# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARITERESA RIVERA-ROGERS

An Oral History Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White
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# PREFACE

In 1965, Chilean-born Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers (b. 1943) and husband Enrique Rivera set out on their adventurous leap and moved to the United States. Sponsored by an aunt living in Las Vegas, their resident visas took only three months to process—a task that would take years in today's world she explains. Their first home was on Convention Center Drive, though they and their four children would experience several different neighborhoods over the years.

Mariteresa is a Chilean of English ancestral heritage. Coming to the United States would be a provocative transition at times. Nonetheless, after raising her children and pursing a real estate career, her mastery of English and Spanish were key to being hired into the certified court interpreter in the program created by Judge John Mendoza. She also found time to earn a degree from William S. Boyd School of Law in 2003.

Over the course of her careers, Mariteresa established herself as highly regarded criminal defense lawyer. She served as Deputy Public Defender, formed her own firm, Evans & Rivera-Rogers, and later joined the Wright Stanish & Winckler firm in 2011.

She has served on the Clark County Bar Association board, Latino Bar Association board, the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys board, is a member of the Clark County Law Foundation and Community Service Committee, and the Nevada Supreme Court Task Force on Racial and Economic Bias.

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October 24, 2018
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Maribel Estrada Calderón

LATINX VOICES
OF SOUTHERN NEVADA
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Ma. Rivera R 10/24/2018
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**Today is October 24th, 2018. I am in the UNLV Lied Library in Barbara Tabach's office. My name is Maribel Estrada Calderón. I am going to interview Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers. And in the room with me, I have...**

***Barbara Tabach.***

***Laurents Banuelos-Benitez.***

**Ms. Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers, can you please say your name and spell out your last name for me?**

Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers. My last name is spelled R-I-V-E-R-A, hyphen, R-O-G-E-R-S.

**How do you identify yourself?**

I identify myself as a white person who came from Chile to this country and got labeled by many different labels, including Latina and a person that is non-white and a person who is Hispanic or different labels. I basically learned to identify with whichever label I was given.

**Now let's begin with your origins, where you were from and where you come from, your family.**

I was born in Chile, in Concepción, Chile. My parents owned a business. My father was an accountant and my mother a very accomplished businesswoman. We had a very nice childhood. I went to a non-Catholic school for all twelve years of my educational life, my early education. I can't say anything wrong; my childhood was pretty good I thought.

Then I started college over there. I was hoping to be an architect, but there was no such thing in the college in my hometown. Of course, being the '60s, my parents wouldn't have any of it, of me going away to college in another town. So I went and started engineering, which was, I thought, building of sorts, but it was in a different area, which I completed the first year and got married.

My husband and I decided to move to the United States. We had an aunt, a relative, who lived here in Las Vegas and she sponsored us. We came on resident visas in 1965. It took three months to do our paperwork to get here, which now it takes years and years.

That was basically what happened before I came here. I was involved in things like the Red Cross. I learned to be a nurse of sorts, help in the hospitals and do things in addition to my regular schooling. I basically can't complain of any of it.

My first husband was more of the fancy type, which my parents didn't agree with. That was one of the reasons we wanted to be more adventurous and come here and maybe work and have a home and not have to live with relatives, as you have to do in our country because it's prohibitive, how much it costs to buy a home. That's how we ended up here.

**Can you tell me more about life in Chile and celebrations that you practiced?**

We had a place in the country in addition to our home that we went on weekends. We lived very close to the ocean, so it was really beautiful and green in contrast to moving to the Las Vegas desert. We celebrated Christmas, like everyone else, New Year's, except that I always got bathing suits for Christmas presents because it was the summer there, although our Christmas cards may have had snow, but we never knew what snow was. That was one of the big celebrations, New Year's, and then, of course, most of the Catholic days of celebration, holy days that are celebrated in most of Latin America.

**Tell me about the journey to the U.S.**

The journey was quite interesting. There was nothing to it in those days. I had hat, gloves, and was dressed up for a flight in a plane like I always had, which now does not exist anymore. My husband didn't take well of the flight; it was delayed and we had to stay a night in Mexico. While I was in Mexico at the hotel, they stole my beautiful cream that I had gotten to bring. But it was

just a day delay, so we got here late, but we got here and it was very, very hot. We came on June 25th of 1965, very hot. He was not feeling well with the heat, and so it was quite trying.

I had learned English in school from first grade through the twelfth grade, so I felt comfortable. I had also visited the United States before and taken classes, like secretarial classes, sort of thinking that if I ever wanted to come here, I could work somewhere that would be sort of in the immediate skill that I could use.

My husband was not as well versed in the language. However, when we got here, he had a job the following week and I found out soon after that I was pregnant, and so I was not feeling great. It was other times; I had no idea that I was pregnant. It's not like nowadays. That was our beginning here.

It was an interesting beginning. We lived in a very nice home. It was on Convention Center, actually, 101 Convention Center Drive where now there's the big bank there, I think. But it was very close to the hotels. The Folger family was the ones that had sponsored my aunt who lived here and they lived in another home in the same area; there were three homes in one big area of land that they had there on Convention Center, which at the time was called Folger Road. That was our first home.

Then we bought a home in what is now called Naked City, on Cleveland Street behind Sahara, the Strip and Sahara there, a very tiny, twelve hundred square foot, little two-bedroom home that was the cutest thing ever. The Strip wasn't what it is nowadays. There was a shopping strip in the corner two blocks from the house and very convenient.

Then we moved to a bigger house on Griffith and Seventh. We lived there for about eight years and then we had four kids in the meantime.

My studies had been delayed for the time being and we wanted to have a bigger place and

room for horses and things, and so we moved to a home on Paradise and Warm Springs, which was way out, way out of the area. That was 1976. We built the home ourselves—not ourselves, but we contracted to have it built and all that and I oversaw the construction and all that in two and a half acres. We had the room and we had the horses. We had everything we had wanted for. That was the beginning.

**What was your assessment of the Latinx community when you first came here?**

When I lived in the Griffith house, it was a very white and Mormon neighborhood, which I don't know if I was welcome or not, but I encountered a couple of times like a Molotov cocktail bomb in my mailbox. We had stuff thrown to our car. But it was a very nice place. My husband's skin was slightly darker than mine and I don't know if that had anything to do with any of what was going on at the time, but it was kind of startling. Like I said, that's the first time I realize that I was not a white person by definition of U.S. definition, although my ancestors came from—my father's side from England, and so it was like they just went a different direction, but the result was different.

But other than that, we met wonderful people. My husband worked for someone that had come from Uruguay and there were people from Paraguay and Argentina and we soon made lots of friends and a lot of Cuban friends. Of course, I learned how to roast a pig. I learned how to do a lot of stuff that I would have never dreamt of doing. We had a lot of contact with different people of the Latin community, and it was very pleasant. We met wonderful people.

**BARBARA:** ***What kind of work was your husband in? What was his name?***

His name was Enrique Rivera or Henry Rivera. He was a farm mechanic where he fixed agricultural machinery, like the machines that milk the cows, big tractors or things of that sort. Then when he came here, he went to work for a mechanic shop that took care of Volkswagens

and other European cars because he had done Mercedes. But the John Deere tractors and all that, he was a specialist in that kind of stuff when he came. Then he, of course, adapted very quickly and there was not much European mechanics, or that knew how to fix European cars, so he did very, very well. That's how we met a lot of the people that we did.

***Did he have his own business or did he work for someone else?***

Originally, he worked for someone else. Then we bought a gas station on Charleston and...I can't think of the name of the street, but it's between Maryland Parkway there. It would be east of Maryland Parkway towards Eastern. Then we bought another gas station across the street. The first one was Phillips 66 and then 76, which were almost in the same corner across the street, but the 76 was bigger. After that he bought a garage, which was on Mojave and 30th Street. That's where he was when he died in 1987. It was a very good business for him at the time, so we did okay.

***That's great.***

**Was the majority of your clientele Latino?**

No, totally mixed because at the time we were in all nice neighborhoods in that area, so they were white people, Latino people, people from the Strip, dancers, waiters, anyone who had a car and needed. By word of mouth was how he did his business because he was good, and he was reasonable, and he was nice. He had a great personality, so it was easy to get clients. But they were from all walks of life and from all backgrounds.

**You mentioned that you delayed your education. When did you begin to go to school?**

The kids were in school. When my youngest one started school. She was born in '73, so probably it was around '79 or so. I said, "One of these days I have to go back to school." I did get a real estate license the year after we got here, and I soon figured out I couldn't sell homes that I did not

like. I'm not a good salesperson at all. I did manage office buildings so that that was sort of detached from me, not liking.

In order to go to real estate school at first, I had to get some money together, so I decided to work. I worked for a tax and accounting office that my aunt knew. They hired me as a receptionist, which was very interesting because with all kinds of English names you have to ask for spellings because the names of the people, the way they sound when you're a foreigner and the way they are written have nothing to do with anything. That's how I got to learn a lot more.

I ended up managing the office soon enough and then I ended up doing tax returns because I learned how to do with the books and the taxes, and so I was doing a little bit of everything. The person who was the accountant in the office took some work as a trustee for the courts when there are people that file bankruptcy or people that have guardianship or things like that. I had to learn how to type legal forms by doing all this, which I did, but that got me interested in the law and eventually the interpreting.

That's how I found out when there was a judge, Judge [John] Mendoza—Eva Garcia Mendoza's husband, not at the time but later on—and he felt that in the courts there was no good representation for the Latino or those who didn't speak the language. He could understand the message wasn't being communicated accurately. He wanted to have interpreters that were qualified to do this job and he did announce it sometime on the TV. Yes, I think it was the TV because I heard it on the weekend program or something. It said that they were going to interview or do an exam to find people who were qualified. I said, "Oh, that would be interesting. I think I would like that." So I did that.

They did an exam for about two hundred and fifty people because it was at the Convention Center, huge room. I guess there was a lot of interest. They selected the fifteen top

candidates to do a forty-hour workshop to learn about the law or the things about the court that usually you're not born with this knowledge or you didn't learn it at home. That's how I ended up in that group. That was 1974.

It was very convenient because, like I said, my kids were little and so it gave me a lot of flexibility. I could work when I wanted, and I didn't have to accept assignments if I didn't want them. By then my family had come and I had great family support. By 1968 my parents and my siblings had also moved to the United States...They couldn't bear the thought that I was here all by myself with children. That was the way I started with the interpreting.

Of course, with the real estate I had to continue education. I actually kept my real estate license for twenty-six years. I did not sell one home—well, I sold a couple of things that had to do with family, but nothing that had to do with strangers. But I did enjoy what I learned, which was very helpful as well for this interpreting because when you're interpreting it could be any subject in the world. I already knew about cars. I knew about accounting. I knew about real estate. I knew all this other vocabulary that other people don't learn, but I've always gotten into everything. I was happy that I had because I had all this knowledge. That was sort of my informal going through life.

In '75, after this group of people that was collected in '74, and then one of them, which was Eva Garcia Mendoza, Eva Green at the time, she was selected to head the office at the actual courthouse. We were sort of on-call, interpreting on-call. I did not want a full-time job. I just wanted to be able to come and go as I wanted because of all the things that I had going. I helped my husband with all of the accounting and cleaning bathrooms and going to pick up parts, doing whatever needed to be done for the business.

In 1981, I did apply for the job. They went through Eva who went to law school and she

became an attorney. Then it was Valorie Vega who came. She was from California. She was the head there for a while and then she went to law school and became an attorney and then a judge. She retired last year or two years ago. Then it was Susan Worry. Susan Worry was very nice and she was heading the office. She was going to get married at the end of the year and this was, I think, in September. She was leaving the office one day and got killed by a branch from a tree that fell in a windstorm. It just fell on top of her vehicle, over her head, and did kill her. It was Labor Day weekend, and I got a call from the administrator if I could go and take care of things while they figured out what to do. I had done that before when they want to have a vacation, when Eva wanted to have kids; I mean, when she had to go and deliver children. So I knew how to do that. Of course, they posted the job opening and I applied. I figured it was maybe something I could do full time since I have. I said, "I'll do that for ten years and then I'll figure out what I want to do." Well, that lasted a lot longer.

***How long did it last?***

I was since '81 until 2003. In the meantime, they interview to hire and all the people they interviewed for that position had a master's degree in Spanish; another had also a master's degree in Spanish, and then they were college educated and I wasn't, but I thought that the position required that you be college educated or at least to have the knowledge equivalent to that. I said, "I have to go to school because if I think I should have something to show that I can do this."

In any case, in '81, they finally hired me as the head of the interpreters' office and I stayed there for twenty-one years. I was very happy. I promoted the certification of interpreters; I have for years and years and I still up to this time do that. That's why I do the interpreter workshops for the state now that we were able to get the legislature to have the statute that says that the Administrator Office of the Supreme Court, they will do this and make sure that there is

a way to have the interpreters that are knowledgeable, qualified and certified to do the work of the court. That is something that has been my passion all along.

Then I decided to just take classes at UNLV. Architecture, of course, I checked into it. It is all daytime classes and they're all in a sequence, so you can't maybe catch one here and another one there. I just did my general classes. Of course, in school as a child my passion was for science, chemistry and physics, and all the math; it was what I loved. Well, as an adult, when I started with the anthropology and history and all those classes and literature and Spanish, I did a one-eighty turn. I found that humanities was really so interesting, which I hated history as a kid. I loved history as an adult. So I totally changed in that regard.

I finally got a degree in Latin American studies and in Spanish, a duo degree here at UNLV. The Latin American studies, I found that I could sort of put together my own degree by taking certain courses because my husband was reading the catalog and said, "Oh, you can do this." I'm going, "Wow, that's awesome." So I ended up doing that. I thought it would be very specific for what I was doing with interpreting and all that.

Then, of course, I said, "Probably I'll get a master's. I don't know, history would be so fun." So I'm thinking what to do next when the Boyd School of Law came. I graduated in '98, so I took the LSAT. The school started in '98 because it was in the second year and I was in the evening class, so it took me four years to complete law school. I did get into law school that way.

I've always said I hated lawyers; I can't stand them. I've worked with lawyers my entire life. I said, "I don't like lawyers." But, on the other hand, I'm a woman entitled to change my mind. So I said, "I'm going to do this."

But I still was working full time. I did the work from seven thirty to five thirty, rush here for classes at six to nine, and then whatever at the library until midnight. By then all my kids

were, of course, grown up and out of the house and no longer a problem. By then my second husband was very good at accommodating whatever I needed or wanted. He just supported me in every way to do what I wanted to do. I've been extremely lucky that I've done what I've done.

Of course, now I practice law. I passed the bar the first time and I've practiced law since 2003. In 2003, when I passed the bar, I applied for a position at the Public Defender's Office and I was there four and a half years.

As a public defender, I had a friend who wanted me to go in business with her. I said, "Okay, We'll try that. I'll give you three years and then we'll see what happens after that. I'm free to do whatever I want."

But two and a half years into our partnership, I got offered the job that I have now, which I've been for seven and a half years now, and that is the top law firm for criminal defense. It was a part-time job doing whatever I want, so I can travel whenever I want and I can do all these side projects, like teaching the workshop and doing things that I really enjoy. They're fantastic people. Of course, I'm mindful of the workload, so when there is a lot of work, I work a lot. It's very nice place to work.

***What firm are you with now?***

It just changed to Wright Marsh and Levy. It used to be Wright Stanish and Winckler. But it's been really good.

Like I said, my education...In the meantime, somewhere in between there, I became a federally certified court interpreter in '95. That is sort of like the top for court interpreters because it's the most difficult test that there is and there is very few that are federally certified. That's it in a nutshell.

**LAURENTS:** ***I have a question—a couple. My first one is: As we're going through this and***

***we're interviewing different people from different countries, we're realizing that there are small changes in Spanish. Every country has their own slang. Do you have a story from your interpreting where maybe the person you were interpreting for was from a different country and they stumped you with one of their slangs?***

One of the things, of course, at the beginning was I had to do a lot of learning about Mexican and Cuban slang because I was not familiar. To me, a taco was something in the back of my shoe, not something that you eat.

**BARBARA:** ***I didn't know that.***

(*Gesturing at shoe heel*) This is a *taco*. And so I had to learn a lot of those. By the time I became an interpreter, I was very familiar with a lot of the vocabulary because we had such a mix of friends, like what Argentinians use and all that. A few times as an interpreter you are stumped, but sometimes because it's a very specific word and it's actually no way to find an equivalent. Sometimes those people will use an Americanized word, like a *quarta*, which is not a word, but it's their way of saying *quarter*. Sometimes you get stumped that way. Like 22nd Street; *Veinte Dos N D*. It's like, all right. Somebody says they live in six four eight *Veinte Dos N D*, and then you're going...Very interesting things that happen as you're an interpreter.

But I had a very interesting story that happened to one of the interpreters. She was from Mexico and she was called last minute to interpret for someone; I think he was being sentenced and he was from Cuba. The case, unbeknownst to her, was an attempted murder. The guy says, "*Le di una galleta*." Then she interpreted it, "*I gave him a cookie*." Then it's like everybody is like, what are you talking about? It's hitting someone or slapping versus eating a cookie. Then you think, well, attempted murder, maybe if she's thinking it's a poison cookie or something.

When she told us about her experience, it was hilarious because that's the kind of thing

that you encounter as an interpreter. They are so different, the slang. Like I said, people don't realize the standard Spanish, what we call standard Spanish, more Castilian and pure. It's very easy to understand for everyone. But once you go down a slang, the differences are night and day. If I went to interpret right now in Miami and they get all the people from Puerto Rico, they use a lot of different slang that I am not used to using all the time like the interpreters over there. I would probably have to get really good at it before I could do some serious interpreting.

On the other hand, you're listening to stories from people and most Latin American people that I've had to interpret for, they get asked a question and they go back to the grandmother; I mean, they don't answer directly. You can't give them to say yes or no. You can't get them to be brief and just answer what they were asked. They have to explain from way back and bring it to the present. It's a natural reaction and I have not seen that on witnesses that are from here. But if you asked, sometimes it's really hard to pin them down to a specific question. That's been always extremely interesting because you start and then everybody is shaking their head; they don't know why you're talking about this when that's not what they asked. I think culturally we're much more detail oriented and wanting to make sure that the person knows how we arrived to this point.

**LAURENTS:** ***My other question was: What was the beginning of the interpreter program like? Was it structured at all?***

Actually, one of our assignments was to write a business plan for the actual position because we had to request grants. At the beginning there was no funding, so they worked through grants that they were able to set it up. After so many years under grants, then it was picked up by the county as one of their regular expenses, once it was proven. We had to write sort of like a business plan; what it would cost, how it would be structured, how it would be run.

In those days we figured that there would have to be a way to test the ability of those that were going to come after us as interpreters, so we developed an exam. I used to administer the written and oral exams. It was something that we just felt was necessary because just because somebody says they're bilingual, as you well know, doesn't mean anything. They think they are bilingual, but they're actually to a very limited degree. A lot of young Latinos, they came here as babies, so their Spanish is mostly what they've learned at home and it hasn't expanded enough to cover the language of the court, which is so expansive, extensive, whatever you want to call it.

When I came here, I felt my education, even though I've never been to college, was equivalent to at least two years of college. It was a very comprehensive education that I got in Chile. We had classes from eight to five every day and a half-day on Saturdays. We had twelve or so subjects in high school. It wasn't electives or anything. You had to do civics, literature. We did two languages, French and English, and went all the way from learning vocabulary to literature. Philosophy. We even had to do religion because we were in a non-Catholic school and then all the Spanish and other subjects that are normal; physics, chemistry and all that. In some of the public schools they had a way to go in either humanities or science, so some of those subjects got just quickly gone over.

My graduating class was, I think, twelve people. The entire school from first grade to twelfth grade, there were probably four or five hundred students. It's nothing compared to the humongous schools here.

The other problem with the people also that they've come too long ago is that they don't use it; I mean, they don't use Spanish and it's kind of hard. That's what I try to emphasize when I do the workshop: Reading, reading, reading. You don't know how much vocabulary you acquire just by reading. It's not the same as reading snippets of a hundred and forty words in your phone.

You have to read and comprehend an entire book. I always say, read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in Spanish.

**BARBARA:** ***That sounds daunting.***

What I do is—also my own personal life because I'm kind of...But you can cross that out. When I buy a book, I like to buy it in the language of the author and then I buy a translated one in the Spanish or English, whatever it may be. Sometimes I only read one of them. But if I ever have interest in seeing how the translator managed a certain passage or certain words that are sort of interesting in the whole composition, then I go and check the other book. It's kind of interesting only to those that are very much into the interpretation and translation, which are two different animals.

**Can you tell me more about your job as [deputy] public defender [2003 – 2008]?**

The public defender job was extremely interesting. You serve people who really did not choose you as their lawyer; they get you because you are assigned to their case. You have to work out some way to let them get trust in you in order to be able to work their case and be somewhat effective. It's very frustrating to see so many people with the lack of resources to do anything. They're ordered to do classes. They're ordered to pay fines. They don't have any anything. They have to sometimes choose between giving food to the kids and paying a fine and risking being arrested because they didn't pay a fine. It's really heartbreaking, the mental illness that you see in many of those that are poor because they can't hold a job or because they've never been given proper treatment or when they have treatment for a while, they're doing okay but then it's the same thing, they run out of medication, they don't have money to get any, and they're back to where they started. That was the sad part about the job.

The great part is the people you work with. It's a team of people that are outstanding

attorneys and there's a lot of camaraderie. There's a lot of ways to work your cases with the input of others trying to do the best you can for the people you are representing. The difficult part is, though, that you have lots of clients. It was like sixty hours, seventy hours some weeks, but it's like you have to do it. It's kind of the ethical thing to do; you have to represent them. Sometimes it's hard.

My only problem with the job is that I was getting to an age where I wanted to travel and you're not on the top where you can choose when you want to go. Clearing my vacation dates through my team chief and then making sure that nobody else in the whole team was going to be gone on the same time. Then your clients, you have to make sure—who is going to be taking care of them?—you don't have a trial or something that is going to put too much burden on someone else. It's a lot of moving parts and it was hard for me.

But other than that, I loved the job. Of course, I learned so quickly because you have so many clients that you're just doing things that other attorneys don't get to do. You're in court every day. There are attorneys that never go to court, in the civil arena especially. They're not the same. But doing criminal defense is really an active practice in that regard, so that was a very good four and a half years.

Then with my partner, we had a good practice. Actually, after I left, she moved to Switzerland, married someone. I says, "I'm good. I wasn't there then to interfere with your personal life." She's a very good friend to this date.

**What was the name of the firm?**

Evans and Rivera-Rogers.

**How long did it serve the community?**

I was there since we started in 2008 to 2011, in January, when I started where I am now. But, of

course, my partner kept going for maybe another two or three years.

**You mentioned that you wanted to travel. Did you get to travel?**

Oh, yes, I travel everywhere, really.

**How do those places compare to Concepción, Chile and Las Vegas?**

That I know of, I love Spain. I love Portugal. I didn't think I had any interest in going to the Far East. My daughter asked me if I wanted to go with her family when they went to Japan, China and Thailand. And I said, "Sure, why not?" You are paying for it—no, I didn't say that. I was extremely impressed, and I felt like I understood very well how we Latinos get all clumped together when people try to figure out what we are, what kind of animal are we. I had kind of done the same for the cultures because I did not understand the difference between the Chinese and Japanese, and they are so different. As you're there and you can feel it and see it, it's amazing because it kind of explains the same thing. We just don't understand and that's why you sort of lump the whole region into one lump that doesn't belong all together. The same with when you go through Latin America. I've been to Brazil, Argentina, Chile. Peru, I haven't done enough yet to consider it; I've just stopped there a couple of times. Of course, I've done a lot of travel in Mexico. I haven't done the central part of Central America, but it's in my radar. I've done Norway and the Netherlands and all the north and Ireland and England and Scotland and Hungary, and the other side, Austria, Germany, France. I've been in a lot of places.

**BARBARA:** ***That sounds wonderful.***

I know. I really have enjoyed the freedom to travel where I wanted. I always joke that I know many parts of the United States, but there's many that I want to still visit. Canada, I've only been to Calgary, so there's a whole bunch of stuff that I need to see. In Italy, you have to go up steps everywhere, cobblestone steps everywhere and they don't have ADA accommodations, but here

they do, so as I get older I'll just go with my walker. I'll be touring the United States.

***She's undaunted. I love it.***

Yes. I used to say, I'll be in my eighties with a cane and I'll be coming to class at UNLV for whatever because they offer some free classes for the old people. Then it's like I'm only five years away from my eighties, so I hope I'm not using a cane by then.

**LAURENTS:** ***You mentioned that your father's family came from England to Chile. How did that happen? Is it a common thing in Chile to have ancestry in Europe?***

Yes, actually. Because the way that Chile is situated, all of the maritime travel or merchants and everything came through the south of Chile and back up into this other side, through the Strait of Magellan. It was colonized by mostly Europeans. My grandfather, as I understood, came when Scott came to install cable, because that was the way of communicating, the buried cables under sea or whatever, and so that's how he came to Chile. But we have regions in Chile like it's all Germans because they offered the land to people in Germany who wanted to come. They would give them the land so that they could work it. They knew that Germans were good workers and that they could. Of course, they built beautiful regions. The entire south region where the lakes are is very, very much like being in the Swiss Alps or someplace that is like that.

The Spaniards, when they tried coming into Chile, they were always sent back to Peru because they conquered Peru and Mexico because they had riches. We didn't have any gold. We had silver and copper, not even much silver, but copper mines, salt mines. In those days they were not interested in us, so the Indian population there was very ferocious and then they just threw them out every time. It took a while to get down for the Spaniards. Of course, right now they're all mixed. It's very interesting, the difference in composition. The same with Argentina; it was colonized by a lot of Italians. They have the best Italian food and pizzas in the world along

with their steaks and delicious meat.

**What are your favorite foods from Chile?**

Empanadas and the seafood. We have so much seafood that doesn't exist in other places. That is, of course, not available here either. We had a lot of fresh seafood and fish and that's what I miss the most.

**Can you tell me more about the Latino Bar Association?**

The Latino Bar Association has been around for a while. It has gone through a lot of different attorneys heading it. I was the treasurer there for a few years. I think it was about two years, three years ago that I gave up that position. I figured that there's got to be someone younger that can take care of these things. That has kept me not as involved as I was, but I still like the way we connect with La Voz here. Are you familiar with La Voz at the law school?

La Voz is the Latino organization at the Boyd Law School. They have a program of mentorship with those at the Latino Bar. The Latino Bar are attorneys who will mentor a La Voz student and then kind of do things together during the school year. I've had La Voz students that I've mentored a few times and we did things, like get together at my house and have coffee and then find out what they're going through, what they want to know, what is it that's challenging, if there's things that they need help with or if there's stuff they want to find out about, up to going to Red Rock for a hike just to talk while you're hiking. All kinds of things that you can have them come to the office or come to court, show them what happens since they're just starting, maybe to get them to see the different types of law they can practice and things like that.

**Are you still on the executive board of the Clark County Bar Association?**

Yes, I am. I've been participating with the Clark County Bar Association since 2001 when I was still a student at the Boyd School of Law. It's very cheap when you're a student; your

membership was really inexpensive and that was kind of like the hook. But then I've liked. Of course, I've been on the executive board I think for six years now.

**BARBARA:** ***I'd like to know...You came here in 1965. It was a different Vegas. You mentioned the different neighborhoods you moved into. You have four children. How has Vegas changed and how was it to raise your children here? Look at it from that perspective.***

The first time I came to Las Vegas I was terribly disappointed; I thought it was the ugliest place on earth.

***I've been there. I know what you mean.***

My friend that I was driving into town with that had picked me up at the airport was so impressed by the sign Welcome to Las Vegas. "Did you see it?" I'm going, "See what?" I didn't see anything that impressed me. But, yes, it was only very little built. The Sands, the Flamingo, the Stardust in there; the Strip was very small. There was a lot of empty spaces. I couldn't understand, why do they leave all these spaces in between and they look so ugly and dirty? The buildings, nothing is tall. Everything is so chopped up and nothing rhymes with each other. It's all pieces put together.

My husband did not think our children should go to Catholic school, so that we should have them in public school. I wanted them to have the Catholic school education because I felt that it was a better education, but, on the other hand, I agreed with his take that the only children in Catholic school were all the Latino children, so they were not being exposed to the rest of this culture and they would be so isolated from the rest that they wouldn't grow to be integrated like they should.

We did let the kids go to public school. It was a challenge because the first went to John S. Park, which was in that neighborhood. Then when we moved out to the boondocks there,

Warm Springs and Paradise, which was desert from there on—there was nothing, nothing, nothing. There were two 7-Elevens two miles from us, one on Eastern and Sunset, the other one on Las Vegas Boulevard and Warm Springs, and it was five miles to the closest grocery store. They had to be bussed to the school. It was very challenging because the difference in ages; at one point they were all in different schools. My son, when he was in sixth grade, he had to be bussed to the section of town that was considered for people of color because they were bussing the other kids to the other schools.

***That was the sixth grade center that he went to then.***

Yes. To me it was ridiculous. You're taking those poor kids out of their neighborhood and you're taking ours over there. They're not integrating. I could not see the benefit. In any case, that was what was going on.

I felt the education was all right; it was not optimal, but they got by. They were some really good students; one sort of good student up to high school. The difference because of the kids' personalities or who their friends were, but I felt that with the education the only problems were a couple of times in one school when it was the Paradise School, the elementary, which I went to law school later at that building, the Paradise Elementary, one of the teachers I had requested for my daughter because I was able to do that. I would spec out the teachers and see which ones were good so my kids could go to that teacher for that grade, which I don't think you can do anymore. But the first thing she said to me for the open house was, "Does she speak English?" I was, *my child doesn't belong here*. That's my one kid that up to this date she has studied more Spanish than any of the others and she speaks the least of all the others because she has an accent. She understands everything, but she can't speak it fluently.

Then my son, when he was in first grade, he's blond, blue eyes, and the teacher asked

them when she's calling out names to say *present* or whatever. Then he raised his hand and the teacher told him, "I called Felipe Rivera." It's like, I am Felipe Rivera. It's like he couldn't be blond and blue eyes.

Things like that would kind of impress on you that there's not an assimilated culture. We were always sort of like on the outside, not in. I feel up to this date it's like I am out of Chile for so long that I don't belong there. I've been here so long, and, yet, I don't feel that everybody accepts me here. I've done everything in the world, but there's a few that you still know that there's not that feeling of inclusion and it doesn't matter how long.

Then with the kids' education and the way that Vegas was, my oldest daughter, she went on to college. My son did not want to go to college, and he regrets it to this day. He's an operating engineer, a union worker, which has to work very hard. He makes good money, but it's hard work. The other one has a law degree, but she's never practiced. The little one has a degree in fine arts and she's happy working in stuff that has to do with her degree. So I have to be happy that they went on with their education and that it served them well, but there were challenges during those times in the way that we were kind of isolated to do any of the things that they had to do. It was a lot of traveling; I mean, I was a traveling mom, dance school, soccer, all this, like all moms do, but that's what I felt I couldn't work a full-time job until I got all that out of the way.

Then when they were going to college that's when I decided, if I keep waiting for all of them to get through, I'll never do this. So I started taking my own classes.

Today I traveled through the Strip because I felt that the I-15 was so backed up. Well, the Strip wasn't any better. I didn't save any time. It was horrendous. It's all cones everywhere. But as I was going so slow, I was looking at all the buildings and I said, "Oh my God, I have never

been in so many of these places." Because so much has grown that there's just not enough time in the day to go and see everything. In the old days you had this, this and that, and that was it. Eastern was a dirt road. Rainbow was the end over there. There was nothing past Warm Springs. Of course, then you had the black community and then North Las Vegas and that was very much nothing. Now it's all the way out. It's all together with Henderson and Boulder City and all that. There is not even any more—and the same here with...It's amazing how it's grown.

***Did your children remain here?***

Two of them remain here, my youngest and my son. My other two, one has lived in Utah, in Salt Lake for a long, long time, until two years ago when they moved to Puerto Rico of all places. And my other one moved to Virginia first and then to Florida and she's been in Florida now for a while. She will probably stay there because I have six grandchildren and two live there in Florida, in Tampa. Then one is going to college in North Carolina, University of Wilmington, and the other one is going to University of Florida in Tampa, and two more here. But it's sort of like, can they find a place where there is no hurricanes?

***Right. They're in the weather pattern for sure.***

Yes. They went through all those hurricanes. The youngest one who is in college, I think she's just nineteen or twenty. But she's been through five hurricanes in this last year. She was in Ireland for her first semester of college and there was a hurricane there, which was totally out of...And then she's in Puerto Rico and they had it in Puerto Rico. In Wilmington, they had the worst of this last with one in Florence. My other daughter just kind of jokingly says, "Adrian, are you in Mexico now because there's a hurricane there?"

***You don't want to be where she is.***

Yes. That's my story.

**Did you experience any discriminatory practices while in school and in the workplace?**

Yes. I think it is that thing that I said that I did not know I was not white until I came here because it was definitely a different treatment. As soon as they find out that you—that's what I said; so now I am either Latina or Hispanic or something that I don't really know what they mean with that. Then they refer to people from Mexico as brown and they refer to people as black and white, but I'm neither, but there is still not all that inclusion. I feel like you have to overcome more steps in order to get what you want because of your background, which is not cool with me.

**BARBARA:** ***I really would love your opinion about a challenge that we're having with this project. One, it needs to be inclusive. Being a non-Latina, it's been eye opening to me to learn the language differences and all of those nuisances. I am guilty of just that umbrella.***

Yes.

***About 25 percent of the interviews are spoken in Spanish where the narrator is most comfortable in telling their story. The students, such as Maribel, take it upon themselves to do the transcript in Spanish and that has its own challenges. When you talked about the word bilingual, what does that mean? I think we're learning together what that really means. Then we know we would love to eventually take it to the next step. It's one thing to have the transcript in Spanish, but how do we make the story more accessible to a broader audience? Obviously we want to translate them into English. Any words of advice? That's a long question seeking your advice in understanding our challenge.***

The challenge in the translation is huge. Like I always say with interpretation, it's a lot easier to interpret. You interpret the ideas. You convey the message. You are transferring an idea. You can use many words to do the same thing and they're okay.

When you're doing a translation, it's very exact, so you have to find the equivalent of the

word in the same way. Written is so much more formal than the interpretation that it's the oral version of it. That is where the difficulty lays in translation because there are so many nuisances to the words and there are so many words that are false cognates that will give you trouble every time because then you're making up words that don't exist in any other language. It is a challenge.

My first translations in those years, they had to be typed. There's no computers, so that any time you make a mistake you start all over again, or if you can erase five copies, you would. I probably made fifty cents an hour by the time I was through because of all the time that it takes to really polish. You do a rough and then you read it and the idea is that your interpretation in the other language looks as if it was original in that language because the syntax is different in the English and the Spanish. You have to rearrange things or they don't look natural. You know what I mean?

It's a challenge. It's a lot of work. So I admire you. If you ever run into a question, I'll be glad to answer it.

**Thank you.**

***I appreciate that.***

**LAURENTS:** ***Just thinking back of your time in the courtroom as an interpreter, do you have a favorite story or case, something that made you feel like it was worthwhile?***

I feel like our work as the interpreter is super important. I don't think I can single out one case. I have interpreted for a man that was charged with killing an FBI agent who was very nice and he would move my chair. He would say, "I may be a murderer, but I am a gentleman." It's very difficult to single out that I have helped.

I always hoped that there was nothing wrong by my interpretation and I always tell the

story about myself being in my early days when I mispronounced the *beat* as *bit*. All of a sudden, this witness is trying to explain that she was beaten and then I said, "Bitten." Then the attorneys go, "What is this? You're now saying something different." And blah, blah, blah. Things get all convoluted and complicated.

Actually, I never thought of me being the cause of this commotion until three in the morning, like the light bulb goes off. I wake up and I start thinking for some reason about this, and I'm going, "That was my fault. I mispronounced the word. This whole scenario was the result of my mispronunciation."

I come in the next morning and tell the judge. The judge tells the attorney. They decide to correct all that, of course. Then I had to explain what happened in front of the jury so that things can get back to...Because the witness had to be credible. This other information was not given before. Those things could totally happen. I'm glad that for whatever reason my internal computer kept checking things out and I got it or it may have never been found out.

At that time, we didn't have two interpreters and that's what I had advocated for, not only the certification of interpreters, but having two interpreters when there is a trial or a case that is too long so that they can trade places, they can help each other, they can check each other, and things can be more fair for everybody. I did a lot of work with Judge Vega and others, Eva included, to get legislation and all that so that these things would be in place. I'm happy to say that it's worked out.

I've been doing all the talking, I'm sorry.

**BARBARA:** ***Well, you're supposed to.***

**Why is it valuable for the university to collect these interviews?**

I was surprised when you called me to do an oral history because I think, *oh, maybe I'm going to*

*die and nobody is going to know my story. And at my age it might as well be oral and take forever.*

But that set aside, I think it is an absolutely great idea because there's so much history within each person that different opinions, different points of view, and they live through the same era and you think that they lived in different places because none other experience have touched. However, it forms a collective knowledge of different people during the era that would not be collected otherwise. Does that make sense?

**BARBARA:** ***That's a beautiful answer. Thank you.***

**Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.**

***This has been fun.***

Thank you.

***What a fascinating life you have had, truly.***

Yes. I'm totally blessed to have had things happen the way they happened. I don't know why they happened the way they happened, but everything is just like...My first husband, even though a lot of men are too macho to think that their wives should work or be involved in other stuff, they don't want to let them do it, he was very supportive of me going into all these tangents that I ever wanted to go. He never objected to me going to conferences in other cities or doing things that usually Latina wives would not be allowed to do in other cultures. So I'm very lucky. Then my second husband, he was absolutely totally supportive of whatever I wanted to do, the same way, and he did everything he could to make sure that I was happy while doing it.

***Was he a Latino?***

No. He was very much American, from Iowa.

***Where in Iowa?***

Burlington.

***I'm from Des Moines originally.***

Oh, yes. He was such a nice man.

It was also very coincidental—you can turn off the thing—but I was working in a trial and Judge Vega had asked me to work on her campaign and greet people at the table that were coming to her event because I knew most people, most attorneys, most judges, so I could greet them appropriately when they came and then collect donations and do things. It was a snowy day on March 28 of, I think, it was 2001. He attended this event because he had moved to town very recently and he knew Valorie's parents in Santa Barbara where he had been living before. They said, "Oh, why don't you go? My daughter is running for judge."

So he came, snow and all. But there was like ten people total because everybody in Vegas is totally turned off by snow. *It's snowing*. It was in a park in Summerlin where this was. There was nothing to do and we sat for two hours just talking. I had flowers on my desk the next day. Then I said, "I'm too busy." But probably because I was doing taxes and I was doing my full-time job, and so I was working all day. Of course, my real estate, which I did in my sleep, because I said, "Sometimes it's two or three jobs depending on what I am doing." Then I said, "Maybe after April 15th we can..." It was April thirtieth, I think, we had our first date, so almost a month later.

***What was his name?***

Hayward, William Hayward Rogers. My two last names are my two husbands.

***I see. That's great. What did he do, what kind of work?***

He was an editor and publisher. He worked for Scientific America and then was working for Freeman. He did a lot of publishing of the psychology books for the different people that wrote

books. He would go to all the universities and get theirs and then, of course, do the editing and all the other stuff. Then, of course, when I started going to school with all this, he wanted to read all my books. I tell you I have them all in English and Spanish. He would be reading the same books and he became fascinated with Latin American literature.

***Did he speak Spanish?***

Not a word. He read the English versions, but he was fascinated with the total Latin American. He still only ate meat and potatoes, though.

***This is wonderful. Thank you so much.***

**Thank you so much.**

You're welcome.

**[End of recorded interview]**