

Margarita Solorzano Interview Summary
First Person Plural
14 September 2015

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Margarita Solorzano for First Person Plural project - in her office, executive director of the Hispanic Women of Arkansas, Springdale, Arkansas, 14 September 2015 [actual interview location, HWOA conference room]

JB Your background – Mexico

MS 30 years in U.S., 1990 California
From Guanajuato [state], in the center of Mexico, part of family here
My daughters in school, doing well, wanted college
Moved to Arkansas, do better, move here in 1996

JB Family farming, factory?

MS Father laborer, part of bracero program
Some of small towns, tradition of ‘el Norte,’ ‘the north’ to help family

4 min in

We have small business, small parcel of land

JB Drive to education, taught in family?

MS Tradition Mexican family, I was youngest of two males
I wanted to do the things I saw them do
I wanted to do better
When I came to United States, ESL at community college, open enrollment
From these hanging out with people who didn’t speak Spanish
I transferred to university, plan to finish bachelor’s in social work

JB Still family in Mexico?

MS Yes. We go back when can – depends on economy. My daughters' education comes first

JB Your daughters have done well – scholarships –

MS Hendrix College
One masters, in Kansas working on PhD
Other at Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, second masters at Clinton School

JB Their specialties?

MS Spanish literature & community work [respectively]

12 min in

JB Return to you – where in family?

MS Middle- complicated story. I took care of them, then they did

JB Why preferred Arkansas to California?

MS At beginning, sister a truck driver, not traditional, saw lots in travels. Arkansas a small community, affordable, good for kids. Could pay rent, found job. But 99% white, kids weren't happy – 12, 13 in age. I promised we would return to California once the money raised.

24 min in

Dedicated energy to making best, getting involved in community
We didn't have a lot of money, we volunteered at the library
Started childcare at church we attended

JB Old established church?

MS San Rafael, began to offer Spanish services
Social melting place for a lot of us

28 min in

JB How Hispanic Women of Arkansas women met, recognized each other?

MS Some at church, some at library, kept running into each other

JB What did you want to talk about?

MS Some immigrants, not much conversation, interaction in the workplace
Transportation, funding for kids, ESL classes

JB How old daughters when moved to the U.S.?

MS Grade school California, diverse group of friends, overachievers, they were different

33 min in

At home we speak Spanish

JB The idea they might be fully bi-lingual?

MS For me, very important
History- Springdale, Arkansas not prepared for Spanish speaking students
We have been learning along with the community
Now 34-35% Hispanic + Marshallese, African American

JB How you educated yourself about the community?

MS Public radio, reading, talking to people, books about Arkansas, Jacqueline Froehlich [public radio producer NW Arkansas]

38 min in

Then some things make sense
With coming of Latino workers on production lines/construction, initially thought to be temporary
Learning process – we want the best for everybody
We are in the same place

JB How/when move from volunteer commitment to job?

MS 2000 visit from La Raza – small grant to their national conference. After that, beginning –

43 min in

2005 began working on –

JB Several people in office, bank of computers –

MS Mainly for adults - study/resumes/job-seeking/voter registration, etc.

JB Citizen?

MS 2000

JB Daughters?

MS Minors – 2000, different certificate

50 min in

Cinco de Mayo – scholarships - 5 @ \$500
Churches, libraries, newspapers – reach out to Latino families
Application was 5 pages long, now 1 page long, lots of help available
Not full scholarship, but some students say that important that somebody recognized early

JB Cinco de Mayo not celebrated so much in Mexico –

55 min in

MS Not a national holiday in Mexico
Timing French army, American Civil War
Pride of states that have large Mexican populations
Mexico stopped the most powerful army in the world at that time, I don't know explanation otherwise

JB Related activities on your part – Arkansas Public Policy Panel

MS Finished term – motto, public back
I'm from new organization, new population, give voice

60 min in

Finished 2012

Arkansas Adult Education, Springdale Superintendant
Reach out to community
Immigrant voice, more active participation
Politics in Arkansas run by a small group
Why you not more active?
Some questions we were asking
Natural for them to think about us

65 min in

Coming to a new community – priority to provide for family
New generation more involved
Not the same divisions – ESL, not ESL
Efforts to register people to vote
Many born here, more prepared
80% of younger kids are native-born

JB Politics in Arkansas – historically, not a lot of change –
What do you think will change that in 21st century?

MS Demographics changing, immigrant population, them/us

70 min in

What it takes now is to moderate this course in people running for office
Reach out – let them know we exist – pay attention to how they present themselves

JB Several people tried to run – Hispanic. How long will it take?

MS Hard to predict – community vote: Latino vote 5% several years ago. Appeal to everybody

75 min in

JB Your family not particularly traditional – where get the grit?
Dad bracero, other things?

MS My parents separated long time ago. My mother came to the United States. We did whatever
needed to move ahead.
Traditional roles of females & males not the same, males & females work outside the home - and
hopefully share responsibility inside the home for raising kids
We all are learning to live in a different way

80 min in

JB Opportunities decline in this area?

MS Some move out, some move in
A lot of effort - some corporations to educate workforce
HWOA – two-way street, how come to perspective of larger community

Growing up in dysfunctional family, you reach out to a lot of people

85 min in

When I moved to California, my neighbor was an Anglo lady. She was working first shift, I was second shift – agreement to collaborate on childcare. We didn't have great language, our kids did

What our strengths/abilities?

Going back to the history of Arkansas- still very conservative in many ways

90 min in

But big corporations bring people from all over the world – it changes for everyone: services, entertainment, attract, retain workforce

JB Changes in Northwest Arkansas – Crystal Bridges

MS Walton Arts Center, restaurants, concerted effort

JB How opportunities for women -

MS In my time – lot of opportunity, non-traditional places, trucking industry, once 3%, now more women are driving

95 min in

My sister training truck driving now –more women in male-held positions, more women vice-presidents, engineering, STEM
Our community can be wider –

JB Anything want to go back to?

MS Lot of opportunity, progress
Not like Harrison [Arkansas], for example
Trying to help people participate more – poverty, transportation, preschool education

100 min in

JB Immigration reform?

MS We support comprehensive immigration reform: some control at borders, assistance for those educated here, path to citizenship

JB I interrupted your list –

MS We are promoting education & community participation for everyone to succeed

JB Anything else?

102/3 min in – OFF

SECOND FILE, 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

JB Resuming our conversation just a moment later – you began talking about difficulties

MS This all happened 2000-2005: why we were celebrating Mexican holidays. Most of time, hearing rumors about noise

JB Can you –

MS Mexican holidays instead of learning English, some threats
I was able to listen, I asked if ever came to festival. Asked to come
Told about other music, not just mariachis, lot of diversity
Sometimes, people just hung up phone
Over the years, we make a lot of strides
In 2000, national movement on immigration reform, big event in Rogers gave people an opportunity
Expected a crowd of 500, 12,000 came
Second demonstration- a lot more people – this time 15,000

7 min in

PAUSE

JB Did the Latino community organize its own security?

MS We had a plan, police also came to us, state troopers

11 min in

Perception of the community changed on both sides
A lot more pride, security, immigrant community
More respect, other side
We have come a long way, not a natural thing, have to work for it

JB Once discovered a neighborhood petition

MS On my side nothing, only white neighbors, petition to remove us from the neighborhood
One person felt unsafe

JB When did that –

MS Around 2005, I moved to this –
I heard rumors, I never had issues

JB Where do you get the resilience, to not take personally?

MS If going to die someday, not live in fear

16 min in

I will represent every single person, just by being afraid
Some of these situations present opportunities to have dialogue
What do we have in common? Start from there –

JB Not everybody has that capacity –

MS Learning from your life. Our islands safer, undisturbed. Invite others to do their part. Of opportunities to meet others, take a chance, expand your horizons

JB Thank you again –

20 min in

OFF