

So there wasn't a lot of talking about those things, and that's why it's been so important for me, as I've raised my child, to leave the door open for any kind of conversation he may want to have. Let me see. He's about nine, eight or nine, maybe. My ex-husband goes to work in Washington as part of the Carter administration, so my son goes to live with him, which I thought would be a wonderful experience for him to live in Washington. It was very hard for me, but it was good for him. So he'd call me and he'd tell me that he was (unclear) senator, was at the Capitol, all this. It was wonderful experience. Putting him on the airplane all by himself and saying goodbye were the hardest moments. When he talks about his friends, I never knew what color they were. He'd give me a first name, maybe. It wasn't till I went to his graduation, because then he goes to live with his father, and his father had remarried and his life had settled. He was working in a law firm in San Francisco. So I said, "Well, this is good, because I have not, and I probably won't. Single family, all that." I said, "Maybe this will be a good time." So I talked to Fred about it. He says, "Are you kidding? Sure." So he came and we talked to Alejandro, and he didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. He didn't want to go, and I think he was very unhappy with the adjustment, but he went to some good schools. He went to a Roman Catholic school, a junior high school, and then he went to St. Mary's, the school run by the Christian Brothers. I never knew who his--until I went to graduation. Oh, well, this kid's that color and this kid is that ethnic--because for him, they were all his pals, and it was so different from my life.

The Christian Brothers would hear--Alejandro put in the application that he was Episcopalian, and I found that funny because it's so typical of a teenager wanting to stand out, "I'm different." So Brother Albert, who ran the school, was this elegant, lovely Mexican American. I mean, he walked like he was walking on air. And they wore their black cassocks. Alejandro kept telling

him about, "Oh, my mother went to here and to this and the archbishop and (unclear)," and all the stuff in my life. And he said, "Well, I'd like to meet your mother." So I went up for tea and we had the most wonderful visit, and he told me how curious he was about me. Then I told him how much I appreciated the kind of education my son was getting, because these men are dedicated to the education of their boys. I mean, that is their whole life. Alejandro, when he was a kid, was a cyclist, and there was one of the brothers who was a cyclist, so a big whole gaggle of them. And I remember one time Alejandro calling, "Mother, I'm okay." I said, "Okay." "I've just been cycling down Mount Diablo, and I fell over the handlebars. I scraped my--but I'm okay." And I go, "Okay." But wonderful retreats with the Brothers.

My son, as a six-, seven-year-old, had told me, "Mom, I know how important the church is to you and God and all that stuff." He says, "But I don't believe in God." I go, "Where have I failed?" Because it is important to me. So I said, "Well, tell me about that." I was trying not to show my concern. And he says, "Well--," and he was talking to me very, very seriously. I said, "Well, you know, I don't want to forget these thoughts, so why don't you just write some of these things down so we can remember them, because these are very important." So he did. He scribbles out the reasons he doesn't believe in God. Well, that's, I think, as a seven-year-old. Now he's in high school, we're on the phone, and they've studied the gospels, and he's telling me about that, and he's telling me how cool Jesus is. And I'm going, "Well, I'm hearing new stuff from him." He says, "Yeah, I've just been off on this retreat with--," blah, blah. So I'm thinking, "Oh, how wonderful that they've made a link for him." So I really have always valued the kind of education he got there. Brother Albert said, as we were finishing our tea, "Well, don't tell anyone, but on a given Sunday afternoon, you'll find me at Grace Cathedral for vespers." (Laughs) And I go, "Well, it's a beautiful cathedral. It's our cathedral in San Francisco." And he says, "Oh, I love to go there."

ESPINO:

Why wouldn't he want you to tell anybody?

LOPEZ:

Well, because, I mean, I think it was mostly joking. But he says, "You'll find me there on Sunday afternoon." So I thought, "How cute."

ESPINO:

Well, we were talking about values that were handed down to you by your parents when you were in high school, and you mentioned that your brother had more freedoms than you did, but was he allowed to date and go out and that kind of thing?

00:33:06

LOPEZ:

All of our social life was around church, the hayrides, we'd go to camp. On church Sundays, after the church service at seven o'clock, the young people would gather for something called a sing, where we'd go to somebody's home and we'd have a little meditation. The youth minister would talk to us. We'd have songs and we'd have wonderful refreshments, and we'd giggle and carry on. So our social life was centered around all the activities in the church. Wednesday nights were prayer service, and the kids would have their own setting, and then on weekends there'd be a party somewhere or a hayride or a something. So all our social life revolved around that. It was never us going off by ourselves with a date. My brother was very popular, and so he would go off with a group of kids and he'd have his friends. I remember there was a girlfriend somewhere during the final years of high school, but I don't remember--there was one, but I don't remember anything more serious than that.

After church on Sundays, we thought we were really hot stuff. You know Happy Days and how they have that drive-in in Happy Days, the show? Well, there was a similar restaurant in Whittier, and that's where we would go after church, and we'd sit in our cars and drink Cokes or Cherry Cokes and eat French fries. I mean, that's as bad as we were. The restaurant was called Nixon's. It was the Nixon brother's restaurant, and he later goes to work for Marriott. But this is where we'd all hang out, cars after cars, and windows down, and we'd eat back and forth.

ESPINO:

Who had a car?

LOPEZ:

Who had a car? Friends had cars. We didn't have cars. When my brother got old enough, he

would use my dad's car, which was an old--I don't remember the kind of car it was, but it was--oh, I don't remember what kind of car it was, but it was very simple. But most of our other friends had cars, so there seemed to be always a way to get somewhere. But that was about as rowdy as we got.

ESPINO:

Did you date in high school?

LOPEZ:

No. No. My best friend was this towhead, and because he lived nearby, he was often our ride, and I was very, very close to him. But I don't remember having a date till my last year of high school when we were getting ready for our graduation parties, and our party was getting on boats--they were really lovely yachts--and going across the water to Catalina--

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

--to a big party there at the casino. Anita Bryant sang.

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

It wasn't till later that I understand that she wasn't my favorite person.

00:35:38

ESPINO:

Oh, right.

LOPEZ:

We go there. It takes a while to get there. We eat there. There's no dancing, just music. And then we get back on the--and we come home. But it wasn't one of these wild all-night kinds of things. It was very, very tame by standards.

ESPINO:

So was that just the climate of the area that growing up in that area was most of the family shared those similar values of wanting their children to be a little bit more reserved and to have more of that Happy Days kind of upbringing?

00:38:07

LOPEZ:

I think it must have been among the people that were part of our social world, the church, because those were our pals. I think it was. It was, in its own way, a very kind of protected

world. Everybody knew what everybody else was doing, because in those days, Whittier was a very small community. There weren't a lot of Mexican Americans in the community, and there were still people that were Mennonites, and Quakers still had an influence in the city. So if anybody saw us on the street, they took permission, "Go home," that kind of stuff. After school, I'd walk up the two blocks with my friend Marilyn and we'd stop at the bus depot and have a Cherry Coke and eat a bran muffin or French fries, and then she'd go on up to her house up in the hills and I'd get on the bus and come home, because she lived one way, I lived another way. But it was pretty--not cloistered. I felt protected.

I remember being at home one time, and my bedroom was the back corner of the house, and there was this vacant lot next door that Dad owned. There were people in our barrio that would get into trouble. I remember the police chasing a man, and gunfire, and I could see it from my window. He was going around and he was a wanted criminal that they were chasing, and they chased him through the buildings. And I thought, "Wow." It was very, very, very odd to have that come that close.

ESPINO:

So then in your neighborhood, you didn't witness a lot of, for example, gang violence or alcoholism or some of the things that other people that I've interviewed describe growing up more in the projects of Maravilla or East Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, that kind of thing?

LOPEZ:

We had our town drunks, uh-huh. There was a lot of pressure on my brother to join--maybe they were called gangs. I don't remember them. I guess they were. There was a lot of pressure on my brother to associate with some of the boys in the neighborhood, but he was so busy with his other world, his sports world, his stuff at school. But I remember there was a lot of pressure on him to do that, yeah. And how he resisted is interesting, because as a child, he played with some of these people, but now as a teenager, he didn't.

ESPINO:

And your girlfriend would be the equivalent, but the female version in the sense that she was considered--I don't know if in all aspects of her life she was considered the bad--

LOPEZ:

The bad girl, right.

00:40:35

ESPINO:

The bad girl. But did you stay friends with her throughout your high school years?

LOPEZ:

There was a time when she disappears, and by that I mean because of the pregnancy, she's gone.

ESPINO:

She doesn't get married?

LOPEZ:

No, but later on, she marries an old man, and we all see that as very, very sad.

ESPINO:

Does she have to give her baby up for adoption?

LOPEZ:

I don't know what happened. I don't even remember what happened to the baby. I think so. But it was just a very, very--a tortured girl. She was very sad, although in her own way, she was great fun, and part of that was that she had such freedom. She could do anything she wanted, and, of course, I didn't have that kind of freedom. I'm remembering the house where she lived. Haven't thought of this in ages. But I don't think she finished school, and I don't know what happened to her.

00:41:58

ESPINO:

Do you remember how you felt when you found out? Did she tell you herself that she was pregnant?

LOPEZ:

No, I think the word came through--I don't know, through the gossip mill, but I was stunned. I guess I go, "Oh, wow." It was a huge shock to me. And then after a while, she's no longer there. But she had the strictest mother, so I didn't get it. She had a very strict mother. Her mother cracked the whip, I mean not literally, but she was very strict. But we can analyze that, but--

ESPINO:

That's interesting. It'd be interesting to know what happened to the baby. Maybe the mother, if she's strict, she sent her away. She never got married. During your high school years, and even elementary, what were some of the classes or teachers that had the most impact on you?

LOPEZ:

In high school?

ESPINO:

Well, any grade that you think. Could be elementary, junior high, high school.

LOPEZ:

I'll tell you, I was ten years old and I was, I guess, in fourth grade, and I decided all by myself that I was going to learn to speak English well. Before that time, I'd go to church on Sundays and I'd play with the children, and I couldn't say--even to this day, I have to stop and think--"sharp cheddar cheese," because of the "c-h" stuff. I mean, I sounded like every other Mexican American kid. So I said, "Oh, no, I'm going to--." So I'd go around the house, "Ch, ch." I mean, I did this all by myself without anybody telling me I needed to do that. I don't think my brother--I don't remember my brother having the same challenge, but I did, and so I learned. And that was when I was ten years old. I went around and I decided I was going to speak English and speak it well.

00:44:22

ESPINO:

Kids didn't make fun of you?

LOPEZ:

I don't remember being made fun of. The only time I ever got into a problem with a kid, I think it

was about second grade, and I was angry at this one boy because he was playing with a friend of mine and I wanted all her attention. So he came over and he hit me with his lunch pail on the head and I got this knot. (Laughs) But not so much have to do, I don't think, with my color, but with my pals. It was kind of a social thing. This is challenging, because I don't remember all these stories. When you leave, I'll remember, "I should have said so. I should have--."

ESPINO:

Well, you can write stuff down, and then when I come back the next time, you can--

LOPEZ:

Okay, all right, we'll do that too.

ESPINO:

--embellish on some of your stories.

00:46:31

LOPEZ:

My most memorable teacher was my kindergarten teacher, Miss Verups (phonetic). Where did that come from? She was a spinster. She's the one that was there with the great patience and helping us learn how to read and how to print, because that's what we did at that school. It was a small class, and she was this wonderful teacher, very dedicated to her students. It wasn't until I was in high school that Miss Verups gets married. She marries a wonderful fellow. So that was great to see her have such happiness. But she was impressive to me because of her kindness and her patience.

My second grade teacher I remember. I see her, but I don't like her, and I don't remember her name. But she was very strict and had a ruler, and she would hit it on the desk to get us to straighten--thankfully, she never hit us. But going through--oh, in high school--no, junior high

school, there was a teacher who was also--because we had several teachers in high school--junior high school, I mean. I didn't know what was happening to my body. My parents hadn't told me much. I had started my period ages ago. And socially I didn't feel comfortable, so I giggled all the time and it made him crazy. One time I wouldn't stop giggling, and he said, "I'm going to take you to the principal's office." He was also a principal. (Interruption)

LOPEZ:

So he was going to take me down to the principal's office because he was also a principal. He got his paddle out and he sat there and he said, "I've never paddled a girl before in my life, and I'm not going to start today." I was scared--

ESPINO:

I'm sure.

LOPEZ:

--because I thought, "Oh, my gosh. And then he's going to call my parents. I'm going to get into trouble." But part of me--you know, the business of having a period, starting to wear a bra, all these changes, none of that was explained to me. I had no reference, and so, I mean, I didn't know. Life was just giggle. So when I needed to know that, there's really nobody to talk to about that, because that wasn't Mom. So it was awkward, an awkward time.

00:49:51

ESPINO:

You mentioned in the last interview that it was many, many, many years later that you became comfortable with yourself, and I'm wondering if you could explain what you meant by that. So now you're talking about basically gender issues of becoming a woman at a time when those kinds of discussions didn't happen in the home. What other kinds of things do you think let you not feel comfortable until much, much later?

LOPEZ:

Well, everybody else was white in my world. Marilyn Geesie (phonetic) was blonde, blue eyes. Teresa Parker had dark eyes. So those are the kids in the school. And although I felt--what is it--accepted, to me there was a difference, an obvious difference, and it wasn't until many years later--I'm talking now as adult, and this has to do with the Chicano Movement. Now, we're talking about '68, '66, '65. I'm learning history. And I've got to tell you, I've traveled to Mexico, but I'll explain that one. From high school through until the Chicano Movement, I have nothing to do with the church. I put that aside as irrelevant.

ESPINO:

It's like eight years, five years?

LOPEZ:

It was about five, six years, yeah. And although I always had this longing to be connected with the church because of my faith, I just couldn't find the right place. And I remember I was working out in East L.A. at Estrada Courts in the Welfare Planning Council, and my supervisor said, "Come with me. Let's go to a picket." How do you say no to your supervisor? Well, typical kind of social worker type, I had a knit suit on and heels, stockings. I go, "Okay." So I went, and I was so embarrassed because I'd never been on one, and I wanted to hide behind the picket thing. But as I was walking around, I saw Presbyterian ministers, Baptist ministers, the husband of the woman that lives upstairs.

00:52:46

ESPINO:

Horacio QuiÃ±ones?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. And Episcopalians. And I go, "Well, this is interesting." We had a lot of time walking, walking, so I started interviewing them. Then I got involved in the activities of the Movement, and we were picketing the Hall of Justice because the thirteen Chicanos had been indicted by the grand jury for the walkouts. I married one of those later on.

ESPINO:

That was your first picket, for the East L.A. Thirteen?

00:54:44

LOPEZ:

Yeah. And then things just--I got more and more involved. Well, somebody--I think it was Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones--says, "Hey, the biggest party is at Epiphany." I go, "Oh, great. What's Epiphany?" And he says, "Well--," and he tells me what it is. So I went, and it was the most wonderful, wonderful homecoming for me, because there was papel picado all over, the beautiful banners, a mariachi, and the altar, and the central message they were giving that God loves you, whoever you are. We have a saying in our church, "Wherever you are on your journey of faith, God is there," and sure enough--I mean, I heard the music, I heard the whole thing. I'd never been to one of those, and I just wept. I mean, I felt like I had come home, and that became my church for the next essentially fifty years. I mean, it became home, although I'm a member at All Saints in Pasadena. I try to help--I don't try to help; I help Epiphany. I go there once a month or so.

So that became home, and as I'm learning and watching and meeting other people that are empowered and are doing all this wonderful work, I'm beginning to feel more comfortable in my skin. It took me a very long time. I mean, I think there were early markers of that years before, but to me, the most significant was that encounter at--well, on the picket line with those ministers, and then going to Epiphany, and then feeling I'm home.

ESPINO:

So all those years in elementary school, junior high school, high school, did you realize it at the time that something was off, or was that something you learned later on looking back?

00:57:26

LOPEZ:

Well, I knew I was different, but I also, because of the Christian overlay, felt accepted. You'd have to talk to some of them to find out how they viewed us. I can only go from what I remember, that I always had a place. I could go up to Teresa Parker's fancy home or Marilyn Geesie's home and we could always play and then they'd take me home. Nobody ever said to me, "Oh, those Mexicans." I never remember that, unless I've really put it away somewhere in my head. But I always felt that I was--I mean, maybe this is a huge contradiction, but I always felt cared for, although I knew I was different. I don't know how to put all that together.

ESPINO:

Yeah, I'm sure there are things written about relationships between, like you were mentioning, the Christianity philosophy of helping others, but what is that like for the person being helped? We hear a lot about how it impacts the person giving and helping and the missionary, but I wonder how it affects the person on the receiving end of that.

LOPEZ:

Part of our life as a Rodriguez family was that we paid our own freight. Parents paid the tuition. They worked very hard. We didn't have a lot, but never felt poor, although if you look at our neighborhood, I mean, we didn't have grass on our front yard. We had some plants, some flowers, but, I mean, it looked like, you know, many little spots in Mexico. But I didn't feel poor. Sometimes we didn't have as much to eat, but Mother's meals were wonderful, and if we were to analyze them, they were complete proteins, because there was beans, there were tortillas, there was cheese, there was rice. Sometimes there wasn't meat, but to me, that didn't feel poor. It's just that we didn't have--maybe it's just a definition. But I knew that my parents worked very hard, and I loved them for that.

00:59:44

ESPINO:

Are you saying you didn't feel like you were, in a sense, a charity for the wealthy white family who encouraged you to go to the school and came to the mission to teach Sunday classes?

LOPEZ:

We might have been seen as an object of their charity. They might have seen us as an object of their charity, because they said, "Oh, well, come to our school," but it was, "Come to our school as long as you can pay the freight." And it wasn't that they were being mean or in any way--I mean, that was just the way it was. We might have been an object of their noblesse oblige, for all I know.

ESPINO:

Was it a discounted tuition--

LOPEZ:

No.

ESPINO:

--or did you pay the full tuition?

LOPEZ:

Paid the full freight. In those days, that's what you did, yeah, and that was a lot of money for our parents at that time for that many years.

ESPINO:

Once you graduated eighth grade, could you tell the kind of education you had in comparison to your classmates in high school, as far as how easy math came, writing came, public speaking, those kinds of things?

LOPEZ:

Oh, math did not come easy for me anywhere. (Laughs) But I had read a lot, and I got involved in the Girls Council and some of the clubs. But part of that initially, I think, was a reflection of "She is Ben's sister," and Ben, my brother, is an all-star, so kind of this is reflected glory. So then after he leaves high school, then it's up to me to do whatever I do. So I was very active in the French Club and that kind of stuff at school.

01:02:19

ESPINO:

How about some of the larger social issues of the period? Because you're coming of age around the civil rights period, African American, Martin Luther King, well, those struggles that were--this is before the Vietnam War started to explode. Did that have an impact on you in high school?

LOPEZ:

Yes. Being raised in Whittier, which in 1955 or so, we moved to Redman, so I'm in Whittier now as opposed to Jim Town.

ESPINO:

1955?

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm. That's when we moved to our house. My neighbor across the street was part of the John Birch Society, and so she was eager for me to have some understanding of politics as I prepared to vote, and so she invited me over for lunch. She made a tomato aspic and a little kind of very typical lunch, and was telling me all these things and was really filling my head with a lot of stuff. Now, Whittier was a very conservative town. So she was also--how long did I live there? I lived there till I was twenty-four, twenty-two. I'll have to go back.

ESPINO:

Like until 1963, '64?

01:05:0801:07:45

LOPEZ:

Where was I when John Kennedy died? I was still living in Redman. Yes, I'm still there. The pastor of our church goes up in arms. By that I mean he writes a piece that we're to distribute to our friends about this Roman Catholic running for president. So when the first black family moves into Whittier, he gets involved with all the rest about the property values and the first black family moving in. So all of that has influenced me, and I had to struggle with that as I was making my way out of that kind of thinking. Martin Luther King was, in those days, from what I was being taught, being influenced by the Communists, and so all these things had to be unlearned as I then tried to educate myself and have my own opinion and my own source of information about these things. So I was very influenced by that.

So it was not easy, because the struggle also is not just one of politics or culture, it's of church, because the church that I was raised in was a very conservative church, and the church that I go

to, by definition, is a very liberal church by comparison. If you know more about it, it's not. I mean my church is. When I was growing up, we would send money to Africa to the missionaries, pay for them to live there, but when the first black family moves into Whittier, our pastor goes ballistic about that. So there was that contradiction, and so for me it was a contradiction. And as I said earlier, as many of us are going through high school, we're beginning to see the contradictions and we talk about it among ourselves. The major theme of a Baptist church would be Jesus loves you and you have to accept Jesus as your personal savior in order to get to heaven, and that's the most important thing for you to do. All the rest is kind of back in line. In my church today, is, yes, God loves you, and because God loves you, you have a responsibility to love your neighbor as you love yourself. So you'll find many people in my community here that go to Bible study, they pray together. For me, I don't participate in that because to me, it feels like a throwback to what I was raised in.

So they are now, many of the people that--I do volunteer work here, and so we're chitchatting and we'll have lunches together. They know of my history, activism, they call it. "Yes, Lydia, our activist." So they'll ask me questions and I'll talk about the things that I've done. I mean, there's nothing to hide, but it's kind of like, "Hmm. How did she get here?" But they're very kind people, very friendly, but they're also a different mindset. It's hard to explain. The theology is so different. That's the best way to say it. I mean, we're all looking at the same God but with different definitions of how to get there.

ESPINO:

Well, but in getting back to the idea of the civil rights emerging in the fifties and becoming aware of Martin Luther King and the struggle for blacks to move into Whittier and that issue that you were exposed to, did you feel like you identified as a Mexican being discriminated against or did you feel more like that racism against the black person is wrong, and at that level or a level of, "Yeah, we go through the same thing, too, as Mexicans"? Can you recall how you--

LOPEZ:

Well, let me see. By the time he's assassinated, what year is it, '68, '64?

ESPINO:

Sixty-four.

01:10:5401:13:38

LOPEZ:

I'm working. Let me see. Where am I? Oh, it's so hard to remember all these things. I began to see--I'm more independent from my family and my neighbor, and I'm beginning to think. The assassination of John Kennedy had a profound effect on me, and I began to really raise some huge questions, and I go and hear all these speakers that are talking about what really happened, Mark Wayne and others, and to me it was very, very impressive. We've gone through the folk music thing. I'd go hear Pete Seager and all this stuff. I'm defining my own life.

I remember the day that he was shot, I was with a friend. We were in Los Angeles and we heard it on the radio. I thought he was doing important work, because it was no longer a Communist conspiracy or he was being manipulated by the Communists. That was an important thing to me. But I didn't make the connection with what he was doing with me. I remember feeling stunned when I heard it on the radio and then watching it. And then I was contrasting that, comparing that to the Kennedy funeral, and I said, well, this is a little folksier. It's different. Because in those days, we had seen the Kennedys as this kind of different level, different world. But the fact that he was killed raises some questions. I didn't put all my own answers to that till very recently when I've read some of the things that come from, well, Jim Lawson and others who have written about it, some things that come about the work of the FBI, I mean just all the things. So that was pretty awful. When Bobby is killed in '68, that was a huge shock, and John Luce and Father Wood were supposed to be down there. I mean, I was up all night, you know. It was just horrendous. I had not been involved in the Bobby Kennedy campaign like some other of our friends, but it was a shock, because I felt like, "Oh, my god. Here we go again. I mean, enough already," because there had been John Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Martin. I mean, it was just, "This is too much. This is too much."

But I didn't make a connection, my ethnic group with his ethnic group, although at the end, I'm beginning to see how important his work had been, and those influences come through, again, my own reading. One of my favorite, favorite authors was James Baldwin. I adored his writing and so influenced by him. There were others, but most especially James Baldwin. What a time that was.

ESPINO:

Well, we didn't get to talk about after high school and if while you were in high school, you were college-bound.

LOPEZ:

I went to Cal State L.A. for about two years.

ESPINO:

And that would be in--

LOPEZ:

About '60 to '62.

ESPINO:

Do you remember the ethnic makeup of the student population?

01:16:12

LOPEZ:

There was a sizeable amount of Mexican Americans there, although I didn't hang out with any, or many--any. I joined a sorority. I was, again, the only Mexican American in the sorority. I hope my brother brings the picture so you can see me at my presents. I had gloves up to here and a beautiful lace gown that my mother had sewn for me for our presents and the presentation bouquet. And then my parents, all of our parents come to the event, and I remember Dad and Mom coming, and they looked terrific. It was very different, but at the same time, very awkward, because most of these girls, although we were all going to Cal State, some of them lived in San Marino, some of them Alhambra. These areas were very posh.

So anyway, I didn't stay very long because I wasn't a very good student. So I went and worked in various jobs then throughout. I never go back to school. My parents never reprimand me for that, although again, contrasting my life to my brother's, which goes on through my entire life, when he went off to school, he met his wife there. He went to school for two years, got married. No, two years. We were in the middle of the Cold War, so he had the draft, so he went into the army. They went to Germany, they had a baby. He came back, went to work for the post office. While he's working at the post office at night, it took him literally ten years to finish college, but he did it.

ESPINO:

Wow. With his bachelor's degree?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. And then he goes and gets his master's, and then he gets his certificates for teaching, and he taught for thirty years. He just retired last year. And I didn't do that, and I was always seen in my family as the rebel.

ESPINO:

Would you say always, like since childhood?

LOPEZ:

No, not since childhood. That's overstating it.

01:18:08

ESPINO:

Or did you become rebellious in your high school years?

LOPEZ:

When I start asking questions at the end of high school that was frowned upon. As an example, there was a group of us in the youth group that had invited people from other faiths, a Mormon, a Roman Catholic, to come and talk to the youth group. Well, the Mormon was allowed in, but the Roman Catholic was not. We were told, "Tell that person they can't come into the church," and we were mortified. So we, as young people, didn't like it. We didn't like being told what to do. We thought that was very, very narrow. So asking those kinds of questions was not looked upon well. My brother always said of me, "Yeah, I had to go to school. I got married, had children. You were the one that got to travel. You got to do things." Kind of like, "You had fun." And I go, "Oh, didn't feel that way, but okay." Because he goes on and they have four children, one right after the other.

ESPINO:

Interesting that he would see that not as his choice, his own choice, to marry early, to start having children right away.

LOPEZ:

I remember being appalled that they were having so many children, because he was working so hard. Nights, he'd go off and work at the post office and then try to go to school. And his wife, I never (unclear). But it was his choice. Yeah, it was his choice. They bought a house in Pico Rivera, and then after that, they moved south to San Juan Capistrano, and that's where they raised the kids.

ESPINO:

Is she a religious person as well?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, very.

ESPINO:

And she always had been when they first met?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah.

01:20:48

ESPINO:

That's interesting.

LOPEZ:

She comes from Wisconsin. Her parents were very active in the Baptist Church there, and she and I have--to this day, we don't have a lot to talk about. I think I look down my nose at her. She doesn't say "Mexican." She says "Messican." She's a Mexican American herself. She says "Messican." And the kids never learned Spanish. She wanted them to be Americans, and I thought, oh, how off putting. But, you know, one never knows what goes on in a relationship

unless you're part of it, and they've been married now I guess fifty years or so, so it works. Something works.

ESPINO:

Well, when you look at some of the interviews of Chicanos from the Movement period or read some of the memoirs--I'm thinking of Jesus TreviÃ±o. Have you read his--

LOPEZ:

No, I want to.

ESPINO:

--Eyewitness? He talks about not liking himself, not liking being Mexican, feeling like if he was going to succeed in life, he was going to have to erase all of that from him. I'm wondering, like in your case where you grow up primarily with white kids and they're the rich people, what kind of psychological impact--

01:23:5801:25:40

LOPEZ:

See, I think that's where it goes into maybe some deeper analysis that I haven't thought through, because there's a huge difference. For me, I feel like I've been in a cloister in the church and protected, because the church people are so kind, so that racism--I mean, I didn't know the word then, but today, looking back, where was racism in all that? I mean, there were certain elements of classism and all of that. What was really going on? I'd have to get on the therapist's couch and figure that one out more deeply. Many years later, I go into therapy for an extended period of time and found that enormously helpful in getting--I was going to say get my sights or get my sense of you go in this direction. But that was hard work many, many years later.

I think there were some comparisons. Obviously, when Teresa Parker comes to my party in her

big black car and her swell outfit, and I have a very simple thing, I mean, sure, I think, "Oh, wow. Look what she's got." But, you know, I think it dissipates. I'm trying understand all that, but it doesn't come out till we're talking about it, because, I mean, I'm not sitting, going through all the elements of my life and my views about people. I do know that we were different, and my father would say to me, "Mija, learn two languages. It's important. Be worth much more as a person." And I would pooh-pooh that. I'd say, "Well, it's important to learn English." I mean, as a child, with Spanish, I remember one time my mother was very upset with me and she was scolding me in Spanish, and I said, "Mother, I don't understand what you're saying." So she scolded me in English. I mean, I could have just shut up.

A lot of the people that came to our home were people from the seminary, people from church, from Dad's church, as a young person, and these pastors would come and they would tell us the importance of speaking Spanish. My brother, as an example, when he wanted to have his bilingual certification, he ended up going to Mexico to learn Spanish, and his Spanish is better than mine.

ESPINO:

Because at some point, it dropped off in your home, the Spanish language.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, although not so much for my dad. Dad spoke mostly Spanish, but Mother spoke more English. But Dad knew enough English to get by.

ESPINO:

And he would speak Spanish and you would respond in English?

LOPEZ:

No, I'd respond in Spanish to him. Sometimes we would joke and play with English with each other. (Interruption)

ESPINO:

So I'll ask you one more thing, and then we can call it a day.

LOPEZ:

Okay.

ESPINO:

Looks like we covered most of the things that I wanted to mention. So your parents encouraged you to go to college?

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm.

01:27:50

ESPINO:

Did they encourage you to think about a profession, a career when you were in high school?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. I was on my way to nursing school, which, looking back, I did terribly in chemistry, and I had a lot of help, I mean classmates, and we'd study together. So it was the wrong career. I think what I was really meaning to do was do something where people were involved or helping people or doing something in that arena. So it was kind of an odd--my first scholarship came from the Nursing Association of Whittier and these nice women who gave me the scholarship upon graduating. So for me it was the wrong choice, but it took me some troublesome days to figure that one out.

ESPINO:

Interesting, because you're such a helpful, helping person. I can see you in the role of taking care of other people. But it was the coursework that was--

LOPEZ:

Yeah, the coursework and the scientific studies that were just off. As a high-schooler, I was a Candy Striper at Whittier Presbyterian Hospital, and I was an overachieving--I mean, I got all the awards, all that stuff, and so I was recognized for that kind of helping thing from some of the nurses and some of the people in the Whittier world, and that's, I think, in part, how that all comes about. So I think that, looking back in my career, I have ended up helping people, but not through medicine.

ESPINO:

So you said your parents weren't--well, you didn't say this specifically, but the implication that your parents weren't disappointed when you dropped out.

LOPEZ:

They never said that. Again, it's that--a lot of things that we don't talk about. I was never--let me see. Mother never said anything about school, about college. Neither did Dad. And Dad died in '71. Mother dies in '98.

01:30:42

ESPINO:

And you were living at home at that time?

LOPEZ:

No, I moved out of home about '64.

ESPINO:

You moved out of the house at '64, and that's when you started college? No.

LOPEZ:

No, at that point I was living with a roommate in Yorba Linda and working somewhere. I'd have to figure out where that was, because that was a long time ago.

ESPINO:

Yeah, wow. I wonder--it's too bad they're not here to ask, but I wonder what it felt like for them,

like because you said your parents had put a high value on education, and to imagine their daughter as a nurse, and then to understand that that was not going to happen.

LOPEZ:

I think the disappointment was never vocalized, but I bet you it was there, because on the one hand, Ben was soaring, although he was struggling, but he was getting there. I never completed that, that goal.

ESPINO:

It's pretty great of them not to--if they felt if, not to pass it down to you or make you feel bad or guilty. Were they always like that with you, your relationship? Was it generally positive and encouraging and supportive?

LOPEZ:

Let me see. I don't think so. I think that Dad had standards. I mean, I remember my skirt had to be a certain length. They had rules for me. They were more lenient with my brother. There were some expectations that I would tend to some of the things at the house while Mother was working or Dad was away.

01:33:14

ESPINO:

But you mentioned that you were looked at as the rebel. Did they make you feel bad about that?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. Well, by this time, my dad has died. We're at my brother's house and it's one of the holidays, and I was talking about the work that--Cesar Chavez and the farm workers and the pickets and all that sort of stuff. And my brother comes over and he said, "Hey, sis, don't talk about that stuff. It upsets Mom." So I went over to the corner and played with the kids. I don't understand all of that till many years later when I'm able to settle down and talk about it to Mother and understand how difficult it was for her when she was a youngster and had to go with the family up the migrant streams of California, and she did all the cooking, and she was ripped out of Garfield High School, and she lost some of her teenage time because of that. But I didn't understand that until later on we're talking about it. And as I've said to you, a happy day was when she was able to greet Cesar Chavez at the church, and then she, along with some of her friends, raised money for the farm workers and food and take food up there and all that sort of stuff. But my arrest, my activism, my picket lines, none of that was seen in a very positive way by the family, so I was the rebel. I tease with my nephews. I have one who is just a real right-winger, my youngest nephew. He was over here before the election and he was, of course, supporting Romney, and I said, "Oh, my darling." I said, "Whenever are you going to be on the right side of history?" Because we've talking through the years, obviously, and he's on one side, I'm on the other. He says, "Oh, there you go again."

01:35:51

ESPINO:

But it sounds like it's amicable.

LOPEZ:

Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

ESPINO:

To keep it that way is nice, because those values are--well, you were there in the beginning of those social justice issues and you witnessed so much. So next time we'll pick up there and we'll talk about some of the first demonstrations that you participated in and the issues. Okay, I'll stop it. (End of April 30, 2013 interview)

SESSION THREE (May 7, 2013)

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is May 7th (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California. I'd like to start today with--you mentioned last time that you left the church for about five years, and I was wondering--four, five six?

LOPEZ:

Eight.

00:00:24

ESPINO:

Eight years.

LOPEZ:

About eight years.

ESPINO:

I was wondering if you had a way to fill that. How did you fill that space, if you did fill it with anything?

LOPEZ:

I left the Baptist Church and would visit other churches. I remember visiting Hollywood Presbyterian church because they had a very active youth group--it's not youth high school, but college-age kids--and that was kind of interesting. So I visited there for a while, but it wasn't significant for me at that time. I mean, I dabbled, as they say--

ESPINO:

You were experimenting?

LOPEZ:

--but I didn't find anything that I found was satisfying.

ESPINO:

Did you do anything on your own independently, any kind of prayer studies?

00:02:06

LOPEZ:

I think there's always been prayers in my life. It's the first thing I do in the morning, quiet and prayer. I think that even in those days, I can't remember ever--I'm trying to think if I ever went to church with my family in those days. I don't think I did, no.

But for me, my life has been one huge thanksgiving. I wake up and I thank God. I thank God for everything I have. I thank God for my friends. I thank God for everything I have, that I don't

have to concern myself with anything. It's not just because things fall into place, but God has provided everything, and it's pretty terrific. My responsibility or my response to that is to continue to show compassion for all of God's creation, and that's been a huge lesson because I was raised in such a white world, and to go from that to a very, very diverse world and to learn to interact with people of different cultures and nationalities and colors, it's been an exploration. The priest at our church says--instead of saying, "I have faith in you," he says, "I have interfaith in you," because our world is that. We had two major Muslim leaders speak at our church on Sunday, and I can call them friends too. I love how all of that has come to be.

ESPINO:

Did you seek out social justice work while you were in this sort of hiatus from religious practice?

LOPEZ:

I'm trying to think. No, it wasn't something that was very much a part of my life in those years. I think the beginning of that was the assassination of Martin Luther King and kind of saying, "Oh, gosh," in April, and then Bobby in June. With Martin, that started me to think about what was happening, and I was putting it all together in my own way. So I started reading a lot of stuff. I'd go to the lectures, but didn't have anything to do with church and didn't have anything to do with social action. That came later.

00:05:29

ESPINO:

What kinds of things were you reading? Does any book stand out or any article, essay?

LOPEZ:

I would read Ramparts magazine. Because I was so flummoxed by the Kennedy assassination, I read a lot of Mark Lane's stuff. That was about it, that kind of stuff.

ESPINO:

What about like, say, The Feminine Mystique?

LOPEZ:

Read that, too, yeah.

ESPINO:

Or Frantz Fanon?

LOPEZ:

Read all of those, yes, thank you. Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan. The French woman--

ESPINO:

Simone de Beauvoir?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, and Frantz Fanon. I mean, these, Frantz especially, really later becomes almost a textbook in the Movement. Everybody had one, right? Everybody was reading it. The Women's Movement intrigued me, but I don't think I was an active participant in it. I mean, I don't know what the "it" is. But, I mean, I appreciated what they were doing, but I don't remember going to--no, I didn't. I never went to any march or protest around women's issues.

00:07:15

ESPINO:

In those early days, we're talking pre-1968. We're talking like '65?

LOPEZ:

We're talking about 1960 through '68, because I had left the Baptist Church in '60, and I was living with my family, my parents, until '64. So, life from '60 to '63, I didn't do much. I don't remember doing--I'd have to really think about it. I don't remember doing much of anything.

ESPINO:

And you weren't going to school either, or were you?

LOPEZ:

I had dabbled in some classes, but nothing significant.

ESPINO:

What made you move out of your parents' home?

LOPEZ:

One of my friends who was a pal for many years had come back to Los Angeles, and she needed a roommate. She was going to do some master's study, I think in library science, so she asked me to move in with her. She had a cute little apartment in Yorba Linda, so I moved out. By that time, I had my own car my parents had bought for me, and I put everything I owned in my car and I moved out there and lived there for a while. Now, I don't remember where my next house was, but I remember living there, and that was, I think, around '64, I think.

ESPINO:

How did your family react?

LOPEZ:

Oh, they didn't like it at all.

ESPINO:

What did they tell you, do you remember?

LOPEZ:

Oh, that I shouldn't do that. "No, no, no. You stay here until you get married. Only loose women do that kind of thing. No." Dad was very concerned about that, but I have a stubborn streak.

00:09:28

ESPINO:

How did you respond?

LOPEZ:

Well, I listened to him, but I didn't fight with him, I didn't argue with him, which is the way I am. I mean, if somebody is coming at me with stuff, it's like I take it in. I don't fight back. It's inside. I couldn't argue with my father. It wasn't something one did. But I just essentially said, "This is my life." But none of them were happy. Neither parent was happy. And by then--well, let me see. This is '64. Years earlier, my brother had already gone off and gotten married, and they had their own house and all that, so they were removed from the scene, as it were.

ESPINO:

Was that something that you worried about, your honor, how people would view you?

LOPEZ:

No, I didn't, because I never sought--I mean, there wasn't anybody to think about that. My parents, they had made their statements, but my family didn't know where I was living, meaning my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, they didn't know, so there was nobody to comment about it. There was nobody around to say--

ESPINO:

You kept it a secret--

LOPEZ:

No.

ESPINO:

--or you just weren't in touch with them?

00:12:12

LOPEZ:

Here's the interesting thing. I came back to Los Angeles for my divorce. We'd been living in Berkeley. Fred was going to Boalt. And I came to my grandmother and I told her we were getting a divorce, and I was staying with a friend of mine who had his huge house in Costa Mesa. I said, "Mother's not going to be happy."

She says, "Oh, don't worry. I'll have dinner for us. I'll invite her over." So she did. Mother comes, and of course, my baby is there and Mother's being a grandmother. I tell her, and Mother's just absolutely shocked, and she says, "Well, you can't tell anybody." I said, "What do you mean?" She says, "No, you tell the family that you've come back because the baby has asthma." And I said, "No, Mother. I'm not going to lie about my life. This is my life." She said, "No, no, no." I was the first divorce. She said, "No, you've got to do that." And she says, "And I didn't like that flacio (phonetic) anyway."

ESPINO:

Flacio. (Laughs)

LOPEZ:

He was very good to her. But I thought, how interesting that she wants to so easily lie about my life. So anyway, that was a conversation we had, but then, of course, that's years later.

ESPINO:

And that's not something that happened when you moved out? They didn't ask you to lie about it and tell--

LOPEZ:

No, no, but I bet you they never talked about it to other relatives, because Mom and Dad didn't have a lot of the relatives over to their house. We'd go over to Grandma's house for the family parties. That's where our family as a whole would socialize. So nobody knew that I wasn't there.

00:13:53

ESPINO:

And it didn't come up? Don't ask, don't tell. (Laughter)

LOPEZ:

Yeah, early on.

ESPINO:

Oh, gee, that must have been difficult. But they didn't stop talking--I mean, it didn't get ugly, I guess. That's what I'm looking for.

LOPEZ:

I'd go visit them. Obviously, I'd see them not often-often, but we stayed in touch, yeah.

ESPINO:

And then you mentioned also last time that you were working--I believe it was the War on Poverty program. You said it was the Welfare--

LOPEZ:

In 19--okay, let me think. Around 1976 or 1975, around then, I started working with some of the OEO programs, whenever that came up. I think it was around that time. I worked for what was GLACA, the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Agency. I worked there.

ESPINO:

Okay, but it was something before that, because you said you were working--

LOPEZ:

Oh, I worked with the East L.A. Welfare Planning Council--

ESPINO:

Yes, Welfare Planning Council.

LOPEZ:

--and that was earlier, because that was like in '68, '67.

ESPINO:

Was that a War on Poverty agency?

LOPEZ:

I think it was funded through the county. I don't remember. But it was to work in the housing projects, and that's what I did. I worked in the housing projects, mostly in Estrada Courts. Gosh, I haven't thought of this one in ages. I'll have to remember where is Estrada Courts. It's over there by Boyle, isn't it, in Soto?

00:16:02

ESPINO:

Is that the one near City Terrace?

LOPEZ:

City Terrace, that's Ramona Gardens. But I worked there, and that's where my supervisor is the one that invited me to that first picket.

ESPINO:

Well, what was your role in the Welfare Planning Council? You said you worked in the projects, but doing what?

LOPEZ:

I did some research and a little bit of organizing, and at this time, I had--let me see. We're talking about '68, so it's like early '68. When did I move back? I moved to Whittier about the same--I was living in an apartment in Whittier and I was invited to a party, and that's where I met this fellow who later becomes my supervisor. And we were the only two Mexican Americans in the party. It was fascinating, all these professors and musicians. It was interesting, and social worker types. It was kind of like he was over there, I was over here, and we gravitated to--and it led to conversations and, "What are you doing? And would you like to come and work--?" It was very fast. And then I went to work for him. Now I don't know when I moved from there. I should have a ledger with all my addresses somewhere. I don't.

00:18:08

ESPINO:

What was the goal of the Welfare Planning Council?

LOPEZ:

It was doing research and it was keeping, I think, residents happy. Looking back, it was kind of stopgap work. Sixty-eight, a few years later, I go to Oakland for a conference on health, and Saul Alinsky is one of the speakers. I'm sitting at the table with Dolores Huerta, and he goes up to

speak. And, of course, he's had a significant role in the development of CSO and development of the farm workers. He gets up to speak, and at that time, the Black Panthers had a hold on Oakland. And when he got up to the stage, they started, from all over, standing up, "You tired old Jew. Get outta here. You don't know what to do. You can't come and tell us what to do. We run this city, not you." And typical Alinsky, he says, "Hey, you don't want me to speak? I won't speak." Dolores said, "Lydia, if he walks, we walk." I said, "Okay, Dolores." (Laughs) So he said, "Hey, I had my airplane ticket here. You paid my consultant fee." "Yeah, get outta here," blah, blah. And so he did. He left. We went from there--we had the whole day. We went from there to the bar, and I sat in the bar with two of these major organizers, and I remember complaining to Alinsky, saying, "Well, I'm not getting very far in the work that I'm doing." And he was telling me maybe I should listen to the people, maybe I shouldn't be so fancy, and, you know, careful in the words you use. And I remember all day long, he drank his scotch. Dolores wasn't drinking in those years and I wasn't drinking. And I found that enormously helpful, but I was complaining to him that I wasn't getting very far with my work.

00:20:47

ESPINO:

Your work with the Welfare Planning Council?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, that's who I was with.

ESPINO:

Well, did you have--I mean, it just seems to me like a big jump from your experience in Whittier and high school. I mean, you did have some politics with the rejection of the other--was it a Jewish--or was it a priest, a Catholic priest, who was not allowed to speak?

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

But how did you get involved in organizing? How was your political consciousness developing?

LOPEZ:

It was absolutely primary. I mean, it was just very basic. It was at that party that we got to talking and I was invited to come and work, and I felt that, in part, that was the beginning of this next phase of my life, because my supervisor then uses our working relationship to begin my education, and he and his wife became really good pals of mine. It was stepping in for the first time, into all of that.

ESPINO:

And they were highly political then.

LOPEZ:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

ESPINO:

Do you remember their names?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, Sy Villa, his name. They divorced. He's married somebody else.

00:22:28

ESPINO:

Is he still alive?

LOPEZ:

He lives in Santa Barbara, yeah.

ESPINO:

His name has come up in other--I can't recall exactly who mentioned him, but his name has come up before in other interviews. Was he heavily involved in different activities, like pre-walkout type of things?

LOPEZ:

I don't know if he was. The things that I know about him that I experienced, there was something called the Mexican American Unity Council, and Esteban Torres was involved in the formation of it with others.

ESPINO:

Congress of Mexican American Unity?

LOPEZ:

Yes, I guess that one. I remember a big event at one of the local high schools, and there was a lot of disagreement because of the varieties of people on the political spectrum, the nationalists, you name it. And Sy got up on the stage and burned the American flag, and it was enormously controversial. I mean, he had very, very strong opinions. He was an athlete at Cal State L.A. He ran track. I think it was East L.A. But he was renowned for that, his athletic ability. I've heard that he's living in the Santa Barbara area somewhere.

ESPINO:

And he took it upon himself to politicize you?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, but it wasn't like school. I remember going to that picket line, and then following that, going to the EICC meetings. Some of those, I went on my own. Initial one, I think I went with them. And then it just took off from there.

00:24:51

ESPINO:

How would you describe his role and his politics, Sy Villa's?

LOPEZ:

Sy's? Way left. And he was a gentle soul. He wasn't noisy. So to have him do what he did at the Congress was a really big deal. But he was a man of, in his own way, very strong opinions. You could engage him in an argument, you know, a discussion, and if you didn't get it, it's your fault, nobody else's. I mean, it's kind of like, "Okay."

ESPINO:

What did you learn from him? "Far left," what does that mean? How would you define that?

LOPEZ:

His politics were way left, and I don't know if I gave it much more thought than that, that he had very strong opinions.

ESPINO:

Well, would you say revolutionary? He wanted to overthrow the government? I mean, those ideas were--that's why I mentioned Frantz Fanon. There was the idea of the internal colony, self-determination.

00:27:26

LOPEZ:

I think he was there with all of that. I think that if I had to give it a--I mean, during the Movement, there were the people that carried The Little Red Book and wore the little buttons; there were the nationalists; there were the revolutionary people. I mean, there were so many places on the political spectrum, it was dizzying sometimes to keep up with all of that, because we'd get into meetings and there would be a discussion about something, and to get agreement was always significant.

As an example, Vahac Mardirosian, Baptist minister, always seen with a little bit of "Hmm. He's one of those. He's a preacher. He's a Protestant." But he would give as good as he got. I mean, he knew how to fight an argument. He's a good preacher. In some of those meetings, some of the meetings where there was not agreement, that you'd say, "Oh, there he goes again. He's from over there. He's from that particular line of thinking." So that's the way it was. I mean, I think there are some of those--I mean, there are the realists, the idealists, the nationalists, the revolutionary people. I was so surprised to see the Brown Berets at Sal Castro's rosary, and one of the priests said, "Lydia, what did the Brown Berets do?" I said, "I don't know, I don't know." I said, "I don't know what they do today." But they came out in their uniform, and I think it was lovely. I mean, it shows some respect to Sal, but it's also a bit of a throwback. But I don't know what they do.

ESPINO:

That's a whole fascinating question right there because--this is just a little aside, a little digression, but someone is making a movie about the Brown Berets. But does someone own that? Does David Sanchez own the symbolism? Can anybody just--you know that idea of intellectual property or something that he created, and the symbol and the look and everything was--but does he own it? Can someone else use it? I think that's an interesting, fascinating question because--

LOPEZ:

And David has gone through--I mean, David today is so different from David then. I mean, we just say he's taken too many drugs. I mean, he's just in such a different place, and he's always running for--not always. He's running for political office so often. The person that really was the worker at the Brown Beret's office was Gloria Arellanes. And the boys had their uniform.

00:30:59

ESPINO:

But the Brown Berets that showed up at the church for Sal Castro's--they weren't with David Sanchez, or were they with--

LOPEZ:

I didn't see David there. I don't know if David ever appeared, because we left early. I haven't seen David wearing a Brown Beret outfit in years. I've had calls of people that want to get ahold of my ex-husband because they're doing a book or doing something about the Brown Berets, and I pass that information on, and I always get back, "No, thank you. No, thank you." So be it. I mean, it really was patterned after the Black Panthers. It was a good symbol. I mean, it was brown. It was this kind of paramilitary discipline that held them steadfast for a while, but like Alinsky said, many of these organizations don't have a shelf life for very long. They just don't.

ESPINO:

Where did you fall in that spectrum that you were talking about of the highly political, The Red Book carriers, the Brown Berets, the more mainstream? Maybe like Vahac would be kind of a mainstream political thinker.

00:33:1900:35:40

LOPEZ:

Well, I had a lot of curiosity about Vahac and Horacio QuiÃ±ones because they were Baptist ministers and I was very curious about them. But what we were getting out of, by that time, church over at Epiphany was a gospel, a kind of preaching that says we're supposed to be out there serving, not so much helping, but serving. So that was my message. That was here and in my heart.

I remember--I think it was '69, the priest at our church, Father Luce, said, "We have this absolutely racist campaign for mayor. I want you all to go over and work for the Bradley campaign on Soto and Whittier," the office. And so we went, and that was important, because, you know, to show that we were supporting Bradley countered all that racism, we thought. Many years later when he retires and there's a big retirement party at a major hotel downtown, he announces that he's going to spend the rest of his life fighting racism, and then he comes over and we have a little chat. I said, "You know, Mr. Mayor, you'll always be my mayor." I said, "I went to work for your first campaign in '69 because we were fighting racism, and here we are so many years later still fighting it." And he had tears in his eyes. I had tears in my eyes. It was a very poignant moment. But that was the kind of thing we were instructed to do. The church was open to the farm workers, and they would come in and do their Get Out the Vote campaigns.

There was a lot of--obviously, it's redundant, but a lot of classism in my church, my chosen church, because I had thought, "This is a really terrific place," thinking that all Episcopal churches were this way, not realizing what a unique place this was, and what a unique place it was for such a short period of history. As we moved around in the church, there was always a battle to fight, people that needed to get educated, people that didn't know anything about our people.

I remember the woman who invited Cesar Chavez to our convention, oh, that was so controversial, but bless her heart, she invited him and he came. One of the priests at Epiphany, who later became a bishop, Oliver Garver, he went to every single farm worker convention. I mean, he was just so strong in support of Chavez, and he worked for Robert Rusack, who was then the bishop. The bishop before Robert was Eric Bloy, and he was an early supporter of Cesar Chavez, so much so that he had a portable altar built that could be put on trucks so as they went around, they could do the Eucharist out in the fields, and it is now at one of the churches in Orange County. I someday want it to come to Epiphany, but that's a dream of mine, but maybe someday. So there was this history in my church of doing some of those good things, but it was often referred to as "God's frozen chosen" and the "Republican Party at prayer" and all that kind of stuff. Epiphany was the second church in the diocese that did service in Spanish. Now there are like thirty.

ESPINO:

More common.

LOPEZ:

A lot. So it's come a long ways.

ESPINO:

Yeah. It sounds like--and correct me if I'm wrong--it sounds like your politics, like what I was trying to ask before, was closely associated with your spirituality.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, I think so.

00:37:55

ESPINO:

So you didn't have necessarily a political ideology, but like a religious political ideology.

LOPEZ:

I think it was because of my faith. And at this point, I'm reading Gustavo GutiÃ©rrez and Freire and some of the writers from Latin America and really being influenced by that and getting a better definition, I thought, of what the gospel should be. I went through it all. My first registration was as a Republican. Then I registered as a Democrat. And then I registered as a Peace and Freedom during that time. And then I registered La Raza Unida. Then I re-registered as a Democrat. I said, "Well, La Raza Unida needs to have a chance, just like I think that the Peace and Freedom should have a chance. If they need my name for a while, they can have it." That didn't go very far, and Raza Unida, the same thing. And I go, "Okay. Settle down."

ESPINO:

But I'm still curious about what issues were important to you, because you said that your first demonstration was at the walkouts, and yet your education seems to have been very different from the kids who went to Garfield and Roosevelt.

LOPEZ:

I was influenced by Sy and curious and embarrassed. I was kind of like I was wanting to hide behind the picket. So I was curious, and then it just grows because we certainly hear a lot about that at the church later on, because at that point, I had not been a part of Epiphany, but it's like it's in the air. I mean, it's everything we do as a community, our community. And looking back, it was a small group, a ragtag group of leaders, of people, and it was like it was us against the world, you know. I mean, we had such a sense of, I thought, a sense of purpose, determination, we're all in this together, and everybody else was somehow wrong.

00:41:18

ESPINO:

Who are you talking about? Are you talking about at Epiphany?

LOPEZ:

No, at that point I'm talking about the people around La Raza, the community, not just Epiphany, but also Epiphany. And some of the people around me were farther to the left than I was. Oscar Acosta comes to mind. He was a character. Little John and some of the people from the--they weren't called La Junta, were they?

ESPINO:

LUCHA?

LOPEZ:

LUCHA? No. La Junta. Because then there was LUCHA, and that was Joel Flores and those people. And looking at all of them, I thought, "I'm not part of that group because they're a bunch of ex-cons. I'm not a part of that because I don't like all that revolutionary stuff."

ESPINO:

Well, what were your issues? Okay, so the Movement is exploding, '68, the student walkouts. It's dramatic.

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

00:42:47

ESPINO:

Did you get involved in that directly, in actually organizing the students and that kind of thing?

LOPEZ:

Well, what I did was in 1969, there was a sit-in at the Board of Education, and I sat in for that whole time. Then when we heard that the police were coming, we needed to have somebody drive the students back to UCLA because we didn't want them to lose their scholarships, because they'd get arrested. So I'm driving the kids back in my little VW Bug, the radio was on, and we're hearing about the arrests going on, and twenty-two people arrested, and two of them are priests from my church and some laypeople from my church, and I go--you know. But it was also scary because you didn't know what was going to happen, but it was important to be there. And I remember Father Luce was invited to come in the middle days of the sit-in to do Eucharist, and that was really kind of cool.

ESPINO:

Raul Ruiz was there.

LOPEZ:

Who?

ESPINO:

Raul Ruiz, Joe Rosso (phonetic).

LOPEZ:

Yeah, Raul. Jesus TreviÃ±o.

ESPINO:

He was also the--he stayed in the sit-in?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. He and I would write songs together about the sit-in and about the members of the Board of Education. I think he's just a very, very special person.

ESPINO:

Do you remember any lyrics from those songs?

00:45:38

LOPEZ:

No. I saw him and I asked him--I don't remember his answer, but it sure was--no, no, he had some of this on film, he said. Anyway, somewhere we can go back and pick this up. But I thought he was awfully talented. Risco was there, a lot of people that are no longer around. I remember how heated those meetings were. Oh, my.

ESPINO:

Yeah, let's get to that, but before, I want to share with you a list of people who were in the EEIC. Maybe something will jar your memory. But I'd like to get to the meetings and then the decision to leave when you realized that you were going to be arrested. I heard that was a controversial meeting.

LOPEZ:

When I was arrested over at CatÃ³licos?

ESPINO:

No, at the walkout. And I thought there was thirty-four, thirty-five that were arrested.

LOPEZ:

I thought it was twenty-two, but I don't remember.

ESPINO:

Like, for example, Vahac was not in favor of being arrested, from what I understand.

LOPEZ:

I think that's right.

ESPINO:

There was a split. There was some sort of political split.

LOPEZ:

There's always a political split. (Interruption)

ESPINO:

I'm going to pause it. (Recorder turned off)

ESPINO:

Okay, here we go.

LOPEZ:

Pat. Phil.

00:46:45

ESPINO:

Okay, we're back.

LOPEZ:

His name isn't in here. He wasn't arrested, but he was in those meetings. Richard Alatorre was in those meetings at the Board of Education, not the sit-in, but some of the meetings with the EICC. I used to think, "Oh, isn't he gorgeous. He's dressed so well. Isn't he cute."

ESPINO:

Was he wearing suits on a regular basis in those days?

00:48:35

LOPEZ:

Oh, yeah. He always looked so fancy. Much later, many, many years later, we go up to Sacramento for a meeting, and this is when I was involved with UNO. We had a meeting with

Richard and Willie Brown, Richard Katz, and one other person. I've forgotten who. And I'm speaking about some work that we want to do and we're inviting Willie Brown to come to Los Angeles, and he said, "Well, why should I come to Los Angeles? You're not my constituents. Why should I come?" He says, "Well, I don't have any need to go there." So I said, "Well, maybe I shouldn't be talking to you," I said. So I start talking to Richard, and Richard gets very uncomfortable because it's the boss here, and Richard Katz. They're very uncomfortable. (Laughs) And so because I'm ignoring Willie, he gets involved in the conversation again. He does eventually come down, but it was so funny, because he was not going to be ignored, and he was also going to be feisty, as he always was.

But when we got into the room, Father Olivares used to wear very, very, very nice suits also, and Willie went up to him and says, "Father, nice. Nice threads." And then he says, "Mr. Speaker, nice threads." Then he goes, "Richard, nice threads." These were all little, you know, cocks on the walk. They were just so typical. Okay. Eva. I remember Eva. Oh, gosh. Ben and Kay. Do they still live up in Mt. Washington?

ESPINO:

Is that where they--

LOPEZ:

Ben and Kay Gruele.

ESPINO:

No, I think Vickie Castro said she stayed in touch with Kay, and then she moved, but I can't remember where she moved to.

LOPEZ:

Frank Cruz was there too?

ESPINO:

That's what the list says. I don't know. Maybe they're the people who showed up to the very, very first meeting.

LOPEZ:

First meeting, that could be, because not all of these people were arrested.

ESPINO:

No.

LOPEZ:

Rachel Galan. Henry Gutierrez, of course.

ESPINO:

Do you remember how you passed the time while you were in the sit-in? Were you planning your next move--

LOPEZ:

No.

00:50:07

ESPINO:

--or just kind of hanging out?

LOPEZ:

There were some meetings. In the night, we slept a lot. Somehow, the food--I don't know what happened about the food, but there was food. People sat, some people read, some people sang. I mean, it was just different--all kinds of things. I don't know Tom and Sara McPherson. Eva Romero (phonetic) has died. Her son went to work with the MASH (phonetic) program, and he's very, very sick. He's on his last days.

ESPINO:

Oh, no.

LOPEZ:

Yeah. But, no, I remember a lot of these names.

ESPINO:

Can you talk to me about any of the meetings that you remember?

LOPEZ:

I remember the meetings were at the Euclid Center.

ESPINO:

For the EICC before the sit-in?

LOPEZ:

Oh, before the sit-in.

ESPINO:

Or during the sit-in?

LOPEZ:

No, during the sit-in, we met at the Board of Education.

ESPINO:

Can you remember any of those meetings?

LOPEZ:

Vaguely. They had to do with--there was a time, and I don't know when, but the doors were locked--I mean chained.

00:52:02

ESPINO:

From the outside so you couldn't get out?

LOPEZ:

No, we were able to get out, because we'd go home, take a shower, and come back, change our clothes. But there were meetings about strategy, and a lot of the meetings were heated because there was enormous pressure to do something. But detail, I'm not really helpful.

ESPINO:

What about the decision to leave versus stay when the police were--I don't know, they were insisting that you had to leave or you would be arrested?

LOPEZ:

Somehow the word had gotten back to the group that it was over, the police were going to come, and I think that Vahac had been negotiating with the authorities, so I remember that we were all given orders about the students, the kids from the universities, and I remember driving them back, driving some of them back, because there were a lot of them. But I remember those meetings as being very heated, and I think there came a time when there was a lot of questions about Vahac's role, that perhaps he had--some people felt he had sold us out, that he was calling an end to this. So, I mean, there were just--again, it was just so many different opinions.

ESPINO:

Well, how did you feel about him? What was your impression of him?

00:55:42

LOPEZ:

How did I feel about him? Sometimes I'd get very impatient with him. I'd say, "Oh, my gosh. Does he ever stop talking?" Then I'd say, "Oh, yes, he's a Baptist minister." And sometimes I was very much in line with what he was saying. I mean, he always had incredible passion for the kids and for their education and concerns about the administration, and so you couldn't wrong him for that. I mean, there was Vahac; there was Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones; there was Sal. I mean, you're talking about people with huge egos, just a lot, a lot.

ESPINO:

Were they all vying for leadership, for a leadership role?

LOPEZ:

I don't know that. I don't know. I don't know. They didn't all pay attention to Vahac. Some of the

kids felt that their leader was Sal. There were some people there that--I mean, Alicia Escalante was there for a while. There were people of very, very, very strong opinions, and off they go to jail.

ESPINO:

Men and women.

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

Do you want to stop it here?

LOPEZ:

What time is it?

ESPINO:

It's been almost an hour. It's probably two-thirty, two-fifteen.

LOPEZ:

We could do that, because I have all these people--

ESPINO:

You're getting a little tired.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, I have all these people coming over.

ESPINO:

Okay, I'm going to stop it. (End of May 7, 2013 interview)

SESSION FOUR (May 14, 2013)

00:00:33

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today's May 14th (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California. I'd like to start with where we left off last time. We were talking about the sit-in and you described your first protest, and that was regarding the East L.A. Thirteen. I'm wondering if you could talk to me about when you first became familiar with the term "Chicano" and when you adopted it for yourself.

00:02:27

LOPEZ:

I think it was about that time. As I began to learn what was happening in the community, what had happened with the Chicano Thirteen, the walkouts, I felt very proud of the people that had done the things they had done in terms of trying to seek some justice. Didn't understand it all. At one point, I felt that the Brown Berets were a kind of a mimic of the Black Panthers, and didn't really know what they did, except that Gloria Arellanes goes from that work to developing her work in health, and I go, "Well, good for her. She's done something." And then all the other--the boys, they didn't stay in kind of common social justice work. They went off to work with the county or Xerox or whatever they did. But I began to meet people, and I go, "Boy, this person really has a lot of courage, a strong sense of self." And I just started reading all the typical books, of course Carey McWilliams, Solitude, Octavio Paz, really moved by that those books.

So I started attending a lot of the meetings and was just wrapped up into that, to the point that I could hardly talk about it to anybody outside of that circle. I couldn't talk to my parents. My parents would get very upset with me. Certainly couldn't talk to my brother about it. I mean, my family just didn't--I had gone so far to an extreme that my brother once said, "Hey, sis, when you come, don't talk about that stuff. It upsets Mother." And I think I've mentioned what upset her was my talking about Cesar Chavez, the farm workers, the organizing, and for Mother, that was not a romantic notion like it was for me. She had been there. She did the hard work, she had the red knuckles from washing those jeans by hand and cooking for the boys while the family was out picking. So for her, it wasn't some fanciful notion of we're going to have peace and we're going to have justice in the fields, and we're going to have peace and economic prosperity for our people, finally. So it took me a long time, yeah, a long time to find a way to talk to her about that, and that was kind of once I found almost a middle ground, but somehow I don't know what clicked in my head, but I was able to start talking to her about it, to the point that she raises money for Cesar Chavez, takes her friends up there, they raise food. And then she comes to Epiphany one time when he is there, and I have this wonderful picture of the two of them. It is a treasure. And as I may have told you, I made copies of that picture for all of her grandchildren and for her son so that they see that connection and great pride that the two of them met. But Mother was always, for me, in those times, a harsh critic. Dad never said anything that was very--

00:05:13

ESPINO:

A harsh critic of what? Of the Chicano Movement?

LOPEZ:

Of what I was doing. The only thing Dad ever said was when I got arrested with the CatÃ³licos, he said, "Mijita, that's not even your church." And he was right. He was right. So that's the only criticism that I ever heard come back to me from him.

ESPINO:

Were you turning into a nationalist? Is that what was happening, or was it more about social justice, equality for all?

00:07:19

LOPEZ:

To me, it was a combination. I was very, very proud of what our people were doing. I had met them all. We went up to Denver with Corky. We had been to New Mexico and met Reis when he came here. I mean, I met a lot of our heroes. So I was proud of what they were doing. I met Gutierrez. So I appreciated the fact that we were from the same raza, but, to me, what was happening at the same time was this teaching of social justice that was very much a part of what was happening in churches at that time, because in the sixties, Gustavo Gutierrez writes his book on the Theology of Liberation. There are other major writers from Latin America that write. And, of course, we've gone through Vatican II, so that there's this overlay that God has a special place for the poor, this preferential option for the poor, as they called it, and so that was a kind of preaching we were getting in our church.

We went to Cuernavaca with Ivan Illich and some of those seminars there, and met some dynamite women from Latin America who were doing incredible things, given how different their lives were than ours. I remember they were really curious about these Chicanas, and one of them was Alicia. They wanted to know about "Chicana." That was a kind of a--, "Why would you call yourself that?" These women, some of them professionals, some of them attorneys, some of them just organizers, all kinds. They were real curious about us, because we lived right here, kind of, like you say, the heart of the beast. To me, it was pride and being comfortable in my skin, probably in a major way for the first time, I mean really, feeling as a child that there was an acceptance, but the overlay there was this Christian faith, this Baptist Church, that we love everybody, but, nevertheless, I was different. And being comfortable in my own skin and then finding my way in that, finding that I had a leadership role in my church where I could there interpret and teach--now we're talking about the Episcopal Church--the place for social justice for my people in that church and that setting, and so that really became my way of life, that my work-work and my church work, community work all was a similar theme. It was all around justice. It was all around being of service.

00:10:22

ESPINO:

Were you becoming more in touch with yourself as a Chicana, and then you got involved in the Episcopal Church, or did the Episcopal Church role start first?

00:13:18

LOPEZ:

I was on that picket line first, and that's where I met those priests. I went to the Church of the Epiphany, and it was just like a huge revelation. I mean, I wept. I felt that I had come home, because I needed a place, as a Christian, I needed a place that accepted me as a Chicana and I needed a church. I loved the music. They were mariachis. I loved the music. It was kind of the stuff we would hear at a party, not a church. I mean, it all kind of came home to me in such a wonderful way. It was delicious, it was wonderful, and I wept, and I go, "Oh, I've come home." And I thought, "Oh, this is a wonderful place," not realizing what a unique place it was, what a short bit of history that that church was to play, but what a significant role it had in the Movement and the development of the Movement, and I said, "Well, if this is the Episcopal Church, I'm home." There was not another Episcopal church like it. It was so unique, and I'm very thankful for that. It took me a long time, it took me years--what we call is the exercise, when to kneel, when to cross yourself, when to sit down, when to do all that, when to bow, all the gymnastics, it took me a while to learn that. Robin Williams, the comedian, who's an Episcopalian, he makes jokes that this is a great place to go to church because you get your exercise as you work on your guilt. It's a church without guilt and all this. Anyway, he has a whole series of twelve reasons to be an Episcopalian, and one of them was the exercise. And it took me the longest time to learn that. But through my time in the church, I'm still there, but I have done probably every job there is to do, from helping clean out the toilets, wash dishes, do the linens for the Altar Guild, prepare the altar, print up the church bulletin. It seemed like whenever there needed to be something, you just did it.

There was--I would call it a ministry, but it was a way of raising money for Epiphany back in those days where the women would make tamales, enchiladas, and then we'd go to another Episcopal church that had invited us to go there, and our kids, our Ballet Folklorico, would dance, and we would take a mariachi and we would serve this wonderful food, and we would raise money for the church. That was very popular back in those days. And it was also because there were some wonderful-- (Interruption)

ESPINO:

Should I pause it?

LOPEZ:

Yeah. (Recorder turned off)

00:15:11

LOPEZ:

As an example, the Salas brothers, their mother was a great cook, and her tamales were exemplary. And Rudy, the father, who was on the--the board of the church is called a Vestry, and he was a great leader and he was enormously helpful. And there were others. You would see them at church and you would see them at the meetings, and you see a lot of those people at the demonstrations, along with the priests. There were three or four people when the sit-in ended at the Board of Education that were arrested from Epiphany. (Laughs) One of the priests said, "Well, I guess I have to go. I mean, you've got to be with the people."

It was great fun, because one of the priests went to law school. He went to Stanford. He was in the same class as Rehnquist, although they had nothing in common. He was our lucky person, because when we were in jail, he could come see us. (Laughs) He could get in because either he comes as a priest or he comes as the attorney. He had his bar card. So we always felt like we were well cared for.

ESPINO:

What was his name?

LOPEZ:

Roger Wood.

ESPINO:

So Wood was the--

LOPEZ:

Father Wood, yeah.

ESPINO:

--attorney and the--

00:17:46

LOPEZ:

He'll be ninety this year. But happy memories. He was a very tenacious--you could almost say stubborn, but I won't, but a very strong supporter of Cesar Chavez, went to all the--oh, my gosh. Here's another boycott. We're going to another Safeway store. He'd bring his dog along. (Laughs) Back and forth, back and forth. I remember, "Oh, not another one." It's kind of like, "Oh, here we go." But just that support of that work and vision. He didn't come that way. When he came to Epiphany in about 1965, I think, he came in a little convertible, and he looked like he'd just stepped out of some magazine that talked about Southern California and sunshine. And he learned, because he was under the tutelage of Father Luce and Father Garver. Father Garver had been a very early supporter of Cesar Chavez, very early, and went to every single convention that the farm workers had. There are movies about the farm workers that I have seen, and there he is. I can point him out because I recognize him.

ESPINO:

How early would that be, would you know? Was it in the fifties, that early?

LOPEZ:

No. It was probably--let me see. I don't know if I really know. Sixty-five, '60.

ESPINO:

Because Cesar Chavez was with the CSO in the fifties.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, but he started--

ESPINO:

And then he leaves.

LOPEZ:

--the work with the farm workers in '65. So I think it was probably around then.

ESPINO:

It had to be in the sixties, then.

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

And what's interesting about Roger Wood is that I interviewed Ruth--

LOPEZ:

Robinson?

ESPINO:

Robinson Rivera. She uses "Rivera" now as her married name--

LOPEZ:

Yeah, in San Diego.

00:18:43

ESPINO:

--although she's divorced. And she was at Stanford around that same time, and that's where she got politicized about the farm workers.

LOPEZ:

And then we had another clergy couple that came.

ESPINO:

From Stanford?

LOPEZ:

Will Waters. He went to Stanford, his wife went to Stanford undergraduate and graduate, and then they went and worked with the farm workers. And then, of course, Ruth was with the farm workers for a while. So, I mean, there's so many interconnections. It must have been something in the water. Who knows?

ESPINO:

Well, you could go to Epiphany and you could get politicized. They probably had a community at Stanford of politicized people who were educating--well, the climate of the time, people were--

LOPEZ:

Yeah, it was beginning. Roger tells the story of going to--when they had the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation, his law school class, Rehnquist invited them to the Supreme Court. He says, "I have nothing in common with that person, but I want to see the Supreme--." And sure enough, it was otherworldly, it was very, very posh, as they say, and he hung out with his crowd. But his father couldn't understand why after he had invested in this wonderful education for his son, he wanted to go to seminary and be a priest, and it took him a little while to get over that, but he did, obviously.

ESPINO:

Did he ever tell you why?

LOPEZ:

Why he--

00:20:21

ESPINO:

What drove him to the church or what called him.

LOPEZ:

He did, but I can't remember. I remember having that conversation with him. I'll have to explore that with him again, because there are bits and pieces of things that I'm remembering that I want to go back and rework.

ESPINO:

For me, it's a fascinating question, what draws someone to--well, in the Episcopal Church, you don't have to be celibate.

LOPEZ:

That's right. But you can be if you want.

ESPINO:

You can choose that life if you want to. But in the Catholic Church, there's some wonderful, wonderful priests of the philosophy of liberation theology, and I wonder what drove them, what led them, or what drew them to that kind of life.

00:22:34

LOPEZ:

To me, part of it is clearly reading the gospel, reading what Christ says, and going from those lessons about how we are to live with one another and care for one another. But it then depends on how you interpret that, whether you're going to be very high and mighty and help them or whether you're going to be with them and serve them. So it's a quite huge distinction. I remember my lessons with John and Roger, and even Ollie, although I wasn't as close to him, was get out there and do something, and so he sent us to work on the first Bradley campaign. Roger had us with all those boycotts in front of Safeway. Oh, gosh. I mean, it seemed like there was certainly plenty to do, but at the same time, we're meeting the most interesting people because people were hanging out at Epiphany and so much was happening out of that place.

I maintain if it hadn't been for the fact that John and Ollie, and a little bit Roger, came from family of means and were able to--and knew people and were able to get money and knew the Who's Who of the church, as an example, and what boards were giving out funds for community work, if it hadn't been for those connections--I mean, I think Rosalio was employed by the

church at one time, Gil Cano was employed by the church. Of course, we know La Raza newspaper started in the basement. The Brown Berets would meet there. I mean, it seemed like there was always something going on and it was a place of a lot of activity, but it felt like it was with a purpose. Across the street, there was a big old duplex that was the Busca School, the barrio something. Anyway, Ernie Gutierrez and Olga worked there. Ernie later becomes mayor of El Monte. The girls that worked there were these gorgeous Anglo girls that came in to teach. (Laughs) And they would have dances to raise money, and they'd go knocking on doors. I remember my bishop saying one time that this young beautiful woman came to his door inviting him to a dance, and he said, "Sure." So he went, and that was his acquaintance with Epiphany when he was still a young man. I think he was at that point still a Roman Catholic, and he said, "Well, I wasn't going to turn down a pretty girl's invitation," that kind of thing. So that was like a little preschool cultural center for children, and it was right across the street from the church. So there was lots of stuff happening, lots of stuff.

00:25:27

ESPINO:

Well, that's interesting, because you have the nationalism exploding at that time, where people are, like you say, feeling good about themselves and their community and their people, but then you have this church that is so supportive of the Mexican American community run primarily by Anglos. Was that a conflicting issue for people or was it something that people ignored?

00:27:38

LOPEZ:

I think it wasn't a concern, not really, because there were times when you felt like they were more Chicano than I was. They were very much there in the struggle. The heartache for me is that there has never been a homegrown--there's never been a Chicano in place there as a priest. All of the priests that we've had are Anglos except for a couple that came from Latin America somewhere, but that was when I was no longer there. Those two boys that I remember were of the opinion, well, they loved Jesus, and that was it. They didn't get involved in anything in the community. Nothing. I went to one service that one of them had, and his sermon was like he was shouting at us. And I've never walked out on church, but I left. I said to myself, "I'm not going to be treated this way. I don't have to listen to this harangue." So it's a heartache that we haven't developed that, and I think it's a generational thing. I think we have to raise up our own people for that kind of leadership. There was a time when Rosalio went to seminary; there was a time when Phil Ramm (phonetic), Virginia's son, went to seminary; there was a time when I went to seminary. We were so taken by what this church was doing that we thought, "Well, we can do that too," but it was more complicated than that.

But you saw a person like Gil Cano, who was a very--he was a good pal of Bishop Arzube's, and

it was through him, through Gil, that they go to Texas because Arzube heard of the COPS organization, the organizing that was going on, and he said, "Maybe this is something we should do in Los Angeles." And that's how the idea for the organizing with the Industrial Areas Foundation, and eventually UNO, starts. But Gil was employed by Epiphany, but he was a very active Roman Catholic, very charismatic.

ESPINO:

His name sounds familiar, and I'm trying to recall if it was David Sanchez who said he--did he work with youth in some sort of War on Poverty program?

LOPEZ:

Oh, I don't know if he--he was also very close to Rosalio.

ESPINO:

I don't remember who.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, he's up in Central California somewhere.

ESPINO:

Oh, he's still alive?

LOPEZ:

I think so.

ESPINO:

But he's older, though, right?

LOPEZ:

Huh?

ESPINO:

He's older than you and he's older than--

LOPEZ:

No, no, I think he's about Rosalio's age. Rosalio is younger than I am, I think.

ESPINO:

But not by too much, I don't think.

LOPEZ:

Huh?

00:29:49

ESPINO:

I don't think by too much. (Laughs) Well, I imagine the Episcopal Church being, like you say, unique and not like other Episcopal churches and not like other churches. My grandmother lived on Sichel Street. My mother was raised there for maybe twenty years of her life, fifteen years, maybe, before she got married, and the Sacred Heart Church is right down the street. Who was your community? Who were the Episcopal--

LOPEZ:

There was a smattering of them around the neighborhood, but in those days, in the late sixties, the relationship with Our Lady Help of Christian and Sacred Heart was a very, very important connection. They would come over to our celebrations, and there was hardly an event, a major event, that Epiphany had that they were not invited and attended. Father Juan Romero and his father, Toby, they had a house just down the street, and when Toby had a day off, he'd come and live at their house. Of course, two of the sons were priests, and one, to this day, is such a loving friend of Epiphany. It seems like such a long time ago, because certainly the relationships with those churches have changed. I mean, there isn't any interaction between the churches anymore. Griffin and Sichel, on that corner, there used to be a Presbyterian church that's now a Community Center, and there's kind of an Assembly of God Pentecostal church on the other corner, and then across the street from Epiphany is another kind of church. So, I mean, this was like church central. There were so many churches nearby. But again, it was a different time, a different time.

00:31:52

ESPINO:

But did you draw your parishioners from the community or did they come from other locales because of the kind of church that it was?

LOPEZ:

Both, both, yeah, and today I would say that the majority of the people are from the neighborhood. There are people that come to the English-speaking service that come from as far as Sierra Madre, Silver Lake, different places. But the Spanish-language service are mostly people that live in the neighborhood.

ESPINO:

And in those early days when you started to first attend, did they have a Spanish-language service back then?

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

They did back in the sixties?

LOPEZ:

I don't remember. It started with these boys, with John and Roger and Ollie.

ESPINO:

It started with them.

LOPEZ:

Well, it started before them.

ESPINO:

Did they speak Spanish?

00:33:41

LOPEZ:

The bishop at that time was named Eric Bloy, and his staff, his key staff, was a fellow named Nick Coletsos (phonetic) a Greek fellow, and he was a connection to John Luce. They knew each other in seminary or they knew each other somewhere, so that when Nick was now in the Office of the Bishop working as his right hand and was able to decide who would come to the church or how they would staff churches and so forth, he called on John. So that's how John got there, and then followed by Ollie and followed by Roger.

My criticism of the work among Latinos today, among the Mexican American community--and now it's more than the Mexican American community--is that many of those members get very involved in the Cursillo Movement, and it's a way of gathering and using songs. You go away for weekends, you have retreats, you study the Bible together, but what happens is that's about it. They love Jesus, but not--it's very harsh to say, but not their human beings. They don't get involved in anything other than church, singing happy songs. So I have stayed away from the

Cursillo, though I've been invited. It's like being in a fraternity. You have to go through all this process of getting into it, and you have to have a sponsor and you have to have all this other--

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

My criticism of my friends, priests, who are very dear to me--and they say, "Oh, we're going to Cursillo." And I say, "Oh, be careful, be careful, because you're going to get indoctrinated."

ESPINO:

And that's with the Episcopal Church?

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh, and there's some in the Roman Church too.

ESPINO:

I've heard it referenced with Catholicism.

LOPEZ:

They have their secret handshake. I mean, it's all very, very odd.

ESPINO:

Sounds very selective and secret.

LOPEZ:

And it's kind of like they're part of the Cursillo and very special somehow.

00:36:02

ESPINO:

Wow. How old is it?

LOPEZ:

How old is what?

ESPINO:

The Cursillo Movement.

LOPEZ:

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know much about it, other than those things, but I've stayed away from it because I feel it's so shortsighted. The other thing is that it is so hard to kind of bifurcate your ministry so you're working on the development of the church, and then you're also doing work and serving in the community. The lessons we learned through organizing made us, helped us, become better leaders for the church as well as leaders in the community. So that isn't happening right now at Epiphany, and I'll have a conversation with the priest there. He has his difficulty with his people--"his people"--his parishioners, and you kind of want to shake them up, but at the same time, they're keeping several jobs, working, if they're lucky, minimum wage, having kids that are in our public schools. So the challenges they have are huge. It's the same challenges that people had back then, except there's not the leadership and the love and the encouragement that has people saying, "Okay, it's okay. We're going to work on this together." So that has changed a lot.

00:38:15

ESPINO:

And you think that that's because of Roger Wood and Father Luce and their leadership?

00:41:08

LOPEZ:

I think that had a lot to do with it. Now we're '76, '74, and Roger Wood is talking about--the Industrial Areas Foundation has come in, they've formed an organizing committee, and I go, "Oh, not another thing." I said, "We've been through the Movement. We know what the issues are, we've done the best we can, and enough already." It was, again, this tenacious, stubborn man. He kept at it. The first check that went to the organizing here came from Epiphany. Of all the fancy, well-financed Roman Catholic churches and others, the first check came from Epiphany, and that's because Roger believed in it. And part of it had to do with Arzube and Cano, and having seen the organizing in Texas, brought back the idea, and they talked about it and threw it around. That's how it all started. Not many people know that. Roger was always well received and well respected by the organizers at the IAF. I stayed away from it. I just wanted nothing to do with organizing. I had a very happy life. I was raising a kid. By that time, I was divorced, and just the idea of meetings didn't appeal to me. But then I heard some very--what I considered just the average parishioner at that church talking about all this stuff, and they were talking about--and the major issue in that time was auto insurance redlining. Enriqueta is

talking to me about zip codes and this and that and all of this stuff, and I'm going, "Where did she learn that?" I go, "She's never been to school. I mean, how does she know that stuff?" I said to myself, "Hmm." So I'd hear it from somebody, and then, "Oh, we went to this meeting." And I'm going, "Hmm." So I found that interesting.

I stayed away from all of that until they had a meeting over at St. Alfonso's parish, and they'd invited the sheriff. I forgot what the specific issue was, but Sheriff Pitchus (phonetic) came. I had met the sheriff when I was back on the grand jury in '71, and he was still sheriff. He saw me there, he said, "Oh, Mrs. Lopez, how good to see you." He says, "Oh, this is an organization I want to work with. They really represent the community." I mean, he was saying this to me; he wasn't saying this on a microphone. And I go, "Hmm. Interesting." So all that goes into the computer. So then I tell people that I was just sucked in, because they knew--by "they," I mean the organizers that I was attending, and then it was a matter of I felt I got the big rush, "Come join us," and this and that and the other. "Let's have a one-to-one and let's talk about the issues that you care about," and all that kind of stuff.

ESPINO:

So you felt like you could have an impact. I mean, you felt like there was an effect to your actions. It wasn't just lip service.

LOPEZ:

Well, there was a promise, and I was curious and I wanted to learn what they knew. And the fact that so many people were being gathered. I mean, they could count on a lot of people at these meetings, hundreds, and I go, "What is happening?"

ESPINO:

Hundreds, wow.

LOPEZ:

So I had my little boy, and I said to Roger, "Well, I have to have a babysitter." He said, "I'll be your babysitter." I said, "Okay."

So that worked for a while, and then we got one of the boys from Epiphany who was attending USC to be my son's tutor. So that gave me great relief, because here's a kid that's had an education, he's smart, he's been at the church since he was a little boy, so I know him, I know his family, I know his mother, his grandmother, and so he would help my son with his homework. So I felt that I could go off to UNO meetings. And then it became a way of life. Every Tuesday there'd be a leadership meeting, every Thursday there'd be a big community meeting. I mean, that's just how it rolled, to the point that from there till the late eighties, when I finally separate myself, it was hard because it left a huge hole--

ESPINO:

It's twenty years.

LOPEZ:

--in my schedule, because it'd been such an intense time, such a time of learning, of meeting the world's most interesting people, going to the White House four times and meeting all these people, and having this battle with my dear Mayor Bradley, and then kissing and making up. I mean, there was just so much that happened during that time that was fascinating, and to then see all that change was hard, but it was, at the same time, necessary.

00:45:12

ESPINO:

Just to go back to your early experiences with the Epiphany, did they have this kind of education classes that you're talking about that happened later on? Did you have study groups? Were you learning about government, politics, that kind of thing?

LOPEZ:

I don't remember classes on that, but I remember a lot of exchange about that kind of stuff. After church, there'd be meals, we'd all sit around. We'd go over to the winery and have some wine together, and there was this constant conversation that was filled with things that were so informative and relevant, because, to me, it was a political education on Los Angeles and the Who's Who, some of which had already come into play through the community meetings, but it was supported by a lot of these conversations with the priests and with other of the people in the church, because there was a time when Gil Cano was hanging out, there was a time when Rosalio was hanging out. And Rosalio was always so informative, such a keen mind, so smart, and certainly had an opinion. I mean, where that takes him later, well, that's for somebody else to judge. But during that time, he was very close to Father Luce and Father Wood, and they really appreciated his leadership, and they were with him through so much of the difficulties. But it felt like in the air. I mean, it permeated everything we did, and you certainly heard about it on Sunday in the sermon, but it was not a sermon with a harangue. It was a sermon that made the connection of what we should be doing as people of faith in our communities.

00:47:44

ESPINO:

Any major themes stand out from those sermons, for example, poverty or racism or sexism? Did they always use the Bible's--like in the Catholic Church, the sermon is based on what the scripture is for that Sunday. Everybody in the whole world is on that same page. Is it like that?

LOPEZ:

In the Episcopal Church we also have a lectionary from which the priests can teach or he can just say something else. The lessons that are most familiar to me is how people lived. We had one of the all-star bishops of the Episcopal Church come and visit us one time. His name was Daniel Corrigan, and he was one of the eleven--no, was it eleven or seven? He was one of the handful of bishops that ordained the women before the Episcopal Church allowed the ordination of women. They got together. It was in Philadelphia, and it was called the irregular ordination of women. He was one of them. I remember his coming to the church, and we'd had dinner and he was affable, and he got up to preach and he said, "I'm not bishop. I'm Daniel Corrigan, and I'm just learning how to be a Christian." I mean, this great humility and this compassion he had, they were all-stars, because, one, he was so smart, and he was there when the Church needed somebody like him. I forgot where he was bishop, but he, like many of our bishops, served on Planned Parenthood board, did a lot of community work. Great guy. I remember his humility, and I go,

"Wow. That's pretty terrific." I remember John preaching, I remember Roger's sermons, but, to me, it's just all part of a whole picture of how things were.

00:50:22

ESPINO:

Well, how was that different from your earlier religious experiences?

LOPEZ:

The way I was raised was that Jesus loved you, Jesus came to save you for your sins. You have a lot of sins, and you'd better repent. And at the end of the service there'd be some very sentimental music, and you could walk up to the altar and be prayed over and repent of your sins. The church, as I think I've said before--when the first black family moves into Whittier, our pastor goes ballistic. When John Kennedy runs for president, he goes ballistic and writes about it, a Roman Catholic. Yet as a church, we were sending a lot of money over to, at that time, the Belgian Congo, okay, helping people over there, but they didn't make that connection. I remember as a teenager, we had Bishop Pike, was a very, very--he used to be the bishop of San Francisco. He used to be the dean of Grace Cathedral. He came, and he was radical, I mean way out. But to come to Whittier, he didn't come to the Episcopal Church. He came to the Methodist church there, and we heard he was coming, but he already had a reputation of being with Martin Luther King, so we all wanted to meet him. So a whole bunch of us in high school went over to meet him, and I remember I was just, "Wow. Listen to this guy. This isn't what I get on Sundays." But it was very different, very different.

ESPINO:

Is that P-y-k-e, Pyke?

00:53:50

LOPEZ:

P-i-k-e. There's a book that I have of his. It's called The Death and Life of the Good Bishop Pike.

What about it is so interesting is that it's about his death and life, and not his life and death. He becomes enormously controversial on our church, so much so that they were going to--well, it's like impeach him, but they were going to take away his orders because they considered him a heretic. He was doing the kind of work that nobody else in the church was doing. He had great tragedy in his life. His son committed suicide, his wife died, he remarried. I don't know, but he would do the most unusual things, and always getting himself into trouble because of the stances that he took.

ESPINO:

Like, for example, gay rights, that kind of thing?

LOPEZ:

No, this was before the Gay Rights Movement. This was mostly black and white, supported the farm workers. And then ended up--there was that center in Santa Barbara, the Center for Democratic Studies or something, where all these intellectuals would gather and they'd ruminate about issues and rights and all that.

ESPINO:

Like a think tank.

00:55:57

LOPEZ:

Very fanciful. And then he remarried and ended up going to Israel-Palestine. There's something I'm missing. But they're out in the desert, he and his wife, by themselves, and they're lost, and he says to her, "You go on. You go find your way home. I'm going to stay here." And they found him days later, dead, on his knees. Very poignant because he was there in what we consider the holy land. But it was a time. But Daniel Corrigan was of that kind. There were other bishops that came to Epiphany to visit because they had heard of its ministry, and they were all part of that

same group of fellows that ordained the women, that were pushing the Church to do things it had not done before. And, of course, the ordination of women was such a common thing for them to do. I mean, not common. It was something that the Church should do. Why not?

When I first heard about women becoming priests, I said, "Well, why does a woman want to become a priest and lose her power?" (Laughs) And then I see women behind the altar years later and I go, "Well, of course. This makes every sense in the world. Look at that, a new way of seeing God working through his children." It was a new day for the Church, and now it's hardly an issue. The biggest issue, one of the biggest, is not just the ordination, but--I think we're beyond the ordination of gay men and women, but it's the blessing of same-sex unions and the marriage of same-sex unions, which is different. Blessing is different than marriage. So that seems to be one of the big issues in our church today. It's important, but it's hard to keep all of the important issues on the front burner, just too hard.

ESPINO:

Well, in those early days when students are walking out and there's, say, for example, the violent uprisings in Watts and places like that in the inner-city areas, what position did the Church take at that time? Because I know you came to the Church after--

LOPEZ:

After Watts.

ESPINO:

After Watts and also after the first walkouts.

LOPEZ:

That's right.

00:57:46

ESPINO:

But you were there right at the time that they had to decide what to do about it.

LOPEZ:

In Watts we had some extraordinary people. In fact, he's very ill, still alive. But we had a group--well, I was thinking of one in particular, Morrie Samuels, who was there. A few others--not many--a few other of our leaders were there, by that I mean priests. Bishop Bruno went to Selma back in, I think, '64, '65, and he'll tell you--he says, "I was there. I almost peed in my pants, I was so scared."

ESPINO:

Oh, gosh.

01:00:4701:02:46

LOPEZ:

He said, "It was scary, the police coming, and there you are." But he was there; Morrie Samuels was there; Malcolm Boyd was there. These were priests. I mean, Malcolm is going to be turning ninety in two weeks, and he was there registering people and he was there when Jonathan Daniels was shot. Jonathan was a young seminarian who had gone into a little store in this little town and was coming out of this store, and he had gone in with the group of people that he was working with. I think he might have been the one or two white people in the group, and he was shot and killed right then. His witness, Jonathan Daniels, his ministry, the kinds of things he did were so special that we have a special day for him in our calendar. Malcolm will tell stories today about those days with such love and really great memory. Malcolm Boyd marched with Martin Luther King. He did a lot of work with Martin Luther King. Back in 1964, he wrote the

book Are You Running with Me, Jesus? I was still in the Baptist Church, or was I just coming out of it? I was coming out of it, and one of my friends had that book. I started to read it, and I go, "Oh, this is incredible," and I had to go buy my own copy.

What it was is a book of prayers written in common ordinary language, like, "Jesus--." And Malcolm is gay. "Jesus, I'm here at a gay bar and I'm so lonely." And then it goes on to say questions about God and God's purpose. He writes just touching, touching stuff, but in contemporary language. We were always used to the "thees" and "thous" and "Creator God" and all this language, and he simplified all of that. I would not let that book--I have it around somewhere autographed. I wouldn't let that book out of my hand, because those prayers meant so much to me. And I go, "What a wonderful approach. I never quite thought of that." Malcolm is a very dear friend. I had a priest that worked at Epiphany, a retired schoolteacher, also an Episcopal priest, and he would teach English at the church, and he was a dear friend of Malcolm's. This is before I had met Malcolm, and I said, "You know him?" He said, "Yes." And he kind of like (demonstrates). Because I had seen him. Malcolm had a television show on NBC, and you'd see him from here up, and he had his collar, and he'd be smoking a cigarette, and he had the most gorgeous eyes, these beautiful big eyes. And he'd be talking to all the intellectuals, you name it. He was like an Edward R. Murrow, but kind of with a collar. I'd listen to this guy and go, "Who is this fellow?"

So my friend, the teacher priest, said, "Well, I'll have a dinner party and I'll invite you over and I'll invite Malcolm--," his mother was still alive, "--and Malcolm's mother, Beatrice." So I went to the party with a bag of all of Malcolm's--he's written twenty-six, twenty, thirty books.

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

A whole bunch of books that I had of his at that time, and had them autographed. We were sitting under the grand piano and he was autographing all these books. (Laughs) It was kind of funny. But Malcolm has become such a treasure to me because he's a wise old man and has seen so much upfront. I mean, it's a very firsthand world. As a young man, he was in public relations. He worked for Mary Pickford. She supported him so he could go to seminary.

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

He worked for the movie industry when he was in public relations, and that's how he met her, and then he goes off to seminary. He is also very controversial because he's gay. When he was in churches, he would not necessarily live in a rectory; he'd live with the poor. And there were some bishops that didn't want him in his diocese because he was so controversial.

ESPINO:

He was out in the open?

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh.

01:04:36

ESPINO:

Gay out in the open in the late sixties?

01:06:23

LOPEZ:

Yeah, he was early, early gay, and he's been with his partner almost thirty years, more than thirty years. He is the writer-in-residence at the diocese. He still has an office there. And Bishop Bruno adores him. He just got a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Literary Society of the gay community--I mean, there's a big title for it--and they honored six major authors for their contribution, and Malcolm was one of those, and he was introduced to that event by our bishop. Our bishop adores him, loves him, and is so proud of him. When Malcolm and his partner, Mark--their relationship was blessed by my bishop. I was there, I took pictures, and it was a big deal many, many years ago. And then my bishop got into a lot of trouble for doing that because we don't have that regularized in our church yet. You don't really have the authority to do that, because the authority has to come from on high, from what we call our General Convention, the body that makes all the rules and regulations for the Church, and that meets every three years. So John got into a lot of trouble for that, but John says, "They wanted me to do it, and when somebody asks for a blessing, you bless them. Plain and simple."

To be surrounded by all these wonderful people and all these wonderful teachers in their own way, whether it's over a scotch or having--I mean, I had Malcolm and Mark here, and we had tea, you know, just listening to him, you never know when these treasures are going to come out, these little bits and pieces. He'll talk, "Yeah, Martin came into a meeting and he'd been out and he was all sweaty, and we were sitting there and talking." He talks and gives life to that person, and you get a kind of a sense of that man and of that time. But there weren't a lot of them around. Many of them are dying or very ill, and we kind of want Malcolm to stay in a little glass box so he's well, you know.

ESPINO:

Sometimes I get confused when you're talking about the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church because a lot of the same terminology applies, so when you say "bishop," you mean the bishop of the Episcopal hierarchy, not the Catholic hierarchy.

01:09:1601:11:3601:13:58

LOPEZ:

In our church, we have one person at the very top. You have--not you, but the Roman Catholic Church has a pope. Luis Olivares (phonetic) used to call Queen Elizabeth, who was the head of the church, he'd call her "your popessa." He'd say, "Oh, your popessa." (Laughs) So in our church, we have a position called the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is selected by the queen and the prime minister, and the Archbishop of Canterbury is the first among equals, so he's not like a pope, but it's a collegial role, but he is the person that gathers all the primates from all of the different dioceses or countries, so that in the United States, our primate is called a presiding bishop, and it happens to be a woman. I was there when she was elected, and I cried. And then

they gave us all buttons, "It's a girl," cute little pink buttons. (Espino laughs). I still have them in my little box. But it was such a big deal to have--that happened six years ago. So we go from '74, when women were irregularly ordained, to that time when a woman becomes the bishop of our Church, the presiding bishop that was a big deal.

Now, the Church itself in the United States, the Episcopal Church contains Puerto Rico, go down to parts of Central America, parts, not all of it, because some have become independent, Hong Kong. I think that's it. So the Church is broken off into regions that are called dioceses, and there are about 111 of them in the United States, and they have a bishop. Depending on the size and the budget, they could have assistant bishops that are called suffragan bishops, which is a horrid name. But that role came into play--remember, our Church was pro-slavery back in the time. The church had not elected any black bishops, so they said, "Okay." So they made up this title called suffragan bishop, and so then that's where the black men were getting elected, never quite making it to the top, but always a suffragan. So then that started to get changed, and so white men are being elected to suffragan bishops, and now women. So we have two suffragan bishops in our diocese. The African American woman that was running didn't get many votes at all. The one that got the most votes right away was the gay girl, because the gay community wanted to take a stance and say, "We want one of ours." And so they got one of theirs. So we've got two woman suffragan bishops.

So it depends on that, the scope of the mission, the budget, who can afford it. For instance, the diocese of Nevada is the entire state, and our bishop there has always flown her own airplane. She is now our presiding bishop. She used to fly and she'd fly around. The bishop before her also flew his own airplane, because, I mean, it's a huge patch of geography, the entire state. There are people called assistant bishops. For instance, if Joe retires as bishop of Indiana and wants to come and live in Malibu, he can say to John, "John, do you need any help?" And so John, "Yeah, come on down." And so he says, "I'll make you assistant bishop." So that's an assistant bishop position. So underneath, there's all these administrative positions. So technically it's the same thing. In the Roman Church, there are regional bishops, auxiliary bishops. Of course you have a cardinal. After a while, the cardinal has--oh, no. You have a bishop, and then if they behave, in time, they can become a cardinal. The cardinal can then choose auxiliary bishops or regional bishops to take care of the different parts of the diocese. In this archdiocese is the Roman Catholic Church, diocese of the Episcopal Church. There was a time when Roger Mahoney (phonetic) had his own helicopter. It was called Halo One, and his friends helped him buy it. And he loved it because he could get around, and you do need something like that because it's a huge archdiocese. But they made him sell it. It was a little too modern, too razzamatazz, too extraordinary, and so they made him sell it.

But our bishop doesn't have an airplane, and some of our bishops used to have--in the day, they used to have their drivers. And John says, "I know how to drive. I'll drive myself." They used to have these little chaplains, they were called, and they were the bishop's drivers, and they carried the bags, they drove him so the bishop could rest or do work while he's in the car. John says, "I'll drive myself."

ESPINO:

It's so interesting, because like you mentioned earlier how Roger Wood came with--and apparently, Father Luce also comes from money.

LOPEZ:

And so does Garver.

ESPINO:

All three of them came from a privileged background, but they shook all that off during this period.

LOPEZ:

But they use those connections to help the Church and the development in the Chicano Movement. Oliver Garver's family was in the industry, the movie industry, and one of the brothers ran one of the big studios, people of money. So now the family, when he died, used some of that money and has built a foundation to support the ministry of young clergy that are doing important work, and it's wonderful to see that that goes on. Let me see. John Luce has been responsible for the development of some extraordinary men and women who've become priests and leaders. One of them is Martha Overall. In the family she's called Muffy. She was an attorney with that big famous lawyer. I've forgotten his name. He was in New York. He's died. But she was gaga over John and was following him all over the place.

ESPINO:

You mean in love with him, really in love with him--

LOPEZ:

She was in love with him.

01:16:16

ESPINO:

--or just in awe with him?

01:18:1701:20:53

LOPEZ:

He would have nothing to do with any of that. He would run from that. But she learned from him, went to seminary, became ordained, and is doing such critical work in South Bronx. It's the church where John went when he left Epiphany. I was there visiting John in '72, and he said, "Okay, Lydia, how would you organize this place?" I go, "Oh, my god." I mean, the places were burned. It was a hellhole. She has turned over the rectory into a school. It's one of these excellent schools. She's made a connection with Mary Wright Edelman. She's gotten all sorts of development money into the area. She's smart. She won't let anybody tell her what for. She can give as good as she can get. She just wrote me an email and told me what she's doing, and it's extraordinary. There was a young curate--curate is the title for a priest who is just the first year out of seminary. So James went to work for John at South Bronx, and it was there that John and his wife, Mary Agnes, had their first baby, and John was there for the birth. This was so far out of John's ken that he--anyway, Bowie (phonetic) was born, and John became Bowie's godfather. Anyway, four of their children were born there.

James has learned so much from John, and through all of his life, went to work in parishes among the poor. It was a kind of a replication of John's ministry. There were times when I felt like talking to James, I was talking to John. It was that same intensity and the cigarettes and all that. So James has remained one of my dearest friends. And he divorced, remarried. Back when the babies were being born, I was the godmother of the third child. And now he is doing some work volunteering. They never stop working. He's volunteering on the Sunday service wherever the bishop wants him, especially with the Spanish-speaking, and is doing some volunteer work on education. So it's wonderful to see this going on. James' daughter, Bowie Snodgrass

(phonetic), decided, finally, after she went to Vassar, then she went to Union Seminary. She was the editor of Union Seminary, and we thought she was going to become a priest, but she fell in love. Her fellow is a director of one of the major orchestras, and they have a baby. She's doing interfaith work in New York, and now she's doing youth work in one of our churches in New York, on track to become ordained. This gal is brilliant. Mary Agnes, the mother, comes from Germany, studied with the major German theologians. She has her own Ph.D., but Mary Agnes was most unusual and prickly person, so the marriage didn't last very long. So, I mean, there are good genes in these kids. But they're carrying on the work, and I'm so proud of the kids, just really proud of them. I don't call James a kid, but his Bowie, Bowie has part of my heart.

ESPINO:

Well, people talk about those early days, and they talk about--like you mentioned the cigarette-smoking and the conversations. Like, for example, David Sanchez said that he would just sit with Father Luce and Father Wood and they would be drinking beer and just talking to them about community issues and class politics, and he said he was just a kid. And he also said there was an empty house, an empty room that he would stay in. Do you recall that? What was that?

01:22:43

LOPEZ:

Yeah, the house was an old Victorian house, 2449 Sichel, right across the street from the church. Its old Victorian, and back in those days, it had about like five bedrooms. John. (Laughs) Thank goodness they had housekeepers because John was a mess. He'd leave clothes everywhere. And John didn't cook, so at that time, around the corner on Daly and Pasadena Avenue, there used to be a Thrifty's, and behind the Thrifty's used to be a little coffee shop, so that's where you could find them on a given morning having breakfast. Roger's life was more ordered. I mean, he would cook. So they each had their rooms. Ollie's was in the front of the house, Roger's was at back, and John's was over here on the other side, and there were a couple of extra rooms. So it was a big house.

When they left, a clergy couple comes in about nineteen--we're talking about eighties now, the early eighties. It was a clergy couple. They were both priests, so what they did--because the boy priest was a good friend of our bishop's mother back in Utah, so he helped have the house renovated for them. So they redid the rooms and put in another bathroom and fancied-up the kitchen and all of that sort of stuff. So when they left, they left the house in a mess, so they reordered the house again. So today the place has been renovated and the front part is a little chapel, big living room, dining room, and then all the bedrooms for--there are four people live there, and they're Franciscan friars, Anglican Franciscans. And they have a big kitchen. Life in that house has always been very simple, nothing grand. There were some really beautiful pieces

of furniture that Roger had. He had a sitting room, well appointed, and his dining room had a beautiful table in it. But for the most part, life there was very simple. Ollie Garver, who later becomes a bishop, he had a little twin bed, a little chest of drawers. Life has always been simple there.

ESPINO:

But was it a place where activists would stay, would find shelter? In this case, David Sanchez says that it was because he was working a summer program.

LOPEZ:

Oh, okay.

ESPINO:

So he would stay there.

LOPEZ:

That must have been before my time.

01:25:09

ESPINO:

Yes, it was before the walkouts. It was when he was still in high school.

LOPEZ:

I don't know. There was also the office upstairs where people could stay, the second floor of the church, where people did stay, but later on, much later.

ESPINO:

Well, what can you tell me about the La Raza newspaper and your experience or encounter with that whole--I mean, I know that they had already started putting it out before you get there, but--

LOPEZ:

I didn't meet up with them until they were over at the Gates house.

ESPINO:

Until they moved.

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh. They were in the basement of this big old house on Gates Street, and that's where I met Fred. I'm not sure what took me there, what the reason for my--but that's when I--but I had seen it. Then they go from there--let me see. Did they go there first or second? No, no, no. I think they went from there to 2411. I don't know how I remember these numbers. Broadway, the second floor. I remember that was a place. I remember being up there before. And then they go to Gates Street, and then from Gates they went over to El Sereno--was it El Sereno? Over by the Harrison

Street School, there was a place. So that's where I remember it traveled. I was always eager to see what they were going to write, because I found most of it very informative.

01:27:04

ESPINO:

Did you play a role in any of the activities, be it the writing or the editing or the typesetting?

LOPEZ:

No. I think I tried to help Ruth with the typesetting once, but it was a complicated machine in those days, because you put it in there and it prints it all on a tape, and the tape has to--I mean, it was just--but I would hang out there. I'm sure I must have done something. I mean, you just can't sit around, but I don't remember what I did.

ESPINO:

Well, people talk about that, because initially I was looking at it as a collective, as a collective of people coming together with a similar ideology using the paper as a vehicle to politicize, but not everybody agrees with that understanding, because there was a lot of infighting and power struggles. I don't know what you recall from that.

01:29:53

LOPEZ:

Yeah, there were, there were a lot of arguments, a lot of discussions. I mean, you can just imagine Raul Ruiz and Eli Risco going at it. Joe and Fred and others, I mean, they were just--yeah, the conversations were intense, but there was a product that they were working on, not to idealize it. But I think that the boys were the--they developed the theory, they developed what would be done, and it felt like everybody else were their handmaidens. Ruth did all the work, and she'd sit there at the machine and work for hours, and the boys would take photographs and flutter around and go to meetings. But there was a lot of intensity. When we got word in 1969, '70, 1970--gosh, can't remember these dates now. Okay, CatÃ³licos was in December of '69. We

got word the next month that there were warrants out for our arrests, so everybody got on the phone with each other and we decided to go up to Risco and Ruth's house, and we were deciding whether to--this is such a romantic notion, whether to go underground or not, whether we were going to turn ourselves in, what we were going to do.

So there was, you name it, all the twenty-something players and Oscar, and it was decided to turn ourselves in. But I remember, oh, the heated arguments, I mean, the back-and-forth and the police and justice, no possibility. But I remember being at Risco and Ruth's house way up on Avenue 33, up there. They had a cute little--it was like a little garret. It was really kind of cute, and she decorated it very artfully. But, yeah, I remember after my son was born in June of '70, one of the first excursions I have is I remember going with Fred over to La Raza, and it was the first time I'd been out of the house. You could see all the activity going on, all the busyness, and it did not have--I don't know when it stopped publishing. I don't remember.

ESPINO:

It keeps publishing on into '77. It changes because Raul takes leadership, takes the helm. But I'm curious about how you describe them, Ruth and Eli, and their role in that paper and their relationship with Father Luce, because it's still kind of a mystery what really was going on between all of those players, and then they leave and nobody knows why.

01:32:4901:35:05

LOPEZ:

Eli and John, let me talk about them. I don't know why Ruth left. I can imagine, because, I mean, these were heavy-handed boys. I mean, they had a view of life and they were in charge. Ruth was enormously talented. Eli leaves and goes to Fresno and does some work there and somehow decides to go to seminary, and he becomes an Episcopal priest. And I go, "My god. I didn't even know he loved Jesus." I was so surprised.

But then the puzzle, to this day is a puzzle, because I have not ever talked to Eli about it--he would hate me for calling him Eli--Risco about it, is this next thing. He went to work for Bishop Schofield in the San Joaquin Valley. Bishop Schofield was pro-growers, anti-women clergy, would not have any of those women in his diocese. Risco goes and works for him there. Of course, Risco had a short bit of time with the farm workers. He was brought into the farm workers by Luis Valdez, and when he came in to the farm workers, he had been at a Baptist college in Kansas. So he comes in through Luis Valdez and works with the farm workers, with the newspaper. Ruth is there also, and I don't know who came first. But for Risco to go from that work in the sixties, early, middle sixties, to come down here to be part of the Movement and to go north to go to seminary, and to work for Bishop Schofield, David Schofield, was a huge

puzzle. Then he leaves there. He has the most beautiful wife. I remember going to his wedding. I remember Joe Razo at the wedding. I mean, it was a wonderful wedding. Then all these beautiful children that are born, and they have all these Aztec names, and it's quite wonderful.

So then he ends up in the diocese of San Diego, another conservative diocese. Never came here, and I don't know if he ever wanted to come here. I mean, he could have asked me and I could have opened some doors for him, but he goes to San Diego with another conservative bishop. So one of my friends was dean of the cathedral there, and I said, "Well, do you ever hear about Risco?" "Who?" I mean, he's invisible. Before he goes to San Diego, he's coming through Los--no, how did it work out? There was some reason we were all gathering at Moctesuma Esparza's house, and John Luce was in town, Risco was there, Joe Razo, you name it, all these stalwarts from that time. I don't know if we were celebrating Risco's ordination or we were celebrating John Luce being in town, but we all got together at Moctesuma's house, and it was pretty wonderful. I remember somebody laughing and making a joke about--it might have been John--about Risco working with Bishop Schofield. Of course, John wasn't going to punch him out for that. He was just, "I don't understand why you ended up working with that guy," you know, and then goes on. Because John was always very kind. But that was a puzzle. We always were intrigued that here he was this Cuban Protestant here, and so there were all these theories about how he was a spy and he was here to do Castro's work and all that kind of stuff. I mean, this is what ended up being one of the fears of Cesar Chavez, according to that book I just finished reading, because Luis Valdez had a poster in his room that said "Carlos Marx," and Cesar didn't like anything that was Communist and was very leery of--and had his disagreements with Risco, then out he goes.

ESPINO:

That's a theory.

01:37:41

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh.

ESPINO:

No one knows for sure why he left the farm workers.

LOPEZ:

No, this is just a writer's opinion. But he was a great mystery.

ESPINO:

Did you trust him?

LOPEZ:

I didn't have any real reason not to trust--I mean, my life wasn't in his hands. I mean, I didn't have any real--I mean, my life, my job, nothing. I mean, he had nothing to--I was going to say he had nothing to do with my life. He had a lot to do with my life because he was a part of this crowd, but I didn't have any reason--I just found him a mystery even then. Couldn't quite figure out why he was here. (Laughs) How did he get here? I mean, it's the same thing with Oscar Acosta. He was another mystery. How did this former Protestant boy, former missionary, end up here, of all places?

ESPINO:

Well, I guess everyone has that story. Like you, how did you end up there from Whittier and the Baptist Church? And then David Sanchez from South Central and Catholic. And everybody kind of meets at this place, but some people have more mystery about them than others, like they kept part of themselves secret, and that's the feeling that I get when people talk about Risco.

LOPEZ:

About Risco, oh, yeah.

01:39:22

ESPINO:

And also Oscar Acosta. It's like you never really get to know them completely. They're not open books.

LOPEZ:

No, they're not.

ESPINO:

Like maybe who else? Who would you say could be an open book at that time, somebody that you got to know well, got to know their feelings well.

LOPEZ:

Well, a person that I trusted was Joe Razo. He was a bit of a mystery, but he was more open. But there were so many levels to him. I mean, even today, when I was over at the house the other day looking at all those pictures, we were sitting and I was learning stuff from him, just hearing things from him that I hadn't put together. Who did I trust? That's a good question. Let's see. (Laughs) Who did I trust?

ESPINO:

Because in a sense, you were putting your life in their hands when you think about the arrests and the protests, and you go to Risco's house because you don't know what to do. Are you going to go underground--

01:41:1001:43:14

LOPEZ:

We all gather. Christmas Eve 1969, we go to CatÃ³licos. That's Richard Cruz leading the march, and there's a mass outside on the doors, and I thought I was going to church. I mean, what did I know? I had heels on, I had a hot pink dress and a hat, because I thought this is Christmas Eve, you dress up and you go into church. Well, we got to the steps of the church and there's no way of getting in. The doors have been locked. Fred says, "Lydia, wait for me across the street." And I go, "Okay."

So I wait across the street, and all of a sudden, all the boys are bringing me their wallets, their keys, and their address books, before iPods. And I go, "Okay, something's going on here." Well, over here, the police are coming on horses, and over here--and all of a sudden (demonstrates). And I go, "Oh, my gosh." I don't know where Fred is. I don't know what's happening. I hear the breaking glass and all of this. So finally Fred finds me, and they've arrested my son's godfather, Alicia, Joe, and so forth. So we leave and go home with Alicia's kids. But the reason I talk about my pink dress and my hat is that when we're on trial--and I'm in the first group, the first group of eleven--the police have to identify each one of us sitting around the table, and the police officer--of course, I was pregnant, and this is now February and March. I'm getting bigger, because the baby is born in June. And the police says, "Yeah, it's that woman over there, except she's put on a little weight, but she kicked me up here, and she was wearing a multicolored poncho, and down in the chapel." And I go, "In my good day, I couldn't kick anybody up here." And then another police officer came later and said, "Yeah, it's that person over there. She was wearing a peacoat, and she was in the lobby yelling epithets." So I recognize that one of those persons was Anna Nieto-GÃ³mez, because we've had these conversations, and then the other person, I forgot who the other person was. So I tell Anna, "I went to jail for you." I said, "But thank you very much."

But the reason I say that is because in discovery--and we get the police pictures, they had photographers all over the place--I stand out. How could you not? Hot pink turban and I was wearing a white wool coat. So Oscar says, "Look, Lydia, there you are." So we showed that to the police. "Oh, yes." Anyway, I'm found not guilty. We invite the jurors to our party up at Richard Cruz's house, and one of the fellows says, "Oh, no, siree, I wasn't going to let my little girl have her baby in jail. No, siree." It was so cute, so cute. And then Oscar develops a relationship with one of the jurors that he'd been eyeing. (Laughter) He's so great. His closing remarks, he cites a Bob Dylan song and gets very teary. I had friends who were attorneys. They said, "Oh, Lydia, come on, you and Fred come and see us." He says, "We're worried about you, and we'd be happy to represent you." And I said, "Oh, no, we've got to stay together. It's a Movement thing." I was a little nervous because Oscar was so--what is the word? Not erratic, but he was--and he was a little mercurial. It just depended on his moods and drugs and a whole bunch of stuff. So he wasn't, to me, wholly dependable, but it was a Movement thing, so, yes, I

put my hands in the life of this person. We all did. But my other lawyer friends were concerned about us, and I appreciated that. It was very kind of them to offer.

01:45:48

ESPINO:

Did you trust him as a lawyer? Was he capable as a lawyer?

01:47:5201:49:19

LOPEZ:

You know what? I had watched him with the Thirteen, the Chicano Thirteen. He did what I thought was brilliant. He subpoenaed every Superior Court judge because he wanted the grand jury indictment quashed, because he said, "It's not a jury of their peers." And it isn't, it hasn't been, and it hardly ever is. I sat in the court because I had an investment this time. There was Fred. So I listened to these judges as they talked about how they went about nominating somebody to the grand jury, and Oscar, he says, "Well, do you know any Mexican Americans?" One would say, "I think our gardener is one." And, "How do you go about nominating somebody?" "Well, I ask around the club and see who's available." So all of this is just really getting developed as the mindset of the judges, and they'd say to him out of the court, "Listen, you son of a bitch, if you ever come to my court, I'm going to--," blah, blah. I mean, they were so angry because their work had to stop so they could go in and be here. Oh, they were furious at him. "Don't you ever appear in my court." Okay, that's '70, early '70. Now, very quickly thereafter, I am called by Father Luce, saying, "Lydia, Norman Dowds wants to call you and talk to you. He's a judge, and he wants to appoint you to the grand jury."

I said, "John, that'll never happen." "No, no, no, he knows all about you, he knows about Fred and the Brown Berets. He knows all that stuff. And he goes to one of our churches, and he's a good man and he's a friend." So he calls me, the judge, and he says, "I'd be honored to nominate you." And in those days, a judge would nominate. Now you can self-nominate. So I said, "Okay, let me talk to--." So I talked to Fred about it, and it was a matter of now we were going to test the system, see if I could, with my record, get through this whole system. (Laughs) So I remember talking to Joe and others. I was off to my appointment with the jury commissioner, and I again wore that same dress and my hairpiece and my pearls, because I didn't know what to expect. And I have my interview with the jury commissioner, and after we have our short conversation--it wasn't very long--he said, "Well, I'd be happy to put your name into the process for nomination." And I said, "Oh, okay." Well, I remember going--I had this enormous headache, and I get back to La Raza and they ask me how'd it go. I said, "Oh, it seemed to go well."

So they subpoena you the day that they're going to make the selection and they put it in a big bowl and all the names are in there, and my name was picked. And I remember you had to go

down to where the Board of Supervisors sit and you had to sit there. I said, "Oh, gosh, what am I going to tell Fred?" (Laughs) I said, "The first thing I told him after all ceremonials--." I said, "You know, I have a phone," so I called Fred. I said, "Our life is going to change a little bit this year," because it's a whole year. If I ever write a book, it's going to be What I Wore to the Revolution, because all these critical days I remember what I wore. I remember I wore that hot pink dress twice. I remember I wore a black and white suit here. I mean, all these things. Anyway, it's a different way of looking at my life with a little humor. But then getting to see how justice works from the inside out was such an eye-opener. At that time, the district attorney was Joe Bush, and he was having us do some stupid things. So there were like seven or five--six or seven so-called liberals, and one of them was the wife of Charles Young, Sue Young from UCLA, and she became a great pal. So we called the district attorney and said, "Don't waste our time on these kinds of cases." So I was the youngest to serve and the first Chicana to serve. I was, I think, twenty-eight. About a month or two afterwards, I got a phone call. I think it was Esteban Torres, and he says, "We just heard word that--." (Interruption)

LOPEZ:

Oh, could you open the door?

ESPINO:

Sure, let me pause it. Okay, we're going to stop right now. (End of May 14, 2013 interview)

SESSION FIVE (May 21, 2013)

00:00:32

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is May 21st (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California. I'd like to start today with backing up a little bit. You had previously mentioned that you met Fred Lopez, which your relationship with him is pretty well known in the Movement circles, and you met him at the Church of the Epiphany--no, no, no, the basement of the church?

LOPEZ:

The basement of the Gates house of La Raza.

ESPINO:

Oh, okay. Then maybe you can start there. I thought it was the basement of the Church of the Epiphany.

LOPEZ:

I think the first location of La Raza magazine was 2411 Broadway. Then they moved to the basement of this big old house on Gates Street, north Gates. Broadway's here, on the north, opposite from the Gates Street school, up, and there was a basement. For some reason, I was there, and Fred was the only person there at that time. So we got to talking, and he was kind of quizzing me, kind of like asking me what I did, what was my work, and I said I was working with the East Los Angeles Welfare Planning Council. And he pooh-poohed that. I mean, it was just too--I guess too bourgeoisie or too bureaucratic. I mean, it was just--he didn't see how that was important.

ESPINO:

Establishment?

00:02:2600:05:2900:08:46

LOPEZ:

Yeah. And I don't remember the next time I see him. To me, it's really a puzzle that I don't

remember every detail of every day that I spent with him, but I'm sure we saw each other in a lot of the meetings. Not I'm sure; I know we did. Let me see. I'm trying to remember where I lived, because that always is very telling.

There was so much activity, so many meetings, all these strategy sessions that the boys would have, and, you know, the women would be around, but they weren't significant players in the development of Movement strategy. I keep saying that I felt that the women were handmaidens to the boys. The liberation for women doesn't take place till--among the white women, until about this time. It's just beginning, and so it's not influencing yet, although there were some pretty pushy women in the Movement. By that I mean strong women. Obviously, the one that I so appreciated because she was afraid of nothing was Alicia Escalante. She was so strong and continued to do her work with the welfare rights organization when people would just criticize people on welfare and all the typical stuff that people say about "those people." So there was a lot of meetings going here to there, demonstrations. At the same time, there were boycotts with the farm workers, so we'd go to Safeway, boycott those stores. Meetings at the Euclid Center for the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee. So there was a lot of interaction. I live in Echo Park, and my roommate is a woman named Conchita Thornton, beautiful woman. And we had on our walls a picture of Che. Everybody did, all these political--we were living in Echo Park, which at that time was greatly influenced, had been greatly influenced by the migration of a lot of Cubans. And our windows were open. I mean, we were upstairs. One day, somebody broke into the house, and so we were afraid. So Fred said, "Well, I'll come over. I'll spend the night." And he did. He sat in the living room chair and read and did stuff. He used to write a lot. He was just there to make sure that we were safe. I thought that was a very kind thing to do.

And then one thing led to another. We moved in together--we moved into a house where Oscar Acosta had lived up on Museum Drive, and so he was moving out of the house, and it was a really cool house up on the hillside. There was just hill behind it. It was really quite private, lots of stairs to get up. So Fred liked the house, I did, too, so we moved in there and rented that house. I remember sanding the floors and doing a lot of work. I used to make my own curtains, I used to sew a lot, so the house was--the decorating was my domain. So we lived there for a while. Before that, Fred had been living further down the hill in an apartment of an old house. Fred was now developing the National Chicano Health Organization, and that was a national organization that he developed and he got funding for. And he was a very good fundraiser. I was working. Fred had gotten some money from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to do some organizing around the issue of free lunches for poor kids in the public school system. But that happened later. Excuse me. First he got something, some money from them, and we developed something called the East Los Angeles Action Council, and it was to organize around issues of consumer issues. We did research in the markets. We'd take women and we'd go with our little clipboards and we'd look and see if the vegetables were fresh, what kind of food they were selling, and all that. And we did this in the stores of East Los Angeles, made some of the owners very angry. One store in particular, on Brooklyn--at that time, it was Brooklyn--the owner was, I think, a very kindhearted Jew, and he--I think it was called Big Buyer (phonetic), Big-something, anyway.

ESPINO:

Bi-Rite or Big Saver?

00:10:50

LOPEZ:

No, it's something like Big Saver, something. Anyway, we saw that their prices were off, they were more expensive, so we decided to picket the store. Oh, he got so upset. The owner got so upset. So we got a lot of publicity for that kind of work because people were afraid of us. So he wanted to sit down and negotiate with us because he didn't want any of this foolishness. I mean, he wanted to continue to make money. So it was an interesting time of activism and getting involved with other people, meaning Anglos that were also doing consumer research, Ralph Nader and some others. So it was a different time. It was a very different time. Today I think it would be very difficult to pull that off because so many of the store are not independently owned; they're big corporations. I mean, even when, in the recent past, Tesco came in, well, it's owned by a major corporation from England, and to show how stupid their marketing was, they came, and the first store they opened was in Compton, and they had one of the princes--I think Edward--to come to the grand opening. And their line, their way of selling, was individually pack things. It was called Fresh & Easy, is, "Come on in. Everything is packaged, easy, inexpensive."

But what they did, it was not unionized. The staff didn't work the full eight hours. I mean, they really cut corners to be able to have cheap food, and they had a marketing strategy, they were going to open stores, hundreds of stores in the southern--and I go, "Hundreds of stores?" But they were all these small stores, and they lost millions of dollars and they decided to close up shop. It was just a stupid marketing strategy. But obviously they had the money to burn. But back in those days, so many of these stores were individual, except for Safeway and then Vons. When we were picketing Safeway, and then they make an agreement with Vons. The head of Vons is, again, this wonderful man. His name was Bill Davila and he was a Mexican American, and he was the head of this major corporation.

ESPINO:

This is much later you're talking about. Like the eighties?

LOPEZ:

No, no, no.

ESPINO:

Nineties?

LOPEZ:

This is 1970--

ESPINO:

Because I recognize that name and I recognize the--it was with the UFW boycott.

00:12:47

LOPEZ:

It wasn't the eighties. It was in the seventies. It'll come to me.

ESPINO:

Well, before we go to that--you're talking about the grape boycott with that, of Vons, right? But when you first start working with Fred on the health issue and the food-quality issue, how many people were involved in that? Was it just you two?

LOPEZ:

It was a small office, about three people.

ESPINO:

You actually had an office? You didn't work out of your house?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, an office over in Maravilla. We rented a little office, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund funded it--

ESPINO:

Wow.

00:15:57

LOPEZ:

--because they were really concerned about food and the poor and access. So then it went from that--we closed that because the funding stopped for that, and so that got transitioned into a deal that Fred made with the head of the NAACP, this wonderful woman--her name was Jean Fairfax--to fund a drive that they were very interested in to get school lunches for the poor. So my job was to organize support for that. Today we think "no brainer," but at that time, there wasn't that for poor kids. So I worked with the National Council of Jewish Women, Church Women United, the National Council of Negro Women, and we started organizing and having meetings to try to leverage the Board of Education to do this. Oh, now I remember. This particular work is 1969,

because this plays into the trial later when I'm arrested. So this was '69 that I was doing this, because when I was arrested, these entities, Church Women United, National Council of Jewish Women, National Council of Negro Women--the Jewish women, the Negro women, and the Protestant women pay for my bail. It was a hoot, because when we decided to turn ourselves in--and I was pregnant at this time. This is January of 1970. Oscar tells the police, "Oh, Mrs. Lopez is pregnant, so don't process her. We have her bail right here."

So the police come over and pat my belly, "Oh, she doesn't seem that pregnant to me." "Well, she's going to have her baby anytime now." Well, that was January. The baby didn't come till June. So we stretched the truth. So that's why I remember the date, because these women were so helpful in providing the bail. So like they say, the rest is history. The kids started to get lunches and meals. I mean, it's still an issue today, and with cutbacks and they want to cut the breakfast program and they want to cut the staff. So it continues to this day.

ESPINO:

Was it the first public school program implemented, free lunch public school program in the United States?

LOPEZ:

Well, I don't know if it was the United States, but I know it was here the first time.

ESPINO:

In L.A. or Southern California?

LOPEZ:

LAUSD.

00:17:05

ESPINO:

How did you present your case? What kind of evidence did you have, and how did you gather that kind of evidence?

LOPEZ:

It was a lot of leveraging. I'd bring in my friends from the National Council, depending on who we were going to see, and we'd go and ask for meetings and we'd present our case. We presented our case in front of the board meetings. We'd bring people with us. It was just Basic Organizing 101, and just keep the pressure on, keep the pressure on.

ESPINO:

But like today, for example, you would have to have numbers, you would have to have statistics, how many kids need this, why is it necessary, and give me some hard facts. Where did you get the hard--or did you not need hard facts?

00:19:38

LOPEZ:

We were working with somebody from UCLA who was in the industrial relations section who'd done studies, and there were some people from the Western Center on Law and Poverty who were also helping us. So it was, in its time, a noble effort. People wanted to do this. It just seemed like the right thing to do. And when those things come together, it's a really sweet spot, it's a really great place to be, because people don't need a lot of convincing. One of the women that was on the Board of Education, many years later, maybe even just five or six years ago, I met her family. I mean, she's died now. But her family were active Episcopalians. I didn't know any of this until I'm at an event and, "Well, my mother was--," blah, blah, blah. And I go, "Oh, my gosh." I mean, so playing to people's goodness always--not always--was really useful, and the difficulties were in some of the members of the Board of Education, just kind of stubborn, and they weren't about to be told what to do. But it was important.

My work with that ended about the time that I--okay, we got the vote, and then I worked with an NAACP Legal Defense Fund office, and I worked in the office doing just stuff. I mean, I don't even remember what it was that I did, but I remember working in the office for a while, and then the baby comes. And at the same time--okay, that's January. I think it was February or March that I go on trial for CatÃ³licos.

ESPINO:

In '71?

LOPEZ:

Seventy.

ESPINO:

In '70?

LOPEZ:

Uh-huh, because the baby was born in '70.

ESPINO:

So in January, you're arrested, of 1970.

LOPEZ:

The CatÃ³licos por La Raza event was Christmas Eve 1969, and then in January, I get a call at the office by one of my attorney friends, said, "Lydia, there's a warrant out for your arrest." I go, "What?" Then he names not just me, but twenty-one other people. So then we all met and decided were we going to turn ourselves in. So we turn ourselves in. That might have been late January, early February. But then the trial starts, and it started pretty soon, because I remember in that spring, my trial goes first and lasts about four to six weeks.

00:21:44

ESPINO:

That must have been hard.

LOPEZ:

Because there's so many of us. There were eleven codefendants at that time. They split us up into two groups, and the police had to identify everyone and come in; their witnesses had to come in; the Church hierarchy came in. It was a time. But Fred was very resourceful. We always had, I would say, a good life. He was a good provider. He was very clever about writing proposals, getting funded, whether it would be like NAACP or the various church organizations of justice and equality and all those major organizations the churches had in those days. So he and some of the other boys from--"the boys"--the other boys from La Raza would figure out where to go for the money, and Father Luce had a lot of interesting connections. So it was just--they were very clever about finding money.

ESPINO:

Yeah, that's what I've heard, but not everyone knows exactly where that money came from.

LOPEZ:

Well, I can tell you where it came from. Some of the money came from--the Episcopal Church had a program called--it'll come to me.

ESPINO:

IFCO?

LOPEZ:

No, IFCO was another organization, but that was one. It was IFCO, but that came through--I thought that one came through the--

ESPINO:

Interfaith?

00:25:0500:26:38

LOPEZ:

The 475 Riverside Drive. What is it? The Council of Churches. But ours was--it's called the General--no. There was a name for it. I'll think of it. But there was an organization within our church that funded that, that kind of work, meaning community organizing, justice work. So that was part of it. Then later, like 1971, I go on one of those boards. It's after '71. I'll have to remember the date. But it's the National Hispanic Commission, and it has money to give to groups. We got into a lot of trouble because one of the Rodriguez brothers was on that board, some of the fellows from the Crusade Denver were on that board. None of them were Episcopalians, but because the head of it was a woman that was politically in line, she sought out these people.

I was the only Episcopalian, and I got into deep trouble because some of the money was alleged to have gone to groups, were then--they weren't called terrorists in those days, but the fellows from Denver stole some dynamite and were going to cause some trouble. The fellows from Chicago that were part of the leftist Puerto Rican Movement were making bombs and blew themselves up. So all of these FBI are then trying to find out the connections, and they see that the connection is this board. I remember we had a meeting in Puerto Rico at the seminary, and the Puerto Rican bishop was very in line politically, attuned to all this activity. The FBI comes to the gates of the seminary and wants to come in. We all knew we were being followed. The bishop said, "No, you can't come in. This is my place." So they waited until we left, and they followed us home all the way from Puerto Rico.

So what happens is that the two women that are staff to this commission are hauled in by a federal grand jury, and they decide not to speak to the grand jury and they end up in jail for years. Then they re-up another federal grand jury to keep them in jail longer. And our church hierarchy works with the FBI to give them as many records as they have. So the FBI comes knocking on my door, and I had heard from my neighbors that there was a car out there sitting, and I go, "Hmm." And the neighbors said, "These FBI came looking, and with some photographs of these--had we ever seen these people at your house." I said, "Well, thank you for telling me that." What they were looking for were some of these Puerto Rican fellows who were actively involved in all of this stuff. Finally, one knocks on my door, and I said, "Oh, come in." They identified themselves as the FBI. I said, "Come on in." And I said, "I'd be happy to talk to you, but let me call--I need to have my attorney. So let me see when he's available, and then we can meet." And so the attorney was Father Wood, because he was also an attorney. Then I had to hire my own attorney, and it cost me a bundle just to be able to protect myself, because I didn't want to go to jail, and also I didn't know anything. I mean, I just had heard stuff.

ESPINO:

And this is much later, though, too in the--

LOPEZ:

Yeah, it's later.

ESPINO:

--seventies.

00:29:29

LOPEZ:

This is like '72, '73, '74. So my point was that Fred was a provider. The fellows knew where to go for the money. The general program for special--

ESPINO:

Well, people mention Risco's role and they don't know where he got his money from, and so they just assume that Father Wood or Father Luce was bankrolling him. Is that your understanding?

LOPEZ:

I think there's some truth to that. It's a deep puzzle, because here he comes from Cuba, goes to Kansas, he's at a Baptist school there, ends up being invited by Luis Valdez to the farm workers, is there for a while and then comes down here. I mean, to me, all that movement is of interest, because travel and money and all of that costs, so somebody--there was money somewhere. But when he gets here and he makes a connection with Father Luce, Father Luce liked him a lot. In fact, bless his heart, Father Luce loved the idea, loved the fact, that Risco became a priest, although he knew that Risco was working for one of the most conservative bishops, one of the holdouts that would not ordain women, was a pro-grower right in Central California. So here he'd been working for the farm workers, all of a sudden he's working for the anti-, and you go, "How do you reconcile that?" And then inside the Church, he becomes a part of all the conservative movement inside the Episcopal Church, and everybody saying, "Oh, I hear Risco's a priest, and where's he working? We thought, well, maybe he's going to South Bronx or he's going to work at El Paso." No, he was working up there, and it was such a puzzle.

ESPINO:

Do you know why he left?

LOPEZ:

Why he left the Church?

00:32:05

ESPINO:

Well, why he left Los Angeles.

LOPEZ:

No. I'd have to think about that one. I don't remember. Why did he leave Los Angeles? Well, he left Los Angeles, goes to Fresno to do that health work. I don't remember when he meets his future wife. Ruth Robinson is out of the picture, and I don't know what happened there. But he goes up there. Then after, we hear that he's then gone to seminary, which is in the north.

ESPINO:

Is your recollection of that time that he kind of just left abruptly and nobody knew what to do with the paper and who was going to run it and that kind of thing, or did he leave and the paper continued to--because it went on for six more years--

LOPEZ:

For a while.

ESPINO:

--after he left.

00:35:12

LOPEZ:

I don't think he was--I don't remember, because isn't it Raul that ends up taking over? So I don't know what caused the transition. Let me remember. I'm trying to remember. Seventy-two or '73--I'd have to look at my divorce papers--Fred and I are divorced. Fred starts going to UCLA to finish his undergraduate, and that takes him a while. While there, he meets a woman named Yolanda, and five years after our divorce, they get married. Then he goes north to Boalt to do his law degree. And she has done her master's at UCLA in social work and ends up being the head of the social welfare system for Alameda County until she retires, not right away, but then eventually, and she retired last year. Fred retired when he was fifty, and I go, "How could he afford to do that?" Well, he did it, and he bought property. He owns property. He and Yolanda had one son, and then the second child was an adopted child from El Salvador. Every Christmas, Fred would come over and bring me a Christmas gift and bring his boys, and I had a piano. One of the boys would play the piano.

I mean, we were very friendly. I've seen him at the wedding, I've seen him at the--no, at the shower, at the wedding, at the baptism, and these days, that's enough, because I remember going to the shower, and it was at what I call the Ponderosa, April's family spread. They live in Leona Valley, which is a beautiful place. Anyway, I'm there, and all of a sudden, this old man comes like this, "Hi. Congratulations," and it was Fred. And I go--first of all, I didn't recognize him, and we'd all gotten a little grayer. Then Yolanda comes over, and she says, "Oh, congratulations, Grandma," blah, blah, blah. I remember when I first met her--and this was like five years, six years after our divorce--I'm in church because a friend of ours, her baby was going to be baptized. It's an Episcopal church in Highland Park. Alejandro's with me, and he says, "Mom, Dad's here." (Interruption)

LOPEZ:

So I was at church--

00:36:50

ESPINO:

Okay, so we're back.

00:39:47

LOPEZ:

--and Alejandro says, "Mom, Dad's here." And I go, "Oh." He says, "And Yolanda's here." I had never met her, and I go, "Oh. Oh." So I said, "Where?" He said, "Over there." He says, "But I'm not going to turn around and look." Anyway, after the baptism, there was a party at the house. At that time, Yolanda was just a gorgeous woman. She looked like a young Sophia Loren. She was quite beautiful. She had a dance troupe, a Folklorico group. So we're sitting across the way, and it was a very uncomfortable time because I thought, "Oh, gosh, she's so beautiful." So we leave. But I remember conversations with him, periodic conversations with Fred, and then I feel something in my stomach and I go, "Oh, that's why I'm not married to him anymore," because he had a way of thinking and his own opinions about things. So thankfully, we're beyond that. But back to '70, my trial is first and his trial is second, his group. In '69--when was it exactly? Oscar Acosta, the attorney, subpoenas every Superior Court judge because he wants to find out how they appoint people to the grand jury and he wants the indictment quashed of the Thirteen, the Chicano Thirteen. So I remember being in the courtroom during some of that testimony, and that was really important work because it was really trailblazing work. Nobody had really given the grand jury much thought, and it was really made up of old retired white people. So now we're at '70. I'm on trial, Fred's on trial. Then that's over. Then '71, I'm appointed to the grand jury, and so that was--we never thought that would happen.

ESPINO:

Yeah, and that's based on Oscar's work. How you got to that point--

LOPEZ:

Yes, yes.

ESPINO:

--was based on that work from the--

LOPEZ:

Oscar's work, and it had permeated the system so much so that my judge--I call him "my judge," but Norman Dowds, a Reagan appointee to the bench, a conservative, wealthy man from San Marino, had called Father Luce and said, "I want to appoint a Mexican American. Do you know any?" He said, "Mrs. Lopez. She just had a baby. She's married," blah, blah, all this. So that's how that happened.

ESPINO:

Interesting.

00:41:59

LOPEZ:

But he, Norman Dowds, gets into big trouble with the system, with the other judges, because he's not playing ball. He is appointing somebody, thereby embarrassing them. It wasn't until he dies that I hear in the eulogy of one of his sons that, "My father was the first judge to appoint a Mexican American, and because of that, he was thrown out of the old boys' club." And it was at that time that I go to--after we finish the service and the grace, I go to the son, and I said, "I am that person." I mean, we had tears in our eyes. It was a very--because he was a wonderful, wonderful man. He would come to church, to Epiphany, for all the major holidays, he and his wife, and on Christmas we would meet for one of the nights of Posadas down at Olvera Street. I still have his picture, his photograph, and his obituary from the L.A. Times. I mean, it's

something that I keep not far away.

So that was so improbable that here I am, and he says, "I know all about your history. I know that Fred was a Brown Beret and I know all of this," he said, "but I'd be proud to nominate you." And I go, "Okay." So I was nominated and I was selected. At that time, well, I had to go and met with the jury commissioner. I don't know. Did I tell you that I wore that same pink dress?

ESPINO:

Yes.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, so I met with the jury commissioner. He said, "Oh, I think we're fine. I will be happy to put your name in." So then it goes into a big bowl and they select me. So life is very different that next year, but I never thought that I would get that far. I thought, "Well, they're going to know she's got a record, that he's--," all that history.

00:43:05

ESPINO:

They don't ask you about your views on certain things? They don't question you?

LOPEZ:

No. I think what he mostly wanted to know, what kind of--I'm trying to remember--what kind of work I did. I'd finished, long ago, my work with the school lunch program, and then I was at home with the baby. So for all they knew, at this point she was just another homemaker from San Gabriel. That's where we lived at that time. But he was just a functionary who had to kind of--I don't know what authority he had. He was just processing all the papers that were coming through from judges.

ESPINO:

Well, that's interesting, because when you are selected for a jury trial, you get asked questions.

LOPEZ:

Oh, you get a lot of questions.

ESPINO:

So for a grand jury, you don't get asked anything?

00:45:13

LOPEZ:

Yeah, isn't that interesting? I never again served on jury duty from '71 until about six years ago, and I thought maybe it's because I gave a year of my life. Well, I was called, and everybody in the office was getting subpoenaed. So I said, "I'm going to do it." So I did, and I went down there, and I go, "I'm going to be quiet. I'm going to be anonymous. I don't want to get selected." So you're up there and they're doing all the questions, and the judge says, "Mrs. Lopez." "Yes." "Have you ever served on a jury?" I say, "Yes." I said, "I've served on the grand jury." And he says, "And for how long was that?" I said, "Well, it was for a year, your honor."

And he says, "Oh, Mrs. Lopez has served on a jury for a year. Let's appoint--." And everybody applauded. I was so embarrassed. I go, "This is the end of my anonymity." So I served. It was like a five-day trial, but here I thought I was going to sneak out of there.

ESPINO:

Well, let me go back to 1968 and how you become aware of CatÃ³licos por La Raza.

LOPEZ:

Through Fred, because he was having conversations with Richard Cruz. It was through that. And then Fred tells me we're going to church on Christmas Eve, and that's when I told you I wore the hat and heels, thinking that I was literally--I thought, "This is Christmas Eve. I know how special Christmas Eve services are." And Fred was dressed up. Fred always dressed well. He was never wrinkled. I mean, I don't know how he did that. I mean, I wear a shirt and it gets wrinkled right away. But it's that long walk down Wilshire Boulevard, I'm in heels, and then the whole eruption takes place. But Fred has told me to stay across the street. I have his address book, keys. Joe Razo brings his keys over. All the boys bring their keys to me, and Fred says, "Stay here." And when I see all this is happening, it's pretty scary to see the police coming this way and the horses and all this stuff going on, and the crashing of the glass door, and you don't know whose where.

00:47:12

ESPINO:

Were you upset that you weren't warned?

LOPEZ:

You know what? I wasn't upset. I'm trying to think. I wasn't upset, that I can remember. It was more of a puzzle. I thought, "Well, it's all part of the strategy, and it's their work," meaning it's always the boys' work. I don't remember being upset. I remember being afraid because not knowing where people are, not knowing where Fred was.

ESPINO:

But there were some women involved who did go inside the church.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah. Anna Nieto Gomez, Pat.

ESPINO:

Alicia Escalante? Was she there?

LOPEZ:

Yes, oh, yes, she was arrested that night.

ESPINO:

Lilia Aceves? Do you remember her from ComisiÃ³n Femenil?

LOPEZ:

I remember Lilia, but I don't remember where she was that night. Yes, there were quite a few women. Oh, of course, Gloria Chavez, who'd pulled the altar cloth. She was a little kind of an unusual woman. So, yes, there were people that had gotten inside during the service time, and there were other people that got inside into the lobby, into the chapel before it was impossible to get in because the doors were locked. I don't know exactly when that happened. I don't know the timing of that, but I do know that the police later say in the trial that, "There was a woman in the lobby who kicked me here and another person in the chapel who was wearing a multicolored poncho." So, I mean, yeah, there were women.

00:49:31

ESPINO:

Did they know it was going to be that kind of a protest, that they might get arrested? Because it seems like when Fred and Joe give you their keys, they know.

LOPEZ:

They know something's coming up, and so much so that--well, first of all, they knew we were coming, meaning there were all these thousands of people walking down Wilshire Boulevard. The police were ready over here. The ushers were undercover sheriffs, part of the Anchor Club. So the stage was set.

ESPINO:

Well, then maybe we can even back up a little bit more, how you got involved in this protest. Was it just, for instance, we're going to church, or were you part of the activism with CatÃ³licos before that?

LOPEZ:

No, I was never part of the strategy of the work, and I felt uncomfortable about it in the fact that I was not a Roman Catholic, and felt that I was a little embarrassed or hesitant--I don't know what the word is--a little reluctant to be overtly critical of the Roman Catholic Church because it wasn't my church. The only thing my father ever said to me, he says, "Mijita, it's not even your church." That's all he said. He never said, "What a stupid thing--." He says, "Mijita, it's not even your church." I go, "Yeah."

ESPINO:

Did you have strong feelings about the Catholic Church?

00:51:1700:54:5000:56:0600:59:10

LOPEZ:

I didn't like the fact that they were not serving our people, and in that, I didn't feel it was right.

Okay, this is '69. In my church at that time, there had already begun work among the Spanish-speaking, and, of course, Father Luce had been around for four years. He and Roger, Father Wood, would come by and see us picketing (unclear), and they would wave, but they were never part of it because it was not their church and they didn't think it was right for them to be there. So I was reluctant to be overtly critical, although there appeared to be an issue of justice in this whole thing. I remember some meetings--and, of course, Richard was such a fiery speaker. He was so animated. I mean, he was really something. He was a character. I remember when we're in trial, he says, "Lydia, have the baby in court. It's good for the Movement." (Laughs) But the charges were made by the Church, by the hierarchy of the Church. When we turn ourselves in and they take us downstairs, they make us sit on the floor in Parker Center while we're being processed, and the police are very glib in talking to us. It was Armas and his boys, and he was notorious because he was the one that was really following the Movement for the police department. We asked him, "Well, who's pressing the charges?" And he said, "Well, the diocese, archdiocese." And I go, "Well, that's interesting." So sure enough, during the trial, the boys in red, the hierarchy, comes in. Not the cardinal, but some of the auxiliary bishops come to talk about the terrible event that has taken place, although later on, I go and work in a Roman Catholic church. I was there because Louie Olivares had asked me to come and work for him, not because I was working in an institution that happened to be a Roman Catholic Church. I was working with Louie and supporting his work with the Salvadoran refugees and the immigration and the amnesty stuff that was happening then later on. Now we're talking about the eighties. So it was a place from which to work, but it wasn't so much church, although I end up, because of that, meeting some of the most incredible human bishops and cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church, some of the people that were really very committed to the community and to justice.

Then one time--this is 1979 now--Louie has gotten an invitation to go to the White House to meet the pope when he was coming in '79, and it was Carter who was the president. At that time, it was his first visit to the United States as pope, and so he invited me to go with him, so I go, "Oh, cool." So we flew all night. We went to one of the local seminaries that we had arranged and took our shower, changed our clothes. I put on my fancy clothes, and I had a Guadalupe medal that I wanted him to bless for Fred's mother. The program was a beautiful program, and so I thought I was the only Episcopalian there. When I get into the grounds--and it was in the South Lawn, and it was maybe two thousand people. In the front row were all these Episcopal bishops, and they, "What are you doing here?" "What are you doing here?" It was just kind of fun.

So, watching the pope come down and then walking around the people and greeting people as he

comes closer, I have never in my life--because I don't go to concerts, so I don't see people getting crazy. I never was crazy about the Beatles to-do, that. But people actually got--I mean, men got so excited, I mean, "He's coming! He's coming! He's almost here!" I remember he had the bluest eyes, just these deep blue. You want to sink into them. I mean, they were beautiful eyes. And then off he goes. It was a wonderful, wonderful event. I come home and I take my program and the medal to Antonia Wright, Fred's mother. She's kind of, "How do you get invited to these things? You're not a Roman Catholic." During the UNO days--this is '79. About this time, I have an annual meeting with the cardinal, and I loved Timothy Manning. I'm sure they had to know what my history was, but he was very kind to me. When I got elected--and I have a picture of it there, of that convention--I sat next to Bishop Arzube, and when the vote is counted, he says something, and he was trying to be kind, but at the same time, there was an edge to it. He said something that, "You were elected by all these Roman Catholics." And I said, "Yes." He had been brought in as a result of the work of CatÃ³licos, because he was their Latino. He comes in from South America, and then he doesn't have a very noble end, because he did get into trouble. But there are people in the Movement, to this day, that will say he tried to be helpful, because he's the one that brought the idea of organizing through the IAF and because of his relationship with Gil Cano. And Gil Cano was a very active Roman Catholic layman who was working out of Epiphany.

ESPINO:

Early, in the early--you mentioned him before.

LOPEZ:

This was '74. We're talking about '73, '74. So he and Gil are in San Antonio and see the organization there, COPS, and they say, "Well, let's see about bringing that idea here." So in 1974, the Organizing Committee was formed, and the first check that went into that was from Epiphany, because Roger Wood believed in that so much.

ESPINO:

For UNO?

LOPEZ:

For what later becomes UNO.

ESPINO:

It later evolves into--it starts as COPS?

LOPEZ:

It was called the Organizing Committee. It was the Organizing Committee. There was another name for it. But the name of UNO did not come out until '76, and that was there was a big, big, big demonstration at the Board of Supervisors, and the place was filled. And at that time, Ernie Cortez, who was the organizer, announces that we are the United Neighborhoods Organization, and everybody cheers. And that's the name of it, and that's when the name comes out.

ESPINO:

Okay, I'm going to stop it here. (End of May 21, 2013 interview)

SESSION SIX (June 4, 2013)

00:59:10

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is June 4th (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California. I want to start today with your recollections of working with Alicia

Escalante. Did you work closely with her during those years you were with the Welfare Planning Council or did you come in contact with her?

00:02:3800:05:43

LOPEZ:

I came in contact with her. I was a little afraid of her because she was a tough cookie. I mean, she was a fighter, and sometimes it was off-putting to me, but she got things done. She was very close to my ex-husband, and he was very close to Bob Gandara, who became Alicia's next husband, from whom she's now divorced. So her comadre went to one of our churches, I think initially started at Epiphany, and then went over to Highland Park All Saints. My ex-husband was a godfather to one of Janice Rodriguez and Earl Rodriguez's children, and Alicia was also godmother of one of the other children. I mean, so there was a lot of family, friendly connections with Alicia, but that was later. I mean, when I first met her and you'd hear all this stuff that she's doing, you go, "Wow, what a fighter." And there was a counterpart in the African American community. Her name was Johnnie (phonetic) something, Johnnie something, this tough black woman. There were times when people would try to pit them against each other. She was very careful, I think, to stay away from that. She was often at the church because she would need Father Luce's help for something or to announce something.

I remember being on some of her pickets, because it was kind of like--it felt like we were all in this together. It was us against the world. I mean, I felt that way about the people in the Chicano Movement. We had the same interests, the same kind of passions, different places on the political spectrum, but the issue of police, the issue of welfare rights, the issue of education, and so forth. So it seemed like there was always something going on. Alicia would come to a lot of the meetings of EICC over at the Euclid Center. She was quite a force, and a force in a good way of saying Alicia, she was a force. It was so good to see her at Father Luce's memorial because I hadn't seen her in so many years. She now has long braids and she wraps them around. I had talked to her. She sent the loveliest note, email when she heard that Father Luce had died and the memorial was going to take place, and she said because of her health, she couldn't get on the train. Her son, he'd been sick, and if he could drive her, she would come. And we didn't know to the very last. That's why she didn't get on the program. But once we knew she was coming, absolutely she had to be on the program. She said something to the effect that, "I didn't always agree with Father Luce, but I had a lot of respect for him." I don't know what the disagreements were, but I thought that was very self-effacing. And to see Alex all grown up, he is the sweetest child--I mean the sweetest young man. The night of CatÃ³licos and Alicia was arrested, so Fred and I went to their home so we could be there with the kids when they woke up, because the next morning was Christmas morning. He was just a wee little baby, and I don't think I had seen him since. And it was so good to see him. He's been so generous with his art and some of the things he's done. He's sent me emails, pictures of some of his huge pieces that he--it's fantastic, really good work.

ESPINO:

He's very talented. Well, you mentioned that Alicia was--that people tried to pit her against the African American welfare rights activists. What was that about? Because I have heard regarding other issues that there was conflict, like regarding War on Poverty funds--

LOPEZ:

Oh, yeah.

ESPINO:

--and who was getting more, that kind of thing. Can you talk to me about that?

00:07:17

LOPEZ:

Sure. The War on Poverty, I worked with OEO. I worked with NAPP for a while; then I went to work with GLACAA, the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Agency, which became the follow-up of OEO locally, and I was on staff. At one time, I had been in the community advocating, then I went on staff, and I was in charge of what was called then the area councils. There was a limited amount of money, and everybody was fighting for that money, for those bits of money. So there were all these fights, and then inside like, let's say, East Los Angeles community, there were fights among--like CSO was taking too much money because Ursula Gutierrez was on the board, so she had to make sure that Tony and his group got money. Then there was the kids that were doing gang work.

We'd go to these area council meetings, and I remember once there were guns in the meeting, and I go, "Oh, my god," because people were really serious about getting that money. I wonder if it wasn't really Machiavellian, that they did that in order to keep people fighting against each other instead of fighting the government or doing something else. But if there was any appearance that any other community was getting more money, oh, people would just--the meetings at the board of the Action Agency were so heated, because people were just going at each other, who got elected to the board and who got elected to head up the area councils and

who staffed them. If Ursula didn't like somebody in East Los Angeles, she'd go to the director and say, "I don't want that person. Get that (unclear)." It was a really hot time because, one, there wasn't that much money. The people always felt that there was more money than was being talked about. People were fighting each other, and the city was so separated, segregated, because there was the San Fernando Valley, and they were just coming up in terms of Latino representation, and that was relatively new at that time. Then there was South Central that was really seen as African American or black, and yet there was the San Pedro area, the Wilmington area. I mean, you go throughout the entire county. But, oh, the fights. I'd come home and I'd go, "What am I doing? Am I safe?" It was really hot.

00:10:03

ESPINO:

Was it just based on race, racial divisions, or were there other issues?

LOPEZ:

I think race and money. I think money, power, absolutely.

ESPINO:

But, I mean, they were split by the African American and the Chicano community.

LOPEZ:

Well, they were split geographically, so you had these areas--like you have now City Council districts, although they're very different today. Demographics are different today than it were then. So the area councils were split into ten different areas. So it was about money and it was about who was going to have the voice of the people that made the decisions about money and kind of moving around for position in order to get money for your--and then the other thing that I was involved in is the team of people that had to review all of the proposals that came in from all these organizations, and review them and then evaluate them and then pass them on. And, boy, if

you had to be careful. If you didn't give a certain organization a good review, your name was mud. It was hot, because there was a time when all the proposals had to come in and then they all had to be reviewed, and that was such a quiet time. And then the word gets out about the evaluation, then the meetings at the board, all these fights. But Alicia did not go after that money. The welfare rights, I don't know where they got their money. Jonnie--her name is--what is her name? I can see this woman.

ESPINO:

Oh, the African American woman?

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

00:12:05

ESPINO:

Lupe Anguiano from the Oxnard area, she worked under her.

LOPEZ:

Yeah, she was something else.

ESPINO:

But I can't remember. I'm thinking Tillman, but that doesn't sound right.

LOPEZ:

I think that's right.

ESPINO:

Is it Johnnie Tillman?

LOPEZ:

I think that is Johnnie Tillman, yeah, yeah. But as I said, I don't know where she got her money, Alicia, but she was a fighter. She lived very simply, nothing fancy about her life, and always had her--she was an organizer. I mean, it's kind of like, oh, right. (Laughs) But she always had her people with her, the women that she had brought along, and others, not just women. There were her people. I don't remember going to her meetings of the welfare organization, but I remember being incensed, because I knew her, of some of the things that people were saying about her.

ESPINO:

What were they saying about her?

LOPEZ:

Well, obviously she wasn't easy to work with. They use all sorts of epithets about her, because you get a woman up there who's pushy and so forth, and they're bound to give her a name. To me, she was simple, but in a good way, not fancy, very down home, rooted, and she didn't--from

my point of view, did not have an easy life because of all the financial limitations on her life, and then her children. I met her early on. Well, for me, early was '69. I don't remember when I met her, but I'd certainly heard about her.

00:14:31

ESPINO:

How did you feel about her position? Because that was controversial.

LOPEZ:

Very controversial, very controversial, because you think, well--as people would say, "If they're that together and that smart and that well organized, why don't they get a job? What are they doing on welfare?" And she was very determined and very strong about how she would respond to that stuff. It was hard. It was hard on her. I'm trying to remember how many children there were. I know there was Alex.

ESPINO:

Lorraine, her daughter.

LOPEZ:

See, I don't remember now.

ESPINO:

I know for sure she had a daughter and a son in the Brown Berets. They were young, junior high,

middle school, and then Alex, and then I don't know how many others there were. Like you mentioned, there was an "us" and we had a common purpose, and Mexican Americans had a similar--but when you look at--she's just one example, because there are several others. But when you look at Alicia Escalante and her advocacy for the rights of welfare recipients, that was a huge conflict, especially among the women, so there was not unity as far as people like Francisca Flores.

00:16:39

LOPEZ:

Well, Francisca Flores was a whole other character. What was the name of the--before the Chicana Service Center, there was another name for that group. We had all been working together. But Francisca was very clever, and she had a proposal ready. We were at some meeting and some people with money were there, some funding source, and she got her thing funded and excluded everybody else, and that was the beginning of the Chicana Service Action Center.

And, oh, it took me the longest time before I could ever speak to her again, because she went after the money to the exclusion of everybody else. Then in the long run, she's seen as a saint who's done all this marvelous organizing among women. But it was so hard because there were those conflicts, there were those different approaches to funding, to relationships, to what you saw as your own mission.

ESPINO:

You felt she betrayed you personally?

LOPEZ:

Well, I mean, there were several of us that had all been part of this group that had been working together. There was a name before that name.

ESPINO:

So it wouldn't be ComisiÃ³n Femenil. Was it ComisiÃ³n Femenil?

LOPEZ:

No, because that was a parallel organization over here that then becomes--I think don't they become--I don't know. I didn't keep up with that after this. But then there was ComisiÃ³n Femenil, and a lot of development was done among ComisiÃ³n of Latinas. So that was terrific.

ESPINO:

Well, can I just interrupt you just for a second? Because this is really important too. Would it be RegeneraciÃ³n? That was a periodical that she put out, like a newspaper.

LOPEZ:

No.

ESPINO:

And then Anna Nieto Gomez had Encuentro Femenil.

00:18:12

LOPEZ:

Mm-mmm.

ESPINO:

So you don't remember the name of the organization?

LOPEZ:

No, no.

ESPINO:

So was it a group of just women?

LOPEZ:

It was an informal group of women. It wasn't an organization. But then I remember we were at some hotel and she goes off and meets with these people. I don't remember who they were. Out of all of that comes funding from her thing, and essentially everybody is out, and it's Francisca's thing.

ESPINO:

Do you remember what you were meeting for?

LOPEZ:

No, I don't, no, but I remember we were in some hotel somewhere.

ESPINO:

But do you remember what the group was meeting for, what this informal group was meeting for?

LOPEZ:

I don't. I haven't even thought of Francisca in a hundred years.

00:19:15

ESPINO:

Do you remember anybody else who was there, maybe Gloria Molina or Yolanda Nava or Sandy Serrano Sewell, some of the early founders of ComisiÃ³n, Lilia Aceves?

00:22:14

LOPEZ:

Maybe Lilia would know. But I think that Gloria and Sandy, they came a little later. They weren't part of this other smaller group, because then the thing gets funded, then there's money, then there's organizations that start. But I have a picture of a newspaper that I have for you to see of a visit of--in 1979, Ethel Kennedy comes to town, and I had a group called Mujeres en AcciÃ³n. Esteban Torres was a dear friend, and he said that she was coming back to Los Angeles the first time since the assassination of her husband, and I said, "Well, great. Let me host her." So TELACU had built a housing development over on Third Street, and so we said, "Well, we'll have (Spanish word) and coffee, and we'll have her come." So there's a picture of us there and some of the women that were there. I remember going to pick her up at George Stevens, Jr.'s house, the movie producer, at their home in Beverly Hills or somewhere where she was staying,

and she was traveling with one of the attorneys that was very close to the Kennedy family. I remember the car trip of Ethel asking about Yorty, about the police chief, "Who's in charge? Do you still have that same--?" And deriding some of that leadership, as I could imagine was still in her heart. But she talked all the way till East L.A. This woman asked questions about everything. She never stopped talking. Somebody else was with me in the car, and I don't remember who the other person was, but there were two of us that had gone over to pick her up. But that was our little women's group, and this was '79, but Francisca's work had started before then. There were all sorts of organizations developing and getting organized, and this one had a short lifespan.

ESPINO:

Mujeres en AcciÃ³n?

LOPEZ:

Yeah.

ESPINO:

Well, what did you--because, for example, Gloria Molina talks about the sexism in the Movement. That's what led her to join ComisiÃ³n Femenil. You were there in some of the early days, I think probably before she was involved. And also the Women's Movement was happening, and the language of sexism was--I think you said you read The Feminine Mystique, if I'm not mistaken.

LOPEZ:

Oh, yeah, everybody did.

ESPINO:

Did you make those observations in those early days of the walkouts, of the moratorium, of the Brown Berets?

00:23:49

LOPEZ:

Yes. There was a lot of sexism. As I've said before, I felt that many of us, as women in the Movement, were the handmaidens of the boys. They did all the strategy, the important strategy. The only person that fought her way in was Alicia, and Bob Gandara was her enforcer. (Laughs) And, oh, some of the struggles. And I felt that very strongly. Joe and Risco and Fred and others would meet. They'd have their little meetings over there in the corner of La Raza, and that was the boys were meeting.

As I've said before, there were so many different groups, so many different organizations. There was La Junta and LUCHA, and MAOF was over here and CSO was over here. Oh, I saw Vahac Saturday, but that's another story. He was here. So I mean, all these different organizations, but the one thing they had in common was, other than welfare rights, there was no woman at the helm. Now, Gloria didn't come into this, into play, until much later, and for me, it was a very personal struggle for her, because she was working--I don't know the years, but she worked at the White House. I think that was Carter, so that was like '76 or so. I think it was in the employment office of the White House, whatever it's called, but it was the conduit for people to get appointments. So that's where she worked, and she was this cute thing. She was just adorable. She came back to Los Angeles and she wanted to run, and this is a whole story about the Golden Palominos and the boys that weren't going to let her through, and so she got angry. So on one side, you have Richard and Art and all the boys over here that had already made their connections with money, and they were it. And then over here, Gloria's trying to make her way. So essentially, makes all of that public, and so then we have the stories written in the L.A. Times about the Golden Palominos, and we all say, "That is so true. That is so true."

LOPEZ:

So she comes back and she struggles and builds her base, and builds her base by connecting with the white feminists, then becomes seen as the Chicana feminist, because she's been able to make those connections in a way that nobody else had at that level, because she had friends with

Palevsky, Joan, I mean, just all the women from the West Side, as they called it in those days. So she was able to kind of coalesce all of that, and there was the longest time--only in recent past--for the longest time, Alicia was at odds with the boys. If Richard or Art supported somebody for political office, she'd support somebody else. I mean, there was--

ESPINO:

You mean Alicia or Gloria?

LOPEZ:

I mean Gloria. There was always--kind of like you'd say, "Who's Gloria going to support? Who's Richard going to support?" That happened for the longest time.

ESPINO:

So there was a longstanding grudge.

LOPEZ:

A longstanding grudge, and I think this last election when Gloria and Antonio--and then there was a grudge between Gloria and Antonio, and that has to do, again, with Antonio sleeping around, and Gloria was upset by that. He was on the MTA board.

00:28:26

ESPINO:

Are you talking Villaraigosa or Rodriguez?

LOPEZ:

Antonio Villaraigosa. So there was a split there, so when he ran, she did not support him. But when Gil Cedillo ran this last time, Antonio supported him, Gloria supported him. I mean, it seemed like he had so many of the top-tier leaders in the Latino community supporting, so it felt like maybe that grudge was over. Of course, now she's not going to be running again, and then they say that Hilda will run, Hilda Solis will run. So we'll see how all that plays out.

ESPINO:

Do you think that those comments about her sleeping her way to the top were part of that same sexism of the time period?

LOPEZ:

It could have been. It could have been. But, see, that was one of the rumors about her, and I have no way to believe that they were true or false. Just like the comments about Antonio sleeping around, I don't know whether they were true or false, other than we later know that his marriage fell apart and he does what he does, but that's current history, I mean recent history. So you just say, well, it's essentially their lives. But what is accurate, from my point of view, is that she did try to run for political office and she had none of their support initially.

00:30:48

ESPINO:

Well, what about your own experience with the sexism? How do you feel you were treated by the men in the La Raza--I was calling it the collective, but I don't know if that's an accurate description, because you were meeting together and there was a central meeting place and there was this paper that was coming out based on your efforts. But I'm trying to find the right word to describe that, since there was a lot of infighting. But how do you feel you were treated by--

00:33:1300:35:12

LOPEZ:

How was I treated? I think part of me was ignored. Part of me was periodically listened to. I don't see my rise in leadership, what I call the pinnacle of my leadership was not around the Chicano Movement. I got a lot of--we had our marching orders. I mean, we were on picket lines, we were at the Safeway, and we were doing all that we were doing, so that was all good basic training. There was a lot of, for me, coming into the Movement and understanding politics as I'd never thought of before. My life had been pretty different, and so now considering who's running for political office, what are the major issues, who's up and who's--all of this stuff was very different. So I was on a steep learning curve. And typical of that time, we all had the books, you know, all the books that everybody was reading, you name it, and everybody was carrying them around and trying to read them. There was a picture at our party at Epiphany where they had a whole wall of the history of Epiphany, and in there, lots of pictures of Sal Castro and the sit-in. There's a picture of me on the front row and Vahac is talking to us, and there I am. People say, "Well, where are you, Lydia?" I said, "Right there." I had my hair up. I had a hairpiece on with curls. And I go, "Oh." I'm trying to now remember that meeting because you had asked before, "What did you do while you were sitting there?" and, of course, we had a lot of pronouncements. But a lot of this was learning how the educational system ran, and then trying to figure out who to believe, because there had been Julian before, and now there was Sal Castro, there was Vahac, there were all these other people that were advocating for some rights.

It was dizzying sometimes, but it wasn't--after the Movement essentially--let me see. To me, the major dates are '74, Fred and I divorced, and then my life from '74 to '76 is very quiet and I'm living in South Pasadena raising a child. Then Epiphany gets started with the first check to the Organizing Committee that becomes UNO, and it was there that I received my most important training, because I stayed away from the organizing of all of that, because I said to Father Wood, "Oh, we know what the issues are. We did the Movement. Enough already. Life is very fine. I don't need to bother about this." And he said, "Okay." So I went to a meeting--and this was probably '76, late '76--and Pete Pitches (phonetic) was there, and there was some talk about gangs and all sorts of things. He saw me there, and, of course, he knew me from '71 when I was on the county grand jury. "Mrs. Lopez, I'm so glad to see you here. Of course you would be here. This is a very fine organization and one that I can work with. It really represents the community." I go, "What the hell did you (unclear)?" I go, "Well, very nice."

So it was not without thought that the organizers see that I'm there, and it's like red meat, you know. They go after Lydia because they want me to be part of the whole effort, and as a leader of the Church of Epiphany, I've been absent from all their work, although I'd been enormously impressed with some of the very kind of dear folk for the church, these women who were talking about auto insurance redlining and had all this information, and I'm like we're talking about how to make tamales. They were talking, "Oh, you know that the auto--?" And they were talking about all these issues, and I go, "How did they get so smart?" And they said, "Well, we went to a meeting and we're going to meet with the insurance commissioner." I said, "How did you even know that?" I mean, I didn't even know there was an insurance commissioner. So one thing then

leads to another, and quickly I go to what is called national training, which is two weeks, fourteen days-- (Interruption)

ESPINO:

Is that your phone? Okay, let me pause it. (Recorder turned off)

00:37:0400:39:15

LOPEZ:

I'm learning. So I go to national training, and it's been the most important set of tools that I have received. Now, I've done training since then when I worked on the CORE board. I was on the CORE board, then I went on CORE staff and did the neighborhood training, but that's after this. I feel that the IAF training was superior to anything we got through CORE. It taught you how to run a meeting, how to work on research an issue, all about the one-to-one organizing, and it was very important training.

They had you go up and learn how to do what was called a power analysis. So you looked at Los Angeles, as an example, and you find out where the levers of power are, and it's not always in the Mayor's Office. We researched that, and then we decided, well, those are the people, the people that run Los Angeles, that we have to meet with. So we went and asked for a meeting with a group called the Committee of 25. It had been put together by an old insurance person named Asa Call. We had wanted to meet with them, and their broker, the funnel through which we had to go, was Art Torres. He got in the middle of that because they knew him and he was so approachable and likeable and he had already served or was serving in the state legislature. So he came and met with us, said, "Well, why do you meet with them? They don't have any power." I said, "Well, it's okay. We want to have a conversation with them." And we pushed and pushed. Then they sent out their person later, and he was an executive with one of the banks. No, no, he was an insurance executive. Later on, we find out he's married to a Latina, but a Latina family from one of the rich families of south of the border. Anyway, his name was Steve Gavin, may he rest in peace. He came out and he says, "Well, I'd be happy to set this up. I mean, what do you want to talk about? There's nothing they can do for you. I mean, you have your elected representatives, you have Mr. Torres," and blah, blah, blah. So we said, "Thank you, but we want to meet with them." And we just kept pushing, pushing.

So we got a meeting, and the meeting was held at the L.A. Chamber of Commerce, which used to be on Bixel. We got there and all these limousines are lined up in front of the building, and we came in in our little VWs. We went in and we were in the waiting area and there's this big map of Los Angeles, and you go, "Oh, great." (Interruption)

00:41:1900:43:3900:46:2700:47:58

LOPEZ:

So this big map of Los Angeles, and so, of course, you want to see where your house is or where East L.A.--it wasn't even on the map. But this was a bird's-eye view of Los Angeles. This starts at the river and goes west. So that became a point of something that we had to remind the leadership that was in that meeting. They represented--Lou Wasserman was there, the fellows from Carter Hawley Hale stores, the Broadway stores in that time, these two insurance people, Fred Hartley, Union Oil--oh, insufferable. That's another story. Well, this has been written up in a book written by Bob Utley (phonetic). But they were there on the table. The person chairing the meeting was Ed Carter, who was the chairman of the board of Carter Hawley Hale. I mean, he looked like God in person, wavy blond hair, square jaw, and he was like this typical patrician kind of taking care of the masses. So we made our case. So what they wanted from us, they wanted a shopping list. "Well, how are you going along with the police chief? How are you getting along with the mayor?" All these things.

And we said, "We'll take care of that ourselves. We just want you to know that we are here and we're intent on correcting some things in the city, and we will do that work ourselves. We just want you to know that we are there." Out of that comes a relationship with Steve Gavin, who becomes very close to one of the priests of East Los Angeles, in fact, goes to their home. I mean, he became very chummy, because, of course, his Latino connection. So it was an interesting thing to have the guts to go up against that, because there had been, just prior to our going into this meeting, an article in the Los Angeles Magazine of a meeting that Tom Bradley had with these people, and that Tom Bradley had gone to meet with them at the club. Of course he couldn't be a member of the club, but he could come as a guest of somebody. And the article says he goes in as a black man and comes out white, because out of that, not unlike what we experience, they have a shopping list of what he's to do, although the Bradley story and my relationship with him and UNO is quite separate than that characterization. But out of that came an understanding that we were serious, we were doing a lot of work, and I think some of the newspaper articles I have about that time--because I have a lot of clippings about the UNO time in my scrapbook that you can see. So that was pivotal because it put us on the map, and obviously the word got out. Snyder (phonetic) was the councilmember at that time, and, oh, he was a handful.

So our work continues. We have learned all these, well, techniques, these strategies. It was typical--well, it's Alinsky. I mean, he was the founder of IAF, and so it was all of that. You organize around something and you disorganize. You go after an issue. And there's a difference between an issue and a problem. Poor education is a problem. An issue is--and for us at that time, was the leadership of principals and how some of the principals who'd been interviewed in every one of our schools by a group of parents, and there was a list of things they were interviewing them about, and they obviously had been trained before they went into these meetings. So out of that comes an evaluation of the principals. So it was decided that some of the principals had to go, and so that became a big fight because the principals have such support. I mean, there's the administration, the organization of principals and administrators. The first

major issue that UNO took on was auto insurance redlining, and we were doing all this work and doing all these interviews, and there were like 30,000 interviews, one-to-ones, that took place prior to this even becoming public. This was from '74 to '76. I was not involved in that, but I didn't come onboard till about late '76. Zev Yaroslavsky was a brand-new member of City Council, and at that time he was fat and had long greasy hair. He didn't own a suit till he became a member of Council. He'd been calling. He wanted to meet with us, and he wasn't on the agenda, so finally he said, "Let's go meet with them." I mean, it was really almost that flippant. So we went--and he put his foot up on the desk, and he says, "Well, I knew something was going on. You're doing work on auto insurance redlining. You're not doing welfare, you're not doing housing or food stamps." He said, "When you took up auto insurance redlining, I knew something different was going on here." And he said, "And I want to work with you."

I said, "Thank you," essentially, and we left. I mean, it was no big deal. There wasn't anything he could do for us because he didn't represent us. And, okay, so he knows that we exist. The person that was really more in our interest was Art Snyder, and the ridiculous--well, his leadership, his whole life was a shambles. He was a most unhappy person, it appeared. We don't know how it happened, but he always seemed to know what was going on with the organization. We would have a meeting with him and he'd be one step ahead of us. "Oh, I took care of that at City Council this morning. I passed a resolution to--," blah, blah, blah. And we go, "Oh, okay." So then you up the ante. So it was an interesting time. I remember when Richard Alatorre was elected. I was at City Hall for the big entrance, mariachis and all of that, and, oh, what a joyous occasion that was as a Mexican American to see him coming in there with his wife and all of that sort of stuff.

Our relationship with Tom Bradley was not always a steady one, not always--Grace Davis once said to me--we were at a meeting at City Hall, hundreds of us, and he was being taken to task, Tom Bradley, and she said to me, "You don't represent East Los Angeles, and you certainly aren't Christian." And I go, "Okay."

ESPINO:

Ouch.

LOPEZ:

We had a term for people like Grace, although I have a lot more empathy for her these days. But she was part of the Bronze Curtain, these Latinos that had made it that were now part of the

problem because you couldn't get through this Bronze Curtain. I mean, it was like Gloria and her Palominos. We were now dealing with the Bronze Curtain, and Art was part of that.

ESPINO:

Would you consider Julian Nava part of that?

LOPEZ:

Julian was already, I think, out of the picture by then.

ESPINO:

But I mean would you consider him someone who was--

LOPEZ:

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, he was--

ESPINO:

--who would fit into that?

00:50:0300:52:3300:53:43

LOPEZ:

Yeah, because he was trying to fix things when we were at the sit-in, and he came in for a meeting with us when we were at the sit-in, and he was trying to make accommodations. And I think if he had had his druthers, Vahac would have probably gone more with him than this unruly radical bunch of Chicanos that could not be controlled, because Sal, to his dying breath, fought and fought. I mean, he was there.

But Bradley would come to our meetings, and I always said--first of all, 1969, John Luce said for us to go work at his office. "There's a racist campaign, this black man is running, Yorty." So he sent a whole bunch of us to the office of Bradley's campaign people, and we worked on that campaign. I was at the retirement party of Tom Bradley, and afterwards, he came by and we were shaking hands and hugging. He had just made an announcement that he was going to spend the last years of his life--the next years of his life; he didn't say the last--working on the issue of racism. And when he came to me, I says, "You know, Mr. Mayor--." I always called him Mr. Mayor. I said, "Mr. Mayor, you've been my mayor as long as I've been involved in community work. You've been the mayor." I said, "I went to work in your office in 1969 because of racism, and here we are together so many years later still talking about racism." We both had tears in our eyes. And he says, "Yes, that's what I'm going to commit myself to doing and working on." I mean, I loved that man, although we had some very difficult days. There was a meeting we had at the auditorium at Public Works at City Hall, and Gloria Chavez, who was the first UNO president, was chairing it. That's why I was in the back with Grace. The issue was around housing, if I remember correctly, and he had been up all night negotiating with the firefighters. He hadn't gotten any sleep. He came in, and she was sitting at the head table. I mean, it was circular. And she was in charge. And he said, "Hey, this is my place. I'm paying for--."

And she says, "No, no, no, I'm paying for this chair." I mean, she was another tough cookie. He says, "Well, if I don't get the microphone, I'm going to leave." And so he left. One of the newspaper articles I have has "Bradley Walks out of Meeting at City Hall." Then he has us into his office several times for meetings on different issues, and then in 1981, I get a call from him, and he says, "Lydia, this is Tom." And I go, "Tom who?" He says, "Tom Bradley." "Mr. Mayor!" He says, "Well, Lydia, I hear that you're the person I need to talk to, because the Archbishop of Canterbury's coming into town, and Ethel and I have been in Las Vegas celebrating our anniversary, and I haven't had a chance to call and make an appointment. Is there any time left?" I looked, and there was none. I said, "But, well, you could meet with him tomorrow at seven-fifteen."

And sure enough, he comes in in the big limo to the rectory there at the church, and he goes in. We put him in the sitting room with the archbishop and they have fifteen minutes. Then I walk with him as we go over to the church for an eight o'clock Mass, and it was a mariachi Mass, and it was beautiful. I have pictures of it. He was sitting there. And at this time, '81, Diana Tarango is the president of UNO, but because I'm from Epiphany, I escorted him. So it's Tom Bradley and Diana, and the British consulate was there, Father Luce comes in from New York to be there for this event because it was a big deal. And the church was packed. We had tickets, and the clergy wanted to come. It was a wonderful, wonderful event. Afterwards, I'm sitting on the dais, and it's Tom Bradley, Lydia Lopez, the bishop, and the archbishop.

ESPINO:

Wow.

LOPEZ:

I go, "Hot stuff." And that's the picture I have right there.

ESPINO:

That's gorgeous.

LOPEZ:

We make the archbishop the first international member of UNO. It's just something to do. But I get to explain to him about the dancers that are going on. His wife was quite a feminist. She died just recently. She was also a pianist. The bishop had not wanted the archbishop to come to East L.A.; he wanted him to go to All Saints Beverly Hills, but Terry Waite, who was his--what do you call the person that does the planning? Not the front man, but the--

ESPINO:

Fixer? That's journalism.

LOPEZ:

The person that came in to do all the groundwork for the visit.

00:55:58

ESPINO:

Well, in journalism, it's a fixer.

LOPEZ:

But Terry Waite said, "No." And Terry Waite's six-foot-five, big guy, (imitates accent), "No, the archbishop wants to go there." So because of that, my bishop had to put Roger, Father Wood, and me on the committee, because it had been all people from over there. So we got invited to all the parties. It was quite a time.

ESPINO:

I'm sure.

LOPEZ:

So we had a wonderful visit and a recognition of that place and our leadership, and a lot of the UNO people got a chance to speak. I had a minor role. I was just up there for the pictures, I think. But it was quite a time for us as Episcopalians to have him recognize this little--the poorest church in our diocese and what we were trying to do in this place. I said, "Well, I hear your wife is a feminist." He says (imitating accent), "Oh, quite so, quite so." I said, "Well, how do you handle that?" He said (imitating accent), "Oh, not very well, I'm afraid." He was so cute. I adored him. I got to visit with him again in San Francisco later on, and he died about ten years ago. But from my point of view, I have met the last four archbishops, and he's my favorite, and he has

done the most, I think, for real ministry in the Anglican Communion worldwide, much more than any of the others.

ESPINO:

What does that mean?

LOPEZ:

The Anglican Communion?

00:57:45

ESPINO:

No, when you say "real ministry."

01:00:04

LOPEZ:

Consideration for the poor, the development of work among the marginalized all over the world, and some of that has come to bite us, because Bishop Tutu, Archbishop Tutu, says, "When the missionaries came, we had the land, they brought the Bible. And when they left, we have the Bible, they have the land." There was a time of development of work in some of these places where people were teaching the Bible in the most literal sense, and Bible-thumping comes--when I was in South Africa, we were at this big service with the archbishop, and it was hundreds in this big church in one of the townships. And I was hearing drums, but there weren't any drums. I was told that the people had their prayer book, and they were hitting the prayer book as if it were a drum (demonstrates). Before, it had been a Bible, so Bible-thumping. And the music is glorious, absolutely glorious, because they'd sing in different--oh, it was beautiful, absolutely beautiful. But the African Church is the fastest growing church in our communion and is also the most conservative, anti-gay, anti-leadership of women, I mean, all the antis that are no longer a part of our lives, for the most part. So, yeah, the Church did a good job, but not my kind of agenda.

Tom Bradley would come to our meetings, and he was so well prepared. He didn't have written speeches; he just knew what to say. In the summer, he'd wear a guayabera. He always looked so well prepared.

ESPINO:

Was he able to do anything practical to help your organization?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah.

ESPINO:

Any real results?

01:01:55

LOPEZ:

We had a big meeting at Our Lady of Talpa Church, and we had up there a board and we had the numbers of the questions that we were going to ask him, and then whether he responded yes or no or wishy-washy, big board, as big as the--big board. There were about seven hundred people there. It was raining, and he was late. He finally arrives. We have our leaders sitting at a conference table, real chairs, and we put the mayor in a children's chair next to this board, and he sits there because there's nowhere else to sit. He's asked these questions, and it had to do with policy for funding of housing, and he answered yes to all of them. So then we had him sign it, and he signs it, but he has to bend over because he's so tall, and the press got his butt in the picture. But the things people will do. He did it, he did it, bless his heart. Out of that came a strong relationship with him about some of these issues.

ESPINO:

Well, let me ask you one thing before we wrap up, and that is just going back to what you said about after you and Fred divorced, then you--well, you were raising your son, and then you got involved in an organization that helped you to develop your leadership. So when you're in a relationship in those early days in the late sixties--well, first of all, you said you moved in together, you didn't get married, so that was pretty radical. But how else did that period affect your relationship? You know, it's a time when everything is being questioned and challenged. Did you have a traditional male-female-type relationship or were you trying to break some of the beliefs or the mores?

01:04:34

LOPEZ:

I think in a little way we were breaking new ground, because he was an excellent father. I mean, he was the kind that would do diapers and change diapers and feed the baby. I mean, I always valued the strong relationship he had with his son, even as a baby. So then when we get a divorce that becomes a real concern of mine, that Fred maintains a strong relationship with his son. But I did a lot of work. I was on some national boards, so I was doing a lot of traveling. Fred would be at home, but we also had a woman that took care of the baby and the house, so there was mobility for both of us. Because he had developed the National Chicano Health Organization and had offices in the Southwest and in Washington. I remember coming back from a meeting I had had in Mexico. We had a great big window in front of the house, and there's my baby at the window. Oh, it just broke my heart. I go, "Oh, gosh." For me it's like, "I've got to stop this," because that little precious child. So it was hard shifting and trying to organize all of that.

Fred was very quiet, very studious, didn't finish his education until after our divorce. He went to UCLA, did his undergraduate, and then from there goes to Boalt to do his law degree, and marries a woman five years after our divorce, who got her MSW at UCLA.

ESPINO:

But during the time that you were in the Movement, I mean, was it okay for you to--I mean, did you have an arrangement where you could do whatever you want, come and go to meetings, and he could come and go? How did you manage all of the responsibilities of the home and childcare?

01:07:3201:08:46

LOPEZ:

I didn't have to wash windows, I didn't have to do toilets, and I had a lot of freedom. As an example, my dearest friend, who died recently, loved the opera. Fred did not. He did not like any of my gringo friends. But this fellow had been in my life since I was three, and a dear friend, so we would go to the opera together. Fred wouldn't mind. He'd stay home with his world. And I had enormous freedom, and I think he liked that. I mean, I think he wasn't intimidated by a strong woman. He wasn't, because the woman he married was another tough broad. And it wasn't that he wasn't strong. He had very strong opinions and a strong core to him. But I had a lot of freedom, had a lot of freedom. We got married at Epiphany, and I bought a dress from Mexico. And I said, "Well, I've got to get new shoes." I bought new huaraches. The mistake I made is that when you're walking down, they squeak, so I'm squeaking all the way down the aisle. It was so funny, because April the 3rd we were supposed to be married, so thought Father Luce. So they had arranged the church for us to have mariachis that night. We didn't know. It was a surprise. So then the next day, Father Luce, he says, "Aren't you and Fred going to get married?" Says, "Yes, April the 13th." He says, "Well, I've already put April the 3rd."

So anyway, April the 13th comes around and we have our wedding, and Bob Gandara stands up for him and I have another friend who stands up for me. We had a party at Oscar Acosta's house. Oscar and Socorro gave us a party, and we were at his house. Grandma's there--not my mother, but my grandma, because my family didn't come to this wedding, nor did his. It was too Protestant for his family, it was too Roman for mine. So I said, well, that's the reason the marriage didn't work, not any other reason. But wonderful meal. Socorro was a wonderful hostess, and there was music and dancing. There were maybe just only about--just us, I mean just about twenty of us. I remember Grandma dancing with Father Luce, and that was great fun to watch because she adored him. But it was a party that went on into the morning. It was wonderful, wonderful.

ESPINO:

I'm interested in knowing about how you negotiated your differences because in some of the earlier sessions, you talk about how you weren't really interested in the people who were too revolutionary, like those--

LOPEZ:

The Red Book.

ESPINO:

--from La Junta, those from--I'm thinking maybe the Brown Berets as well. I don't know if they were too revolutionary.

LOPEZ:

Fred was part of that. I remember being at the Brown Beret office several times because I was helping doing some typing, and I remember leaving. I had a little blue Bug, and I took David home, and David said, "Don't look now, but we're being followed by the police." He didn't live far from where the office was. So he gets out of the car and stands up, and sure enough, there's the police, and the police, "Oh, we just wanted to make sure you got home safely," kind of bull. But the Junta people, I mean the people with the Red Book, LUCHA, I put them in the little categories. What was his name? Joel Flores and that group from La LUCHA were, from my point of view, unremarked, former jailbirds and former drug addicts, and I didn't really want to have much to do with them. La Junta, they were Red Book carriers, and that wasn't me either. But there was a basic tolerance of these people because they were all part of this Movement. So in trying to do anything, you had to be really mindful of who was talking, because you'd understand, then, their interest, the CP types or the accommodating types. I mean, there were just all of that. But there was something else you had asked that I thought to tell you, and it's passed.

01:11:20

ESPINO:

Well, I was thinking about how you and Fred related, because it seems like you guys had different viewpoints.

01:13:26

LOPEZ:

Very different, different families. When I went to meet his family, finally, I say I broke the color line, because my sister-in-law has strawberry blonde hair and green eyes, I mean from the Spanish roots of the family. And his mother, Fred's mother, was a saint. We used to go their home. They lived in South Central, and that's where they were raised. He went to Mother of Sorrows School there. He had all these brothers. And in those days, I had long black hair. Sometimes I'd wear it in braids. So, I mean, to me, I felt I looked very Indian. But I always felt Fred was very proud of me. I would go to church on Sunday and he would drop me off. He wouldn't go to Epiphany. Sometimes he'd leave me with the baby or sometimes he'd take the baby and they'd go off and do stuff. So I had my friends that he didn't want much to do with, and also some of my church friends that were not necessarily a part of the Movement. So 1971, I'm on the county grand jury, and I had asked him for his advice about that. I remember I also asked Joe Razo. He said, "Oh, yeah, go." Both of them said, "Test the system." And I go through the whole thing with the jury commissioner and the interview, and I remember when my name was called that I was a member, I called Fred and I said, "Well, our life is going to have to change a little bit. Our schedules are going to have to change." And sure enough, for the next year, they were very different.

I'd come home, and although I wasn't supposed to, I'd talk to Fred about what was happening. He didn't say, "Go and storm the Bastille," but there was a political understanding that stuff that was coming out of there wasn't always smart, wise, fair. There was only one time when I was kept out of a hearing, and that had to do with a young Chicano that had been arrested for something. I've forgotten what it was. I was just a little late. I could have gone in, had they wanted me, but they said, "Oh, we've already started. The testimony's already started. You can't go in." Then later, I thought, well, it's because it's this--somebody that we knew, somebody, somebody that had been--but anyway, that time was, I think, a time of deep tolerance on Fred's part for my jury work, and it was not an easy time.

ESPINO:

Because you were gone a lot?

01:16:1001:17:2501:19:35

LOPEZ:

Well, ten to three, four days a week. Fridays were for playing golf and getting your hair done, I mean, not me, but the other people. I was the youngest member, the first Chicana to serve, the youngest member ever to serve. I was twenty-eight, I think. So it was a time. And one of the persons that was on there was Charles Young's wife, and she became a pal. The judge that nominated me knew about Fred and me and our history and our arrests and all that. He says, "I'd be honored to nominate you." So it wasn't until I was on there about a month or two that George

Putnam and Hal Fishman, who were news people, news readers together, did a piece about me, and they said, "Do you want this radical representing you on the grand jury? Her husband was a Brown Beret," and blah, blah.

And Esteban calls me, and he says, "Lydia, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, let's get a copy of the transcript." So I told Susan, I told Sue Young, and she says, "Wait a minute. Let's go call--I'm going to call Hal," Hal Fishman. He and Chuck went to school together. So she calls Hal Fishman and says, "Hal, this is--." Of course she got through. "This is Sue Young calling." And she says, "What is this you're saying about Mrs. Lopez?" He says, "What? What's wrong? Did we lie?" She said, "Hal, you know you didn't lie. It's how you said it." He says, "Well, if she wants to, she can come on the television. It'll be good for the ratings." And I'll never forget this, and I'll always love her for this. She said, "Hal Fishman, you're a Nazi," hangs up. And I go, "Yay team!" I was right there. Later on, we were in their home and invited to some of their parties and all that sort of stuff. But she was amazing in that. She was one of the seven liberals on the jury.

We were concerned about the direction of the district attorney, and one day, Thanksgiving that year, there had been a riot at the Hall of Justice jail that used to be there on the top floors there on the Hall of Justice. So we, as jurors, have overview of all of the facilities, the county jail facilities and camps, and we all had our badges and our ID and all that. So we decided we wanted to go see what had happened, so the six of us got together and we decided to go down. They said, "Oh, well, yes. Can you wait a minute? We're moving Charles Manson, and when he gets moved, everything else stops because of security reasons." So we waited, waited, and waited. About an hour later, they said, "Well, you can go now." So we're walking and talking to some of the inmates and trying to find out what had happened, and one of the fellows said, "Psst. Hey, miss, come over here." So I went over. He said, "Aren't you the daughter of Angelita and Ladio (phonetic) Rodriguez?" I said, "Yes." I go, "Son of a gun. How does he--?" He says, "I'm so-and-so. I used to live across the street from you in Jim Town." I said, "Oh." I mean, I started to cry. And he said, "Well, we've known that you were coming about an hour. They made us clean our places." He said, "I don't want you to spend very much time talking to me, but the pigs are--," this, that, that, and he told us what was going on. And he says, "You go on and you go talk to somebody else, because if I talk to you too long, I'll get in trouble." And I go, "My gosh." I mean, it was one of the most poignant moments of my life. I forgot his name, but I'll never forget that moment.

We had meetings with the district attorney because we told him he was wasting our time with some of the cases that he was bringing before us. I think it was Bugliosi, the attorney that was handling the Manson case, and he was showing off. He came up one time and he said, "Well, you want to go down and see the Manson trial?" (Laughs) And we did it. We sat in the first row, and Manson turns around and he looks at me, and I've never seen deader, more evil eyes in my life, and the thing on his forehead. He looks at you and you feel like he's going through you. It was awful, awful, awful, and then all that stuff. It was a time. It was a time.

ESPINO:

Right, and then you have to go home and be a mom to your little kid--

LOPEZ:

Yeah, be a mom.

ESPINO:

--and be a wife with all that in your mind. Jeez. Well, I think that that's a really interesting part of your story. I don't know too much about--I mean, I don't have a legal background, and I feel like I don't have enough information to ask you intelligent questions about the jury system, but maybe I can find some young grad student who can really do a thorough interview.

LOPEZ:

And the grand jury system has changed a lot since then. This was '71, and you got paid like maybe $5 a day plus your gas mileage. Now it's more, and now you can self-nominate. Before, you had had to go through a Superior Court judge. But Oscar Acosta, during the Chicano Thirteen, was trying to have that grand jury indictment quashed, meaning thrown out. Mind you, my husband is indicted by the grand jury in '68, and I'm representing the county and the grand jury in '71. It's just so ironic, ironic.

01:21:52

ESPINO:

It was quick the way--the transformation.

LOPEZ:

Yeah. And Oscar, in order to do that--sometimes Oscar was brilliant and sometimes he was lost. But he subpoenaed every Superior Court judge.

ESPINO:

They had to come?

01:23:20

LOPEZ:

They had to come because it was subpoena. They had to come, and then they would go to him and say, "You son of a bitch, if you ever appear before my court, I am going to put you in jail." I mean, the most incredible--because he had elicited from them how they went about nominating people to the grand jury. He says, "Well, I ask around at the club and find out who's available." I would sit in on some of these hearings, and I heard this stuff. Oscar would say, "Do you know any Mexican Americans?" And he'd say, "Oh, I think our gardener may be one." I mean, stuff that you wouldn't believe. You couldn't make it up, it was so racist. So I think that had a lot to do with my judge, Norman Dowds, the fellow that appointed me, looking for somebody to appoint, and he knew Father Luce because he went to one of our churches nearby, lived in San Marino. So that's how that happened.

But today you can self-appoint, you get more money to serve, and they've split up the work, because you do criminal work as well as civil work. Now they've changed it a little bit, but all of the work in that room is supposed to be secret, and, boy, you sure do see justice in a different way. It's so different and it's so--I can't imagine it being more off-putting, I mean even people that have a heart, and that's why some of the so-called liberals that got together during that time and we would talk, and we said, "Well, we've got to get the district attorney in here. This is nonsense." And it was. It was a waste of money, some of the stuff they had us do.

ESPINO:

Have you thought about--well, the initial grand jury of the East L.A. Thirteen, several people have mentioned the fact that Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones testified.

LOPEZ:

Yes, he did.

ESPINO:

Did you ever reflect on that? What's your view of that?

LOPEZ:

I don't know what he said. I just know that he--what I'd love to get my hands on is the transcript. I think you can get them. You have to pay for them, and I think it's expensive, so it's not something that's on my top things to do.

ESPINO:

Why would you love to know what he said?

01:25:17

LOPEZ:

Because I'd like to know what he said. I'd like to know his viewpoint about that time. I'd like to know what other people said that were there. I'd like to get the transcript of my trial and of Fred's trial, because we had two separate trials. I'd love to get those transcripts to see, because that one was the Roman Catholic Church going after us for embarrassing them.

ESPINO:

Well, some people feel like he must have named names.

LOPEZ:

Well, that's what I've heard, but I don't know.

ESPINO:

You won't know until you actually see the transcript.

LOPEZ:

Yeah. You know, he's been so distant, hasn't he?

ESPINO:

I don't really have a relationship with him other than a professional one at the university.

LOPEZ:

I saw him in a picture that Al Juarez took. It was on his Facebook, and I said, "Who is that?" And it said "Juan Gomez." He's gotten fat, a beard, and I go, "Oh, my goodness." He used to be so cute when he was young, long black hair and sometimes a little ascot. I mean, he was really something. And I knew his first wife and also the next one. But don't know about that. And there, I think, have been others. I don't know if he was one, but there have been other people--I mean, like Art Torres and the role he tried to play as the go-between between UNO and the Committee of 25. He's Mr. Hotshot, he knows it all, and he is the one that told them who we were. I mean, he named names, and so when they come, I mean, they already know the who's-who because they have a list of people that they're going to allow into the meeting, not the big meeting at Chamber of Commerce, but the initial meeting that we have with this so-called secretary, Steve Gavin. When we meet at Talpa Church, there's a list of people that can be allowed into the meeting, and those are people that Art has named, not so much the people we had wanted in, so there was a bit of a struggle about that, but we got through it.

01:27:30

ESPINO:

Interesting.

01:29:28

LOPEZ:

So that's not new, and because Art Snyder knew everything we were doing, that's not new. So what you do is you do it with as much integrity as you can muster, working on your goals, and you just go at it. Sometimes these were not comfortable meetings, but of all the training I have received throughout the years, this has been the most useful, and it is something that I would recommend to other people that are involved in any kind of organizing. Four weeks ago, Marshall Ganz was on the Bill Moyers show. Go on PBS and you'll get the transcript of that. I have it, twenty-some pages, because it's an hour-long show. Then at the end, Madeline Janis-Aparicio from LANE is on there. Anyway, Marshall talks about his organizing with the farm workers and he talks about Alinsky and he talks about--I mean, everything he's talking about in terms of how you do something, the tactics, I mean, it's all very familiar. I was a Hillary girl. I wanted Hillary Clinton as my president. I just thought that'd be wonderful. I'd have these long conversations with my son, and he was an Obama person. And I go, "Oh, Obama." I couldn't even say his name. So I said, "Okay, I promise you this. I'm going to listen to him. I'm going to hear what he has to say." And he said, "Okay."

So I started listening to Obama. Well, he's been through the same training, so his conversation, his appeal to people was what I'd been taught, and I go, "Well, I know what he's going to say. I mean, that's what you--." Then I went back to my son, I said, "I think I like him." And so I voted for him twice, and maybe next time I get to vote for Hillary. Who knows.

ESPINO:

Those are powerful concepts that were developed in the fifties. Fifties, right, when Saul Alinsky--was it the late forties?

01:31:27

LOPEZ:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, out of Chicago, and he was an unchurched--the criticism was that he had Communist leanings. I don't know that. But I don't know if I told you the day I spent with him. I went up to Oakland for a conference on health, and I went with "Joe" Jose Duarte and Fred stayed home. I went up, and Alinsky was going to be the speaker. So I sat at a table, and here's Dolores and here's Lydia and Jose Duarte. Alinsky gets up to speak, and all of a sudden, popping up all over the room are these Black Panthers, because the city was still relatively controlled by the Panthers. And they said, "You tired old Jew, get out of here. How dare you tell us what to do. Go back home. We don't need you here." And Alinsky, typical Alinsky, said, "Hey, you don't want me to talk, I won't talk." Dolores said, "Lydia, if he walks, we walk." I said, "Yes, ma'am." (Laughs)

So he said, "Look, I've got my airplane ticket, you've already paid my consultant fee. I'll walk." "Yeah, get out of here," blah, blah, blah. So we left. We spent the whole day, because now he had the whole day free. We spent the whole day in the bar, and Lydia Lopez is getting Organization Training 101 from the two master organizers of this world, Dolores and Alinsky. Of course, they knew each other from UFW days, and so they were telling stories, and I was just eager to hear all of this because I knew nothing. It was a whole day, and he drank his scotch, she drank her 7-Up, and I just was wide-eyed because here, what an opportunity. And I said to myself, "I've got to try to remember as much as I can."

ESPINO:

Do you still remember some of those stories?

LOPEZ:

Well, just some of the things, yeah. But I found him engaging, interesting. So many stories. Oh, my gosh, the stories. So I decided that what I would do next--not then, but this has come through the span of my life--is that I have a lot of stories to tell myself, and that maybe I become the Chicana Studs Terkel and tell stories, only because I have other friends that have written books, and basically they're stories. I go, well, if people are interested in those stories, maybe I have something to tell, and if nothing else, it's for my grandchild. He'll know some of the things his grandmother did, because Fred won't talk about this stuff to his son.

01:33:22

ESPINO:

Not even to his own son?

LOPEZ:

No, it's a closed chapter in his life. Alejandro, my son, were at City (Lights) Books in San Francisco one day and he went over to the Chicano history. He said, "Hey, Mom! Here's a picture of Dad!" It was one of those books reliving that time. He says, "I didn't know this." I said, "Oh, sweetheart." I said, "If you have any questions, just come to me. I'll tell you everything." It is really a closed chapter for him, and I've had other friends or people that have my number or have been given my number that that are doing research, writing books about the Berets or about that time, and Fred has said no. Because I say, "Well, I'll ask him for you. I can't give you his number." I said, "But I'll ask him for you." And Fred says no. I mean, I don't ask him why. I mean, I respect his decision. Just it's closed.

ESPINO:

Wow. Well, I'm going to stop it right here. (End of June 4, 2013 interview)

SESSION SEVEN (June 11, 2013)

00:00:31

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is June 11th (2013). I'm interviewing Lydia Lopez at her home in Alhambra, California. I wanted to recap our conversation about the walkouts and have you look back, not tell me what it was like back then, but looking back in hindsight, and tell me what you think was accomplished from that activism, from the walkouts and from the Education Commission and the sit-ins and the Sal Castro reinstatement and all those different things that you were involved in.

00:02:4800:06:17

LOPEZ:

I'll answer that by saying there was an anniversary event that took place, I think it was like twenty-five years after the walkouts, and we had a big event at City Hall there in that patio area. Then there was an event at the Board of Education, and sitting behind the board was Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones. Ruben Zacarias was superintendent. I'm trying to remember. But a lot of people were there, a lot of people that'd been part of the walkouts, of the Movement. And then it was filmed. I don't know who was doing the filming, but they were making a video of this, and they got to the point of questions--oh, Sal Castro was up there also. It got to the time that they asked questions. We could ask questions, so I got up very quickly and asked questions, and I asked questions about the progress. I said, "Back in '68 was questions of the food, the teachers, the curriculum, and the care that our kids were getting at schools, and that one of the remedies was going to be to get our own people there. And now we have superintendent, we have teachers, we have area superintendents, whatever they're called, and we still have a dropout rate that kids are--," and I numbered a few things that were still problematic.

One of the respondents, somebody told me, had been drinking too much, but they really just kind of blew off my question. They tried to answer it, but it was not satisfactory, and, I mean, I didn't have an opportunity for a retort. I mean, it was just not possible. The people didn't boo me. They didn't say, "Hey, shut up. Sit down." But people were very respectful, and I'm trying to remember who else was on there. But the person that answered the question, tried to answer the question, was the person they told me had been drinking. So it was just wholly unsatisfactory. "But here were all these years," I said, "after the walkouts, and what has changed?" For us, it was an important time in history because our people, our friends, the students said, "Enough already," and were speaking with a united voice about their schools, but it takes a persistent, persistent group of people that are focused on the education system. Many years later--okay, we're going from the sixties now to the late seventies, maybe early eighties, late seventies--I'm asked to be on the board of the Los Angeles Education Partnership, and that came by--I think they needed a Latino on the board, because these were the heads of all the major corporations, and they were doing good work. They had the Humanities program, they had all these different academies, and they're still in operation. I found it a very worthy organization led by very, very well-meaning people, and with all the millions of dollars that they were accumulating for their work, the schools were still awful. So I remember getting my bishop on to the board. I thought, well, he'll

stir them up. After a while, he just said, "No, I don't think that's where I want to spend a lot of time.

ESPINO:

Did you get involved in the Education Commission or the Education Committee or any of those organizations that formed to improve education?

LOPEZ:

No, no.

ESPINO:

And your son, did you think about where he would go to school? Did you think about public versus private, East Los Angeles versus South Pasadena?

00:08:34

LOPEZ:

Yes. My son was ready to go to pre-K, and his father said, "There are only two schools where my son can go." He said, "Either St. James Parish School or the UCLA School." And at that time, he was attending UCLA. So I said, "South Pasadena, that's wonderful." So that's where he went. The funny story is that I called, and the headmaster told me, "Oh, I'm sorry, we have a waiting list." So I had Father Wood call, and the headmaster said, "Oh, we didn't know Mrs. Lopez is an Episcopalian. She goes to the top of the list, because all the students in our school our Buddhists." And I laughed. It was a very, very good school. He was there for two years, and then it was time to get on to kindergarten. But because we lived in South Pasadena, the schools are so good there, the public schools, so he went to the Oneonta School that was on Fremont at that time. Now it's a Learning--something else now. I was very pleased with the school. I participated in the PTA and the fairs and all the stuff that--baked cookies, cupcakes, and all that sort of stuff for the things that we did. And I was very, very pleased.

My son, went to--from there, we moved from South Pasadena to Highland Park. A friend of mine had a house there, and he said, "Well, you can come and the rent will be low," and all that. So we had Alejandro, my son, enrolled in the Garvanza School, and he got beaten up in the bathroom. Well, Fred, my ex-husband, came and threatened to sue the school. He scared the principal. But it was pretty frightening for us because we had felt that the school setting was such a safe place. So from then on, he ends up in Roman Catholic schools.

ESPINO:

Did you think about, when you decided to move to South Pas, that you were moving there for the school district?

00:11:11

LOPEZ:

No, no, I was moving there before he was in school. Let me see. Gosh, you're making me think. (Laughs) Who was--I'm trying to think of what--I think that we moved there--I moved there. I think one of the considerations was the school, but that wasn't an immediate--I mean, it was like we had heard that the schools were very good there, but he was not of the age to go to school, and then when Fred mentions the thing about St. James, letting my baby go to pre-K was hard, but it turned out to be a really, really good decision because that school was so good. So, yeah, I think it was in my head somewhere. But I was so surprised, and at the same time pleased, that Fred had decided that these were the two places his son could go.

ESPINO:

That's an interesting question when you think about--I'm sure at that time--because I also went to South Pas in the late seventies, mid-seventies, and it was not very diverse. So what you're exchanging is a quality education for diversity and for cultural sensitivity. Did you think about that? Was that something--especially coming from the Chicano Movement and nationalism and pride and self-awareness, and those kinds of things were so much a part of you and Fred's--

LOPEZ:

Part of me did not want to experiment with my son, and I followed through with this, but I really wanted him to go to a good school. So for me, it was that. I never knew, until I went to the school events, what the diversity was of the school. In St. James, obviously a lot of Asian children, and when we go to Oneonta, there was a smattering of Latinos, but they were middle-class professional types. It was a different setting. So it was partly protecting my kid. And then all the rest of his schooling are Roman Catholic schools, private schools.

ESPINO:

When you look at your activism in the Catholic Church, how would you reflect on that organization, CatÃ³licos por La Raza, and what it was able to accomplish?

00:14:03

LOPEZ:

The first major accomplishment was bringing Bishop Arzube in. He was born in South America and comes here, and that was the first thing. Then there was a lot of development done among the Mexican American community, and today you can hardly go anywhere where there isn't a Spanish-language service. So there's been enormous change.

But as we know, with a lot of institutions, the fixing of them, making them better, making them more responsible is a constant. We know that the Roman Catholic Church, of recent, has gotten into a lot of trouble, and a lot of, I think, Roman Catholics today are looking to the new pope with a lot of interest and excitement and wonder. So we'll see. It's such an established bureaucracy that it's kind of like, okay, let's wait. Let's wait and see. But locally, having Arzube here, he was useful and then not useful. Rosalio MuÃ±oz is much more charitable than I am when it comes to Arzube, because I had my personal conversations with him that were not very pleasant. But Rosalio wrote like an obituary piece to friends--I don't think it got published anywhere--but talking about what a wonderful leader he had been and all that sort of stuff. And then it isn't until later that we find out all the trouble he got into. So to me, he was there to take care of the Mexicans, I mean, take care of the problem, and he was the face of the church to the community. I did not find him very effective.

ESPINO:

So your activism with CatÃ³licos led to more awareness. You think that was successful, but the activism around the walkouts, you feel like that wasn't as successful.

00:17:29

LOPEZ:

I was pleased with the efforts that a lot of our friends made. I mean, obviously, the first one that comes to mind is Sal Castro and all that he tried to do with his life and his profession. They beat him up plenty, but he kept on. He loved the kids, his students, and he was so faithful. There were other people like that. I'm sure there have been lots and lots of teachers, but you have a person here, a person there. The system is so huge. It's so huge.

To me, the solution was not to have a Latino for superintendent, and after Zacarias, Bill Anton (phonetic) was superintendent for like twenty minutes. All he wanted was to be able to say, "I was superintendent," and then he went off on his boat and retired. His wife still kept teaching. But there was only so much a person could do, or there was only so much a person--not could do, decided to do.

ESPINO:

Well, when you think about the tactics as far as walking out, sit-ins, pickets, things that made that period for a lot of different organizations and groups and issues, do you think that that was the best strategy to achieve your goals?

00:20:26

LOPEZ:

Well, okay, we'll talk about the goals and we'll talk about strategy. The goals were--there were questions about the food, about history, bicultural, bilingual. Some of those have been met, but the quality of all of that is in question. The tactics, it caused some people to be very angry, to be very embarrassed, and when it came about, it was a surprise. I don't think--today, the police would come in in a hot minute, as opposed to letting us be there for all the days. It's not possible anymore. And if you organize something like that, today we have to be so careful because now they throw around the word "terrorist." The things that went on in that time, I don't know if the authorities know all the things that went on, nor should they know. Today, it feels like if you

want to call it the system or the authorities, can come down on you very quickly and very harshly.

00:20:41

ESPINO:

Well, when you think about the tactics that were used, like you say, the unmentionable tactics, what was at stake that would lead people to such aggressive measures?

LOPEZ:

Oh, I think absolute frustration, anger, hate among some. If you look at the major leaders of the Movement, they all had a church background, they all had--not all--some of them had seminary training, some of them went to Roman Catholic schools. I mean, it was interesting to scratch the surface and know that--so that some of these leaders really cared. I can only say that about the ones that I know. There were others that had a more intentional kind of political ideology that caused them to do other things. But for some, it was just the love of their people, wanting progress. And it kind of depends on who you talk to too. I mean, if you talk to somebody like Vahac, well, he saw this as a mission. If you talk to others, they'll say, "Oh, burn the sucker down." It just depends on who you're talking to.

ESPINO:

And where did you fit in that continuum?

LOPEZ:

Where did I fit?

00:22:11

ESPINO:

Yes.

LOPEZ:

To me, it was partly anger but partly my faith. Then later, when I have more what I consider skills, it was more intentionally using my head, being smart about what one does. There were no more sit-ins. There was a lot of mass movement of people, moving people into the Board of Supervisors and filling the hearing room so that they would do something about an issue, having hundreds of people at a meeting with the sheriff. The same thing later on when we met with the police chief, we had seven hundred people in that meeting at Our Lady of Lourdes. Or when we would have our conventions at the Shrine Auditorium, that place would be filled with five thousand people. Those were more delegates to that convention than there are to the Democrat or Republican Convention. So it was moving people with a strategy and a focus, with a particular set of spokespeople, more organization. So for me, it was rooted out of our faith, out of our churches, into some focus, and I thought that was awfully smart.

ESPINO:

So do you feel like you learned that from your experience in the Movement, like you'd see that as an evolution?

00:24:39

LOPEZ:

Well, I had said to Father Wood when he was talking about UNO--I mean, the beginning of UNO at that time was called the Organizing Committee--I said, "I don't want to get involved in that." I said, "I've been through the Movement. We know what the issues are." It's kind of like, "We tried."

When I saw that some of the very--this is going to sound awful, but just some of the members of our church, some of these dear old ladies who'd never been to school but were stalwarts at the church were talking about all these issues, and with a lot of information about what they were doing. And I go, "Oh, my goodness, Enriqueta knows all about--how did she learn that?" And

then so-and-so and Celia was--and I was very impressed by that, and so I finally decided to go to a meeting, and that's when I feel that I was kind of just sucked in.

ESPINO:

Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones says something interesting in his book about that period, and he talks about how many of the Movement activists moved from that militant activism to a more reformist position by getting on the payroll of government programs. How do you feel about that argument?

LOPEZ:

Well, that was true. I think it was true, because who was going to keep paying for these militants? Nobody was going to--I mean, I went from the Movement to work with programs that were funded through the government. Early on, it was the OEO programs and it became the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Agency that was the umbrella for that money. I mean, people needed jobs, people needed to work, and so, yes, we became a lot of reformers. I mean, I don't disagree with that, although realistically, people needed work, and from that, some people finished their education and some of them became professionals and formed their own law firms and did their own work. So it just kind of depended on what resources you could pull together.

00:27:27

ESPINO:

Did you see that as a trend, like in the mid-seventies, people stepping away from some of their--

LOPEZ:

No, I think people went in a variety of places. I mean, some went off to school, some went to jobs. I mean, people did a--it wasn't--not everybody went in the same direction.

ESPINO:

But were they stepping away from that kind of direct action that typified the late sixties, early seventies?

LOPEZ:

No, there wasn't that kind of--the only place where that action remained was in the work of Bert Corona and Chole Alatorre, where they were consistent, tenacious about their work with the immigrant. And even that was tough because there was a time when, because it was such a well-organized group with potential money, there was a real split, and some people wanted to come in and take it over. It was a very, very difficult time. But I think the people that wanted to come in and take it over were more interested in the potential money than they were the work, the advocacy work.

ESPINO:

Are you talking about--I don't know what organization you're talking about.

LOPEZ:

Talking about the group that Bert funded, started.

ESPINO:

Was it CASA?

00:30:15

LOPEZ:

Yes, yes. And he remained a fighter forever, and in the end, the interesting thing, in the end, the last years of his life, he comes to my church, All Saints Pasadena, and he sits there with his son and his--the last wife. I forgot. I don't think I knew her name. But he was at All Saints on Sundays, and I go, "Isn't this interesting." And I'd greet him. But yet when he died, I think Chole took over, and the service was over at St. Vincent's. But I think because of his very close connection with Father Luce, I think that he went to that church and he found solace there and also energy to keep on.

ESPINO:

Well, let's talk a bit about the moratorium. During this time, it sounds like you were very active, and then you get married and you have a child in the early seventies period, the late sixties. But were you paying attention to those politics, the politics of the U.S. in Vietnam?

00:32:34

LOPEZ:

I had a general feeling about the war and wanted it very much to end. I had friends that had gone to Vietnam and friends that had died, and so I found that just a very difficult time to see a lot of my peers. The big march was in August 1970. That was the big one. August 29th was important to me in a very personal way because it was the first time that I was able to come out of the house. My son had been born in June and I'd been very sick after that time, and so from June to August 29th was the first time I was out of the house, I mean other than to go the doctors and things like that. So my son's godfather and godmother and Fred and I, we double-dated that day, and it was my first time out. I remember what I wore. It felt like we were going to a picnic. We got there early, and I remember walking down Beverly Boulevard, and it felt so good to work and to be with all these people. Then we're turning on Whittier Boulevard and we're going further.

When the commotion starts, the boys say to us, "Get back to the car." Well, the car was parked in a place that we couldn't get to because the sheriffs and the buses and all that, so there was no way of getting there. I mean, we had to walk a long ways to get to safety, and then we lost them. And I, at this moment, do not remember how we regrouped, other than Michael Madre (phonetic) and I were all right. But it was so frightening, as we were walking back to where the car was, to see

all these buses and buses of sheriffs coming down the street, coming west on Whittier Boulevard, and not knowing what was going to happen, not knowing where our husbands were. It was pretty scary. Later on, we see the news. I remember being at home and hearing about Ruben Salazar's death and seeing some of the news footage about what had gone on and how the story was told about the commotion started at the liquor store and it was their fault, and discounting the sheriffs and their role. And, boy, that made me so angry, so angry. It was an awful, awful day, just awful. But I didn't have anything to do with the Moratorium Committee. I was not involved in that, and I don't know what role my husband had in it. I don't remember that. I just remember the sunshine and how enjoyable it was to be able to walk in the sun. It was when we were going south on Beverly. When we go up Whittier, it all kind of changes.

00:35:12

ESPINO:

You never made it to the park?

LOPEZ:

No. We made it close to the park, but I guess by the time we got there, there was already problems, so that's when the boys told us to get out of there. Ballet Folklorico from Epiphany had been dancing, and Father Wood, as soon as he saw the commotion, got them off the stage and got them into the church van and got them out of there for their safety. I don't know where Father Luce went.

ESPINO:

Some people say they expected the violence and other people say, "I took my kids there. I had no idea it was going to turn out like that." What was your impression of--

LOPEZ:

Well, as I said, I thought we were going on a picnic, because I thought, "We'll go down here,

then we can have some carnitas in one of the little restaurants, and it's wonderful to be with my compadre, comadre." I was feeling just really very joyful at being out of the house. I was probably the last person in the world that anybody was going to tell me there was going to be a commotion. I had been kind of way over there, having had a baby and kind of out of it. But it was awful. It was just an awful, awful day, and to see what the sheriffs did and to see how they essentially got away with killing somebody that was such a noble person, it was very difficult.

00:37:19

ESPINO:

Did you follow Ruben Salazar's writings up to that point?

00:40:02

LOPEZ:

Yes, yes. In fact, that morning--because we got to Belvedere Park early, and I saw him. I greeted him and then we kept moving on. I felt that his writings were important. I was thankful that the L.A. Times kept him on. I use often his definition of Chicano, "A Mexican American with a non-Anglo view of himself," he would say. And I would watch him every so often on Channel 34. It was a little operation at that time over on Melrose. I mean, now it's this huge, huge international establishment. And really appreciated his writing and always looked forward to it. It was just the same with Frank Del Olmo. I would often look for his editorial pieces and was at the Times when they published his book. I was invited, and really appreciated Magdalena, his wife, pushing all that forward. And then was also invited to the school that was named after him for the big opening, and it was good because there were a lot of old friends there. Then this is funny. Magdalena and Frank were to be married, and he'd been married before, so the cardinal would not marry them. So they loved the Carmel area. I think they bought a place up there, and they found a little Episcopal church up there. So Frank calls me and he says, "Do you know who the rector is of so-and-so church?" I said, "No, but I can find out for you. What do you need?" He says, "Well, we'd like to get married there." "Oh, okay. Let me--." So I made that happen, so they got married there.

So when Frank dies, Roger Mahoney calls her and says, "I'd be honored to do his funeral at the cathedral." And she had the guts--I love her forever--guts to say to him, "When we wanted you to marry us, you were not there for us, and I will not let you do this." (unclear), other place, other big place. So they did it at All Saints Pasadena, and she asked me to do the prayers. I was just honored because, to me, he was another important person. And you looked around the audience, and it was a Who's Who, you know, Tom Johnson. It was a Who's Who of the people in the news, and Tom Johnson went to All Saints Pasadena, so did Anthony Day, and there were others. I was helping in identifying who should sit where, because we had reserved seats for some of the notables, and in comes Roger Mahoney, and I go, "Holy shit." I said to one of the persons that

was helping us usher, I said, "Put him in that row over there." So he had a row, maybe like the fifteenth row. I mean, it wasn't a prominent seat. But he had the gall to come, and I go, "Gosh." I mean, this ego thing is just--I don't get it. But it was a wonderful celebration, and then the L.A. Times people left there. They had buses and big cars, and they left there and they went to the L.A. Times for an event there for the L.A. Times family. But I just thought, All Saints is a home to anybody, everybody. You're all welcome. I was very pleased. I was very proud of the fact that that happened there.

00:43:03

ESPINO:

So he came a little bit later after Ruben Salazar was writing. But looking at Ruben Salazar's work, some people say that he became a hero after his death, that he wasn't that much of an important figure when he was alive. Did you find that? I mean, I know you followed him.

00:45:54

LOPEZ:

I think that's accurate, and we do that with people after they die. He was important, not critical, but he wrote things that were important. But I can't imagine why--I mean, you'll have to talk to other people, some of our conspiracy theorists, but there are some friends that say that the police was going after him, that they wanted him out, and something about his desk and information that he had about some investigations that he was doing that had put him in danger. And there was another reporter that worked with him that also felt he was in danger. So he, like others, when they die or are assassinated, they become larger than life. You can look at Bert Corona. This man just never stopped his whole life. His whole life was that of a fighter, an advocate. He just kept at it, and he was smart about it. Sal Castro is going to become even larger because he loved his kids so much, and the people at the Foundation will keep that spirit and keep him alive in the memory of a lot of people. There are others like that, Miguel Contreras, who was a leader with the Los Angeles Federation of Labor. I remember when he was coming up through the Labor Movement and having so much trouble with the leadership, meaning some of the old--essentially the old white conservative unions. Can't say that about many unions today, but at that time he would come over to Father Olivares' church in the middle of the night because there was some controversy brewing, and ask for help. I think that, in fact, Louie baptized the baby that is now no longer a baby.

But again, that people came to me, the subtext of my life is the connection of my activism to my faith, and here I see people who may not be as vocal about their faith coming back to the church for help, for solace, for understanding, for support. So, yeah, that happens. That happens to people.

ESPINO:

Well, when you think about Sal Castro, do you think that--because some activists say, "I never saw him," activists from the walkouts, and, "I don't remember seeing him." And other people do remember him being around and having an important impact.

LOPEZ:

Isn't that interesting.

ESPINO:

What is your memory of his presence?

LOPEZ:

I saw him a lot. I saw him a lot, and like so many other young girls in the Movement, had a crush on him. They thought, "Oh, isn't he wonderful," and he dressed so well and all of that. He was at the sit-in. I remember so many events that involved him.

00:47:35

ESPINO:

Do you think he was an organizer of the walkouts?

LOPEZ:

No. I think there were other people that were the organizers. Let me see. I would not call him the organizer. I think that he had a spirit, an opinion, a concern about the kids in the schools and all that sort of stuff, but to actually get the things done in the different schools, I think a lot of that had to do with the students, and you need to talk to them. John Ortiz was here for a meeting with Rosalio and others the other night, and he was telling some stories about that time. So much of what happened had to do with the students, I think, with their own interests. How that all got organized I don't know, I don't know. I mean, I know that the end result of all of that is that these thirteen Chicanos get indicted by the grand jury, but that's kind of another story.

ESPINO:

Right, but it's also--I think we talked about that last time, a bit about that and about the grand jury process and Oscar Acosta's--but were you worried for Fred? Was he worried for his--

00:50:22

LOPEZ:

Oh, yes, yes. I felt that he was going to go to jail. I guess that would have been prison. Yeah, we didn't know, and it wasn't until--I don't know if I've told you, but many years later, I have a friend who's working with a law firm where he is of counsel. I'm sorry. Otto Kaus (phonetic), one of the members of the State Supreme Court--no, the Appellate Court, because it went to the appellate level--and I saw him walking by, and I said to my friend, "Is that Otto Kaus?" She says, "Yes." I say, "Can you introduce me?" And so I went up to him and I said to him, I said, "I'm really quite honored to meet you. I want to thank you for making my life possible."

He says, "What did I do?" I talked about the case. He said, "Oh, that Castro case. There was nothing to it. Absolutely nothing. Of course we were going to throw it out." And I go--well, it just gives validity to the political maneuvering of Evelle Younger to make his political career on the neck of the Chicano, because it was during that time that he wants to run for attorney general and all that sort of stuff, and so in order to make this case, a case that he could take to the grand jury, he had to make it a conspiracy. So therefore, he took it to the grand jury, and there was nothing to it.

ESPINO:

Did you ever think about fleeing?

LOPEZ:

Who?

ESPINO:

Fleeing, leaving, jumping charges.

LOPEZ:

I don't think so. Leaving? No, I don't think so, no.

00:52:00

ESPINO:

Becomes sometimes, I don't know, even just random things like you're in a car and someone else is driving, they're not driving very safe, and you think, "I don't want to die in this car. I don't mind dying, but I don't want to die like this." Did that seem like a justifiable reason for Fred to go to jail? I mean, was it worth it? I guess that's what I'm saying.

00:54:53

LOPEZ:

Somehow there was a stupid naivetÃ© that I had. Maybe that's redundant, but I just kind of felt that somehow this was going to take care of itself. The work that Oscar had done in subpoenaing

all the Superior Court judges--because his attempt was to quash the indictment, so he was saying that it was not a representative jury, the all-white people, and so therefore, this had to be thrown out. So he calls in every Superior Court judge, he subpoenas them, and I was there for some of the hearings. He would ask them, "Judge so-and-so, how do you go about nominating your person to the grand jury?" He says, "Oh, I ask around in the club and find out who's available." And then he'd ask another judge, "Do you know any Mexican Americans?" And they'd say, "Well, yeah, I think my gardener is one." If I hadn't been there, I would not have believed it, because it was so blatant, and they were really talking about living in another world. I said, "Well, go, Oscar," because Oscar, again, had his--he was quirky. (Laughs) But in this one, I thought, "Where in the world did he get this idea?" Because I thought this was brilliant. But they said to him as he was going out--they'd see him in the hallway, "You son of a bitch, if you ever come in front of my court, I'm going to send you to jail." And he would just kind of brush it all off. That was part of doing business. But I had a lot of--I guess it was hope, but it was built on not knowing so much and just kind of going with it, because as I've said before, it was us against the world. We were a hearty band of people, and there was support among each other, among some of them, not everyone, but there was this small community of people that had gone through so much.

ESPINO:

Do you know why they had different lawyers, do you remember?

LOPEZ:

I'm trying to remember the names of the attorneys. There was a fellow from the ACLU, there was a fellow from the Mc--there was another law firm, and the leaders of this law firm were also leftists. They wanted to come in and help. I don't know if they did it because they wanted to be helpful or because some of the defendants had decided to bring them in, but there were quite a few of them. I thought there were four others.

ESPINO:

I don't know too much about the whole legal process of it, because you have the grand jury indictment and you have Oscar's role, but then--because in my interview with Cruz, he said he

had his own attorney and that Carlos Montes had his own attorney, and that somebody was trying to say something about how some individuals who had more culpability than others, and that they decided that they were going to stick together and that nobody was going to be brought out as having more blame or having more evidence against them, that they were all in it together. Do you remember that?

00:57:14

LOPEZ:

No, no. Years later with the CatÃ³licos, when the warrants go out and I get a call from one of my friends who's an attorney with the Western Center of Law and Poverty--and he also is a rabbi, wonderful fellow--he calls me and says, "Lydia, I'm worried." It had gone down a little further because he knew that Oscar was going to be our attorney. He says, "I'm worried about you and Fred and the baby." He says, "Why don't you come in and talk. Let's talk, because I'd be pleased to represent you."

So we went in and we met with him to essentially talk, but to tell him that this was a Movement thing, that we were all in this together, and he said, "Okay." It was hard. It was hard to do that, because with that one, I'm in the middle of that one and a baby's growing, and you think, "Oh, my god. What's going to happen?" But it was a Movement thing and we were disciplined enough to stay with the Movement thing.

ESPINO:

Well, after that first arrest, did you talk about maybe dropping out, maybe not taking those kinds of risks? After the walkouts, did you ever rethink your role in the Movement?

01:00:13

LOPEZ:

You go from the walkouts to CatÃ³licos, and Fred is working with La Raza newspaper, still has some involvement in that. It wasn't, for me, very risky business until after the CatÃ³licos arrest. Then having been a part of that, I thought--I didn't do anything. I mean, I was over there, and I didn't know where Fred had been. But it wasn't until we came back the next day, which is Christmas morning, and the police are across the street taking photographs, and we come, every single day we're there picketing the church, that they start putting two and two together. And that's how they got the twenty-one people that became codefendants in the CatÃ³licos case, not

because they knew we had done anything, because in the trial, they weren't able to identify us, and as I've said before, even in their own photographs, because of the color hat I was wearing and all of that, I stand out because this was a hot pink turban and hot pink dress and a white coat, and I'm across the street as they're taking photographs. In discovery, we find those pictures, and Oscar says, "Look." (Laughs) So they did a pretty shoddy job, but the church was intent on slapping our hands and going through with this thing.

ESPINO:

Well, some people and the history books talk about decline in the Chicano Movement in the seventies, I mean like Juan Gomez QuiÃ±ones and Ernesto ChÃ¡vez, and they all talk about how it was just a moment in time and it ended, and important, but not transformative. And then some people say that they were so afraid after the repression at the march that they got out. What was your feeling after witnessing that?

LOPEZ:

I think that happened. I think there was a dwindling of participation. I think that they can come down with the police, they can come down with arrests, and all that sort of stuff, that's pretty scary business. An individual doesn't have that kind of power. We can shout, we can demonstrate, but I think there were a lot of people that--after the--other than starting, I guess, '05 or '06, 2005 and 2006, with the immigration marches, I don't think, from that time, from back in the sixties, early seventies, there haven't been mass demonstrations, and the immigration stuff was not so much--I mean, that was different. I mean, that was not just a Chicano thing; it was immigrants of all kinds, all sorts, all countries coming together. But, no, there was a dwindling of people. Also La Raza newspaper, and you know how that stops publishing. Yes, that's true.

01:02:33

ESPINO:

How would you articulate the reasons why that happened?

LOPEZ:

Oh, I think it was fear. I don't think people were ready to put themselves up to doing that again, to going through all of that, not having jobs while you're in litigation. I mean, it comes at a huge cost. And having families that don't understand what you're doing. Going against the church, my goodness, it's going against God, and a lot of our families don't make the separation. But it was pretty costly, pretty costly.

ESPINO:

How did you decide your involvement after that? Did it change?

LOPEZ:

After CatÃ³licos?

ESPINO:

No, after the moratorium.

LOPEZ:

I didn't have much of a role other than I was there that day and then I went home, followed the news, but I was not--let me see. I don't think I went to any marches for the longest time, any demonstrations.

ESPINO:

Were you afraid, or you just were too busy?

LOPEZ:

No, I wasn't afraid.

ESPINO:

Because there were several more in '71. I think there was an antiwar march in '71.

01:05:05

LOPEZ:

I know what happened. The '68 march. No. The moratorium was '70. Then is when I get a call about my nomination. In '71, I'm nominated and appointed to the grand jury, so my life takes a big change. No, no, no, it goes back even--okay. Seventy was the moratorium. The CatÃ³licos had been in '69, so, I mean, it feels like it all kind of comes together.

But, no, I didn't go on demonstrations again until I think it was 2005 or 2006, when we had a big immigration march. Then what we were doing, what my church and others were doing, is a whole bunch of us went to Washington, about forty of us, to do lobbying, and so we talked to all the--not all--talked to our senators, congressmen, members of the Judiciary Committee, I mean one by one. So our way of doing things changed and we were then seen as leading Episcopal liberals who had gone to advocate, and so we made it into our Episcopal newspapers and so forth, photographs and all of that sort of stuff. So my M.O. changed.

ESPINO:

Right. And it also seems like, just from our conversation last time, that you got involved with

some Women's Center somehow, maybe not full involvement, but with women-centered groups. Is that correct?

01:07:13

LOPEZ:

Back in '68, I was already working on the school lunch program, and that's where the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Negro Women, and Church Women United came together to support that effort. So those are the groups I was working with. And then that spilled over to--when did I work with the National Council of Jewish Women again? I worked with them again, but I can't remember at this moment why, but I remember going over to their offices. Well, it might have been that same time.

ESPINO:

Were you involved with ComisiÃ³n Femenil?

LOPEZ:

No.

ESPINO:

What about organizing just solely with Chicanas, like Anna Nieto-GÃ³mez or Carol Jaces (phonetic), or any of those Chicana--

LOPEZ:

No. Other than that one group that I organized of women around the visit of Ethel Kennedy and some things that we tried to do. It was very little, very minor.

ESPINO:

And your role with Planned Parenthood, did that take place in the seventies?

LOPEZ:

That was in Pasadena, and that came by virtue of being a part of the church in Pasadena. One of the persons that was on the board knew me, and they asked me to come on the board. The same thing when they asked me to come on the Pacific Oaks board. They needed their Latina, and I was a willing player.

ESPINO:

Were those issues that were important to you?

01:10:01

LOPEZ:

Yes, and to have education available for young women about reproduction was really important, and then later, when I went on the Pacific Oaks board, I didn't know this, but there was a whole stirring among the students and teachers, some teachers, about education. They took a lot of credit for the kind of diversity training that they did, but there was a conflict inside of all of that. And I remember some of the students and teachers appealing to us. The board was not very responsive because the board was made up of all the ladies bountiful of Pasadena and business types, although they tried to be sensitive, so it was just as good that I went off the board. Dennis Hernandez followed me on the board, so maybe you ought to talk to Dennis about what life was like on that board.

ESPINO:

Well, I'm wondering about the issue itself, the issue of, like you say, reproductive--just the whole process of reproducing and not reproducing, and birth control and what do you do when you get pregnant, those kinds of questions. Was that ever an issue for you before your involvement in Planned Parenthood? Was that something that you saw? Because scholars who look at the Chicano Movement look at--and even Chicanas themselves who were of the Movement talk about how some of those issues were never part of the larger Movement. They were trying to make it an issue, and the men just weren't really interested.

LOPEZ:

I never remember any of the boys in the Movement nor the women in the Movement ever talking about reproductive rights. My support for Planned Parenthood came many years later, and what I really liked what Pasadena was doing was some of the special programs where kids would be trained to talk to other kids as kind of peer counseling that they had, and the availability, that you could go there and get whatever you needed, your birth control pills or advice and so forth. So I liked what they were doing. So that was my support of it, but I don't remember talking to other women during the Movement about any of this.

01:11:56

ESPINO:

About that being something we need to address and it's critical? Because Gloria, through the clinic, was able to do some education also.

LOPEZ:

Gloria Arellanes?

ESPINO:

Arellanes. Were you following their work at the clinic at all, since health was one of your--

LOPEZ:

No, no, I didn't, although I remember her. I remember very little, but I do know that she went off and started her work with the clinic.

ESPINO:

So then there was another issue that was pretty big in the seventies, and that would be the sterilization of women at the L.A. County Hospital. Did you follow that at all? Do you remember hearing about it?

LOPEZ:

I did follow it from a distance, because that became something that--if I remember, Gloria Molina got very involved in that and there were other women that got involved in that. I can say I remember reading about it, but I was never physically involved with any of that.

ESPINO:

You didn't attend any of the demonstrations--

LOPEZ:

No.

ESPINO:

--or anything like that? Okay, so you mentioned being involved with the Jewish women. Were other women's organizations, were they trying to recruit you, like, for example, the National Organization of Women? Can't think of any others.

LOPEZ:

No.

01:13:38

ESPINO:

They were always looking to bring in--like you say, they needed their Latina to--

LOPEZ:

No, I didn't, and I didn't have any--there was one meeting that we had. I don't remember what the reason for that meeting was, but there was a whole bunch of us women that got together, because remember the actor in Bonanza, Lorne Greene?

ESPINO:

Yes.

LOPEZ:

His wife called us to their house for a big meeting. I remember the house, I remember the meeting, but I don't remember the reason for being there, but it was all women. Gosh, I'll have to think about that one. I haven't thought about that one in ages.

ESPINO:

Do you remember the time period?

LOPEZ:

No, no, no, I'll have to think about that. I don't remember. I remember being at the house, but I don't remember the reason for being there.

ESPINO:

Interesting, interesting. Let me see. Let me look at my notes here. Okay, so we talked about the moratorium. What about looking at the Brown Berets and your experience with them? What do you see their contributions to the Movement were? How would you define them, considering Fred was a member?

01:16:26

LOPEZ:

Yeah, he was in it. Initially, I felt it was just a rubber stamp of the Black Panthers, only everything was brown. Will Waters says in his report that I'm going to send to you that the idea of the Brown Beret started at Epiphany, he says, that Virginia Ram talked to David Sanchez, who was at that time a kid at the church, and there were all these used clothes that they used to have there to give out to people that needed help, and she picked up a blue beret and he wore it, and that that's, he says, the beginning of the "it," of the Brown Beret, that it goes from that to brown.

Anyway, I remember being at the Brown Beret offices. I remember trying to help them with some clerical work, but it was a very male institution, and I think the rough-and-tumble of all of that, you'd get better understanding from Gloria than you would from me, because I was only there a couple of times. Fred never talked to me about the Brown Berets, and I don't remember his wearing his uniform.

ESPINO:

You don't remember seeing him in his uniform?

LOPEZ:

No. Maybe I've blocked that out, but let me see. I remember Fred never wrinkling. He always had a well-ironed shirt on, and I go, "How does that guy never get wrinkles?" But I don't ever remember his wearing a uniform, although he did--because we have pictures of--I mean, with the Chicano Moratorium thing--

ESPINO:

Oh, yes. You mean the La Raza negatives, or what do you mean, the Chicano Moratorium?

LOPEZ:

I think it's the Chicano Moratorium History Project.

ESPINO:

Oh, okay.

01:19:30

LOPEZ:

The other day, last week, I was over at Homegirl's CafÃ© having lunch with friends, and on the wall there's a picture of a man wearing his Brown Beret outfit, nicely pressed with all the pleats and everything, and a brown beret, and he's standing there. I looked at it, a big price for the picture. It's a photograph of somebody, and I go, "Look at that. That's an anachronism." I mean, he's standing there like this kind of icon of the Movement that doesn't exist. But they do--where did I see the Brown Berets recently? Oh, it was at Sal Castro's rosary. They were there, and I said to Father Wood, I said, "Look. I haven't seen one of those in ages."

ESPINO:

What did he say?

LOPEZ:

He just kind of laughed.

ESPINO:

Well, what do you think their contribution was? Did they make a contribution or were they just some--

LOPEZ:

It's hard for me to tell. I think they became a symbol of resistance. I think that some families didn't look kindly upon them. As were the women, most especially the women, they were a pretty picture. We have some beautiful pictures of the women. They were beauties. And the men looked so disciplined. But I don't know what they did. I don't know what they did.

ESPINO:

You don't think they have a lasting legacy--

LOPEZ:

Lasting legacy? No.

01:20:48

ESPINO:

--when you think about, like, Sal Castro or the role of the student walkout? Well, do you think that the walkouts could have happened without the Brown Berets?

LOPEZ:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, because I don't think the students were members of the Brown Berets that I know of. I mean, shows how little I know about the students themselves. But I think that the

Brown Berets became a symbol of resistance. During their organization, I've heard tell that there was less fighting among the gangs and that it gave some people a sense of pride. "Look at our kids and look at how disciplined they are," and all that. But I don't have a strong opinion about them.

ESPINO:

Not even a negative opinion? Do you think that they hurt the Movement?

LOPEZ:

No, I don't think they hurt the Movement, no.

ESPINO:

There's a picture in this book by Ernesto ChÃ¡vez, Â¡Mi Raza Primero, and it shows the vato loco of yesterday and the revolutionary. Do you think that that really had an impact as far as transforming maybe somebody who was hooked on drugs or kind of without direction and gave them direction?

LOPEZ:

They say that it did. I've heard tell that it did, that during that time, because there was a sense of pride and people were looking at them, "Look, look at how disciplined they are," that there was less violence and less activity among gangs. That's what I've heard tell.

ESPINO:

But you weren't witness to any of that as far as your proximity, considering you were married to a Brown Beret?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, but as I said, I don't remember him talking about that, and I don't ever remember him in a march wearing a uniform.

ESPINO:

Do you remember why he left the group?

LOPEZ:

Why he left the group?

01:23:05

ESPINO:

The Brown Berets.

LOPEZ:

I just think he got busy with work, busy with work, with his marriage, with his family. I don't even remember. It's quite possible there was one, but I don't remember a brown beret in the house.

ESPINO:

That's interesting.

LOPEZ:

It doesn't mean that there wasn't one. I just don't remember one.

ESPINO:

When we first met, you said something about David Sanchez, the way he is today isn't the way he was back then. What did you mean by that?

LOPEZ:

He was quick, he was smart, and people say he's just abused his body and he's just not the way he used to be. He got himself a good education, but you talk to him today and it's like, "Where are you?" I mean, he just doesn't seem to be all there-there. I mean, people have rumors about what all those reasons are, but he just did not take care of himself.

ESPINO:

Did you see him as a leader that you could follow in the Movement, somebody that you could put your energies behind as far as your work and your activism?

LOPEZ:

No. It takes a lot for me to follow somebody, but with David--how do I say it? To me, he was barrio boy, you know, so different from the men that I'd grown up with, the boys that I'd grown up with. He didn't, to me, have a strong--what is it? There wasn't--I mean, he could make a speech, he could shout, but there wasn't a lot to him. And later when I found out that he's finished his education and he's so well educated, it just comes as such a surprise to me because I didn't know that he had the ability, I didn't know he had the smarts to do all that. Then doesn't he teach in the college level for a while?

01:26:20

ESPINO:

I think he was teaching.

LOPEZ:

That surprised the hell out of me because I just didn't know that he could do that.

ESPINO:

Wow, yeah, because you see those pictures of him that circulate where he's shaking the hand of Mayor Yorty--

LOPEZ:

Oh, when he was a kid?

ESPINO:

Yeah, and he's wearing a suit, so the impression, having not met him, having not known him, you think, "Wow, smart young kid out of--." Well, he wasn't really from East L.A., but probably you would assume he's out of East L.A. because all Mexicans, you think they're from there. But he wasn't that kind of sweet, studious, academic young man when you knew him in the early days?

01:27:55

LOPEZ:

I don't know. Maybe he peaked too early. I don't know. I do remember his role as a youth something during Yorty's time. Virginia Ram over at Epiphany was almost like his godmother. Obviously I wasn't around during that time, so I don't know much about him at that time. But to me, he wasn't going to lead me anywhere.

ESPINO:

Well, that's so interesting, and that is a good segue into my next question, because there was an article that came out in the eighties about the leaders of the Chicano Movement. It came out in the L.A. Times and it was written by Maritza Hernandez.

LOPEZ:

Oh, yes, I remember her. Is she still in Chicago?

ESPINO:

I believe she is. The article title is "Generation in Search of Its Legacy." So it basically talks about how the Movement died, and now they're trying to figure out--"Chicano Leaders of a Dead Movement Look for Its Legacy." And all of the people that she interview are men. David Sanchez is one of them. Let's see. Raul Ruiz, Reis Lopez Tijerina, Rosalio MuÃ±oz, Corky Gonzales, they're all profiled here as people who were leaders then and what they're doing today. What do you make of that? I mean, she's a woman.

01:30:36

LOPEZ:

I think that it overstates--a lot of things come to mind. One of the things that comes to mind is that this was an important time, and maybe it was important because I was on the periphery of it and I knew people that were in it, so I cared about those people. So because of that, maybe I think it's more important than she is, but I haven't read this. But the development of leaders during this time, the effect of all of that was felt in many, many different spheres. The work that we did in the Episcopal Church and in the national Episcopal Church and in the funding mechanisms to get money out to groups that were doing things, I mean, all of that came because we did something here, became recognized, and then they put us up there.

So for some of us that time was a time of training, in a way. Met a lot of people, some of whom are still dear friends. And I think that that time in history has to be told and retold, not because it's telling our history--I'm not a major part of all of that--but what other people tried to do, and some of them were successful. By successful, Rosalio MuÃ±oz and his work and later on becoming student body president at UCLA, Sal Castro and his education, all these different things that we could point out. But one of the things that I know about these boys is that they were not good with women-- (Interruption)

LOPEZ:

Excuse me.

ESPINO:

Okay, let me pause it. (Recorder turned off)

ESPINO:

Okay, we're back.

LOPEZ:

The boys, they're not very good with girls. Most of them, except for maybe one or two, have been married several times, and some more than once or twice. So that says a lot to me. And as I've said before, the boys, from my view and opinion, were the ones that did all the strategy, they're the ones that did all the planning. Sometimes I feel like they were in the backroom doing all their work. There were a few of them--I mean, a few of them I think were really solid, were with the same mate, but I know one fellow who's had five wives, somebody else has had two. So there's a lot in that.

01:33:31

ESPINO:

What do you mean by that, there's a lot in that? What do you think that says about somebody?

LOPEZ:

There's a lot about how they interact with women. There's a lot in that and in their own ego needs, their own discipline. If you say you're going to marry somebody, how are you working to keep that marriage intact? Do they listen to their women? Do they appreciate their women? I mean, there's just a lot there. I mean, that would be a case study in itself. Let me see.

ESPINO:

Well, when you look at their leadership and how they changed from being at the forefront of these direct action kinds of activities to--like Raul Ruiz, who's a professor, and David Sanchez, who was teaching--I don't know if he's teaching anymore--Rosalio, who does this history project, do you think that you can argue that the Movement is dead or do you think that it's changed?

01:35:55

LOPEZ:

That Movement is a piece of history. It's a moment in time, but that doesn't make it any less significant, because it shows a lot of things to people. It shows what happens when people can get together. That time raised a lot of issues that our people thought were important. It raised a lot of leaders. Many of those people have gone on to do important things, not all of them, but how many of them became professors at universities? How many of them are in the process of writing their book or have written a book? People have gone into the media, have made their own movies, they're directors of movies.

I mean, it was a moment in history that needs to be told and retold so that people know that there were some people that had some courage to raise the issues. So you can say it's lost or it's dead. That time is over, because it was encapsulated in a few years, preceded by the '64, '65 Cesar Chavez work, all the way to the beginning of the seventies with the Movement, but then other things happen out of that. Bert Corona continues with his immigration work. We go into UNO work. People do other things. So I wouldn't say dead, because it means that nothing happened, I mean, it's gone. But our time is different, but that, to me, was a very special time, and I am committing some of my volunteer time to work with the Chicano Moratorium History Project. We're going to do some things a little differently this next year, and one of them is we're going to buy a lot of books--I am--a lot of books through Amazon, and then we're going to have them there, we're going to invite the authors so they can sign them, and we'll sell them and let people know that there's a history that they can read about. So it's not just pictures, us telling the story, but they can read it for themselves.

ESPINO:

What did you get out of your activism of the Chicano Movement?

LOPEZ:

Besides an arrest record? (Laughs)

ESPINO:

And a husband and a baby, organizing skills. (Laughter)

01:39:1401:41:29

LOPEZ:

A husband, a baby, and arrest record. Well, recognition. It's recognition, but it was undeserved, because I think I went to jail for two other women. When the police talk about pointing me out at the trial, they said, "Yeah, she was in the basement wearing a pea coat and yelling epithets," or, "She was up in the lobby wearing a colorful poncho, and she kicked me up here." Well, I could not kick up there even in my good days. So I think I know who those two women are, as I've talked to women who were there, and I say, "Yeah, I went to jail for you." So I said, "But thank you, because I get the credit." (Laughs)

So there was that, and in certain quarters today it serves me well. They call me--I'm a veterana now and all of this, but to me, my link goes back to what my dear, dear friend John Luce did in finding money for the Movement, for allowing the Brown Berets to start in the basement, La Raza newspaper. All of that happened at that sweet little Epiphany Church. And meeting with the chief of police there in the hall. I mean, there was a lot of mischief also, but to me, it just all comes around to it helped establish my place in the community. It was not so helpful--in UNO, being part of the Movement was almost not a good thing, because in UNO and in that kind of training, it has its own discipline, its own rules, its own way, and so you have your marching orders. The feeling during the UNO work was that they didn't want so many of those activists because they didn't see activists as having really solid grounding, that they would go from this issue to that, to that, to that, that you needed to focus, you had this training, you needed to work on things.

And the work that we did in UNO was not your typical stuff. It wasn't working on issues of the war or issues of poverty. I mean it was very specific other work, and that was a hallmark of the UNO stuff, but it was also very clear discipline, and there was a feeling that activists and people that didn't have the ability to be that focused without a lot of work. Rosalio started with UNO early on and then dropped out. The only person from--let me see. Who else was in the Movement? I don't think there was anybody in the Movement that I can think of that was in UNO.

ESPINO:

Do you think it was more of a narrow kind of organizing than the Movement organizing or was it--

LOPEZ:

Which?

ESPINO:

How would you differentiate your work with UNO with what you were doing with the Chicano Movement?

01:43:5401:46:3201:49:52

LOPEZ:

Oh, it's very different. In the Movement, it was the boys over here making decisions about what was going to be going on. In UNO, there was a committee of people elected from their parishes, and all went to national training for two weeks to learn how to run a meeting, how to set an agenda. We were taught how to analyze your city so you knew where the levers of power were. It's called a power analysis. I still have my notes. They're very important, because I feel that, now, looking back, that was the best training I ever got. They taught you how to go from a problem to an issue, and the problem was poor education.

The issue was after the principals had been evaluated by the members in that local school community--they went and interviewed each principal, but before doing that, they were trained and they took their little clipboard and they asked these questions, and all that information comes back. The principals are evaluated to see the condition of the leadership in all the schools. So it was decided through some of those interviews that there were some principals that needed to be reassigned. So that became a huge bit of work, but it was not without its pitfalls, because the principals had their own administration and they were well supported through their means in the

bureaucracy. So it was very difficult to get a principal out. But all that to say that whatever the issue was, it was very specific. The first one was auto insurance redlining, and out of that came the insurance companies finally charging you by your zip code, as opposed to just putting you all with everybody else, so that there was a lot of work. So what we did is we met with all the heads of all the major insurance--you name it, Allstate, State Farm. Mercury Insurance was the head of that. The fellow that started the company met with us, and it was always surprising to me why they would want to even do that. But these fellows have huge egos. I can handle anything. So what came out of the meeting with him is that he was the first company to do that. So what we ended up doing is telling our people, so many of them went with that particular company. So it was wonderful because he made a lot of money, but then the other companies saw what was happening, and so they decided to change.

Then the governor at that time--it was Jerry Brown's first round, and he called together a meeting. We said, "No, you come to East L.A." He had been my neighbor when I lived in Silver Lake, and he used to come over a lot because he had his eye on my roommate. He comes to this meeting and he brings Mario Obledo with him, who's head of this department in the state. It was a big meeting, and I hadn't seen him in years. He said, "I want you all to know that this is first time the governor of the State of California has come to a meeting in East Los Angeles in a church like this." And I said, "No, excuse me, Mr. Governor, we'll take the credit because we got you here." And he said, "Oh, Lydia, you're never satisfied." And I said, "Oh, Mr. Governor, don't get personal." Then we went on with the meeting. But he said at this meeting that he would call together all the major companies doing auto insurance for the State of California and he'd host the meeting. He was going to host the summit, which he did. So it kicked it up a notch, and there were some remedies. But that was 1974 and on. I ended my work with them about 1985 or so. I think it was about '85, because I was working with Father Olivares at that time, and we wanted to get involved in the immigration issue, but the immigration issue--it was trying to get UNO involved in foreign policy. It was kind of bad. So it was a difficult bit of work. But the leadership of the IAF staff, the Industrial Areas Foundation staff, were not willing or ready to let go of Father Olivares, so they were trying to find ways to work around the issue without getting involved in the wars in El Salvador and all that kind of stuff, where he had been spending a lot of time and effort. So after a while, it just became something that I wanted to separate from, but it was really hard because every Tuesday was a preparatory meeting, every Thursday was a meeting-meeting, and then there were other assignments. But there was enormous discipline in that and tough, tough work. It was tough work.

ESPINO:

So are you saying that you developed your organizing skills not from the Chicano Movement, because you weren't allowed to with that male leadership; you developed your skills with UNO?

LOPEZ:

I think that that's true. I think I was able to, during the Chicano Movement, see what other leaders were doing. Certainly some of that rubbed off. There were some women that were doing stuff that was important, and I had a lot of respect for them. But they were doing their own thing. Irene Tovar was doing her education work out in the Valley, Alicia Escalante was doing her welfare rights organizing, and there were other women. But certainly some of that spilled over. But when I go through this training, it really is significant and important.

ESPINO:

Well, that's great. I think I'd like to do an oral history just on UNO. Seems like a whole separate thing, with other UNO members and doing a different trajectory. Did I ask you what does it mean for you--do you still call yourself a Chicana?

LOPEZ:

Yeah, I do. Makes people upset.

ESPINO:

What does that mean for you when you say that, that you're a Chicana?

LOPEZ:

Well, two things. Once I said it here at the table, and there's this old Mexican woman sits at my table, very talkative, very opinionated, and she says, "Oh, how dare you use that word." So now she calls me "the activist." I joke with my friends, because I told them I will not be called a Hispanic. And I quote Richard Rodriguez's book, Brown, where he talks about Nixon being the

father of Hispanicity, and that it was when they were preparing for the census that year that he pulled together all sorts of Salvadorians, Dominicans, Cubans, Mexican Americans, and others. I think our dear friend Leo Estrada was in the meeting. They came up with the least offensive word to call them, us, and it was "Hispanic." So I will not use that word in referring to me. So all my friends, my Anglo friends, "Yeah, she is Lydia Lopez, but don't call her Hispanic. She's the non-Hispanic Lydia Lopez," and they make great fun of that. They know to call me a Chicana. I still use that. Sometimes I feel that I'm one of twelve people that uses that, because it's not used very often.

01:53:56

ESPINO:

But what does it mean to you to be a Chicana?

LOPEZ:

It's a strong name. It has a lot of--you say it and people react to it. It is kind of a set-apart name, and it's what makes my identity stand out. When I use that with people that have not met me or don't know me, I'll explain to them what that means to me, and if I have time, I go through the Nixon thing or the Ruben Salazar differentiation. But because it's strong, because it's set apart. It's who I am.

ESPINO:

Thank you. I think we're going to stop here, and I'm going to turn it off now.

LOPEZ:

Okay.

ESPINO:

Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. It's been a great interview. (End of June 11, 2013 interview)