

# Palm\_School\_Sanchez-Ruiz\_Velia

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Palm School, community education, political participation, extended care program, Latino principals, East Austin, school board, union organizing, economy furniture strike, cultural heritage, folklorico dancing, after school activities, student engagement, educational equity, community organizing., Palm School, Mexican American community, East Austin, teaching career, after school activities, community involvement, school conditions, cultural heritage, educational equity, family support, historical research, community leaders, student impact, teaching challenges, community events.

## SPEAKERS

Velia Sanchez-Ruiz, Tracy Flores

### Tracy Flores 00:00

Hello. Today is Saturday, December 14, 2024 My name is Tracy Flores, and I'm interviewing Velia Sanchez Ruiz 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 be part of this interview in this project. The 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. As we said earlier, if there is anything you don't want to talk about, or you wish we respect your wishes. Also, if there's something you want to discuss, please do make sure that we discuss it. Please also, let us know if you need to pause the interview today we are going to talk about your life experiences, particularly as it relates to palm school. We will also discuss your relationship to community, education and political participation. And if you're ready, we'll go ahead and begin. All right, ask away. Can you please tell us your name and your relation to palm School?

### Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 01:01

My name is Velia Sanchez Ruiz, and I worked at Palm elementary after school program called the extended care and it was in 1970 it was in 1974, 73 because my daughter was born in 73 and I was on maternity leave from the school district, and at that time they were not it was unpaid maternity leave, so I had to, and I had just gotten divorced, and so I had to have some income, and the only thing I could work do some work, was it with the after school programs, because then my children would come home from school and and, you know, and I had to be there and whatever so, and they were, I had somebody watch them after school, but I had to go work. So Andrew Guerrero was the principal there, and that's important to know, because AISD and East Austin was going through a some real changes education. We did not have any principals or administrators Latinos, Spanish speakers, okay? And so somehow or other, I'm not sure, the University of Texas developed a program called Pauta, whatever that means, I can't remember, but they went and did a search to hire Latinos principals. This was also a result of that Brook Elementary School here in East Austin was going through some real serious issues with the

principal. And his name was Mr. Gosee and there's a whole story there, you know, I mean, and I'm going to tell him, because it's also connected to me ending up working at Palm. Brook elementary school was out here in East Austin, and primarily Mexican American students. And the principal there was not a very compassion or a very caring person. My husband, at the time, Buddy Ruiz, was a student at the University of Texas, and we were living on Lake Austin Boulevard at the student, married student housing. And we became friends with Nelia Mireles and Brigido Mireles, who were she was a teacher there at at Brooke. And she and a couple of teachers came one evening to talk to Buddy, because Buddy, my ex, my ex husband, now was beginning to get, was involved in organizing and speaking up. He was very intelligent and very, you know, caring about his community. And so they came and said, we have a principal at Brooke who expelled a fifth grade student and and will not let him come back. By law, the state of Texas says you cannot expel the student for longer than a certain time. And the young man was working at Azteca at restaurant on East seventh dish washing. And she said, Not only that, but we need that student back, Mr. Gosee, he was also corporal punishment. A lot of that was going on, and then he would not issue books out or whatever to the teachers. Because, according to Nelia, and she said, Well, you know? He said, "What do we want them to learn? Anything," you know, what? So the the materials were not being assigned to the to the teachers and to the classrooms. Nelia and her husband came from, from Laredo, Texas, okay? And el Laredo, they spoke up. They were not like in East Austin, you know, everybody kind of just, you know, placated the white community, whatever. And so she said, you know, something needs to be done, because we're not getting the materials that we need for the students. So they Buddy organized, and Buddy and Andrew Ramirez, who was a native Austinite, also Buddy was a native Austinite. They went to go to speak to Mr. Gosee and say, Hey, this is going on. And he got real nervous, because nobody had ever confronted him. Buddy at the time, I think, was also becoming very well known, because he was very outspoken, and he he was appointed to the Human Resources Commission or something or other. So he went as a representative of whatever that organization was, and he organized the community. There was a lady. Then after that, some parents started calling buddy, Miss Josephina Samariba was a very famous lady in East Austin. She had, like 12 children, wonderful, and she was a lady that worked hard, and so she Buddy organized them to come to his school board meeting, to come and tell the school board what Mr. Gosee was doing. And I remember Josephina got up and she spoke, and Wilhelmina Delco was one of the school board members there, and I remember I stood up and said, "This is not right. I'm an educator. I teach at Becker. I'm not a teacher at Brooke. But these teachers are coming to and they're here, but they're afraid to speak up, because for fear of that they would get fired" and Will Davis was, was the board member. And he said, You know, I "stand up. We're not going to fire you". And you let us know. And very few teachers you could see him, kind of sneak up. And finally, but it was the Laredo teachers who stood up, you know, so as a result, so that moved for, I mean, the community got organized, and miss sam aripa and everybody you know, you know, whatever, so they pulled Mr. Gosee out of that school and and put him somewhere in North Austin. And that's the first time they hired a Latino principal, and his name. Can't remember his name right now, but he got hired from Brownsville. The name doesn't come to me right now, but I'll remember it later. And so he got hired to be the principal, but he had no idea what Central Texas racism was about. He comes from Brownsville, The Valley where they were. It was a class system in The Valley. It was not a racist kind of I mean, they don't. They didn't. Couldn't understand why we, the Latinos, were complaining and whatever. So anyway, he wasn't doing very well. Ed Leo, that was his name, and Yolanda Leo was his wife, and she became a coordinator for the district and whatever, from Laredo, they were from Brownsville, Texas.

But so this is the first Latino that we got that were hot, not the first Latino. One of the guys that got hired by the district to come and replace Mr. Gosee. Ed Leo he's a Mexicano. So that's what y'all want. That's what you're going to get. Well, in the middle of the night, I remember Josephine calling say, "Hey, this guy doesn't have a clue what we're what we're experiencing here". You know he's not understanding what's going on in our in our area. So Ed Leo got moved, moved down and went to another school, but because of that incident, then they decided the community was really demanding more Latino administrators and teachers. So the school district then hired Andrew Guerrero, Jose Flores. You know, Josa- can't remember, there was some, but they all were hired like, I think Andrew came from God, I think from Corpus area, from sentence somewhere. And Jose Flores got hired. They were all from wonderful people. And they, Jose Flores started teaching at Mets, and Andrew was at at Palm. So Andrew hired me to come and work in the Extended Care Program, after school program, and

**Tracy Flores** 00:09:18

and did you go in there for an interview? Or? how did he ?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 00:09:23

No, he just knew me because I taught his his students would went to school at lender, where I had been teaching his kids were my students, and we became friends. And he knew, he knew I needed a job. He said, You want to come? I said, Absolutely, I'm going. And I had a little pint station wagon at the time, and so I being a teacher, I organized. I said, we're going to do this. We're going to get your you know, not just a day, not just an after school care. We're going to get, you know, involved in things. We're going to do things. We're going to learn dance. We're going to know how to do this. And so I went to the Pan American Center, recreation center in East Austin. Then, and it's now called AB Cantu or whatever, and AB Cantu was director at that time, and I saw the city brochure that said they listed that they had cooking classes and that they had folklorico classes and blah, blah, blah, and all this and that. And I said, Okay, we're gonna go over there and I'm gonna take the girls and I'm gonna enroll them in cooking classes so that they could learn how to make snacks and whatever after school whatever. So I go there and nothing. The brochure did not have what that was publicized. All they had was Golden Gloves boxing from for young guys and being who I am. I said, "Oh, wait a minute. You're not, you know, this is what you're supposed to have." "Well, we haven't been able to get a teacher, whatever, whatever. And then he said, I'll do the club cooking class". And he brought the kid, "we'll do peanut butter". I said, No, no, no, no, no, I'm not going to have this. I was furious. I went to, I can't even remember if I went back to the city. I called somebody said, you know, this is not right in West Austin, you can enroll them in ballet and baton twirling and tumbling and all that, and they have recitals. I said, my kids, our kids need that also. We want that for them. So I remember they finally did have a folklorical group that they bought a teach and brought a teacher in San Antonio. His name was, I can't remember, Buddy was his name and he Rudy Mendez was, was a teacher, a dance teacher there. Rudy Mendez, was very well known here, but he only taught. He wouldn't take students below 10, you know. And my kids were like from first grade on kindergarten on that. So I had an outstanding after school program. Andrew was very Mr. Guerrero was very pleased. In fact, the PTA gave me an award, and I can remember what year that was, but some of the students there were truant, there was a lot of truancy. And Andrew, you know, did a darn good job of trying to get the kids to want to come to school. There was a family in particular that that they lost their mother, and the father was raising them. And the little name was Emilio and Sandra. I don't know why I remember their names, but there was a lice

infestation at one time, you know, in the school district said if kids had lice “piojos”, as we call them, they could not come to school. So this particular family, you know, had them, and so they were not coming to school. So I went to said, Hey, Andrew, I need to go. I'm going to go because Emilio and Sandra, I love coming to extended care, because we did a lot of fun things. And the father had shaved bald, shaved them, and they were not going about to come to school like that, to be made fun of, you know. But I went to see them, I said, Well, you know, that's okay. We'll get you a wig or whatever. And that didn't work, but, but then Emilio started coming to after school, extended care. He wouldn't come to school regular time, you know, to regular classes, but he would come to the after school program “hey miss”. He would say, you know, “are we gonna go to the Pan Am, and what isn't that?” Whatever, you know. So Andrew really said, and I said, Really, he's coming, at least he's coming here, you know, maybe we can entice him to come to the, you know, regular school. So that was a very wonderful experience for me working with that population. In fact, when I graduated from TW, I went on on a student loan. And the student loan at that time, it was a national defense student loan. They said, If I, they would, if I would go and teach in low social in low socioeconomic schools, they would forgive my loan. So I liked it anyway. I always wanted to work because I I was bilingual, and they couldn't believe that a teacher this was so awesome that they that I could speak Spanish. “Hey miss, you speak Spanish!” You know they all they thought in teachers would only speak English, and that that was, that was all they knew. So you're able to connect with this absolutely, absolutely, and I loved, totally destroyed my Pinto Station Wagon, but I would load them up, and we would go into the after school program. So that was

**Tracy Flores** 14:43

What do you think it was about the after school program that enticed, not, I don't want to say enticed, but made the students want to come and be there?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 14:51

Well because a lot of these students remember the Extended Care Program was started on the premise that it was for people who couldn't afford after school care, for the Kids. This was funded by I remember her. The late lady's name was Roland rose Lancaster. It was connected somehow or other with a Presbyterian Church, and somehow or other, she opened up the first extended care program was started at Becker. And then they and they got to be all over and it was mostly in low income school communities so they could the kids had some place to come and to be taken care of, and we also provided snacks for them and activities. We had activities. And so it was better than going home to nothing, you know. And the parents, parents were working, so they that was really more of so the students could have a safe place to be after school,

**Tracy Flores** 15:45

and you designed it as a after beyond that, and thinking about how you could provide these activities that could, then, yeah, build up different options and skill sets.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 15:57

I was a visit teacher, and I wanted them active. This was not about, you know, sit down and color and, and, you know, it was a, and it was not, it was really, it was not like you have to be here, kind of a program maybe, or you're going to get, you know, whatever it was a, it was they chose to be there, or

the parent sent them there, and it was a safe, fun environment. Well, at least mine was, and at Becker, I was a PE teacher there, and the afternoon extended care was there, and and people that that worked at these extended care were very good people. There were students from University of Texas, to be honest with you, a lot of them were students, you know.

**Tracy Flores** 16:38

Are they students who are going to be teachers?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 16:40

No, not necessarily. In fact, the young, the fellow that that that started that program at Becker and worked very closely. He was a Vietnam veteran. The Vietnam War had been and he was working on his master's degree at University of Texas. He was getting a degree in folk, something or other with Americo Doctor Americo Paredes he became a really, really good friend of mine, and then he's also the one that said you need to and I used to work during the summer times on summer camps with extended care for kids. I had to work all the time because on a teacher salary, it was very difficult to raise four little girls, okay, and an infant. I had one that was she was only three months old when I got divorced, so extended care and palm, where that was my connection, one of the connections, but the first connection I had with Palm was when I came from San Antonio with my husband. He had been at Fort Sam Houston, and he finished his his term in the service, and he also started attending community meetings in West Side San Antonio, where there was a lot of talk about community organizing. And it was these people, these trainers, were the ones that also went to were going to California to connect with Ceasr Chavez. This was happening all over the country. I mean, there was the community organizing in California, in Colorado and in Austin, specifically, you know it. My husband said, I want to go back home. I want to go to my community, East Austin, and we're going to take care of some issues. First one was the junkyards across the street from where he lived on Third and Waller. And the second issue was the Palm school problem his sister in law. My sister in law, was president of the PTA at the time, and she would say, you know, we plug the fan on we can at that time was overhead projectors. It wasn't computers or any of the technology that we have now, nothing like with those plastic sheets. Yes, you know you and and so if you put the overhead projector, you couldn't plug in the radio, or you can put in the clock, or you couldn't plug in the fan. And so she was very unhappy. And so they started complaining, and some other people, and so then Buddy said, my ex husband said, We need to get together. And I remember meeting in the backyards here on Third and Waller, all the neighbors would come back yard said, you meet in her name was Thea don't know what we're you know, she was a little old lady. Now, she led us in her backyard and well, and everybody came and we, they complained about the junkyards, and then the the palm school issue,

**Tracy Flores** 19:33

How many people came to those meeting?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 19:34

I would say there was, there was, not remember, 10 or 10 or 15, but then it's big. It's people start hearing about it, saying, really, can we do? He said, You know, nobody listens to us, and we can't speak English. And but he said, I remember sitting there. I was always involved. I was always sitting

there, you know, listening or whatever. And he said, you know, we may not have the money, but we have, we all stick together we have the power with people. He always said, lock solids. If we don't have the power of money, we have the power of people. Stick with us and we'll, we'll get you going. And so, gosh, one of the first meetings that we went to, to the school board, we went to posters and whatever, and everybody you know was afraid that they were going to get kicked out. So

**Tracy Flores** 20:19

What was that? What did you go to, about the first meeting for what was that like? That

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 20:22

like? What that first school board meeting? Yeah, well, I tell you what came out in that article that I've that it's archived in Austin, American statesman, I started looking for it because I called my sister in law, said, Ruth, when was east. He said, Well, yeah, I remember she had, she made me laugh because she said I went in my house shoes to that meeting because, you know, she was in a hurry to get there and but all this, you know, they all met, and Buddy was a student at the University of Texas, and when he he, he did not get up and speak right away. He organized and said, this is you're going to speak, and you're going to speak because you're the parents and blah, blah, blah, and the, the first owners of Juan in million restaurant that's on East first was Mr. And Mrs. Luis Martinez and name fan, they own that restaurant, and they had a child that went to school there at Palm and so they joined the group and and so Buddy showed them how to stick together and and assign certain people that could speak. So they did.

**Tracy Flores** 21:09

So everyone had a role?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 21:10

Everybody had a role. Said, which was scared, you know, but, but it's okay. We'll practice them, whatever. So they and then buddy got up and started handing out a memory graph copy to all the school board members of the letter what that said that that he was president of the MASO, which was a Mexican American student organization at University of Texas, and that he had a letter from the Paso, which was the political action committee of whatever Spanish speakers. And then he had one from somebody else, I can't remember what, which was a third organization, and and he was speaking, and, you know, he was very confident. He was good at what he did. He was a good leader.

**Tracy Flores** 23:08

And what was the reaction to the people in that room?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 23:11

Oh, my God, they were very proud of him. They, they, they believed in him. He really and altered further what else he did. So he they Red was one of them Red and all those people were there. They were all supported, you know. And they knew what he was doing. So the school board kept interrupting him and said, "Are you a parent of this group?" And supposedly some of the people in the background said, "Well, what difference does it make? You speaking for us, you know?" And he said, "I am a native Austin. I was born and raised on the third and one or whatever. My nieces and nephews go to school in

the district. I'm speaking for, for my family and for other" so they and, you know what they did? And so the people started getting mad because they kept asking, they kept interrupting him, and so one of the school members made a motion to call the meeting to to adjourn,

**Tracy Flores** 23:09

and they walked out school board in the middle of the conversation,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 23:11

whatever. Yeah, it reported in there they decided to adjourn they don't want to hear anymore. They were, you know, they were not. So that was really my first, my very first contact with Palm Elementary and being a part of the community and supporting, you know, I supported education. I was an educator. I mean, you know, I was teaching at Becker at that time. So, so that was my first connection. Is the organizing a long time. I don't take full credit. I'm not going to say the bit I support it. What buddy was doing. He knew I believed in it. I supported him. When with, again, with the the junkyard. There was a junkyard where cars were piled up and whatever in front of his house. And they went to the city council for that. So there was so that was the beginning after that, after he did the palm school, the junkyards. Then it was the economy furniture strike. And so that is my connection to the palm school issue, and, and, and, of course, getting involved with this, the economy strike. You know, my father in law and my brother in law's all work there. And my ex husband was one. He became a union organizer, and he went and stood before the economy furniture, picketed, passed out leaflets to all the workers. And my father in law was livid that he he was doing that because that was his police employment. And if he was finally was able to convince his dad that unionizing and getting you know doing all the work that needed to be done to get better wages and and, you know, whatever needed to be done. And that was one of the biggest it was really, really important to the whole community of East Austin.

**Tracy Flores** 25:12

Was it better wages and better conditions? What exactly was like...

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 25:16

Everything. Okay, so let's say it was Milton Smith, the owner, you know, like my some people would work there for years and years and years, and when they were almost getting ready to retire, then he would fire them. And then, you know, so that he wouldn't have to be paying their pensions, or he would get a white guy to come in. And let's say, for example, it said my father in law taught him how to run whatever machinery for the furniture or whatever, and then that person got the better wages and became the foreman or the boss of whatever, you know. So it was unfair labor practices, and it's all it's there's a lot of information on the economy and all the and Buddy, like I said, became a union organizer. And he organized the first, the first strike. And I remember going to San Antonio, I mean, it became a national thing. I remember that I even he got, he got hired by the AFL CIO in Washington, DC. And I went to live over there. And I remember that Ethel Kennedy and all the they had a big fundraiser for the for Cesar Chavez and let us boycott back then. And I remember sitting there and watching, you probably don't know who Anthony Quinn is Anthony Quinn was a great actor. And I remember he stood up there in the podium and said that he used to be, they used to work in the farms. And he said that his father always said, "el que levanta la lechuga no come la ensalada". He who picks the does not get we, we don't get to the luxury of eating that". And it was very exciting for him. But that

was it was happening all over the country. Cesar Chavez in California, Corky roll. Porky Gonzalez in Colorado. He's the one that wrote "yo soy Joaquin". I got to meet him. Reyes Tijerina in, you know, in in New Mexico, and I got to meet him. It was exciting. And now we were, and we the women, the wives, we were out there, you know, you know, we had a when we had protests, we were, we were doing more than just making chicken salad sandwiches, you know, for the people that would come in, like Mayo and all those people that came to support us.

**Tracy Flores** 27:41

What was that role like for all the women like you? Said, beyond the chickens there,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 27:44

I tell you what. That's one of my my pet peeves, right? And I said there was a lot of good work done by a lot of women that were not like every time I see this strike being, you know, shown about the history would they don't really talk very much about the women, and they sacrificed a lot. The women did, and a lot of those people at the economy furniture that were, they were upholstering and whatever. I don't know that I ever hear anything about them. And they were very supportive, you know, my my girlfriend, and I am I, Emma and Letie Riegas, who was her husband, and then came from Uvalde, we, we were, you know, we lacked because we all were pregnant at the same time in 1969 68 and 69 and there was a big protest here in Austin, down on Congress Avenue. And Emma was pregnant, I was pregnant, and Letie was pregnant. And boy, we were supporting our men in support, and we really believe in La Causa. And we started out in the March at the very beginning, at the very front, yeah, okay, we will say, you know, this and that. And we were all waddling, you know, because we were so, so big, and we ended up at the end of the line because we couldn't walk fast enough, you know, to, you know. And there's a picture some, there's my there's a picture in the archives that has my ex husband with his at the la huelga, and he has his arm up, Chicano, power, whatever. So it was an exciting time. And the women, I wish I would know more the names of the ladies that worked at the economy and actually, the women that were actually involved were white girls that were called the VISTA workers. There was, there was a VISTA was kind of like the Peace Corps. You know, the Peace Corps was in the abroad, but the VISTA program was funded by the government so you could send, you know, young people to come work in communities like East Austin. So a lot of the some of the women, not a lot of them, they were angry. They there was still that double standard where we could not go and meet go. To a cantina or to a bar, you know, we had to stay home and take care of the kids and whatever. So it was an exciting time. I was, you know, I'm glad that I did what I did, and then I ended up being a single mom and and I'm not, I'm happy that now that my girls grew up in a time where women would be a little bit more respected, and that they had the power to do what they needed to do, and I have some very strong, beautiful daughters and a bunch of granddaughters,

**Tracy Flores** 30:37

and I wanted to ask you a little bit too to make sure that you were talking about your the women and that you knew and who were part of these movements, and I wanted to ask you, what was your childhood like, not what your childhood like?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 30:51

Oh my gosh. I grew up in Lockhart with a very wonderful, smart mom who never got an education. She came from Mexico, and we were five sisters. We're out in

**Tracy Flores** 31:03

Where in Mexico?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 31:05

Matewalla, she was born in the town of Matewalla in the state of San Luis Potosi. What was her name? Her name was Adela Mayo, and she had a twin brother. And her siblings came across like she always say, "Yo soy mojada" I says I was a wet back, you know. And you know what? She never, she never got her citizenship. And as far as you know, going through the whatever, she married my not my father, who was here from Texas, and she, she was, she, you know, didn't work. She became a as this domestic engineer, house a house cleaner, and she loved working out in the field. She worked very hard as the as the even as a young child, one of her sisters, one of my aunts, tells me that she remembers my mother plowing the fields with a mule. My mother guiding the mule at the age of eight years old, and she was, you know, and she hard worker. So she raised, we were five sisters, and we, my mother would just, you know, was a strong woman, and she didn't work out of the house, other than later, when we were growing up, she was always at home. My father was then working with the came back from World War Two, because I was born in 1942 the war was over in 1945 and I remember clearly when the when the war was over, and my father came, he was in the Navy. So, you know, my father was a strong believer in education, because he only went to the sixth grade, and Lockhart, you couldn't and his time, there was no school for Mexicans to go beyond the sixth grade, so he joined the Navy, went to World War Two when he came back, it was also the time when there was a lot of discontent over the fact that a lot of our Mexican American heroes soldiers would not really allow to be buried. You know, there's a famous story, and I think in Three Rivers, there's a story about Longoria that I think there was a group that finally got Lyndon Johnson to allow him to be buried in national Arlington Cemetery, whatever. But there was a lot of you know you, I mean, here, you serve your country, but you couldn't be buried. You know where you want to be buried? So, Dr Hector Garcia from Corpus Christi organized a GI Forum. I think that's what it was my father and his pals that came from, from the war, you know, joined and and I remember, I was in the third grade when I saw my father. I saw him and Julio Perez and Jose Ruiz and all of them come walk up. They had all been veterans, and they wanted to talk to the principal. And I don't know what happened,

**Tracy Flores** 0:34:03

but do you know what the conversation was about?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 34:08

No, I just saw them coming. I wasn't like, so who my father was here? And I wonder what happened. But no, I don't remember the conversation, but it wasn't too long after that. It was in third grade by the fourth by the time I entered fourth grade was when we got it. We got integrated into the public schools with the white people.

**Tracy Flores** 34:25

And what was that like for you?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 31:05**

Oh my gosh, it was traumatic armor. My mother starts, starching dresses. My mother was so, you know, being a Mexican, you know, she always thought the Gringos was, were always oh so special, whatever. And girl I got into fight the first day of school, you know, because I got into the fourth grade, and all the you know, little Anglo girls, the little Anglo girl sat over here, and all all me and all my friends, my cousins, Elvira, Rosemary, you know, Bertha, all of a sudden one time, we were looking at each other and. This was, this was so it just really affected me a lot. I remember it was embarrassing. The teacher said, Okay, stand up to say the Pledge Allegiance. Well, we went at the Model School, we never stood up to say the Pledge Allegiance, you know. I mean, we were doing good if having the teacher make us speak English only, you know. And I remember that the all the everybody stood up, and the little Anglo girls, I think, did this or something, or put their hand up here, and they were saying, the pledge. And so we did we, we did what we did. The same thing, either here,

**Tracy Flores 35:35**

I can't remember, like, on their heart, or, yeah, something

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 35:37**

like this. And then, and then we sat down, and then one of the little Anglo girls, and I reminded her, whenever you the one that stood up and said, "Miss, they're not supposed to be doing this whatever, because they're not brownies." And girls, we all kind of like, oh, and I said, and I looked, I said, what, you know, what do you mean? We're not brownies? Well, we didn't know what brownies were. This was an organization of the Girl Scouts that was a first level. Well, I got very offended boy in recess time. I like a hood all my girls, come on. I was a leader of the pack, and I remember seeing los Anglo girls take off running. And I said, Let me tell you what. I said, "What do you mean? We're not brownies. Look," we're It wasn't till later that I realized that Brownies was an organization and but it wasn't embarrassing. That was, that was day one, you know, of school, and you know, later on, we have our class reunions, and they ask us, where were y'all? How come y'all didn't go to elementary school with us? They had no idea the Anglos. So because we there was, we weren't allowed, you know that we weren't allowed to go? So, you know, I had a I had a good time growing up in a small town, and then in high school, there was we. My graduating class, mexicanas, were 18 of us, and we were very fortunate that we had a Jewish school counselor. We didn't know what Jewish was. To be honest with you, to me, all the teacher white, we didn't know what a Jew was. I didn't find out till later, but he that's when the National Defense loan became available. And he called all of us into his office, all the Mexicans, and he said, there's this money that's available to this loan, and it's you don't have to have a 4.0 you just have good grades. And it's for people who want to go into teaching, who want to go into the Medical Field and into, say, education, math and and math and health, whatever it was. And since you all can qualify him. And so he gave us the form. He says, take it home. Have your parents fill it out. And he said, If you can't, if they don't know how to write, because he assumed that they were all illiterate, he says, I will sign it for him. Just bring it back. And so I took it home, and my mom said, my dad said, I don't know about this, you know, whatever, because, you know. So then we turned him in and Dr Weinberger. He was Dr A L Weinberger. And then he told us. He says, "if you get the money, do not go to the University of Texas". He said, they are not going to treat you right at the University of Texas. He says, "Go to San Angelo or go to some other college". But do not and because he was a Jew, and he said that they he remembers

that he would used to go and pick up the trays in the cafeteria somewhere down here, you know, and that he would get a nickel or a dime back by when he would turn it in. And he never really told us why, really, but he said, do not. They were not. They're not going to treat you right. So go to some other school. And none of us applied to University of Texas. And back then, University of Texas was not accepting a lot of I remember the first Mexican football player, and then was Rene Martinez or something like that. You know, very few blacks were admitted. One of my uncles, in Lockhart, applied, and because he was a Cisneros and he was a great ball player, he was, he got recruited by some professional baseball team. But they did not. They were not University of Texas, not very, was not very open to have it. You didn't see way back then, you know, you didn't see a lot of Mexicans or Negroes come to this. School. It was a very fraternity kind of large kind of thing. So I chose to go to Texas Women's University. And the only reason that I chose to go to Texas Women's University was because when I looked at the map, and I saw Lockhart right here, and I saw del Denton over here, and I was 18, I was so ready to get leave the home, you know, I was ready to and that was the furthest I had never, tend, never even visited the campus. I just filled out my application. They accepted me, and I got the National Defense loan money.

**Tracy Flores 40:33**

How was that for your parents and your family and your sisters?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 40:37**

Well I was the only girl. I mean, there were five sisters and my father said, I can. They couldn't afford it. That's what for me. It was May of 1960 when he when Dr, a Weinburg gave us the information and and I applied. And my father said, Well, there's no way I can send, you know, so my my mother did the my mother knew how to write, so she signed a form. And my brother, my oldest brother, had gotten a scholarship, baseball scholarship to A&M, so he was at A&M, and then my older sister wanted to go to school, but college, she was brilliant also, and she got married, so she did, but I was ready to fly, so I went to TW and it was my younger sister. They were all very supportive. I mean, you know, I was the first female to to get a degree. But it was destiny. I was destined to be and I wanted to be a teacher. And my father said, "Why do you want to be a teacher? Be a pharmacist, be somebody that makes money". And I said, "I don't know". Those are the only nursing or or teaching, whatever. I don't know, they weren't, I didn't think of any of the options. But later, when I finally got divorced, I realized why I had to be a teacher. Because I was not about to get my kid leave my kids. I was having, you know, three babies and whatever for and I wanted to to be able to be, you know, to take them to school with me, and I would have the summer off with them. And it was a good choice, because I was offered multiple jobs to work, especially during the movimiento, the awakening of the Latinos. Contract work. Hey, come work over here we can use it, but they were all contract workers. I mean, you would work from here to here, and then that was it. And I needed something that was more, not so risky. I needed to make sure that I got insurance and that I had, you know, that that they would go work with me, they would go to school with me, and then when they got to junior high, they no longer wanted to be around me anyway, so it was good. It was good. I loved it. I loved what I was doing,

**Tracy Flores 43:05**

and what was it like for you at college to go away for that first time?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 43:10**

Oh, girl, it was. I thought... Okay, I have to explain this. Tracy, Texas is so big and Central Texas here where we're living, Lockhart, Austin, New Braunfels, Gonzalez, Lul... It was a very bigoted community, okay? We had segregated schools. Almost every Bastrop had all Mexican school. Gonzalez, all of it, we were not allowed to go to school with the Anglos. Okay, the the when I got to college, it was when it was like, wow, you know, all these Mexican girls going to TW. They were from Brownsville, from Harlingen, from, you know, from all those communities, and then from Laredo. And they all their parents. This all. My mother's a school teacher. My dad is a, is a, is president of the bank of Alice and Alice, Texas, and oh, my mother is a superintendent of school or my father's school, though we never had those roles. Role models in Lockhart, you were either a domestic working clean in somebody's house or somebody's janitor or somebody we didn't have bankers and teachers and whatever. So for me, when I went to TW, could not believe I always thought all Mexicans were like me, you know, and and to see that that wasn't so that in Laredo, people were coming in with Ph Ds. That's where I met all my they continued and from TW they went to get a doctoral degree. Oh, man, I thought, Wow. It was, it was a wide a rude awakening for me to see that that Mexicans could do more than just be cleaning houses and working as janitors or running errands for you know?

**Tracy Flores 45:06**

How did that make you feel?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 45:08**

I was angry. I became a very my daughter even. I said, My God, you carry a chip on your shoulder. I said, You know what? I loved. We didn't even have radio stations with music, Mexican music. It would come maybe from San Antonio. We are now. We could hear it. I loved my music. I loved my language. I loved speaking Spanish. I loved the dancing. I loved everything. Okay, in Lockhart, we did a lot of Tejano dancing. That's every Saturday and Sunday, believe it or not, put the guy from the sky. Sunny and The sun liners were coming from San Antonio, West San Antonio had a lot of music. They would bring all their Ruben Ramos, Alfonso Ramos, they would go to lockhart, and that's where we did our dancing. We loved the music and the dance. And it was, for me, it was very hard, because we couldn't go like we would go eat barbecue at the cruise market. And had one section for the Blacks and Mexicans and the other section for the whites. It was, I mean, it was really and truly a white and it wasn't just the blacks, Mexicans and blacks. I lived in the Barrio. We call it Barrio of cuckold burr in the north side of 183 going to Lockhart, and it was All Blacks and Mexicans. I learned my first English from the blacks. I didn't know how to say 50. I said Fity, 50 Cent. Say, Hey, show enough and all that. That was my first English, you know, and my, that's who I played with and there was a black Baptist church right next door to where I lived, and another black Baptist church right behind us. And it was always, you know, this, you know, believe it or not, but BB King went to locker there was what they called the Chitlin route, you know, Ella Fitzgerald and all that, they would come to Texas to perform, but they would end up in little pulled up places like Lockhart and one of those, you know, I don't know it was, I could hear the music, okay? It was very definitely, we live. We knew our place, you know, no, the theater. No, no, we had our own theater, you know. And we had to sit upstairs, you know. No, the Black sat upstairs and we stood. And then the baker theater was nothing but whites. The only movies, Mexican movies we would see would be this man who would lived in San Antonio, would built like a little theater about the size and he had church benches, and then he would bring films from Mexico, and

that's where I got to see Antonio Aguilar and all those singers and the white horses and whatever. So for me, I was being denied access to my culture, and my mother was a great singer. My mother and my mother spoke only Spanish to us, and she spoke good Spanish. It was never you know, you know Street. It was always very correct, because my mother came from a very well to do they were born and raised in Matewalla, in a Hacienda with servants and everything so but she she was five years older, she came over and she started working. So for me, it I was angry. I was angry. And when I was a senior in high school, the seniors, the white seniors, had their parties, but we were never invited. So I said, Okay, I organized. We're going to organize, and all 18 of us every month, we're going to in our senior year, we're going to have a senior party, and I did with, you know, so we would do our own thing. So it wasn't, it wasn't hard for me to step into the movimiento during the palm school issue, you know, because I I wanted, for my I wanted for our students to be proud of who they were. I'm getting emotional because I loved, I loved who we were, and I wanted them to hear the poetry, I wanted them to hear the music. I wanted them to read the literature. Because nothing like that was ever told to us in our schools, nothing. And my mother would tell us, you know, no mira, que Agustin Lara and you know the blue Daniel, all these, these were composers from our country. Oh, my God. So I, I wanted to do that for my students. So when I came to teach at Becker, I've, we, if you do Google more, I would there was the little folklorico infantile the I remember 1964 in San Antonio. Saw the folklorico group come from San Antonio, from Mexico City, when I came to teach here in Austin. Bunch of us. Delamanmore, Geneva Sanchez, Rachel Gonzalez, Emma Barrientos Delia Sanchez, my sister Eliza Voto to all of us San Jose church. Summer time we we announced that we were going to have teach Folklorico classes. I taught the Harebe Tapatio because someone from Laredo taught me and another one taught the Sandunga whatever. And whoa at Becker, I was able to get the principal to loan me the the auditorium, and we did our first performance there, you know, like, Oh, God, it was, oh, we became so popular. We even performed at the at that time, at the auditorium down at the Coliseum. One time they were having a state PTA convention, and we were invited to come in and perform. Then I had a folk dancing group there, at at at Becker, and we performed all over and then I got involved with Roy Losanos Ballet Folklorico Angeles, Roy was a student University of Texas, and my daughters were, then already, you know, ready to dance. And I wanted them in Folklorico, and they did Folklorico and then my sister helped organize the San Jose church la Posadas, which was unheard of here. So we mothers and I always tell them that the reason the MAC is where it is the Mexican American, because the mothers organized. They said, We want our kids to have, you know, access to learning to play the guitar, to play the to do performances, to do plays, and whatever. We even had the audacity one time, all of us women, not Yeah, because we went and enrolled our students, our children, at the West Austin, the Austin recreation center where only Anglos went. You should have seen him when we walked in, because we were all had all these kids. Emma, Letie, my sister, all of us, we all have five, four or five kids, and we enroll them in baton and this, and ballet and whatever. And they told, Well, you know that we're going to have a recital, and you might have to, you know, I don't know whether you could afford it. You know, the costumes. Girl, we did the costumes, and we, and I said we, we went and crashed their little program, you know, because, you know, and that's what one of the things that I wanted for Pan American to do, be able to provide that for our students. No, I love my culture. I love who I am. I love I and I all my kids, you know. And I told them, Don't ever forget to speak Spanish, learn English, but always maintain your language. Don't forget who you are, you know.

**Tracy Flores** 52:32

So all these experiences fueled the work that you did as a teacher, and also at Palm and what you wanted to provide them at after school, the extra after care. Can you talk a little bit about what that space was like? What did the building look like where you had that after school care

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 52:46

That after school program that we had at Palm was in the auditorium. They had an auditorium. What did that look like? Like an old fashion auditorium? It had wooden floors and had a wooden stage. And, you know, they don't have them anymore, and they have one over at Zavala Elementary School, Becker had one. I had pictures. You know, I have some pictures that we the kids were dancing on the stage and whatever. But here at Palm we were in the auditorium, and it was the auditorium cafeteria stock kind of thing, usually, where they had the audit room. They would have a cafe, like a cafetorium, yeah, something like, and I remember that I have, I mean, that's what we would meet. And I'm, you know, extended care provided the every afternoon the extended care director would come in with a box with all the, you know, peanut butter and jelly and fruit and everything, all the snacks that we were supposed to give them, and the equipment, you know, whether it was a kickball or utility ball and whatever were all the equipment. And so we did activities there. But then, like I said, I wanted them to be more. I wanted them to go to the Pan Am center and and, you know learn more.

**Tracy Flores** 53:54

about how many students do you remember having?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 53:59

Oh, my God, it was never. It was from K through fifth grade. And I think it was fifth grade or sixth grade that they went to at Palm. So I would say I would have about 20-25, students and all those, great, yeah, but we had somebody else. We had some assistants, and some of them would stay with some kids while I would take this to to the Pan Am. And it wasn't every day to the Pan American Center, because they only would have, like, Mondays and two Mondays and Wednesdays do this or whatever. So I can't remember who my assistants were, but I remember Andrew Rivera was so wonderful, and the PTA president were so grateful that I was going a little bit more beyond just, you know, whatever. So

**Tracy Flores** 54:42

Can you tell me a little bit more about your relationship with Andrew Guerrero and the work that you were able to do during that time?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 54:49

Well, he was, you know, he came, I mean, they, they were brought in from The Valley. I think, well, I know, I think Andrew was from Senten or corpus area or whatever. And his wife, I remember that was were so sweet, and they knew they understood what we wanted by then. By the time they got into the district, there was a lot of there was a group of professors that here at University of Texas that were got involved, and I think it was from the University of Texas at these that they encouraged Andrew. And Andrew was absolutely wonderful. He understood like he could have said to Emilio, I'm sorry you can't come to extended care. If you don't come to school, you don't deserve to come to this program. never did that. And I would look at him said, do not do that. He said, No, we're gonna have if this is the way

we can keep him out of because he, the young man, had the potential to go there was already going the wrong way. And so that's yeah. And Andrew was very understanding and very care. And he had two sons, so it was not just because, you know, he knew what it was like to have a family, and he understood the other one that was at Mets. He was absolutely wonderful. His name was Jose Flores, and he was also on, and I had the opportunity to work in the summer program sometimes there at Mets,

**Tracy Flores 56:17**

and worked with Mr. Flores?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 56:19**

Mr. Flores and I used to do, we used to do a camp program for homeless, for homeless families during the summer, and I started it at Linder to region 13. They were getting funded from the Kellogg Foundation for and so they asked me, because the kids summer school to them, coming to summer school for them was meant like they were losers, like they were only come to summer school because they were behind or something like that. So they asked me the PE teacher, because I had a great program, and kids love coming to my class. They said, We, if you we open up the gymnasium and and we can use the lender facilities. And they asked me, and I said, Okay, let's get we and we hired some other team. One of them was we did a kindergarten teacher who would love to go back packing. So we did a summer program. It was so much fun. In fact, we got, we got asked to go to Nashville, Tennessee, to go and do a presentation. Because one teacher that loved hiking and whatever, you know, we would take the kids to Mabel Davis Park and, and it was a group cooperative work, you know, how do you set up a tent? You know, okay, what? What are we going to take to, you know, talk about what we were going to taking our backpack, and we actually would go, I'm very hands on. You learn to do by doing kind of a person, okay? And then my, one of the other teachers loved to cook, and she would teach them how to make good, nourishing snacks. And then she would teach these kids were homeless. Some of them came from Salvation Army. Some of them came from, you know, different really bad situations. And so we would provide, and remember the Diana Vajeo used to do, we used to do bottle rockets with the, you know, the shoe had a science program. We take them outside, and the kids, so it was a lot of hands on. And we became very famous.

**Tracy Flores 58:19**

It sounds like lot of different curriculum that was happening,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 58:21**

oh yeah. And lender was also brought in a lot of special needs students, some autistic or whatever. And at the end of the session, I would do a humongous outdoor play day, and oh my god. And we had all kinds of activities, because I was, you know, I had all kinds of, you know, water boom, water balloon volleyball, you know, where we would fill the balloons up with water and with the sheet. We'd have one team on one side and the other of the and we would all kinds of activities. And Teresa Ramirez was a PE teacher, instructor here at UT, and she would send me all her students from UT to come and help me. They had a wonderful time. Oh, as, like, co teachers. Oh yeah, they would come. And during the summer, they were doing summer school work, and we did all kinds of fun things, and every and it became very well known. And so I had, like I said, the lady that teach to get how to lay the baby, how to

wash clothes. It was actually activities that would be beneficial. It wasn't a head thing. It was okay when you go home, when you, you know, and some of these kids, like, when they would come to the gym, you know, we had, we would, we would, I was a yoga teacher, also would do deep relaxation. And these kids had a really hard time because they were afraid to sleep, to really relax. Because I know that some of these kids were in Salvation Army, and they couldn't sleep because they were afraid somebody was going to hurt him, you know, so it was, and I took we took him on for. Trips like we take them to Georgetown, to the caverns and, and, and, believe it or not, the Travis County adult, juvenile, where it was, I asked them if they could send me some, some of the people to come and help me set up like I would set up parachutes and whatever, and and jump, you know, jumping things, and even the special ed kids and everything, and all the homeless kids, they they came in their fatigues, and I told a guy that was with a gun. I said, Don't Sure. I mean, hide the gun. And, you know, those kids thought that they were military. They did not see them as convicts or potential juveniles or whatever, and the kid and and though several of those kids, young people, came up and were crying and said, they remind your students, remind me of us when we were kids, and they felt special. And I said, Well, you're special. And you know, I don't know what you did or why you're at that county jail or whatever, but, but you helped us, and that's all we, you know. And the kids love you. And they would get in those, you know how, those jumping things, those big old inflatable things, yeah, those, they would go in with them and jump with some of our special students, our special ed students. So it was, it was,

**Tracy Flores** 1:01:16

it was really about the whole child, yeah,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:01:19

oh yeah. I'm a hands on person, honey. I taught everything you, you know, don't, don't, don't, tell me how to do it, show me and let's do it. And if you don't do it right, that's okay. We're gonna learn again. And that was and

**Tracy Flores** 1:01:32

when you were at Palm did you take the students on field trips as part of the after school care? You talk a little bit, yes, maybe one, yeah.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:01:40

We well, like, sometimes we would get together with others, other other extended care groups that we would meet, you know, like at a park, and, you know, have games out there for them. And those were, yeah, we try to take them off campus, as you know, and take them out to different kinds of things. I could only do so much because, you know, like I said, by the time I finished at Palm, my Pento station wagon was falling apart because the kids said, so, yeah, we would do like, field days that we would go and, like, it would be palm. And maybe, I don't know whether the school had it. I'm not sure whether Brooke or who else had extended care. But we would meet and have field meet, field days.

**Tracy Flores** 1:02:27

What was that like? Like, what kind of activities were part of?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:02:31

Would have all kinds of activity, races, you know, like, you know, you know, volleyball games, all kinds of Act and extended care always provided us with with a lot of equipment, tug of war, you know, the three legged race. You know, volleyball, balloons and whatever we would do as a PE teacher, you had to learn how to do all that. Okay. I mean, I could. I did track and fuel meets all the time. There were 50 yard dash, you know, the tug of war, the three legged race, the all kinds of activities that we would do, you know, jump a THON. Some would do jump a thons. You know, the Heart Association used to provide me with all the stuff, you know, so I'm in I was, it was fun.

**Tracy Flores** 1:03:09

And during the school day, the students at Palm what kind of curriculum did they receive? What did they get to learn?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:03:17

Yeah, no, I don't, I don't, because I would come after school. I didn't really have a time to go visit the school during the day. I only would really deal more with with Andrew and Mr. Guerreo and some of the PTA parents that were there. You know, there was a lady that I think her name was Miss Acosta, and she was a, either became president of the PTA or something like that, but, yeah, I would, we would not all the time and, like, I couldn't go during the day to go into the school. And I really don't remember the I know that at Palm school, palm school was known because they did a lot of square dancing. And the PE teacher there, her name was Pat Swinson. She was she taught my my nephew and nieces, and they love the square dancing. I think square dancing and all kinds of dancing is very good for the whole mind, body and whatever. It's not just, you know, exercise, it really is a good learning skill. I I taught everywhere. I taught no matter who I did when I dealt with the students. It was a whole child. It wasn't just the physical and it wasn't just the mind. It was all together. I mean, your jumping rope has a lot to do with how your brain is going to be. You know, your your folk dancing is you going to left, right, laterality, everything, everything was always teaching the whole child in every aspect, and I still believe them

**Tracy Flores** 1:04:48

absolutely. Do you remember attending any special events at the Palm school? Any special celebrations?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:04:56

No, I don't. I have to be honest with you, I don't. I. Know, they had him because my sister in law, Ruth Ruiz, who was a PTA president at the time that they had that meeting, yeah, she, they, they, they were very active at Palm you know, by that time I was living like I said, I had already gotten divorced and I was living in South Austin, and became very active in the South Austin community. We, we formed the first South Austin Neighborhood Association. And I say we, and I said because I was part of the committee that was involved in setting up the first use Bureau, neighborhood use Bureau, because South Austin was very didn't have any after school or anything. Well, Becker was, Becker was one of the reasons that they opened up Becker there, because there was nothing for the students after school, and it was a lot of vandalizing and whatever. So then they built the South Austin recreation center and they built the South Austin Neighborhood Center. But I, Bebe Ruiz was one of our first I was on the on the board of the neighborhood youth association. It was we formed the first use Bureau, and that would,

you know, meet the needs of the young people there. I was too busy raising a family by the end. It was, there were, you know, like I said, Five little girls. It's a lot of work.

**Tracy Flores** 1:06:20

And what are your little girls doing today?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:06:24

My little girls are all mothers now. They're all they're all grown up. In fact, my my, my oldest granddaughter is going to be 31 tomorrow. Tomorrow is her birthday, and she's getting married in the I mean, I have 19 grandchildren, no 13 grandchildren, and nine of them are granddaughters, and the others are all boys. I have nothing but girls. I have set of triplets that are going to the university, to one in Tucson, the other one in Tempe and the other one in San Diego University. My grandson is at UTSA. My other grandson just started A&M, he just graduated this year. And my other girls, the oldest girls all you know, got their degree from the University of Texas.

**Tracy Flores** 1:07:12

And then thinking back about your experiences, how do you feel about this, seeing what they've accomplished?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:07:18

I'm very proud. I'm very proud of them, and I'm, I am not one that wishes for the good old days. I like what's happening now. I like the fact that that, you know, this double standard, a man can do this, or a boy can do this, but the girl can't. And, you know, I didn't raise my girls like that. My mother was way ahead of her times, even for her generation. She says, if, if he can fix the screen door, you can fix the screen door. If you can do this, you can do that, you know, whatever. So I'm very proud. I'm very proud of how they've grown up and and I, like I said, I don't, I don't look back. I like what's going on right now. I like the fact that that because I have the feminine energy running strong in my family, okay, the feminine I don't have it just for my and I'm love my grandsons. They're absolutely wonderful and and I'm glad I have them, but I only raised girls, and I had five sisters, so it was a very strong feminine energy in my family. So, you know, I, you know, right now, it's hard for me right now with what's happening right now, okay, in this current moment, yeah, yeah. My two granddaughters that are getting married will be moving out of the state of Texas, the one who's going to Milwaukee, Minnesota, or Minnesota, whatever, the other one is in is going to go to Wisconsin because they want to start a family. And they don't want to start a family here in Texas for reasons that you know, and I don't want to. And I encourage them. I said, No, we don't, you know? I knew I grew up at the time with Ann Richards being our Governor and her daughter, Cecille, you know. Ann Richard's husband was a union organizer. His name was, he was good friend of buddies, and he helped buddy become a he helped the union, the economy furniture, you know, deal with, negotiate and whatever. So I'm a feminist, and in a good way. And I'm not saying I'm, you know, against No, I think we mamas have to do a better job raising our boys also, you know. And I tell my daughters that don't, don't teach him that they're the kings and that they're supposed to be waited on like my brothers and my our generation. Oh, he's a man, you know? He bring him his plate, you know? Do this and whatever. No, no, no. They have to. They have to. And I love the young man, my my my son in laws were great dads. They were all great dads. And all my girls, all, I have a bi racial family, everybody, unfortunately, they did not marry mexicanos. He got no they're all

married, and they're all, that's fine. That's That's okay. I have an African American family. My oldest daughter is her husband's Dutch, the other is Irish, Italian, and the other one is German, German, and then my Monica is African American and beautiful family. That's the world as it is, as it should be, you know.

**Tracy Flores 1:10:33**

And you've talked a lot about your mom and how brilliant she was and all that she taught you. How did she still instill education in you? Like, what values

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 1:10:44**

my mother actually, my father was the one that instilled more of the education. Talk a little bit about that. My father had the theory, and I'll never forget he that they he said that when he told his brothers my uncles that maybe I wanted to go to college. Oh, no. Cruz, No, she doesn't need an education to stir a pot of beans. You need her her to stay home and work and help support the family. My uncles would be were migrant workers. They would take their families out of school and go, excuse me, they would go to follow the crops forever. And I know one of them family ended up in North Dakota picking potatoes and all that. And part of the family stayed over there in this part of the family came back to Texas, but they my father was the one who said no, no. And he told me, says, You girls need an education, more even so, because we can always get a job. Men, you girls are not well, thank goodness. I, like I said, I know it was destiny, or afraid, or whatever you wanted, that I decided I wanted to go into ju- because I was the first one to get divorced. I was the first one to have to take care of my family. None of my other sisters divorced. They're all married, you know, stay married. In fact, you know, three of them are still married to the same guy. They were boyfriend with in Junior High. I you know, so there was, it was good. My profession was great. So my father was really, my mother gave us a strong work ethic. I mean, you get up and, I know, sleeping late, you get up and you start cleaning the house and you do this and you do that, she had really strong work ethics, and she was, she was, and she actually was the one who encouraged me, so you go on and go to college, don't worry about us, you know.

**Tracy Flores 1:12:33**

And how did that feel when she said that to you? What was that like?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz 1:12:36**

Oh, it was great. It was like, you know, she my mother, like I said, did not have a formal education. I told she was brilliant. My mother knew carpentry. My mother could sew. My mother her ma... I mean, she when she was going to make a dress, she would measure the yard like this and whatever she would use. I mean, I wish you learned it. I don't know, but she was a fabulous seamstress. She was a fabulous cook. She was a fabulous she loved to do carpentry. She I still have some of her stuff that she made, you know, little tables and whatever. And she always encouraged us to stand up for ourselves. "No, se dejen. No, se dejen. Ustedes pueden", el dicho "si se puede", but that was not famous, but, but she would tell us, you all cannot. You know you need and you know, I always tell people, because when I got divorced, oh my god, you know, children are going to be emotionally disturbed, you know, blah, blah, blah, she's and I thought, no, no, that's not true. Because, you know, since the beginning of time, women have been raising families on their own, when the men died in war, when they died,

sickness or whatever. I known many women that had raised, they were raising eight and 12 kids, you know, doing working at the Austin laundromat. My sister in law, Ruth, the one that I'm talking about, that lives on third and Waller. Her mother used to work at the laundromat there, and she had nine children that she had raised. Her husband died. They came from Mexico, and she raised those because she never remarried. She always, you know, she raised all those children. You know, she brought her sister from Mexico. The sister would cook and take care of the kids, while Eleanor, as they called her, would work. So, you know, single women have been around since the beginning of time. So it's not, it's not nothing, anything new. And you know, she taught us that my mother was, like I said, a strong woman and and she they were married for a long time, and my father died first, and then Mom died. My mom died at 93 and let me tell you, hard working. She loved to work in the field, pick cotton. She would take us up to pick cotton every summer. So

**Tracy Flores** 1:14:46

So you worked alongside her? Oh, yes. Did she teach you any of her how to be a carpentry?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:14:51

No, no, I've unfortunately, my my older sister was like her artistic. My mother could very she was a great artist. She could sew. My My Sister Alice, was the one that got all all the she got all the talent. And my oldest brother, I said, by the time it came to me, I was the third one. I said, I think all the genes, you know, but you know, I couldn't draw a straight line, and I couldn't, you know, but I love to sing, and I love to dance and and I love to garden. So my sister, you love to garden, and you do this great, because they said, I can't do what y'all are doing, you know? Because, yeah, my mother was a very gifted lady, and she gave it all to my older sister and my older brother.

**Tracy Flores** 1:15:29

And you draw on all of that too. Though, in your teaching and you're singing, you love to sing. You love to dance, you garden. How, how else does that play out in the work that you've done all of these things that you love.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:15:45

That's who I was. I mean, I I'm not a I mean, I wasn't shy about singing. I wasn't shy about in church. We used to sing quite in the mic, because they used to invite me and my cousin to go and sing. We used to sing, you know, the 50s music, like the Everly Brothers and all that kind of stuff. You know, we used to the 50s were our music, you know, the the the, you know, all that, you the twist and all of that we used to do, all of that it was part of, you know, we did a good job entertaining ourselves. We wouldn't do not have much money, but we loved to dance, and we loved to sing and and and move around and whatever it's I've always been that way. Always, since I was a kid, my mother said, like I said, I was very traviesa, she would send me every summer to my aunts here and on Third Street because, you know, she couldn't keep up with me, because I was always out visiting the neighbors, you know, especially la viejitas, as they were always, you know, a mi having Baca, you know, and, and they would, they and there was a little lady that you still would cook on a wood burning stove. That was when I was little, and I could smell the potatoes cooking, man at tortillas that she would and so I would visit. I was a visitor. I was always out there doing stuff I shouldn't have been doing, you know, being social and organized Absolutely, and I'm still the same way. And I and, you know, I see the pattern

even now with my grandchildren. I look at him, I said, Okay, what? How she was when she was born. She was loud and she was cranky, whatever. That's exactly how she's going to be. And sure enough, I said, we, you know, some of us are just have that. And I, I'm, I feel like I'm very blessed. I really am. I have no complaints. I love life, and I I still. I may I'm gonna be 83 next month, and so I still go out walking. I still. I became a yoga teacher when I retired because I wanted to work with seniors. I did that only for a little while, but I had too many other things I wanted to do. So I'm still a little bit active, not as much as before, but I love palm. I love palm. I love East Austin. I got to know all these people, like Red and the Quintanilla, you know, Quintanilla, what? I can't remember what her first name is, yeah, and I helped. We I was worked with the group. I didn't do it, but I worked with the group to build the MAC, Emma Barrientos and I were very good friends. We were She was my best friend.

**Tracy Flores** 1:18:10

And how did the palm school fit into the larger Mexican American community?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:18:19

Well, I can't tell you from a perspective of being a native Austin, not I can't tell you that, but I know that that was the hub of the school, of the community, of one of the communities. And I think I don't know when Zavala was done. So the schools were very important. Zavala elementary school was run by her Hermelinda Rodriguez. She was one of our first Hispanic principals. You've heard of her. She and Carmen Gamboa. They were both and I don't know where they were. I think her Melinda was from Martin Dale, Texas. But anyway, so there was, you know, the jamaicas and a lot of the church stuff, and the schools were kind of combined, but I, I can't really tell you, because I was not, I didn't live in the community, except in the summers. And then when I came to Austin and I became I started teaching at Baker, I started teaching in San Antonio, but then I started teaching at Becker. Becker was very special to me, and still is, you know, they've done, I used to do after school activities with the kids. I mean, that was before extended care and they had, I would open up the gym and let the boys come in and and play basketball. And there was a famous young man who got from prison. He's been in prison forever, and he was, he was a sad one, but anyway, he used to come out to school, and I was pregnant with Monica, and I used to play dodge ball. He loved to play dodge ball, so I would open up the gym, okay? And he was very protective of me, "hey man watch it". Miss woods, whatever I loved. His name was Raul, and he ended up in a very, very bad place in the community. I'm not even going to say what, but

**Tracy Flores** 1:20:13

what you're mentioning the ways in which you had relationships, like good connections with the families and the students. How do you think the neighborhood felt about the palm school?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:20:24

About the palm school? Yeah. Well, I know that the few people that I knew, Mr. Martinez and all, and that was, you know, they were very they, you know, they were active in the community they liked. I think, you know, I can't really tell you. I know that Mr. Martinez and Mrs. Nimsa, his wife, and I know that I can't remember the Saucedos the people that I knew, because by then I had married. I got married in 1963 and I graduated from University of Texas, Texas Woman University in 1964 and so then, when I graduated, I went on to San Antonio, and I had my first daughter over there in 1964 when the Charles Whitman shooting from the tower happened. Okay. And then my I came. Then when Buddy

finished his his turn there in Fort Tim, Houston, that is when we came back to us. It was 1960 like I said, 1968 and I became very involved with the South Austin community, and then I got divorced in 1972- 73 so only lasted married 10 years, and I had three children. Biologically. I raised my step daughter. She was two years old when I married her dad, and then I raised a cousin of mine that I got from Houston, and she was five years old, and she went to Baker and and she's now 59 years old, and she's the mother of my triplets, so and she in a very bad home situation. Her mother was a drug addict, and she was my cousin, and so she's proud to say, she graduated from the University of Texas and became a teacher. She taught at Govalle for a little while and Govalle elementary school, but she didn't stick with it. You know? She decided she teaching was too hard.

**Tracy Flores** 1:22:21

And I wanted to ask you, how do you feel? People who care about palm school, remember the school and the surrounding neighborhood?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:22:30

You know, I got to hear a presentation by Martha Cotera. I don't know whether you all have whether you she did beautiful research on school itself and gave some history that I didn't know. There was a lot of people that showed up from this community. I can't tell you, there was a lot of interest. Where did they it was at the at the Mac, at the at the ESB, at the Mexican American, Mexican American Cultural Center. We had a meeting there, and Martha did a beautiful presentation on it. She had a lot of stats, a lot of data.

**Tracy Flores** 1:23:08

What kinds of things did she share? Huh, what kinds of things did she share?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:23:12

Well, it was about the history, about how it used to be. It used to be that they had a swimming pool there, and then they had, I don't know what else it was she talked. I can't really remember. And I remember that I was there in the front row, and there was a lot of questions being asked, you know, and this was this research that she had done because of the reasons being that they didn't want the school to be torn down or whatever, and that she did mention that it belonged to Travis County, and there were some conflict as to what was going to happen and whatever. And I came to the meeting because of the fact that I was interested in finding out what was going to happen to Palm. And she said it was going to be a museum, and it would be wonderful, because I think there's a lot of things in East Austin, a lot of people that have wonderful things that they could, you know, incorporate in that building.

**Tracy Flores** 1:24:06

What kinds of things are you thinking?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:24:08

Well, you know, some you can talk to Red Garcia, and you can probably find out, you know, because he knows more about this is his community. I mean, I knew about the red and white store. I used to go there. I used to go to the little I used to go spend a lot of time at Cristo Ray church or whatever. But I'm sure that they can. They know more because they lived here. I cannot. I can only tell you that my two

experiences at Palm or being an activist and getting the school scored, as they called it, and I think they and then they've got Dr George Sanchez from the University of Texas to score, it is and then years later, they got the property on on Holly. And first, not Holly, and whatever street it was anyway to make Sanchez element, it used to be the Salvation Army. On that ground, there was a lot of dispute because of that, also because there were a lot of people had to. Uh, you know, it was what they call it, when they had to move people out in order to displace, yeah. So I think they opened up Sanchez in 1976 I'm not sure, you know, but doctor, it was named after Dr George Sanchez, that from the University of Texas, and he became involved, because I remember that buddy and Andy went to Buddy was at the University at that time. I call him buddy. His name is Santo, but he, he, he's, I mean, I wish he, you know, he lives in Virginia, or something like that. I told him, I said, I told my daughter, I'm tired of telling his story. He needs to come down and and, and, and say, You know what he's got to say? Because he was very, he was very instrumental in a lot of the things that happened here and there. Lot of people looked up to him. He was a good leader. He was a very good leader. So and a lot of people minute, the minute, Red turned around, looked at me. He knew who I was he, he knew all about his wife, or whatever. No, he didn't know his wife. But anyway, he so, I cannot really tell you that you need to talk to people from the community, like Anita, containing all of them. They lived here, you know. And you know, another person that knows a lot about East Austin is Modesto Trevino. She was a teacher here at Sanchez. He was very active in the with Cesar Chavez and everything. You know, a lot of those people were okay.

**Tracy Flores** 1:26:29

And then I wanted to also ask you, we've been conducting some research that indicates that the palm school around its closing was in somewhat disrepair, the lack of AC the building falling apart, as well as the challenging of getting to the school due to the newly constructed highway. What do you remember about these challenges?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:26:49

There were challenges because that's when I used to come. At that time, I used to come with extended care, and there was a basement down in there. It was a dungeon. It was a dungeon. As far as I was trying to feel like you're being punished. They were having a class. They were down there. I think it's still there, I don't know. And that was one of the in that article. And I remember that there was a list. The wooden floors were splintered. They weren't taking care of them. The no AC, the plumbing wasn't working right, the windows being open. And, you know, when I 35 got built and whatever. And the other thing was that that was, I remember hearing them complain about, was the fact that the children had to from East Austin cross age 35 to get over here. That was dangerous to them. So, yeah, those those were, those were legitimate. Those were, I mean, and I think that when the I don't know whether the school board, I don't know what happened after, after that, you know whether, how, the process of what, whether the school board said, Okay, we're going to, we're going to, we're going to do something about it, and, and so you know, whether they went back and tried to see if they could fix anything, I don't know. All I know is that the next thing I knew is that that they had was a big, a big victory for us to be able to have the school on that side of ih35

**Tracy Flores** 1:28:15

where the neighborhood was, yeah, did the students walk in groups? Or did they walk with their families?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:28:22

Well probably the families crossed them. I know that Ruth and Ruth had killed I was Victor, her son, Chris, Kelly and Kevin, those four got to go to school. And I'm sure she walked them, because they were very careful parents. They were very good. She was very active in the PTA and she, you know, do fundraisers, you know, for whatever to PTA, you know, schools, you know, do so many fundraisers to buy a bunch of stuff. You know, you know how it is, you know, if so they would do fundraisers and whatever, and they would come over here. But they would have, yeah, they would, I'm sure that they had the parents crossing. I cannot honestly, I was not privy to that. I didn't see it. I moved. When I moved from San Antonio, I lived in third and waller with with Buddy for a while there, and then we moved to the marriage student housing on Lake Austin Boulevard, and not the deep Eddie apartments. It was called the Breckenridge apartments. Back then, there were barracks for married students and and that's when buddy went to was at the University of Texas, and he decided to run for city council, and he almost won, and it was terrible. I mean, they called him a card carrying communist, and that he was in touch with, with Fidel Castro and all kinds of stuff. It was, it was not. It was not. And then when he organized the strike, you know, he was running for city council back then, and and, you know, he had an office down on six street so, and I was teaching at Becker, he was somebody walking to his. Campaign head quarters, threatening with a gun. And my life, somebody came to pick me up in Baker said, you need to, we need to come take you home, because there's been a threat made of what you know, that kind of it was, it was a lot of stuff happening at that time.

**Tracy Flores** 1:30:12

And are you connected to any of the students that you were able to work with at Palm any of the after school students that you were able to no

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:30:21

because they're probably, you know, I, like I said, I only worked in the after school, and it was, I don't know what happened to those students, to be honest with you. I know there was, oh no, yes, there was one that was Pepe and his pepper in America. They were, they did. They went to palm, and then they joined a dance, a folk political group, and they danced for the folk political group that I think Miss Salinas row and Salinas, and then formed a group of dance group here in East Austin.

**Tracy Flores** 1:30:57

Did they start dancing in your group at the after school care. No,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:31:01

no, I didn't do dancing back then. I mean, at backer, I did okay. Not at science, not at not palm.

**Tracy Flores** 1:31:11

And then, um, I wanted to talked a lot about the different schools that you've worked at in including palm as the after school care. What? Um, what did you notice any differences between the schools, like the buildings, or what kinds of things you say about that? Yeah,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:31:27

no. I mean, it was well known. It was, I mean, I was written, but it was pretty well known. The school district would send their teachers that were not very effective. They weren't being effective in western North Austin, they would send them as punishment to East Austin schools. So, you know, I think East Austin Mets and Zavala and Allen, all the schools that were Allison or, I don't know when it was one of the Mets and Brooke. Brooke was one of the newest schools I remember, but you know it was not. Their scores were never outstanding. Of course, you know how they rate schools. I don't know whether they still do that or not, but, but I know that that the one at Brooke, Mr. Gosee, was sent there because he wasn't very doing a good job and whatever. So that's, you know. So it was the quality. There was a difference. It was not, there was no equity. I mean, it was not like, you know, like, let's say Austin High School, their parents were well to do, and they could write a check for \$2,000 to do a computer lab or whatever. We had nothing like that. Here it was, you know, that that just was not something that happened.

**Tracy Flores** 1:32:50

So a difference in leadership curriculum, access to materials.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:32:54

I say access to material. I don't know about the curriculum, because I really did. I only did an after school program. I didn't. I worked at Mets in an after school program during the summer. I did. Worked at Mets during the summer. I worked at the school out in West Austin called Matthew. I worked at St Paul, and then, of course, lender during the summer, I would, I was always working during the summer. It wasn't just and I would take my growth with me to those kinds of activities, yeah. So on the curriculum their daily I mean, I only knew what was being taught at lender. If it was, I don't know whether they were teaching it at Palm at that time. Palm close. When was it in 1970?

**Tracy Flores** 1:33:46

1976. And what were your some of your accomplishments that you are especially proud of?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:33:57

Oh, my gosh, actually, I'm, I am, gosh, just my life has been in a compliment. To be honest with you. I mean, you know, I have no regrets. I've loved everything I've done. I'll tell you what. I still have students that they found me on Facebook. I used to teach a dance called "tinikling". It was a Philippine Bamboo Dance. You know, where you climb the fist? Are they bamboo sticks? Yeah. And they knew, jump in and out and whatever. And we still, I used to do programs at Lin at Linder all the time. And one of my students is a student is living in Arlington, there by Fort Worth, and she found me on Facebook. Says, "Miss Ruiz, I remember we used to do this." And I said, Oh, my God, Cassandra, Cassidy, where our university. And then another, another person lived North Carolina, and she wrote, and she said, "I saw I am, I'm a principal at a school, and I think that dancing is so important. Learning how to folk dance and do all those dances that you is very important also to learning and I" and so she was going to start a program that would I was one of the few PE teachers that liked to do all kinds of dancing. Okay, so I did folk dancing, I did that line dancing, I did perform. We did performances. I taught kids, we had hold hoedowns with touch of Virginia reels the you know, all that I so I feel like my life has been good. Mija, I

cannot. I don't have any regrets. I really don't, you know, everything happens for a reason, and and I'm glad I chose teaching, and I'm glad that I got my experience there at at Palm it was, it was it was a wonderful experience. It was sad sometimes, because, like I said, this particular family that their heads got shaved and whatever, you know, they were so sweet, and they deserve so much more, and there's so much pain. A lot of times when those kids are so, you know, as a teacher and as a human being, you don't need to make their life miserable. You need to do what you can to lift them up, you know, and you can't. That's why I've been about teaching from the get go. I have never, you know, I never really thought about the money, you know. Oh, my God, I need to, you know, whatever. So I think I was born to be a teacher. I, you know. And I, like I said, it's the noblest profession, and you impact so many people in your line that, you know, I was a PE teacher, so I taught everybody in the whole school. So I don't care where I go, I don't care where I go. I will always run in. I have a judge that Judge David Preier. I was at a cafeteria one day having lunch in Lubbock or something like that, and I'm sitting there eating, and I see this leg jeans. And I look up and this tall young man, he says, he gets in. He says, "is that you Mrs. Ruiz". I said, Oh my god, David. He already had gray hair. He was a judge. And he said, Just a minute, he went and brought his little girls, and he had his little girls, and he said, "I want y'all to see meet Mrs. Ruiz. If it had not been for her, I wouldn't have never met your mother." I thought I always told him that everybody had to learn the cotton eye, Joe, that it was un Texan if they did not know how to do the cotton jewel in the Texas Two Step. And I made those points. I said, you're going to thank me for it, because I know that you don't want to touch the girls. You don't want to do that. Oh, that's girl stuff. He went to the Dallas club, and he said he saw his that girl on the dance floor during the cotton eye, John. He says, I can do this. And he got in there, and then he married that woman. He says, Because of you, I said, See, I told you, you know, I still get those stories from a lot of my students, believe it or not, and they always remember me as being the teacher that made him do the cotton eye Joe and the Texas Two Step, you know, everything. So it did, you know, I made a little bit of difference. We do make a difference. We do make a difference. And you're in the right profession, and I think you're doing the I think you're doing the best job in the world. Somebody's got to do the teaching. You know, we really do need to get to our kids. And in this time and age, when we have such a diverse population. You know, oh, my God, it's incredible. Anyway, I agree,

**Tracy Flores** 1:38:05

and I have wanted to ask you one last thing, what does the palm school symbolize to you?

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:38:12

It symbolizes, it encapsulates the lives of the people in that community. That's where they like, like, Red said, it is an encapsulation that's where they got their education. That's where they went to school. Well, most of most of these thoughts in schools, because they were still Metz and Zavala, but Sanchez was, I mean, palm was right there, and I think it was, it was the parents and the families knew that it was important, and they they knew to get involved. And I know that my sister in law did, and I knew that she always talked about the Saucedos and the Martinez or whatever, that they became involved in, everything that was going on in there. So, yeah, it encapsulates the, you know, what parents and families want for their families, you know, to do better than the first you know, like I was sharing with you, every generation has to do a little bit more than the previous generation. My father and mother didn't get an education. My father said, if I can get you to graduate from high school, I'll be doing good. So we graduated from high school, and then, you know, Mark, then our kids went off to college. They

built on what. So we're supposed to leave it better than what we found it. And so, yeah, I still, I still enjoy talking about East Austin and my, my, my relationships with the people. They were very beautiful people there and a lot of those people came from small towns. They moved from Lockhart to Austin, from San Marcos, and they formed that community you need to Modesto Trevino, Trevino did a whole an essay, or wrote a document about East Austin before, before all this happened on the Swedish people, and you know how they all the way down to do for Matthews Elementary School is in West Austin, how Guadalupe church was over there, and how the panderias were on West fifth, and all that kind of stuff. You know, she, she did a whole bunch of study, and that's interesting. That was before I knew about, see, palm was built in 18, what 60, I got that information.

**Tracy Flores** 1:40:43

Yeah, it's in the 1800s I remember exactly the date,

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:40:48

so and it was what a military something or other closed

**Tracy Flores** 1:40:51

in 1976 right? When Sanchez was opening.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:40:57

Okay, thank you. Is that in? Did we talk enough, I don't know. Sorry, it was a platica. It was great. Sounded great. You look you look great. Oh, my God, I didn't get my we feeling No, I was waiting, you know, getting all these and what to wear. No black, no red, no white. And I said, that's all I have, right? No. And what else I mean? And they said, no patterns. And then I said, Okay, I love to wear my . huipiles. Did you all ever see that that's done by PBS? Yes? KLRU, are you Yes? Okay, I was interviewed, and I wore my huipiles and I loved and I like the way I looked. And so I said, I'm gonna wear it again. And then I hear no patterns, no this. And then I said, Okay, so I found this this morning. I said, Okay. And then they would say, you should have brought your huipiles. I was gonna wear my flower shirt too. Yes, yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, you know. But then they said, and so my so I said, okay, my husband's, like, very muted, yeah. Well, this is, you know, this is not my color, and usually I like to, but they said it was going to be a black background. And so I said, okay, so thank you so much. Oh, you're so welcome. It was fun. Now I'm getting hungry. I'm gonna go eat my lunch, and I

**Tracy Flores** 1:42:13

I appreciate what you were saying about your own personal experiences and how you weren't provided access to your your culture and your language and your traditions, and I see that showing up in all that you've done in your life, and you've done a lot, and I'm just honored to be you

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:42:29

You know what? It really surprised me when I walked in, the person that greeted me said, You're a legend. I said, Wait a minute, you know, let's talk about this. I don't understand, because I do get my I meto, metiche, okay, I get into folklorico music into, hey, let's do this gardening and whatever listen i We, we infiltrated The Valley crown Garden Club of Austin, which is the was founded by Clara Driscoll, who saved the Alamo and and blah, blah, blah, and all this. And no mexicanas were in there. No. I

mean, there was all the muck, a muck with gloves and and hats and whatever. And I said, we're going to join that club. And boy, I tell you what. The first Christmas party we had tamales. And, you know, I insisted that the tamales, beans and rice and champurada and chocolate and everybody's going, Whoa, what is this?

**Tracy Flores** 1:43:24

You've been doing this all this is you like your life, and I think beautiful and powerful, yeah, oh, I really do.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:43:29

Well, I'm glad, and not, you know, I thank God every day for every day, when I wake up, I pinch myself, I'm still here. Thank goodness, you know, and I can still do that. I could that right now, I really do, because I'm, you know, it's like, I tell him, I said I'm mas aya que aca. No, yeah. So I have

**Tracy Flores** 1:43:48

to, my mom's like, one day I'll be pushing Daisies.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:43:50

Yeah? My yoga teacher used to say, you need to straighten up, because, you know, you, if you keep going forward, you know, you think you're going to be that n... We're trying to get there so we can get acquainted, you know. But no, she makes us turn back. No, life is good, honey. I have no I, you know, and I love the fact that you I, I really believe in the youth and the young people. I tell, I tell everybody. I said, I'm more I'd give more credit to the kids. I don't ever put them down. I said, The future general it that's, that's where it's at. And those of us who've done something before, I said we need to help and support those young people, not be sitting there criticizing whatever you know I support. And you know all the new leadership I've I support him. I said I'm more power to him, and I'll support him, and put as long as they're doing what's what's right for the people you know. And I say, if you introduce and this, I firmly believe this, you do something for somebody to do because you want to do it, not because you expect something back.

**Tracy Flores** 1:44:49

expect that person to give me something. Yeah.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:44:53

Oh, well, after all, I did, you know, for them, look at how they pay me back. I said, No payback, no pay back. You know, you do what you want. Going to do because you want to do it, and don't be waiting for something in return. You know, just do it because you believe in it. Put your try. I we have to work in our ego, push it aside the I thing, no, no, no. And, you know, it's about

**Tracy Flores** 1:45:12

the collective Yes, absolutely, yeah.

**Velia Sanchez-Ruiz** 1:45:15

Yes, absolutely, yeah. This is a, this is a, you know, it amazes me sometimes when how I believe all of us, how I feel and how I see I see other people, it is a universal thing. It's not just me. So, yeah, so I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna be kicking up, you know, maybe not too high. But.