

Palm_School_Jesurun_Gutierrez_Cristina

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Palm School, community education, political participation, Christina Jesurun, Travis County, oral history, fourth grade, Mrs. Reyes, English learning, spelling bees, recreational facilities, community organizing, Del Springs, social work, parental support., Palm School, role models, selfless teachers, activism, Mexican American youth organization, fundraising, scholarships, Cesar Chavez, UFW, resourcefulness, East Austin, community impact, educational activities, legacy, family history.

SPEAKERS

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez, Annette Rodriguez

Annette Rodriguez 00:00

So today is Sunday, December 15, 2024 My name is Annette Rodriguez. I am interviewing Christina Jesurun in Austin, Texas for the Travis County oral history project. We are at the University of Texas at Austin campus. Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. This raw, unedited recording of this interview will be archived at the Travis County archives, where it will be available to anyone who wishes to access it. So if there's anything you don't wish to talk about, we respect your wishes. Also, if there's something you want to discuss. Please let me know, and please make sure we do discuss it. Also let us know if you need to pause the interview for any reason at all. Today, we're going to talk about your life experiences, particularly as related to the palm school. We'll also discuss your relationship to community education and political participation. So if you're ready, Miss, Miss Jesurun, let's begin. So please tell us your name and your relationship to the palm School.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 01:15

My name is Christina Jesurun. I was a student at Palm school when I was Christina Gutierrez. So that was back in the 1960 to what do we say? Maybe four years after that. So, so anyway, so I spent some very good years there palm school and have very fun memories. You know, when I was a student there, particularly when I started the fourth grade, didn't know any English at all, so they placed me with a with Mrs. Reyes, I know a Hispanic teacher, and she was really good. She She paid particular attention to me, and I felt, you know, really lucky that somebody was really taking the time to make sure that that I was learning, you know, English. And so he would have, she would have some flash cards, and some of the students we would she would have one of the students go outside in the hallway with flash cards so I could, you know, learn some of the words and stuff like that. So

02:45 Camera Man

may we pause for a moment? I apologize, there's a bit of drilling, and we may want to get her just setting up the setting about how she was in Miss reyes class, that portion where she introduced Miss

Reyes. We have the rest of it, but that very first bit, okay, okay, sorry, ma'am, I'll let you know they seem to have paused. I think we can take it.

Annette Rodriguez 03:06

So as we're talking about your your childhood and your entry into palm school, maybe you can give us a sense of how you arrived at Palm school. You said you started there in fourth grade, but you had already finished fourth grade in Mexico.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 03:22

Yes. My, my parents used to, they were farm workers. They worked as braceros back in the, I don't know, 60s, 50s, so I was so after they settled down in a small town called Reynosa, just on the other side of McAllen, on the border. They were originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, and so when they settled there, you know, I started going to school there, I was actually like, this is funny, but like, an illegal immigrant, right, because I was a US citizen there, that was funny. That was anyway. So, so I finished fourth grade there, and since my parents were still working on becoming legal residents. They felt that I needed that I shouldn't have to wait any longer to get an education in the US. So I had a sister that she was probably 15 or 17 years older than I was. She was married, so we my youngest sister and I, we went ahead and I lived with my sister while our parents, you know, got all the things together. And so we lived with her few years. And so I had just completed the fourth grade in Mexico, so I'm thinking that they probably asked her, What grade is she in? And she said, fourth grade. So they put me in fourth grade again. But anyway, so I figured that's fine. I didn't have any say. So you know how that goes when you're a child, yeah, so they placed me in in the fourth grade with Mrs. Reyes. She was a very good teacher, very patient, very caring, because she took the time to make sure that I've learned English, you know, like the rest of the kids. So she would have one of the students go out in the hallway and with flash cards so I could learn as fast as I could. You know, a lot of the words, and I also what I I felt special because, you know, she didn't just leave me. Okay, you know, you're on your own, you know, sink or swim. So she, she took the time to make sure that that I was moving along and learning English by so and so I really like that. So I tried very hard to learn how to spell and write and speak. So we used to have a spelling bees in class, so I was usually the last one that got to sit down, because I became a very, very good speller, and that's because I was learning how to spell the words in English, right? So actually, I became better than most of the kids there, you know, spelling. So that was really, that was really great. We also had a librarian, which also, have to give her credit, I don't recall her name, but she also used to sit down. When went to the library, she would sit down with me and help me read, and she will help me pronounce the words, and, you know, spell the words. And I feel very blessed that people actually took the time to make sure that I was learning English. So that was a really great experience for me. So then I from there, I went to another another teacher, I think that was Mrs. Adair. By the time I went to the fifth grade, I could very I could already read, write and speak English very well, because, well, you know, I, I studied at home spelling, you know, how to spell the words and how to say them. And then I, you know, got more reinforcement, you know, in school from my teacher. And so some of the people that I had known before adults were really amazed that I could re read, you know, one year when I had to right, you know, so. So I'm really glad that, that you know, that those two teachers, those two people, were there to be my mentors, my saviors, I guess, and help me. You know, learn as fast as I could, which I did. Can we take a break? I need to get some water.

Annette Rodriguez 08:35

Yes, please, please. Yes. We take breaks whenever you ever you need no problem. We are still rolling so you also had a little sister who went to palm school. Also, did she have similar experiences? Did she have Mrs. Reynosa or Reyes?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 09:14

Reyes? No, she was placed two grades before me because she was two years younger. I'm not sure what kind of experience she had, but she also picked up the language pretty fast as well. I also had a little brother that when a few years later, I think I was probably in middle school. My parents were finally able to get that legal residency in the US, and they so they moved to Austin, and then we moved with them. And my youngest brother, you know, Manuel, came, and he also started, oh, wait a minute, he started, also the fourth grade with Mrs. Reyes, that I remember, but I don't remember much about my youngest sister, but my little brother, I did so he, I think he graduated, like around 76 by then, I had already also graduated from the University of Texas and was married and had a son. But the other day, he was telling me, which I found it very interesting that he had I graduated, I think like number three or number four in Austin High School. So and I said, I said, Well, who paid for your school? He said he got a full scholarship. And I said, did you apply to any other schools? He graduated from MIT as an engineer. And I go, did you apply to any other schools? He said, Yeah, the University of Michigan, UT and MIT. And I go, and who accepted you? He said, all three. And I go, why didn't you choose your team? He says, because that was not number one, number one school. I wanted to go a number one school that was MIT. So off he goes, back then I didn't know that that at MIT, that was an Ivy League school, and I did not know, I think that they only accept, I think, a couple of high school students from each high school, but he did. I didn't know, if you know, I want to share an experience that he had. He told me that when he was in high school he he noticed, he noticed that they were some of this, some of this. You know, a lot of the Hispanics were placed in some classes like English and math and all that. So one day, he said he went and asked if he could go sit in an English class where some other students were, and he noticed that they were teaching them more advanced so he told them he wanted to be placed in that class. I'm thinking, Oh, my God, he was pulling his own little strings. So anyway, so we had, we had a good experience, you know, growing growing up, you know, after, you know, palm school, then then we went to Mendez middle school and Austin High School, and Then Then I went to UT. A lot of people ask me, why did you go to college? I said, Well, I know there was, I was supposed to do something else like so I was really lucky. I think we were lucky. I was lucky because back then there was a program from LBJ, where I lived in East Austin, and they had this program where, if you lived in East Austin and you were poor, that was me, and said, as long as you get admitted to UT, then they will pay for your school. So I applied for that. And, yeah, they paid for room and board. I had to stay on campus. I said, that's fine. I'll be away from home, but at home, right? So, so that's why I took that opportunity. And, you know, sign up for classes and I went three years, and I was always working so I could, you know, because it didn't pay for other things, you know, like clothes, shoes, whatever. So I was always working on weekends and nights and stuff. So I took off. I took off a year, and in that year, I met my husband. We were both working at Breckenridge back then, Bracken Ridge hospital, and so we got married. Then I decided, I said, and then a few months later, I found out that I was expecting my son, and I said, Uh oh, and so I still needed one more year to finish, right? So I said, I'm gonna go back to school. I have to do that right for my son and for me, for my family. So I went back to school and finished in a year, because I just figured, if I don't go back now, after I have my son, it's not going to be

that easy, right? So I forced myself to go back to school, and I figured I don't have to make any fancy grades, just good enough degree, you know? To graduate. So I so I did. And so from there I, you know, I started working. Oh, I was going one, one day I was going to pay. Oh, because the last year I borrow some money. I borrow money so I could finish school. Because I didn't apply for that grant anymore. I figured just, I just need one more year this I can, we can do it, right? So I went ahead and, like I said, I applied for a loan. Then when I graduated from UT in '76 I decided, anyway, I was going to go pay for my student loan, make a payment at the one of the downtown office building. It was the LBJ building, I think, and I saw this job posted. They needed a clerk in one of the enforcement offices. And I was thinking, Well, I have a degree. I don't really want to be a clerk, but I was thinking, I'll take the job. Then when something better comes along, then I'll be there. Always look for opportunities to grow, to to move ahead a little bit. So if a door open, I went, you know, through that door. So, so I got interviewed. And one of the things that that I had over all the other applicants, was that I spoke Spanish, so I'm in right? So a year later, I I decided that I wanted to do something better. Oh, actually, I was going to stay there temporary until I found a better job. Either there or somewhere else, so they I decided that I wanted to do something better. So they used to it was an enforcement office, which meant they had enforcement officers. They went around the state and enforce the tax laws for the state of Texas under Bob Bullock. And so I decided to to apply for it. Oh and they had this big, thick manuals, you know, but the the procedures and the flow of collections, you know, for the state of Texas so on, during my breaks, I used to study those on my own. So I decided to apply for an enforce... a job that was being an enforcement officer. So I go up and go to the job interview, and they and they tell me, "Well, you know, this is a man's job?" I said, "really?" I said, "I know some women there, they're doing this kind of job", and so they say, "well, you know, since you, since you want to, you want that job, we won't be able to pay you. Oh, they said, there's an opening in Galveston, Texas. Would you be willing to move there?" I said, "Yes, right?" "So they said, but won't be able to pay, pay for you more". I said, that's fine. I said, I have a small savings. I always, I always say, for the future, right? A little bit. So if I go with my little baby, I think it was probably about three or three, maybe four, not three. So I worked so I worked there for a year. And you know, they have offices all over the state of Texas. So my husband back then, he didn't, he didn't like the weather because he was really hot and humid. So I found that there was an office in Conroe, Texas, so I asked for a transfer. So there I go. I was really funny, because I was thinking the other day is when I was young, there was there was it wasn't anything I couldn't do. I put my mind to it, right? So I so went to work in Conroe, and there I had my second son, Mario. After I went back, was going back to work after my maternity leave. I I had a friend that was a field manager in Houston, and he called me up and he goes, Hey, Christina, I have two job openings. You want to come and work for me in Houston? I said, No. Oh, Houston is crazy. It's big. I'm not used to a big city, you know? So I complain, blah, blah, blah, blah. He goes, okay, but if you, if you change your mind, let me know. Okay, so I thought about and thought about it, and go, Oh, I can do it. I can. I can make it in a big city, right? So he goes, which job do you want? I have one as an enforcement officer, and I have one where you work in the office. I said, I'll take the enforcement officer. Like what I was, well, going there to Houston back then and then, think it's in the 80s, early 80s, the people working in Dallas, Houston and San Antonio were two pay grade levels higher than anybody else in the state. I didn't know that, but that's how it turned out, right? So there I go. And then, like in the middle 80s, they started closing down offices because I think the state was losing a lot of money because of the oil industry or something so. So I said, Oh, and they open an office in Austin where they were going to do to save money. They weren't going to do a field work anymore. Not a whole lot, mostly was going to be done

over the phone. So they open up a phone bank. So I said, Oh, can you send me there? That's where my family is, and I want to go back. So, so there I go. I so I went back to Austin, and in Austin, when my kids were in school, I became very active in the community. It's probably partly because of my dad, because he was always very active in the union, even when he was in Mexico, right? And he used to take me to the meetings with him. So maybe that's where I got that from. So I became very active in Austin when my kids were in school. So I said I became like the PTA president for Mendez middle school. And when I moved there, it was a brand new subdivision, and we bought a house there, and I was in South East Austin, and I noticed that I had to take my kids when they wanted to go swimming, I had to take them across I 35. I was thinking, Where is that right? That was.. wasn't right. So I started talking to my neighbors, you know, and then in the neighborhood and they and I go, how come there's no park over here. There's nothing for the for our kids. And they said, Yeah, we tried, but we tried to get a park, but no, we didn't get anywhere. So I went and talked to all the principals. I think there were four elementary schools, one middle school, and talked them into joining me in a campaign to get some recreational facilities for the children right, for our kids. So they all agreed that, yeah, that was needed. So I said, Would you let me talk to the parents during the Christmas holidays? You know, they have in the Christmas holidays, all the parents go to the to that meeting, because the kids are going to be singing in the choir or something. So I said, let me talk to the parents there, because that's when we had the most parents there. So I went to every school, and all the parents got really excited. I wanted to reach them, you know, the biggest audience, the most people that I could. And I just figured that's the time to go. So I did that. Then I decided to go. I need money, right? So I went and visited the parks director with Travis County, don't remember his name, but I told him, I said, you know, our kids need a swimming pool in the park. I said, there's nothing over there. You know, we have to drive them across I 35 so I said, and we need a pool and a park. And he said, Well, I think this had \$1.7 million for parks. And he told me, he said, we have \$1.7 million for parks, recreational things, and, well, in all Travis County or for that area. And he said, How much money do you think we should give you? I said, all of it. And he just looked at me and kind of almost fell back in his chair, and I said, he said, Well, there's some parents from Del Valley that want some soccer fields, and they're supposed to come and talk to me. Go ahead and talk to them. I said, talk to them. Listen to them. But we want all the money for our neighborhood. Hey, if you don't ask, you're not gonna get anything. That's my way of thinking, right? And ask for them a lot, that way you get what you really need, right? So so he talked to them, and so they gave us a \$1.7 million and so he told me, hey, the go talk to the city of Austin. So we went and talked to the city of Austin also, but they didn't have enough money. So I got together other leaders in my community, you know, two or three others, and we went and spoke at the City Council over and over and over again. You know about the need of needing a park and how we needed to keep our children busy? I said. I said, we need, we need a pool, and we need some kind of a recreational facility. And for our kids, I said, we need to keep them busy. Otherwise, I said they're going to be up to no good in the streets. I said, So you either pay now or you pay later when they go to prison. So they didn't have enough money, but in the following bond election, they asked, they asked voters for money for a lot of things, and also for parks. So they included us in there, and I now is the time when Brigid Shea she was was and was working with save our springs, and she was also trying to get money to save our springs. So I went and had a conversation with her. I said, Hey, can you help us out? Because she was passing out flyers. And I said, Can you put a new flyer on the other side? Vote for parks she said "sure we can do that". So so the the bonds for park and for more parks passed. So we got money, enough money to build a recreation center and a swimming pool. Yay.

Annette Rodriguez 28:21

So what recreational center and swimming pool was that? Do you remember what year and which?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 28:25

Think it was in 19 I'm thinking it was 1994 maybe it was in Dove springs. So now, you know Dove springs is now. Now has what they need, which I'm really glad that we started the ball rolling. I don't live there anymore. I moved out to Dripping Springs, but I occasionally go back and go back to the park, and I sit on the bleachers and with a big smile. We started this when I was here, and during that time I was also, I also worked with some political campaigns about Bullock's campaign. I um, Barrientos campaign, or anybody that I would support, I would work on that. So I'm not sure, back then, when I had kids, was working it was, was a mother, a wife. I'm not sure where I found the time. I find it amazing that, you know, I didn't have a lot of time, but I made the time, and so I was happy. Then a few years later, my husband passed away. So I was left with my two small sons. And that wasn't easy, you know, it never is. But I made it. I made it for 21 years, you know, as a widow, then I and then I met my current husband, Richard Jesurun. I met him at work, and I started dating and but I never wanted to get married until my kids were grown, so I could just dedicate myself to raising them and nothing else. But after 21 years, I met my second husband and we got along really well. We like the same things. We like to travel. We like to try, you know, experience different things, you know, in life. And so he sold his house and moved in with me in Dripping Springs following year we got married. So, so there we're there now, and I, I, you know, sometimes you you wonder, what is your purpose in life. Why? Why are you here? Why am I here? And I feel that that somehow, somewhere I had a purpose, and I made the best of it.

Annette Rodriguez 31:41

When you've talked about your your campaigns to bring resources to the to the kids and to the community, I'm wondering if you can tell us about your own experience as a kid, like when you were in fourth grade and fifth grade and sixth grade in the palm school, did you have facilities? Were you thinking about that as an adult?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 32:04

Yeah, well, palm school had a swimming pool, or we, during the summer, we went swimming there. All the kids in the area went swim in there. Then, you know, my sister signed, signed us up for swimming lessons, and I'm really glad that she did that, so that way we can take care of ourselves. Yeah, I was thinking about that because, well, we live when we live with my parents after they moved to Austin. We live when we live with my sister, we live close to palm and then when we and then we went to swim pool there swimming during the summer. But when we moved with my parents, we lived actually closer to Metz, so we will walk to Metz pool and over the playground, and they enjoyed that, yeah? So that's what I was thinking, like, you know, the kids can walk, you know, when I thought about, you know, bringing some facilities for the kids so they could have something to do. Yeah, that's that was my thinking, that they were able to walk, you know, to to the recreational area, go swimming, go to the park. And here they had to go all the way across. I 35 what were the I can't remember the nearest swimming pool. Oh, Garrison, right. Was one there and did more, I think, yeah, so, so, yeah, that's what I was thinking. Hey, we need something where the kids can walk to like I did.

Annette Rodriguez 33:49

because you had had that so at Palm school, tell us more about living with your sisters and sort of, what did the home life look like? What was the neighborhood like

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 34:06

when she she got married, and then when she got married, she brought us to Austin, and we lived on East Avenue. It wasn't anything like it is now. They're all homes all along East Avenue, close to where the Emma Barrientos is Mexican American, same as that. And then when we went with, with, with my parents, we were able, actually, I was able to, it was in middle school. I was able to go to Martin or walk to the school, and we lived about a block from la... from town lake, so we would go walking. Yeah, down that way it was actually we had everything, I think, in East Austin, everything within a walking distance for us, you know, the school we could walk to, Metz swimming pool. We could go downtown, Town Lake, jogging. Just walking, enjoy nature. It was a very good place to be. I had a lot of my friends you know that live down the street and you know, we socialized and went, Oh, when I was a teenager, we used to go with my with my sisters and my friends. We used to go dancing. I not sure, well you were too young. Yeah, every weekend we would, we would go dancing at the Coliseum, they had Mexican dances, Alfonso Ramos and la revolution mexicana and all those bands. So we look forward to that. So that was the place where it was socialized. And also, when I was going to Austin High School, we used to take the there. There weren't any school busses to take us to school. So we would catch the city bus. You had to catch two busses. We would transfer one close to the house, and then we'll catch another one downtown, and that one would take us to Austin High School. Then on the weekends before I was old enough to go dancing and stuff like that, all our little friends from the neighborhood, we all meet up on 610, Congress. They used to be at woolworth there we go there and drink sodas, ice cream, or go to Piccadilly and go eat. There was a place to socialize on that in that little corner there. So actually, I had a very, very lovely childhood, you know, growing up. So I couldn't think of a better place to grow up in than East Austin, also, oh, back then, I don't know, back then, it was mostly Hispanic people, right? And I had, I had a friend that she became a nurse, and there was a clinic in East Austin around Second Street, and she said that one day she was trying to call Mr. Gatti's so they could deliver pizza, and they won't deliver on that part of town. And I'm thinking, why not they go? "I don't know. They just won't come over here to deliver pizza." So can you imagine, back then, nobody wanted to go to that part of town. Now, everybody wants to be there.

Annette Rodriguez 38:09

Did you when you were a kid, when you were in in elementary school? Did you notice things missing, like, did you notice that, as you're saying, you know, certain people wouldn't come in? Was it a closed community? How did it feel to you there?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 38:24

No, it was, it was, it was, we were pretty close. I had friends across the street, and we would, you know, get together, either at my house or their house. It was mostly, you know, Hispanics, actually all Hispanics living down, up and down the street from me. So we all went to the same schools. So, you know, we became friends for many, many years, I think, Hortensia Palomares used to live down a few blocks from me. Actually, I don't think I knew her until after, she must have been in another grade, but

her and I, much later, became really good friends and did a lot of stuff together and kept in touch for many, many years. But overall, overall, I think growing up was, you know, was the good life, in East Austin.

Annette Rodriguez 39:31

Wait, you talked about the emphasis on learning English, and how Miss Reyes helped so much with that, and how other students helped, helped teach each other. Do you remember the classrooms being really bilingual, like lots of students speaking Spanish and English? Were there lots of folks teaching each other English and Spanish?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 39:59

I didn't know any other students that were doing the same thing, I'm sure. I think there were others. Now, I have found out recently that there were other students like me, and I didn't know them then, not they didn't have bilingual classrooms. I was told later, a few years later in life that a lot of teachers wouldn't let the kids speak Spanish, and I go, they let me speak Spanish so... I didn't what's the word? I didn't have like the mentality to see if there was any discrimination or not. I mean, that was not, that was not in my mentality at all. But I did notice that they wouldn't let the kids speak Spanish. They let me probably because that's all I could speak, right? And then eventually, you know, I could speak with the other kids. No, there were no bilingual classes, none whatsoever.

Annette Rodriguez 41:11

Did your older sister before your parents came? Did she participate with the school? Was she someone who went to the parent teacher, yeah?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 41:24

She went, yeah. She went to the PTAs. When everybody, it was funny, because all my friends would go, my classmates would go, "your mother is young". I said, "She's not my mother. She's my sister". No, she did. She she took part in everything. She would go to the she was sign my report cards, and she would have meet with the teachers, and she was very supportive also.

Annette Rodriguez 41:52

what do you remember about that? Do you remember her talking to your teachers, being part of fundraisers?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 42:03

Uh no, I, I don't, because I, I just remember that she, you know, like when I was in the choir at Palm school. She, that was also like a PTA meeting. So we were there, because I was in the choir, she would take us with her to the PTA meetings. She always wanted to stay, stay on top of things, and be informed about what was going in the school, you know, to help us, you know, learn and do better in school. So, but I just, no, I just went along with her to the PTA meetings. But, you know, she was, she was a very busy woman. She worked hard. And when, you know, she got home from work, we would help her fix dinner. You know, we would take part, part in that. And you know, we, I think she took very good care of us, especially she made sure that we we were getting the right education, and that we

were getting the help that we needed, even though she didn't really have to ask for help, because the teachers were helping without asking. And that was good, yeah, that was a good experience.

Annette Rodriguez 43:44

Do you remember your first day at Palm school?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 43:50

No, I don't. I really don't. I just remember, no, I cannot remember the first I remember the days that followed. You know, when I was in Miss Reyes class, you know, trying to learn English as fast as I could, did my homework. My sister helped me because I couldn't read the books, she would help me and translate for me, and we would actually, she, actually her, and I would do the homework together so I could turn in my assignment the next day. Because, just because I didn't know any English, I, you know, I didn't, that didn't stop us from turning the assignments. Yeah, she helped me.

Annette Rodriguez 44:44

So you all spoke both English and Spanish in your house.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 44:47

Yeah, we did. Yes.

Annette Rodriguez 44:50

So what did a typical day like look like when you get ready for school and do you walk there?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 44:57

Oh, I. Yeah, yeah, we did walk to to the elementary school, because we actually, when we first moved within with her, like I said, she lived on East Avenue, so that wasn't far from school. And then she moved to Waller Street, close to Cesar Chavez and we walk to school from there too. No, but no, we, we spoke mostly, actually, I was gonna tell you that when we're at home, you know, helping out fix with dinner and we had chores to do. No we spoke mostly Spanish, actually, and but she did. She did speak to us an English some only to teach us or to reinforce what we had learned in school, but not like, not, not like to carry out of a conversation all day long. Yeah, and

Annette Rodriguez 46:13

what about when you're playing with your your friends in the neighborhood on the weekends or after school?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 46:19

No we all spoke Spanish, actually, yeah, we all spoke Spanish most of the time. Yeah. So, yeah, it was, it was a good experience there too, where I was in familiar surroundings, you know, where there were kids like me in the neighborhood, kids that spoke Spanish and English, but actually we we spoke mostly, or maybe it was because they knew that I was when I was still learning Spanish. Maybe they spoke Spanish to me because of that, I'm not sure. But whatever the reason was, I don't know.

Annette Rodriguez 47:17

And when you all were listening to music, it was like, Spanish.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 47:21

Oh, yeah, yeah, it was in Spanish, for sure. You know, we listened to the music from Alfonso Ramos and, you know, in Spanish. And we would listen to the radio. My sister would, you know, when on the weekends we would listen to the radio, oh, that was, there was a radio station. There was the DJ. Was his last name was Tefoya. I can't remember his first name. I don't know. And we will listen to him too. But yeah, yeah, we, yeah, we mostly listen to Spanish music.

Annette Rodriguez 48:03

Yeah. So then, what year did you join the choir?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 48:11

Oh, that must have been. I'm thinking maybe the fifth grade. So six, maybe 62 probably around 1962

Annette Rodriguez 48:24

and what was that experience like? How did you find your way into the choir?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 48:31

Well, I just said I wanted to be in the choir. Well, I was also in the band or played the clarinet, and I was also back then we used to have, oh, my god, I forgot the name of it. We used to have, they used to let the students help the kids cross the street. I can't remember what the name of it was, so I did that too, and it was like a privilege, you know, to be picked to stand on the corner and help the kids cross the street. Hey, I was into everything now that I went, I want to do that kind of stuff. So yeah, I was, yeah. Band was in the band, played clarinet and the choir, oh, Safety Patrol. That's what they called them. And yeah, and I was also part of the Safety Patrol kids. So I stayed busy.

Annette Rodriguez 49:43

was the Safety Patrol. Can you tell us where you were helping students cross? Because I know it was a tricky way to cross the street to get to the school.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 49:53

Oh, yeah, back then we didn't have as much traffic as we have now, but there was traffic that was a busy street. I will help them on the I mean, that was the west northwest the corner where the school was at. That's, that's where I would stand there to help the kids.

Annette Rodriguez 50:13

And when you say it was an honor, how did you get chosen for safety patrol?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 50:18

I'm not sure, but I probably asked. "If you don't ask, you won't get". Yeah, that was also been my thing, "ask, if you don't ask, you won't get anything."

Annette Rodriguez 50:30

And you liked being Safety Patrol?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 50:34

Yeah, I don't think we did it all the time. I think there were only certain times. Well, they let us do that. I'm not sure when, if it was certain days. I'm not sure but, but that it was an honor to be a safety patrol person, student, child.

Annette Rodriguez 50:56

Did you have a sash or a whistle or how did you give instructions.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 51:04

I can't remember if we had to wear something. Yeah, that was a long time ago. No, we would. We would just stand on the corner and would look both ways, make sure there weren't any cars coming in. We just signal the kids, you know, to come on. But yeah.

Annette Rodriguez 51:29

So you were doing that, plus band. So how did you choose the clarinet?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 51:41

Let me see, I think my sister and I totally wanted to be in and part of the band, we went and looked for an instrument. I think I picked the clarinet. Yeah, she, yeah, she started rent. She rented it because she want to make sure that that was something I was, you know, I was going to do. No, I think I picked out the clarinet for went to to the music store. But I'm not sure why I, you know, I chose that. I just needed an instrument, and that one looked good, good enough for me, so I and then I would practice at night, you know, making all this squeaky sounds. What a good thing was that nobody told me "stop". So yeah, that was another good experience.

Annette Rodriguez 52:47

Did your younger sister go to band too?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 52:51

No, she didn't. Not that I can remember. I don't think she was in the choir, either? No, no, she wasn't.

Annette Rodriguez 53:07

did you have friends in band who played clarinet or other instruments?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 53:11

Oh, yeah, Anna was in the band. What's her last name? Saucedo. It was. So, yeah, she played the flute. I I see, oh, it was another student, Odie, Odie Alvarado. Alvarado, I think he played this big. I think it was the trombone. It was a big instrument. See, those are the only three that I remember.

Annette Rodriguez 53:48

But do you remember your performances? Did you do it at Christmas or assemblies, or

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 53:58

think we played? Think it was doing assembly. I think we will practice, I think once or twice a week, where the band instructor would come to school, gather in the cafeteria, you know, I guess it was probably after lunch because, you know, it wasn't busy or anything. Yeah.

Annette Rodriguez 54:31

And what about choir?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 54:36

Choir, that one is a little fuzzy. That one, I don't remember. I remember a friend of mine, Mary Lou Trevino. I think she's Mary Lou Lugo now, she was in the choir, and I don't recall the other students that were in the choir. I. Yeah, well, you know, this was all kind of like in the beginning of me arriving here, you know? So for me was first learn for what I'm being taught. And because we didn't really have that much time to socialize when, like when we're in the band, we're there, and we started, we sat down, and then the choir, the same thing for practice. So then when he was over, then everybody went to the back to the classroom.

Annette Rodriguez 55:42

So it was a like a practice during a class time, not after school or

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 55:47

no, it was, it was during class time. Yeah, yeah,

Annette Rodriguez 55:51

from the picture you were showing us earlier, it looked like a pretty big choir. Was it all girls?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 55:59

No, I think they were boys in there, but I remember which ones who was in it, but it was mostly girls.

Annette Rodriguez 56:09

Yeah. Do you remember telling your parents or communicating with your parents before they moved to Austin, the kinds of experiences you were having in school or in the neighborhood.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 56:25

We We only went to visit them during the summers. Actually, we stayed with them during a couple of summers, the whole summer, yeah, yeah. We share with them. You know, I was coming along, learning English and and some of the other activities that I participated in.

Annette Rodriguez 56:50

Did they have any thoughts on what you were learning or what you all were doing?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 56:56

Well, what they were glad that we were getting an education. They felt that since we were US citizens, that we needed to be educated here. But one of the things that really kept me motivated in school was

the fact that my parents were always pushing us to do well in school. I remember them saying a do your best in school, because when, when we die, we won't be leaving you an inheritance, because we don't have anything to leave you, but the only thing we can leave you is a good education and that nobody can take away from.

57:54

It's beautiful.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 57:56

Yes, I always think about them when you know, when I remember them, think I was, it's always in the back of my mind.

Annette Rodriguez 58:06

When can you tell us more about those summers, what you did in those summers, how you got to them?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 58:11

Oh, when I went to stay with them in Mexico, my sister would would take us there, and I we were okay staying there, like, like the first summer, you know, spending time with them, you know, we would go to the market and help my mother cook and, you know, just be part of what they were doing. I think the second, the third year, we didn't really want to go that much because we already had friends, and we didn't have any more friends there, right? So it was, it was kind of awkward for a while. So, yeah, I think that later on, we started going, going going there, less and less because of all the friends that we had made here and we didn't really want to, weren't that excited about leaving anymore.

Annette Rodriguez 59:18

So you had found your way around Austin, found

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 59:21

new friends, you know, things to do in Austin, and things to talk about, and places to go and that sort of thing.

Annette Rodriguez 59:31

Can you tell me more about your mom? You were saying that before she came to the US, she had been a midwife.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 59:38

Yeah, she...well, both of my parents, they didn't have a formal education whatsoever, so, but my mother was a midwife. I remember she used to deliver babies, but the funny thing is, she didn't know how to read or write. And I remember she used to get one of my sisters to read to her books. She was very smart woman, even though she, you know, she didn't have the formal education. She was pretty smart. She was really good with money. She could count that money. And I'm thinking, if she didn't go to school, how did you Yeah? So, oh yeah, she was, she was a very hard working woman. Did what she could to, you know, help raise us when we were with her. Yeah?

Annette Rodriguez 1:00:39

Do you remember the books they would read together, any of the topics? Or,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:00:46

I think it was about, if I remember, tried to listen, hear what they were reading, what she was reading to my mother. You know? It was about delivering babies. Yeah, but yeah, just about delivering babies. And I don't think she was, she was, I don't think she really wanted me to be listening. I have, but I can't pretend like I didn't hear anything. So yeah, she she was a pretty smart woman.

Annette Rodriguez 1:01:36

Do you remember any of those those births, or did she go to other women's houses. How did people find her?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:01:44

Well, by word of mouth. I never went with her. She went by herself to deliver the babies. I never I never went.

Annette Rodriguez 1:01:56

Did she ever talk about it?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:01:59

Oh, yeah, she would talk about, you know, like, to some extent, you know, she would, you know, just in general, you know, about the baby she had delivered, and for who, but she wouldn't go into great details about it.

Annette Rodriguez 1:02:19

And what about your dad.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:02:22

My dad also didn't have a formal education. He worked in construction, or whatever kind of job he could get, you know, with his, with his lack of skills, I guess, or whatever skills you know he had, he worked in odd jobs, also just whatever he could get so he could, you know, help raise a family. Because there were a lot of us.

Annette Rodriguez 1:02:53

How many of you were there total?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:02:55

Um we were nine, nine, but let me see, one of my sisters was already married on her own, so they were really, like eight. Well, really, when growing up, what I remember, actually, they were really seven because my oldest sister was working in the US already, so there were just really seven. You know, my elder sisters and my mother had six kids almost every two years and then, but then about 10 years later she had me. Two years later, she had my youngest sister, and then a few years later my youngest

brother. So it was like as if they had two families, two separate families, because it was a big gap in between that so from what I was told is my mother got married very young, when she was 15. So the first six were kind of raised. I was told different than the last three. I guess there was they were learning and and then the the last, the last three she was, I was told by my older sister that they were, they were different with us. They pushed us more to get an education, to do well in school, to learn English, and if we're the first six, I think they were kind of more pushed to help help, you know, with the family. As far as you know working and stuff like that, more than going to school. So, but they did. They all learned how to read and write, you know, well enough, but, you know, but they were raised a little different.

Annette Rodriguez 1:05:15

So for you, you last ther - there was this more emphasis on education. How did they How did they tell you about those expectations? Did they talk to you about education? You said it that they told you it would be your inheritance, right? But what other ways Did Did did you get from your parents that education was going to be so important to focus on?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:05:45

that would tell us to oh, my mother, especially, she said, she said, I want you to do well in school. She said, don't. Don't worry about helping me in the house, or don't worry about washing dishes or cooking. You just focus on school. Because when I was in high school, I was also working, you know, part time, you know, so I could, you know, buy my own clothes and stuff like that, so I didn't really have a lot of time, right, you know, between school, doing my homework and working also. So yeah, she would, she would leave us alone so we could study. Then didn't bother us about, you know, washing dishes or helping her cook or or anything, washing clothes, none of those things.

1:06:44

Wow, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:06:45

yeah, I know that's what I say. Yes, that's how well, I think one of the one the reasons that she pushed us that hard was she used to say that she regretted not being able to go to school, I guess. I think her parents were probably farm workers as well, so they both, they had the kids so they could work in the field, I suppose so. But then later in life, she, I guess she realized that, you know, you need an education. And she, she pushed, pushed the last three, you know, to do well.

Annette Rodriguez 1:07:29

Did she then also be become part of the PTA or go to any school events?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:07:36

No, she didn't go to the PTA because she didn't know any English. My other sister, the one that that we live with, she knew English. She told us, well, she worked, she worked, and she learned English on her own. She used to buy these records that would teach you English. And she said she used to listen to them at night after she got off work, and she taught English to herself. But my parents, my parents, never learned English. They knew words like phrases like "no speak English". That was very useful. And "bye", "thank you". You know, just a few words like that. So, no, they didn't,

Annette Rodriguez 1:08:34

but there were enough Spanish speakers in Austin once they moved here that they could navigate the city as Spanish speakers?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:08:42

Oh yeah, oh yeah. You know, we lived in East Austin, and everybody in East Austin, you know, spoke Spanish. Yeah, there was no they didn't have a problem. They didn't have a car, so they would ride the bus to go to places, or they used to be. They used to be what you might call the taxi, which you could compare that, not to Uber. They used to be this. Whenever she needed a taxi, she would call a phone number. I don't know if your parents ever told you this, but it was a taxi service that was not a taxi service. Nobody's supposed to know about it, right? And they will call this number and they will say, "Tienes two nickels?". Do you have two nickels? That was a code word that you need a car, a taxi. And they would, they would get a ride from them. Wow, yes. And the other day, I just met the the daughter of the person. They used to run that and I go,

Annette Rodriguez 1:10:03

is that Roy's?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:10:04

No, I see why? No, it wasn't Roy's. So I don't know. But no, I think he used to go to some place, but it wasn't Roy's. Then they would dispatch a car. It wasn't a taxi or anything. It was it was just a person. They would take people places where they wanted to go.

Annette Rodriguez 1:10:33

How do you think they learned about that in the code word?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:10:37

I'm not sure. I learned about that a few years later from I would say, Oh, "tienes two nickels". Then I asked her what that was, and she told me, I don't know how she learned that, but I'm, you know, I guess by word of mouth, probably, yeah, so that's how they got around. You know? They walked. They took the two Nickels. They took the city bus, and yeah, they did well, because in East Austin, everybody spoke Spanish. No, it was like another little Mexico. So that was no problem.

Annette Rodriguez 1:11:19

And when it came to palm school, though, kind of there, the parental figure kept being your older sister did. Did your parents ever get to meet Miss Reyes or No,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:11:33

no, no, by the time they came, I was already I wasn't in Palm school anymore. I was already in middle school,

Annette Rodriguez 1:11:43

and was your brother in Palm at that point?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:11:47

Yeah, yeah, he was, but I don't know if she was still there or not. I don't know

Annette Rodriguez 1:11:57

what about once you got to middle school. Did they interact with your schooling? Did they go to any of your special events?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:12:06

No, no, because they did. They didn't feel comfortable because they couldn't communicate. They didn't know enough English. But no, but they were very supportive. You know, they kind of kind of stay, like in the background, being supportive about our education, but they didn't get involved. And I'm thinking it's because, you know, they couldn't speak English.

Annette Rodriguez 1:12:36

But you came home and you showed them what you were working on. Did you tell them about your favorite subjects.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:12:45

Yeah, I did tell them what I was doing in school,

Annette Rodriguez 1:12:51

yeah, what was your favorite subject once you hit middle school and high school?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:13:01

Math. Yeah? Thinking middle school, I think I was doing algebra. I was in algebra class. They were only, like about maybe 10 students in that class. Was a small class,

Annette Rodriguez 1:13:16

yeah, was it in it because it was an advanced math class, that algebra class, yeah. So you inherited that from your mother, the good at math?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:13:29

probably, I know, I still can't believe why she knew how to count money.

Annette Rodriguez 1:13:35

She knew what was important, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:13:39

yeah, that's right, yeah, it's fairly true. Yeah, yeah, she did.

Annette Rodriguez 1:13:47

So when you finished high school and went to UT, how did you decide what you were going to study? You told us part of how you got there was through this LBJ program. But how did you decide what you were going to study?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:14:03

Well, my parents wanted me to be a teacher, so I did that the first three years, right. And then when I left school, I decided to just take a break from everything and just work. Then when I came back, I decided, well, you know, I don't have to be a teacher. I can be whatever I want to be. So I changed majors. I think I signed up for social work and that really kind of, I think that really kind of helped me, you know, getting a degree in that, because I have always been very good at doing things for people and helping my family, you know, like the ones that. I needed some additional resources. I would, you know, do the research and connect them with that. So, yeah,

Annette Rodriguez 1:15:14

tell us more about that. What kind of you know before you you take on social work. You're doing this informally, right, helping people in your community and your family. What kinds of things do you remember doing and finding and connecting people to?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:15:35

Well, yeah, like, if somebody needed there used to be a clinic in East Austin, and I can remember what it was called. So when, well, when I will find out that some members of my family were sick and they needed a doctor, and I knew about that clinic, I would refer them to that, because, if I recall correctly, you didn't have to pay very much to see a doctor. Yeah, so I refer, refer them there. And also when somebody had a baby or something and they needed, you know, things for the baby, like milk. I would refer them tell them about WIC, you know, so they could apply for that. You know, while they got themselves situated, to this day, I still do the same thing with my family, like the other day, I haven't I have a niece she doesn't make a lot of money. She gets Social Security, and I told her, Oh, I was doing her income tax. Because I I do income tax with AARP as a volunteer. I've been doing it for more than 13 years, and we do them for free. So I was, so I was doing her income tax a couple of years ago and I and, you know, she doesn't work very much anymore. She's actually, she's older than me two years when I told her, say what? I said, You paying the premium for Medicare. You shouldn't be doing that. I said. I said, I bet you you qualify. You qualify for a waiver. So you, I said, because you, you know, she don't make hardly any money, you know, just her Social Security, and then she worked part time. So I told her, let me find out. I didn't know how you would qualify for that, but I just knew that she didn't make that much money. So I made a bunch of phone calls to several state agencies, and I found out where she could apply. So I had them email me the application, and I filled it out for her. A couple of months later, she called me and she said she didn't have to pay the premium anymore. I go, yay. So she was getting, what is it? \$174 more a month that can make a difference. So it's about roughly 2000 a year.

Annette Rodriguez 1:18:30

That's a huge difference. A huge difference. Yeah, yeah. And my family uses the AARP free tax service. Oh, yeah, yeah. My grandma did until she passed in in 2018 and there were, there were bilingual folks who could help her, because she's she spoke Spanish. And then my auntie Apollonia,

she's still, she's the first one to sign up at the senior center when the when AARP volunteers come to the Senior Center.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:19:01

What they have? They have that in Austin too. They also have foundation communities. They also do taxes, and they use the same software as the AARP does. I actually started volunteering with them when I was living in Dripping Srings. One year, what you do is you go through training. But they they train a lot of volunteers, a lot, and so I started working with them, and they have you sign up on an app for the times you can work. So it was like, I think, two hours at a time, or two and a half or something. So I would sign up for two shifts because I was driving from Dripping Springs to Austin, and just for two hours, that wasn't worth my time. So I would sign up for two and I would, I think. I worked about two days out of the week, and then found out that AARP, they did that in Dripping springs for one day a week. So I went through the training with them. So one year, I was doing two days in Austin, driving back and forth, and then one day in Dripping Springs that wore me out, because I wasn't that young anymore, but I was still using my brain, which, that's what I wanted to do. So, so I saw so I stopped all together for a year. Say, I want to take a break. My my brain is to take a break. So then when I started up again, I just decided to do it and Dripping Springs one day a week, I had the rest of the time for myself. You know, I need me time. So I've been doing it for I'm thinking at least No, at least 13 years, maybe 15 so. And I really enjoyed it because when I was doing it in Austin, when I was helping out in Austin, there were a lot of people that got all this earned income credit, and also the child tax credit and all those credits that would help them out a lot. And they would leave there when they were getting a big refund. They would leave there with a big smile, happy that we had helped them. I remember one time there was this lady that she had lost her job, and her one of her sisters, her brother, passed away, and they had, I think, three or four kids, and she was, she took them, and as you said, she she lost her job, and she was looking for a job, and so I did her tax return. And since she was raising those kids, you know, she got a nice, maybe \$8 - \$10,000 refund, she started crying as because I had helped her, and that really gave me a lot of joy, that I could do something for somebody that wasn't costing me anything, just my time. And she was so so so happy, and I told them, I said, you go to the leasing office and tell them that you show them the tax return how much you're going to get. Ask them to wait, and she also couldn't make her car payments. I say you do the same with where you buying your car. And I mean, she was crying and crying. So that's my way of helping people now without much effort, and plus, it gives me the opportunity to continue using my mental capacities, right? So, so that's, that's my other social work.

Annette Rodriguez 1:23:18

So, so at Austin, you got your social work degree? Yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:23:21

yeah, on ut here, yeah, so

Annette Rodriguez 1:23:26

And afterwards, when you went working, work for

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:23:29

the State Controller, yeah. Actually, I didn't need a degree there, but I and they didn't need one. But I said, Well, when something better comes up and they need a degree, I'm there, I'm ready, and they're ready to go. So that worked out pretty well.

Annette Rodriguez 1:23:51

You would move into that position, which I did. Do you think that when you were doing that job with the county. Was it the same time you were trying to organize the new facilities? Was that happening at the same time

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:24:10

with that was with the state of Texas? No, that was in the I went to work for the state in 19, think it was 1978. I was probably 29 or 30 back then. I only had one son. No, I didn't start working with the community until when I left Austin, then when I came back in mid 1980s when I came back and started looking for schools for my son, for my oldest son.

Annette Rodriguez 1:24:55

And how did you get involved? What were your first steps to become a community organizer?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:25:01

Well, we bought a house in South East Austin, and I think both of my sons were I think the little one was kindergarten. The oldest one, can't remember what grade he was in, maybe second or third. Not after I moved to South East Austin, and they started going to school. That's when I started. That was that was already, like I said, in the mid 80s. That's when I started doing something about it. You know, not just talking, but doing active, actively talking to people, neighbors, school principals, anybody who would listen. Yeah. Because I was very much concerned that, you know, my kids weren't going to be able to walk to swimming pool, or there was nothing,

Annette Rodriguez 1:26:11

especially since you had had those opportunities as a child.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:26:14

yes, yeah, yeah, so. But I also noticed, you know, that that side of town wasn't getting much period. So when I went to speak to city council, I basically told them, "Hey, listen the people in my part of town, we pay property taxes too, just like the other side of town. Why aren't we getting our share?"

Annette Rodriguez 1:26:43

Were you nervous that? How did you get the courage to speak at that first?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:26:47

I've always been I always like to talk a lot. I have never been afraid of speaking up or talking to people. I never, no, I was not nervous. I was wanted to be forceful, deliver the message and make sure that they got it. Yeah, so no, I was even in school when we had speech classes, some some other classmates, they will always get really nervous, and not me. I want, I like being in front of people talking. I don't know where I got that from, but I did,

Annette Rodriguez 1:27:29

did that start with your spelling bee days?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:27:32

Maybe? you know, that could be it. But, you know, just to get up in front of the class and spell the words, you know, yeah, that's probably Yeah.

Annette Rodriguez 1:27:44

And did the folks that you were when you were organizing in the neighborhood for these recreational centers and for the the swimming pool, did they like having you as a spokes person? Were they so excited to say, like, Yes, you, you're the one go talk.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:28:00

Yeah, yeah, they did because, because I was very open with them, you know, and I think what I had to say also touched them. Because I think they felt the same way. They, you know, exactly, and they knew exactly where I was coming from, yeah, so I didn't do it alone. I had some other people the neighborhood also joined me. So we worked as a as a group, you know, together,

Annette Rodriguez 1:28:45

can you remember the big moments of success you had?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:28:52

You mean when I was organizing? Yes, when, when we open up the recreation center, we had a big celebration. And I said to this day, you know, the I have some I have some videos from the county when I also want to speak at the at the county level. And also, no, I don't only have the ones from the City of Austin, but many years after that, you know, I had, I had days when things were not going well. So get up, let me use

1:29:47

to make me feel better, to let me know that that I should have something to be happy about. I.

1:30:01

That did. It made me happy. It lifted my spirit. So I tried to lift myself up again, because it was a big accomplishment, because others had tried without any success,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:30:17

and I won't give myself all the credit, because I couldn't have done it alone all by myself, if I didn't have other people also joining me,

1:30:29

you know? So, yeah, I occasionally watch it for an hour. Now, think about the good I've done to lift my spirits up.

Annette Rodriguez 1:30:48

The videos there videos of the news of or videos that other people took, like home movies.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:30:56

No, the video was when I was trying to work with the with the Travis County and the director of parks, a group of us went to speak before the county commissioners. We gave a big presentation. We we did a survey in all the schools. We asked all the principals permission to see if we could send surveys with the students to see so the parents could fill them out and see who could find out exactly what was it that they felt was lacking in our neighborhood. We include things like baseball field, soccer field, swimming pool, recreation center, all kinds of stuff on there. So, so we, we got permission from from everybody, all the schools, and we went out, and I went out and distributed this. Found out how many students there were in each school, and we distributed them. Then a few days later, I went and picked them up. And then my team, you know, my group, we got together, and we started tallying and everything. So I think there were three of us that went before the county commissioners, and we, we, we presented our findings. What we found out? What was it that they wanted? The thing they wanted the most was a swimming pool and a recreation center and other things so and I can't believe how unafraid I was when I was because I wanted them to hear the message, right? And so So anyway, just and so the county video tapes all their meetings. So I think Margaret Gomez after Commissioner De Leon lost his race, and then Margaret Gomez got in there, and she got, she got me a copy of that, and I still have it said, you know when, when things aren't going well. I watch it.

Annette Rodriguez 1:33:30

You watch that strong woman advocating for her community?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:33:37

Yep, not being afraid to speak up and as for what you know, for what's needed,

Annette Rodriguez 1:33:44

I'm thinking too about your strategy, your organizing strategy was so careful to do, to do a survey and collect the data and present them with The data. How did you decide to use that strategy? How did I How did you decide that was the best strategy to go out and collect data?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:34:11

Well, I figured that in order for us to let other people know, like the county commissioners, you know, those that have the power to make things happen, in order to let them know what we needed, we needed to find out from the parents that they knew what they needed, and the best way to do it was through a survey. I don't know. I just came up with that. You know, how else? How else are you going to find out? I mean, you could do by word of mouth, but, but if you have it in writing, that's more powerful, because they put it in writing.

Annette Rodriguez 1:34:57

Yeah, it just seems to me so. Yeah, so smart to do this data. You know, driven need. This is community need, and we know it because we've collected data and we've talked to parents and children, and so you're right. It made it a much stronger argument for you, and obviously you convince them Yes,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:35:21

and what I'm really proud of also is I was able to convince all the school principals about the need for them to join us in this campaign. And they agreed. You know, then the parents, when I spoke to them during their Christmas PTA meetings, they nodded their head. I don't know how I came up with that idea. Maybe it was part of my social work education. I'm not sure

Annette Rodriguez 1:36:01

it is smart and effective. I mean, it's a great way to do it. Do you so you so you're talking about, like, one of the great victories was, was when you, you saw the opening day. Oh, yeah, describe that for us. What was opening day? Like?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:36:19

Oh, I organized. By organizers. And asked them all. I asked them to go on to go talk to some of the businesses. And I said, what we want is the big entrance to the to the recreation center. We want to build a circle with balloons, red, blue and white. I don't know where I get all these ideas. I can't get any ideas anymore because I'm just focusing on me now. it's time for me, for so we so had someone go to there was a Walmart nearby, and I said, I said, first asked for donations, because we don't have money anyway, so yeah, they donated that. And then I went to the, the HEB, that's on William cannon and I 35 , i spoke to the manager there, and I told him who I was, and I think they already knew who I was, because I was always in the news. Then they did a newspaper article about me and another, another person that was working with me, thinking I asked them for \$1,000 yeah, for the opening they gave me \$1,000 a friend of mine said, you should have just asked him for \$500 I said, No, you start high, because they might want to go low to what you really were gonna ask for, right? I said, but we didn't have to go low. They gave me what I asked for. See, "you don't ask you won't get it". But anyway, so they gave the money. They helped with a lot of that by the opening so we had the the Parks and Recreation Director. I can't remember his name anymore. We had all the people that work with him there, I think some city council members. I couldn't tell you which ones there were, but so we did a ribbon cutting ceremony, and it was a great day, and that we're all wearing. We also created a Parks Board. Of course, I was in it, and the city of Austin made us some real pretty photo shirts with our names on it. So for the board members. No, it was, it was a good day, you know. And there one of the reasons I uh...Oh, the other thing that we did is we also decided to let the kids vote for the name. I did the same thing. We sent out flyers. Some of the people wanted to name the park after me. I said, No. I said, I think the kids need to decide that. So we put my name, Dove Springs and William Williamson County, something. I can remember there was some kind of a place over there. It was called Williamson something, anyway, so we put those three names so the kids Re. Related to Dove Springs. So they picked the name Dove Springs. And I said, the reason I wanted them to do that was so they can take ownership and take care of the park. They said, Hey, I had something to do with that. I voted for that name. So it's ours, it's mine. That was my whole idea behind that. You know, I guess psychologically speaking, as what I wanted them to feel like in their mind, that that was their park, not the adults that got it there, but it was their park. So

Annette Rodriguez 1:40:47

do you remember what the what the ballot procedure was? Do you gave them all little ballots? Was there a little ballot box?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:40:54

Yeah, no, I distributed to all the schools, and then a few days later, I went and picked them up. And then three of us counted, counted the all the ballots, and yeah, then we announced, announced the name, and thought that was that was a good day. Very good day. So you always want to do things for if you also want want to do things for people, not so they can remember you, but so they can remember que “si se puede”, if you want something bad enough, You can do it.

Annette Rodriguez 1:41:40

Do you remember the first time seeing kids in that swimming pool?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:41:46

Yeah? They Yeah. They were happy, laughter, you know, talking, playing, and

Annette Rodriguez 1:42:01

your sons went there, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:42:05

yeah, my son went there too, yeah. But anyway, it was a good thing.

Annette Rodriguez 1:42:13

Did you ever swim in that pool with them? I did.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:42:16

I did. I did. Like I said, occasionally, I'll go in this summer, I just sit there and watch the kids splash water, play with the balls, laugh, yell, run, and it brings joy to me. So I told the kids a long time ago. I said, Listen, some of us got together and we brought the spark to you, I said, and it's yours. You take care of it so your children can enjoy it after you're gone, and your children's children can enjoy it, take care of it, because it's yours. Actually they're doing really well. There's a new generation, which is great. You know, new generation of people there, which I'm glad, because somebody needs to continue. You know the the work,

Annette Rodriguez 1:43:34

when you're thinking about legacies, and you know the people who come after you, like you said, your children and your children's children. Do you think about all the work and the activism you've done as something that's a legacy of your first educational experiences at Palm school? Do you think there's a connection there?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:43:59

Oh, giving back. You know, getting the help from my teachers, and then yeah, and then giving back. Yeah, there was a connection. Definitely.

Annette Rodriguez 1:44:16

Did they become sort of role models for you later?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:44:21

Yeah, I would say that. I would say they were role models because they selfless, they weren't selfish when they helped me and I didn't expect anything in return, just the satisfaction that they had helped, and I guess, yeah, that carried on.

Annette Rodriguez 1:44:48

Do you remember others, other role models? There were there school nurses or other staff secretaries?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:44:59

I. You mean, in palm school? I'm sure they were, but I didn't interact with them much, you know, I was this kid.

Annette Rodriguez 1:45:13

It was your teacher and a

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:45:15

librarian, yeah, yeah, those two,

Annette Rodriguez 1:45:20

and those are the ones you remember for being so selfless. Yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:45:25

yep, yeah, I remember. I remember those two a lot, you know, because they made a big difference.

Annette Rodriguez 1:45:34

Do your siblings remember their teachers at Palm school or their experiences?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:45:43

My sister doesn't talk about it, about her experience, but my brother, think when my brother went to palm. I was already a student at UT,

1:46:06

and so

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:46:08

I wasn't living at home much. And later, when I graduated from UT, I was already married, so, you know, started a family already. So I was kind of on my own, so I didn't really have that much contact with my brother, you know, because life happened and but no, he just talks about Austin High School, about, you know how he found out things? You know, the kind of classes they put the Hispanic

students in versus non Hispanic? Yeah, but No, he doesn't like I said he doesn't talk much because we weren't that together back then, when he was going there.

Annette Rodriguez 1:47:06

And for you, so much was happening at once, right? You were moving to Austin, you were moving away from your parents, you were moving in with your older sister, and all of that happens with palm school. Yeah, yeah, that's all happening at the same time for you. Yeah, so the impact of those teachers must have been big with all those transitions.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:47:33

Oh yeah, yes, it was. They had a big impact on on me and my life, because they helped me get ahead and not stay in the same place, you know, helped me learn English, and that was, that was the help that I needed. And they provided that help.

Annette Rodriguez 1:48:01

So by the time you you got to junior high, even by fifth grade, you didn't feel like you were behind in any way. You had no

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:48:12

no no, I caught up. I was equal like everybody else. Yeah,

Annette Rodriguez 1:48:20

that's, that's a huge accomplishment.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:48:22

Yeah, it was. It was really scary when I went to UT, because nobody in my family had gone to college. Didn't have anybody to mentor me or tell me how to, it was scary, and there weren't that many of us on campus. The few that were there, I I bonded with them. They were from Eagle Pass, from El Paso, like all those little towns in South Texas. Yeah, it was, for me, was a scary experience when I started, you know, coming here, but, but, and it's over. I finished, finished. I went through it and accomplished something.

Annette Rodriguez 1:49:28

How did you find your way? How did you find your way, and how did you find your people like you're saying from all over Texas that you bonded with?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:49:37

Well, for now, we're running to somebody that looked like me, I would go up and introduce myself, and I would actually, I would carry this little spiral book in my purse. And so when I would meet somebody, you know, I would ask the typical questions, name? where you from? You know, what's your major? you have any brothers and sisters? and blah, blah, blah. So they would tell me, right? So after we say goodbye, I would write it down the name. So it was really funny, because the next time I would sit and I go, Oh yeah, your name is Cesar. Oh, are you from El Paso? You're starting to be blah, blah, blah, blah. And "how do you remember all that you have such a good memory". I go, Yeah, I do, don't I?

Yeah, I actually, I'm terrible remembering people's names. I was then, back then, I am, still am. I don't write down anything anymore, but, but that's, that's how, that's how I got around meeting people, just writing down the names. Actually, that carried on to work. And I used to work at the same I did the same thing. When I would meet somebody at work, I would go, "what's your name? and what do you do? and who's your boss?". So that way, if I ever needed help from somebody that did what he did, then I would call on them. That has always helped me a lot, except I don't do that anymore, because I'm retired. It's not that I don't need anybody, but, and I'm just, it's just me now, I'm just taking care of me and, you know, and nobody else.

Annette Rodriguez 1:51:34

So I'm thinking about that resourcefulness when you're when you're when you're talking about your mom making the phone call to get the right, you know? And it's like we don't know how she knew who to call, how she got the number, how she figured out the code.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:51:48

I know I did. I never found out. I might, I might ask that lady that I met the other day, she happened to live in my neighborhood. Yeah, she lives in my neighborhood also, and she used to live in East Austin, my, you know, I might call her up and ask her, How did that get started? And I was like that. It was similar to an Uber. You call here, but it was called two nickels. Two nickels. Do you have two nickels? Since my mother didn't know in English, she would say, "tienes two nickels?"

Annette Rodriguez 1:52:26

yeah, you all invented Uber.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:52:30

But they did, yeah, imagine that they were ahead of the time.

Annette Rodriguez 1:52:36

But there's that kind of resourcefulness, then that was must have you you absorbed it as a child?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:52:46

Yeah, yeah, I'm sure.

Annette Rodriguez 1:52:48

Were you involved in activism on campus?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:52:51

Yeah? Oh yes, yeah, I was with what's called MAYO, Mexican American youth organization while I was there, we did a lot. I convinced everybody to raise some money for scholarships, convinced my, you know, the Mexican American youth organization members, and I said, Let's organize the dance so and so. Let's do it on a Tuesday or Thursday, because that's when we can. I said, Oh, and let's go talk to It was place in Ben White. I can't remember the name of it. I said, Let's go talk to them and see if we can can use their place for free, Tuesday, Thursdays. And so they, I think it was a Thursday, they say we could use it for free. And then some of the other MAYO members went out and then convince four

popular bands to play for free, one hour each. Oh, my God, I didn't tell them anything. They just went out and did that.

Annette Rodriguez 1:54:17

Do you remember the bands?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:54:19

No,

Annette Rodriguez 1:54:22

can't what kind of music were they playing?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:54:27

The musica ranchera, conjunto? No, there was no conjunto. Well, we know the kind of music, the kind of music Alfonso Ramos would play that kind of music. And we also, we decided that we needed to promote it. There was this guy, Tafoya again, his name keeps popping up and, you know, things that I remember, I think he also had a. Yeah, he had a radio station and a TV station, I believe so, another guy and me, we went to speak about it. There I go again, right? Yeah, so and then, so we got free time, I think he also had a radio station. We got free time on his station, and then then we went on TV, some kind of a program they had, we talked about it, and we, we had made a big poster. Oh yeah, we also made posters and put them all over East Austin. So we took the big poster so they could see daytime and and I think we had listed the bands. Wish I had saved that. But if I saved everything in my life, I, you know, wouldn't have a place to live. It would be old storage, right? Eventually, gotta get rid of things. So anyway, so everybody was really happy that we were this spokesperson, because, you know, we conveyed the message very well, and we made, I don't remember how much money we made, but we made some money, and it was packed, I think it was a Thursday during the week, and he was packed. They reminded they had to go to work on Fridays. On that Friday, yeah. So, yeah, I was, I was also active on campus.

Annette Rodriguez 1:56:40

And so these dances, they were fundraisers for MAYO. Was there a political project or some objectives MAYO had?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:56:49

No I was just we only did once. We were supposed to do it every year. I told him, I will do the first one. Well organized the first one after I left, nobody organized anything like I wasn't there, I guess. Now, we just did it once, and we raised money for scholarships. We had somebody designated to take care of that so, but yeah, that was another good experience. Then after my sister went to UT, she says people are asking me if I'm your sister. So yeah, I guess we kind of looked the same because we had the same parents. Oh gosh.

Annette Rodriguez 1:57:35

and you were famous already for being on the radio and these interviews.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:57:41

Yeah, that's funny. I was never afraid to say something. Speak,

Annette Rodriguez 1:57:49

yeah. Were there specific issues on campus you were speaking about in addition to scholarships?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:57:59

Well, I used to, once in a while, seated that, you know on campus, you enter people that have issues or whatever, they would have little tables, pass out flyers and stuff like that. So I did that a couple of times for Cesar Chavez, who was boycotting the grapes back then.

1:58:26

Yeah, but

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:58:29

that was my personal issue. I think it was probably all of our all of ours. We all backed them up, supported him, yeah. I remember, remember Bob judge Perkins. He used to go, he used to go on campus and talk to us when he was running for judge, I think, or judge or something. I remember the guy that was the president of MAYO. He said, "No, why should we vote for you? You're not Hispanic". He spoke Spanish. He was married to a Hispanic. So he said, My heart is Hispanic. He speaks Spanish, right? Perkins? I haven't seen him. He married, he married me and my first husband.

Annette Rodriguez 1:59:26

But when he said, My heart is, is Spanish, or were you all convinced? Was MAYO convinced?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 1:59:33

I was, I don't know, but, you know, can't speak for the others. But I was, I think he was, yeah, I think he was married to a Hispanic lady, but I think that's what I heard him say. But yeah, I was

Annette Rodriguez 1:59:51

so so people knew you all had some political power. They knew they could look for your votes. They knew that you were flyering.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:00:00

Oh yeah, Had, yeah, yeah. Now that I think about it, yeah.

Annette Rodriguez 2:00:02

And when I'm thinking also about your connection with Cesar Chavez and the UFW, did you think about that connection? It maybe had to your parents early on and the work that they had done in the fields.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:00:21

Oh, yeah, yeah, because my parents did that kind of work. I also picked cotton. I think one summer when I went over there, I went to pick cotton, and I came back and I was crying. I said, because I have a fear of big cotton, but they have thorns. They have here. They have these things, their thorns. You

have to know how to pull the cotton just right, otherwise you're going to cut your hands and you'll be bleeding. So I was learning how to and my hands were all cut right. So I told my parents, I'm never going back. I'm never gonna do that kind of work. I'm gonna study hard and become somebody. That was it. I didn't ever went again. That was hard work.

Annette Rodriguez 2:01:17

That was one of your elementary school year, summers, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:01:21

yeah, that was really hard work then,

Annette Rodriguez 2:01:28

and that was the work you knew your parents did.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:01:32

Yep, they did that for many years so, but I said, I'm not gonna do that. Just I mean, no.

Annette Rodriguez 2:01:42

And you remember all those experiences. Then now you're at the university, right? Your years, you're in higher education, yeah. And then you all are being informed about the UFW campaigns, yeah.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:01:58

And then many years later passed, and I was working for the state control during those years. And there was a lady that worked for they did work for the Union, and she told me, Cesar Chavez is coming. I go, "really?" said, "yeah," so I went to that event. Then went and talked to Cesar Chavez, and I told them, I have two sons. And I said I named my oldest son after you. Says, "You did. You should have brought your kids!" I said, "Well, I thought it was adults only". Said, "No, you should have brought him". I said, "Oh, okay", so a year later something, there was another event in some kind of a theater that was obviously somewhere downtown. My friend told me again that he was coming. Did I want to go? I said, Yes. So then I took my kids, and I took a picture of my kids and says, I chose I still have it,

Annette Rodriguez 2:03:04

that's wonderful. I

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:03:05

got to meet him, yeah, and he was, I mean, he was just thrilled that, you know that my son was named after him.

Annette Rodriguez 2:03:14

So was your son excited to meet the man he was named for?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:03:19

Yeah, he was so that was another good experience in my life to meet him.

Annette Rodriguez 2:03:29

So when you think of the legacy of your family and kind of the first place you land in Texas is the palm School in East Austin, right? What do you think for you and your family and your community, the palm school sort of symbolizes and it feels like it's so connected to the rest of your life.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:03:54

I think palm school was like the magnet for the neighborhood, you know, the hub, the center of everything, because, you know, we're educated. There we went swimming. There it was a park. So, you know, that was the place to go, you know, for the kids and even the adults as well.

Annette Rodriguez 2:04:24

Yeah, when you think about palm school now and the plans for restoration, what would you like that place to become or to be?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:04:39

I would like for it to be a like a museum that tells the history of how we evolved in East Austin and the people that contributed to the neighborhood, they made contributions. Oh. Um, and just the history of, you know how East Austin evolved. And also, perhaps, maybe you know some educational activities, you know, where they teach kids to, I don't know, make bunuelos or make pinatas, those kind of things.

Annette Rodriguez 2:05:24

Yeah, those enrichment. Did you do any of that when you were?

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:05:31

no but I do that. I do that now. I make bunuelos.

Annette Rodriguez 2:05:39

There's that's always important, no matter what age, right, yeah, but yeah, I mean, thinking about how you would want that space to be used, knowing what the space meant to you, yeah. So for you, it's really still a place for children, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:05:53

yeah. Because you know, children are the leaders of tomorrow, so we have to give them, help them experience life in a positive way. So when they become leaders, they can be positive and do something positive in their lives,

Annette Rodriguez 2:06:25

and that's what you learned there. Reinforced they reinforced what your family was teaching you already. Yeah. Do you have anything you'd like to add that we haven't gotten to cover today, about your life, about palm school, about your family.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:06:46

No, not really. I think you did a very good job in jogging my memory, things that I had kind of put in my in the back of my mind. I No, I think I just said that gave you my whole life history.

Annette Rodriguez 2:07:10

Well, I have more questions. I still want to know about the choir, because you showed us that sweet little picture. And I thought, oh, I want to know the story of I cannot.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:07:23

I cannot remember how. I guess again, you know, I asked to be in the choir. Suppose. I mean, if you don't ask, you won't get it, right? I can't really tell you much about it, just you know that I was in the choir, but,

Annette Rodriguez 2:07:46

but now thinking back, there's nothing you regret asking for. Is there anything that that you thought, oh, I probably shouldn't have asked for that. Oh, no,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:07:55

I pat myself on the back for asking for things, because I always told my kids, if you want something, ask for it. Because if you don't ask, nobody's going, oh, did you want that? They want to do that. My kids were always kind of when they wanted something, they would nag and nag and nag and nag until they got it right. So now I think about and I go, I'm glad they nag, because that's going to carry on in life where they going to ask for something that they want, because if they don't ask, ask, they're not going to get it. They might not get it, but at least they asked.

Annette Rodriguez 2:08:43

And if anyone ever doubts you can point to Dove springs, yeah,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:08:46

yeah, "Ask, and you shall get", oh, that's it. Isn't that a phrase already?

Annette Rodriguez 2:08:54

You invented that too, like Uber All right, well, I think we're just about done here. Thank you so much. I appreciate so much the time you've you've taken, and if there's anything else you want to share with us, please let us know.

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:09:10

No I can't think of anything, but thank you for reminding me of the good things that happened in my life, for reminding me of what my purpose in life was.

Annette Rodriguez 2:09:28

Such a powerful model for us, such a powerful model for the work we can do. And like you said, you know the kind of work where you didn't think ahead to how you were going to get it done. You just started doing. You just started doing and now you have this legacy that that we can all see,

Cristina Jesurun Gutierrez 2:09:51

yes, just do it as just do it.

Annette Rodriguez 2:09:56

Thank you so much. You're welcome. Thank you. Thank. Is very important.