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A Lifetime Commitment to Giving Voice: An Oral History of Elba R. Sánchez

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*A Lifetime Commitment to Giving Voice:
An Oral History of Elba R. Sánchez*

Interviewed by Susy Zepeda

Edited by Irene Reti and Susy Zepeda

Santa Cruz

University of California, Santa Cruz

University Library

2014

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Interview History

Elba Rosario Sánchez was born 1949 in Atemajac, Mexico, a small town near Guadalajara. She is the oldest of three girls. Her father worked in the cotton mill until an accident injured one of his eyes. The accident sent him to the United States in search of work, first to Chicago, where the family had relatives, and then to San Francisco, where he worked as a bus boy at the Fairmount Hotel. After about eighteen months, he brought his family to San Francisco in 1960, where they lived at Divisadero and Pine, in a Black neighborhood. At the neighborhood elementary school, Elba was one of very few non-Black children; ironically, even as she struggled to adapt to a white-dominated country, in the racial definitions of that time she was considered white. She learned English quickly, and soon became the translator for her family.

Within a few years of her arrival, the social movements of the 1960s altered the national landscape. Witnessing the brutal repression of Black civil rights protestors on television was formative for Sánchez's growing political consciousness and her eventual activism as a young supporter of the United Farm Workers movement. Her early activism with the United Farm Workers boycott on grapes was impressive, particularly since her family did not approve of her protest. This activism grew intertwined with her passion for writing and for language. In the oral history, Elba vividly recalls that her first pieces of poetry were written on small pieces of paper that she then crumpled up and hid in a

drawer. Her first poem, "The Price of Color," was published in her parochial high school's yearbook.

After graduation, Sánchez attended San Francisco City College. There she was inspired by the Chicano activist spirit of several classmates who had been taking courses at San Francisco State College, where the student protests had shut the campus down. But after a semester and a half she dropped out of college to marry and have a child.

In the late 1970s, Sánchez and her husband relocated to Santa Cruz so that her husband could attend UC Santa Cruz. Sánchez became a bilingual counseling aide at Santa Cruz High School. In search of UCSC students who could serve as English tutors at Santa Cruz High, Sánchez met Paco Ramirez, a lecturer in Spanish who coordinated the tutorial program at Stevenson College and Paul Lubeck, a professor in sociology. Both encouraged her to return to college and finish her B.A., which she did, graduating in Latin American studies from Merrill College. At UCSC, Sánchez was a nontraditional student who lived off campus with her husband and her three-year-old child. This experience, plus the class and cultural differences between her and the mostly white middle-class student body of UCSC at that time, led to feelings of alienation and isolation.

Professor Roberto Crespi, Sánchez's advisor in Latin American studies, encouraged her to go on to graduate school in literature at UCSC, which she did, earning her MA from UCSC. Crespi was one of very few Latino professors at UCSC in the early years of the campus. He was also one of the founders, with J.

Herman Blake, of Oakes College.¹ In 1979, Crespi also hired Sánchez as a tutor in the Spanish for Spanish Speakers Program (SPSS), which he had founded, and which was then only in its second year. Sánchez spent the next fifteen years teaching in, coordinating, and directing the multidisciplinary Spanish for Speakers Program. This pioneering, cutting-edge program, incorporated poetry readings, theatrical performances, cultural nights, political discussions, visual arts exhibitions, and small press publishing into its curriculum. Students studied Latin American history and literature in SPSS courses, and honed critical thinking, speaking, translation, and writing skills. Sánchez credits SPSS for higher levels of retention of Latino students at UCSC, and also for the successful careers of many of those students after graduation.

Also while at UCSC, Sánchez was one of the founding and primary editors of *REVISTA MUJERES*, a bilingual literary and visual arts journal published at UC Santa Cruz from January 1984 to 1993. According to their mission statement, “REVISTA MUJERES: In Our Words and Work, Our Vision,” REVISTA was

dedicated to interviews, poetry, essays, as well as visual art work and set a page in the history, struggles, and contributions of Chicana and Latina undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and faculty members...REVISTA was also envisioned and produced as a response to the lack of access in mainstream publications for Chicana/Latina bilingual, budding as well as experienced writers, whose work was unpublished. Its aim was to promote and encourage a community of writers and artists, to plant a seed of reality and creativity.

Sánchez’s commitment to honor the Spanish language, teach Latin American history, and to offer a keen critique of colonization is part of her legacy

¹ For an oral history with Roberto Crespi see *Oakes College: An Oral History* (Regional History Project, 2011) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oakes>

on the UC Santa Cruz campus. This commitment was particularly evident in her fervent dedication to SSSP and the co-production of *Revista Mujeres*. In her oral history, Sánchez describes the organizational work that went into funding, editing, producing, and distributing this groundbreaking journal, which was distributed far beyond UCSC and was the first of its kind published in the state of California. Sánchez locates *REVISTA* in a cultural effervescence of Chicano-Latino writing and publishing in the 1980s and 1990s.² Sánchez recalls that at the time of her earliest publications, there were very few Chicana and Chicano writers who were published.

Sánchez's own development as a writer flourished during that cultural flowering. She participated in a bilingual writer's workshop in San Francisco with several other key Chicana and Chicano writers. She is the author or coauthor of several books of poetry including *Tallos de luna /Moon Shots* (Moving Parts Press, 1992), *From Silence to Howl* (Moving Parts Press, 1993) and is a contributor to many anthologies, including *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Duke University Press, 2003), *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (Aunt Lute Books, 1990). She continues to write and is currently working on flash fiction and children's books.

Elba Sánchez was interviewed in three sessions by Susy Zepeda in several locations in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area. The interviews took place on February 8, 2013, March 1, 2013, and April 5, 2013. The interviews were

² Some issues of *REVISTA MUJERES* were recently digitized by the UCSC Library and are available in full text at <http://digitalcollections.ucsc.edu/cdm/search/collection/p16019coll3/searchterm/revista%20mujeres/or der/title>

A small collection of papers related to the publishing of *REVISTA MUJERES* and to the UCSC organization *Las Mujeres* is available in the UCSC Library's Special Collections Department.

transcribed by Irene Reti and a transcript was returned both to Zepeda, who audited it for accuracy of transcription, and Sánchez, who edited it for flow and accuracy, corrected the Spanish. Both Zepeda and Sánchez added some footnotes. We chose not to italicize the Spanish in the transcript, a political decision that recognizes that italics can “other” Spanish words as “foreign,” or non-normative. This is a style preferred by many Latino/a writers today.

It was an honor and a pleasure to interview Elba Sánchez. Her storytelling was full of heart, joy, and animation. Her oral history offers a sense of her strength, vision, and dedication to forms of resistance.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library’s website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and Interim University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

—Irene Reti, Director, Regional History Project, University Library

—Susy Zepeda, Interviewer, Regional History Project

University of California, Santa Cruz, April 4, 2014

Early Life in Mexico

Zepeda: It's February 8, 2013, and we're here at the World Ground Café in Oakland with Elba Sánchez. Welcome, Elba.

Sánchez: Thank you.

Zepeda: I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project [at the UC Santa Cruz Library], honored to be here for this interview.

Sánchez: Likewise.

Zepeda: So if we could just begin with you telling us a little bit about yourself, where were you born, your family, family history.

Sánchez: I was born in a small town outside of Guadalajara in 1949. I was born at home. I'm the oldest of three girls. I come from a working class familia obrera. My dad worked in a cotton mill. It was the only factory in the town of Atemajac where I grew up. Atemajac was in between the town of Guadalajara and Zapopan. But now, because the city of Guadalajara has grown so much, it pretty much ate up Atemajac. Atemajac is now a suburb of Guadalajara, totally changed. When I grew up, it was cobblestone streets. (laughs) They had a little plaza, and they had a band at the Kiosko on Sunday, and everybody would go down there and do the promenade. (laughs) It was so old, so small-town, now that I think about it. The girls would go one way; the guys would go in the opposite direction. Round and round.

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: There was a whole art to that. But it was nice growing up in a small town. I lived there until I was almost twelve. My dad had an accident and injured one of his eyes. And because of the work that he did at the cotton mill, I don't know what they called the section where he was working, but his vision was really important for the work he did and when he lost sight in his eye, he pretty much lost his job.

That's when he had to start exploring other options. He ended up coming to Chicago in the late 1950s. The only reason he ended up in Chicago was because one of my mother's older sisters was married to a Chicano who lived in Chicago. (laughs) So he ended up there. It was awful for him. It was the first time he was far away from the family. We girls were really small. It was a big hardship, like it is for all immigrant families, to have him be so far away. He was not used to the climate or anything. So he only stayed in Chicago for a little over a year. And he really couldn't handle it. He ended up—he had some friends from the town that we were from. They connected him, they got him a job at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. He was a bus boy; that's where he started.

When he moved to California, to San Francisco, after working in Chicago, that's when he brought us up, three girls and my mom, to San Francisco. This was in 1960, when I first came to the U.S. We all came with papers. My dad, because of his job, I guess they had to produce a letter that said that he was needed in this certain position. Whatever. He applied for visas when he was in Chicago. So by the time he moved to San Francisco, we were able to come with him.

Coming to the United States

I don't really think I knew what it all meant. I think there were parts of me that were really excited, because I remember the year before we came to the U.S. my dad got us a TV. I could watch the Mickey Mouse Club in México. The programs were dubbed so you could watch them in Spanish. It was my first introduction to culture in the U.S., images of what people did here. I was excited because I thought people sang in the street. (laughs) You know, you watch those musicals and you think crazy things. I had these crazy, unreal notions, because I was a little kid and didn't know any better.

It was a big surprise, of course, first coming here. We come from a big family. My mother was the youngest of thirteen kids. And so we had like, oh, my gosh, it must have been about fifty cousins when I was growing up. It was the kind of family where every Sunday we would all get together at one of the aunts' or uncles' houses. There were thirteen uncles and aunts (laughs) so there was plenty of time to get around to visit everybody's house. We would all gather. All the cousins would be playing and my aunts and uncles would be talking. It was a weekly Sunday thing. So all of a sudden to come here and not have any connections, not speak the language, not like the place where you are because it's not where we were, was a really hard, hard experience. I remember we would cry. We would cry around the dining room table. When I think about my mom and dad, I think about how it must have been so hard for them to hear us crying. Because we were like (wailing sound) "I want to go home. I don't like it here." We were just all letting it out.

Zepeda: You and your sisters.

Sánchez: Me and my sisters. We would sit at the table and just wail, you know, because we wanted to go home. We didn't like it. It was too cold. [pause]

When we first came to the U.S., my dad rented a house on Divisadero and Pine, which was the Black neighborhood in San Francisco. But on that street where we lived, on Divisadero between California and Pine, there were three Mexican families besides ours. We all knew each other. We were connected from the town where we lived. So there were at least those connections.

We were sent to the local school. Things were not mixed like they are now. There were some very clear lines between colors. The Black kids in the school thought my sisters and I were white. I knew, I knew I was not white. The first couple of months I didn't know any English at all. I was in the classroom and things were happening. I was considered a white kid in a class of Black kids.

Zepeda: So it was in English.

Sánchez: The teachers were Black; the principal was the only white lady. So it was a segregated school. That's when they had segregated schools. The kids in the yard would want to fight with me and I didn't know what they were saying. I knew they wanted to fight because that body language was clear. They'd call me White Patty. And I'd say, "My name's not Patty." (laughs) I didn't get it. I didn't know.

So there were some really clear color lines. It was scary not knowing the language. But in a way, finding yourself in vulnerable situations pushes you.

Within three months, I had some kind of survival English skills. The more I learned English, the more I realized my dad spoke hardly any English and his English was very heavily accented. My mom didn't speak any English. So I ended up becoming the family translator. By six months, I was doing all kinds of things, calling PG&E, following up on things for my parents because they couldn't communicate directly. Translator became my "official job."

Zepeda: Wow, within six months you were able to—

Sánchez: Within six months I was the official translator.

Zepeda: How did you start to grasp English? Was it through school?

Sánchez: It was through school and through TV. Oh, my gosh. TV was my teacher. I remember when I realized I had to learn it. I was imitating the way people talked, not so much the words but the tone. "I want that." So I'd say (imitates tone). I was going for the tone of it at the beginning, the cadence of the language, versus the real vocabulary, because I didn't know much vocabulary. I came to this country with three words: lemon, car, and house. That was the extent of my vocabulary. I could have at least learned a phrase for how to go to the bathroom. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: I didn't even know that one. (laughs) And how do you connect those three words into a sentence?

Zepeda: That's impressive that in six months you were the official translator calling the official places.

Sánchez: Well, I think it's just survival, you know. Not that I knew everything by then but I was able to handle a conversation and to make inquiries about bills, or whatever it was that was happening.

Zepeda: And did your position as the oldest—you were the oldest, right?

Sánchez: Yes.

Zepeda: —propel you to—

Sánchez: Totally. Well, being the oldest daughter in a Mexican family is a heavy weight.

Zepeda: Yes.

Sánchez: Because from the time that I was nine or ten years old, I was already the designated childcare person. I was already responsible for my sisters if my mom and dad were out of the house. I had to take care of them. It was a lot of responsibility. Being a translator—part of it—I knew that I was helping my parents. They needed help, so I knew that I was doing good. But it was a lot of extra weight on me to have to do all of that. But, you know, it's about survival, too. Everybody pitches in and does what they need to do in order for the family to move forward. My parents needed my help so of course I was going to go in there and I was going to translate, or write the letter, or make the phone call—whatever needed to be done.

Zepeda: Wow, that's powerful. So what was your relationship with writing? Were you already writing in Spanish when you were in Mexico?

Sánchez: Yes. I finished the fifth grade when I was in Mexico. I was going into the sixth grade, so I would have finished elementary school. I had a very extensive vocabulary in Spanish, all my basic math concepts. When I came here, they put me back a grade twice, once when I first came to the all-Black neighborhood school, and later when they transferred me to the parochial school, the same thing happened again. I don't know, people think you're dumb, if you don't speak English. And when my teacher started doing math stuff and she saw that I was doing really advanced math, then she realized it was the language, not necessarily my intelligence. She realized that I was doing much more advanced work in math. But you have to learn. I mean, for me it was having to put English to use almost immediately because I could see the practical use—just at home in my parents' own lives let alone outside. I did what I needed to do to help everybody. I think about it now and I think, wow, that was a lot.

Zepeda: That was a lot.

Sánchez: And I'm very grateful to that little girl, who kind of kept doing it—
(laughs)

Zepeda: Exactly.

Sánchez: She was a courageous little kid.

Zepeda: That's beautiful that you can see that and recognize yourself as courageous in those moments that were difficult.

Coming to Political Consciousness in the 1960s

Sánchez: Oh, my God. When I came in the sixties, within two years this is what I saw on television: cops with huge fire hoses, putting the fire hoses on Black people, siccing dogs on them, people being attacked. I was so scared when I was watching that. I remember thinking, “Oh, my God. They’re going to do that to us, too.” And already realizing, this is not a really safe place to be if you’re a person of color. That was very clear to me. And not having anybody explain that to me, and me trying to figure it out on my own. What the heck is going on here? And then realizing what’s happening here. These people are asking for the right to vote and I’m like, of course they should have that right! Already at a young age I remember thinking, this isn’t right, and we are just as much at risk as they are. Any of us. I don’t know how that all came to me but I was able to make connections. Being witness to this shaped me so much because that’s what made me realize that: first of all, we’re social beings; second of all, there’s a lot of need for us to be involved and to make a change. That was my beginning, my awakening, because it was almost like there was no other alternative. I had to do something, otherwise they were going to come after me too.

So at a very early age I had a consciousness that there was not a lot of justice for people of color here and that people were prejudiced. They were prejudiced about Mexicans. I already felt that. I already knew that. I’m so grateful to my parents because they always instilled pride in us when we were growing up. From my parents we heard, “You’re Mexican. This is something to be proud of.” So when I came to this country, I never had any doubt about who I was. My

identity was already strong. I knew that I was Mexican. I knew my history. I hated Spaniards. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: (laughs) I identified as an Indian. From a young age, I identified early on with the undesirable ones. So there was a consciousness that grew in me as I saw more and I started participating. When I was in high school, my sophomore year, Sister Mary Margaret was the most influential person in terms of my political development and my consciousness. She taught me about César Chávez and the UFW through the Current Events class. I was like, what? I had no idea this was happening. Then I did start seeing people picketing and boycotting Safeway. At that time it was grapes and later lettuce. My parents did not want me out doing any of that stuff. But inside of me, I knew that I had to.

So this is what I did. At that time, if you were going to downtown San Francisco, you had to get dressed up. You could not wear jeans and that stuff, oh, my God! That was unheard of. And my mom and dad always had this thing of, "You're Mexican. Every time you step out the door, people are looking at you. You have to look nice. You're representing the family." So there was this thing instilled in me that I cannot step out the door if I'm not looking right; if I'm not representing right. So I would have to get dressed up as if I was going to go downtown. I mean, you have to wear nylons; you have to wear heels. (laughs) But I'd be going picketing to the farthest Safeway that I could get to on the bus so my dad wouldn't find me. Because my dad shopped at Safeway and I just thought, oh, my God, the worst thing for me would be to run into him with that picket sign.

(laughs). He had already told me, “I don’t want you with these people, Chicanos. I don’t want you hanging out with them. This is not what you’re going to do. No, no!” Because I was the oldest, he’d add, “You’re an example for your sisters. You’re modeling for them. If they see you—” So there was all this pressure, but I knew in my conscience I had to do something.”

My parents just broke my heart. When I said, “Please don’t eat grapes. We’re trying to support the farmworkers,” my mother came home with a huge bunch of grapes and put them on the table, in the middle of the table. This was after I had asked and talked with them. It was so heartbreaking. They loudly stated, “We are not *those* people!” It was about class. I didn’t know all of those things at the time. I just knew that what my mother was doing was wrong. What she was doing was wrong. And furthermore, she was trying to hurt me because I had already expressed my support—explained the farmworkers’ struggle. I kept wondering, what is wrong with you guys? *We are them*. They are us and we are them. I know I am. Maybe you guys aren’t, but I know I am them.

It was a strange time for me because I had to hide all of these beliefs. But I knew ethically I was right. I was sad for them that their consciousness—and I didn’t call it that—later on I did—but I knew that there was a big disconnect for them. How could they not see that we were the same? And little by little, I realized, oh, farm workers versus urban workers. Urban workers who want to be middle class, who want to have this middle-class mentality, do *not* want to identify with the farm workers and the stigma and prejudice that go along with the words. It took me a really long time, but I knew that what I was doing, whether they

agreed with it or not, I was going to have to do. Because I could not live with myself not doing something, knowing and just sitting there.

I don't know if it was Frantz Fanon or someone else that said much more elegantly, "If you're not doing something, then you're a collaborator. You're a collaborator with whatever is happening." I've got to do something even if it puts me against my parents, in conflict with my parents. I tried to be as quiet as possible about what I was doing so that I would not have that conflict.

Zepeda: You said that when you were in Mexico that you were already identifying with Indigenous people.

Sánchez: Oh, I always did.

Zepeda: Was there someone who influenced that or was it through school?

Sánchez: I think it was through school. History has always been my—I love history. My favorite subject. What I remember is the Mexican history books were really graphic. When they talked about the conquest, they talked about Indians being branded just like the African slaves were branded. They were slaves. They'd tell all these horrible stories about the treatment the Indians received by the Spaniards. And I was like pissed, already! Because I knew I was Indian. I was no Spaniard. How dare they come here and do this to our people, brand our people? So I don't know where that came from in me but I knew, I identified with the Indians. I don't remember a specific teacher who taught us that. I just remember seeing the pictures in the history book and being like, how dare they?

How could they? This is just horrifying, I'm not accepting that this can go on. Maybe it was just seeing the picture and knowing instantly who I was.

It was the same thing when I came here and I saw what they were doing to Black people. I was thinking, oh, my God, they're going to do that to us.

Zepeda: Yes. Identifying with it. I know you are a creative writer. So where does writing start to fit into that?

Sánchez: I've always written things, my thoughts or my reactions. I remember when I was maybe eight or nine years old writing things on little pieces of paper and folding them up as tiny as I could get them because I didn't want anybody to read what I was writing. (laughs) And throwing the tiny rolled up piece of paper in the back of my drawer, under my underwear or wherever, so nobody would find it. I have that early memory. I never had a journal, and I never had a notebook when I was living in Mexico.

And then when I came here to the U.S., and I started learning English, it started looking more like I guess what I would call poetry. So I would write and I would even try and rhyme things. (laughs) My first poem was published in our high school yearbook. It's called "The Price of Color," and it talks about racism. (laughs) That was the first time that something of mine was published. And it was like, oh my God. It felt so good to me because it was speaking a heartfelt truth for me. I wanted other people to see this truth. It was a time when there were so many things happening. The sixties were a big pot of bubbling, bubbling, bubbling, bubbling and churning. It just did not stop. It went from civil rights, to the Black Panthers and Brown Berets, to the Chicano-Latino fight for

unionization in the fields, to immigration issues, to third world studies, to women's liberation, anti-Vietnam—I was in all of that.

So something happens when's there's so much stuff bubbling around, and you're hearing all these discussions—it can't help but impact you, too! So you're forced in that kind of a situation into thinking, well, where am I? What am I going to do? How do I align myself? What's the best way to deal with this? I think the times required that. Like I said, even if my family—like, my sister would call me a Commie. We'd sit at the dinner table, "Oh, yeah, you're the communist in the family." They would make fun of me. So I learned I had to speak my piece, whether they liked it or not. They would call me a Commie, or a Black sheep, or whatever it was. I knew I was different from my sisters. I knew I was different from other folks around me. But I didn't know exactly why or how this happened. I just knew that my thoughts were in a different place than other folks. I did feel like, okay, so I'm over here and you all are over there. Okay. That was a little difficult. Sometimes I felt alone.

All through my high school years whatever activities I did had to be hidden. I couldn't even tell my sisters because they would go and fink on me to my parents. They would tell on me. So it had to be just me and whoever else was inviting me to do this or was giving me the information, but no family, because they were not open to it at all. My dad told me, "Yo no quiero que andes con esos chicanos refulufios que están causando problemas." Because he had a prejudiced notion of who Chicanos were, and they were NOT, according to him, nice. They were troublemakers. He didn't want me labeled a troublemaker. I'm sure my dad

was trying to protect me. But for me it was like, what are you talking about? (laughs) We were on very different sides and understandings of our situation.

I don't remember hearing my parents talk about the civil rights movement and what was happening. I have a feeling they probably would consider everybody troublemakers, given what they thought about Chicanos. It would have been helpful, I think about it now, for somebody to sit with me as we were watching TV and say, "Let me give you a little context for this." (laughs) "Let me give you a little historical background." Obviously, eventually I learned all of that history and I realized how important the civil rights movement was in terms of impacting and influencing all the other movements that arose around it. Everybody would get the bug and then everybody was demonstrating and everybody was complaining and everybody was in the streets; it was important!

I stumbled and I went by what my instinct and what my heart told me. I just followed that without really having a context for it, just knowing that, you know what? This is not right and I'm not going to stand for it. I'm going to go down to the Safeway and I'm going to do something. I'm going to hand out leaflets and tell people, "Don't buy grapes. Support the union."

Zepeda: Amazing. So just to get them on record—what were the names of your schools that you went to?

Sánchez: The first school that I went to was Emerson School. We lived on Divisadero, and the school was half a block down. I remember the name of my teacher, Mrs. Anderson. She was a Black teacher. She was so sweet. I had never

had a Black teacher and never had one after her, at least not in grammar school. It wasn't until college that I came across a Black professor.

After one year at Emerson, my parents pulled me out and they put me in parochial school, because they thought I was going to get a better education. So then I went to Cathedral Parish Elementary School. It's not there anymore. And then from Cathedral Parish, my parents kept me in Catholic school and I went to Presentation High School, which was an all-girls high school. By the time I left Presentation High School, actually by my senior year, I was such a nonbeliever. I gave up Catholicism. I was sick of it, sick of the hypocritical stances, sick of the hypocritical church. I was just, like, over it! Do you know what I mean?

Zepeda: Uh, huh.

Sánchez: I was a rebelling senior. I did *not* want to participate in anything. I started realizing a lot of things about Catholic school and nuns and the church, because in our school, for example, all the girls of color were in secretarial courses and all the Italian girls and all the other white girls were in college prep.

Zepeda: Oh, wow!

Sánchez: And nothing hammered the point to me as much as the parent conference that one of the nuns had with my mother, where she told my mother—this was my algebra teacher—Sister Mary Anunciata. I still remember her. She told my mother—because I was not doing well in her class—she told my mother, “Oh, Mrs. Sánchez. I don't know why you're so worried about your daughter. She's going to get married anyway!” My mother, I never saw my

mother turn such a red color. I thought my mother was going to jump up and grab her! (laughs) You could tell my mom was mad. But she handled herself very nicely. I don't remember what she said to the nun but when we were walking out she was fuming, totally fuming. But she never totally explained why she was fuming to me. I just knew she was really angry. The reality was because we were Black or Latinas or Filipinas we were being channeled into non-college prep courses. We were the students in the secretarial classes.

Sister Margaret [was] the only one in that whole four years of experience that really lifted me, and that's because of her enthusiasm with current events and history. That's what I needed to learn at that point. She was wonderful. She was encouraging and she was all for justice and equality and she let that be known to us in the way that she taught and in the things that she taught us. I remember her very vividly. She's one of four or five lone teacher stars in those four years of high school.

I remember liking English a lot; most of my English classes were [taught by] lay teachers, so it was nice because you could explore ideas that sometimes you couldn't with the nuns. I really hated Catholic school by the time I was in my senior year. I'm really glad for the little stars in the sky that helped me to hang in there because I think it was a very challenging time for me, and I don't think I acknowledged it, being a young kid, because things were happening and I was kind of going along, and really, trying to stay my course. There wasn't a lot of support. From an early time in my life I learned to keep information about my activities close to me and to do what felt right, follow my instincts, plug along. I

had to learn to trust my own ethics, what they were telling me, and my own instincts guided me. If it said, this doesn't feel right, then I didn't do it.

And I'm surprised because I spent a good deal of my life pulling the rug from under me by not accepting what my instincts were telling me. Those were the times I got into trouble. During high school, it was just really engraved in me that I had to say something. I had to know what was happening and involve myself as much as I could, to the extent that I could, with my family being—I mean, they had us like this [holds fists tightly]. We never spent nights at friends' homes. That was not done in our house. (laughs) "Why are you going to be at someone else's house? You have your own house," my dad would say. (laughs) That was his logical thinking. We were kept very close to home. I learned if I was going to go out and do something political, I had to lie.

Lucky for me, I started working part time to pay for my school tuition from the very first year of high school. I think I was fifteen or something. First I started—I would help my mom. She had a beauty shop so I would go every other Saturday to answer phones and sweep the hair, whatever I could help her with. But during the week I also worked at the convent to pay off my tuition. I would answer the phones or do whatever the nuns wanted me to do. I was earning a little bit of money and I could tell my dad, "Oh, I'm going downtown to see about buying a coat." Or, "I'm going downtown to whatever—" The fact that I did have a little bit of money gave me a little bit of freedom, a little tiny bit.

Zepeda: Yes, yes.

Sánchez: So I could make my escapes. (laughs) But other than that, it was a very, very controlled house. And because I was the oldest, it was even more so. Because, “No, tú eres la que les estás enseñando a tus hermanas and so there was this really tight hold. So I could only move a little bit but I made myself— (makes sounds of escape)

Zepeda: Yes, you did.

Sánchez: I had to.

Zepeda: Yes. And how did that road of high school then lead to college?

Sánchez: When I graduated from high school, I really didn’t know what I was going to do. Nobody talked to me about college. I had been tracked in secretarial classes. I thought, well, I’ll probably just work. I really wasn’t thinking college at all.

San Francisco City College

However, after I graduated and I continued working part time, somebody said to me, “Why don’t you take an English class? You like English.” So I started taking an English class at City College of San Francisco. And then, that was the time when San Francisco State exploded. S.I. Hayakawa was the chancellor at San Francisco State and students were asking for classes that taught them about their experiences, Third World classes, courses that dealt with our history and our movements in the U.S. Of course, the administration was not going to do that. In response, the students shut down the campus and it got violent, eventually. Students from San Francisco State were coming over to City College, where I was

taking my class. So I started getting to know a couple of Chicano/Latino students.

I somehow connected with the right people, because Rosa Pérez was a student at City College at that time. She was a Chicana, morenita, morenita. She was smart. She was studying; she had a full load. She was on the student council. And she told me, “Why don’t you take more classes. Why don’t you work with the student council? I can tell you which teachers to take.” She started connecting me with a counselor and other students who were adults. Because part of my disappointment in going to City College was the atmosphere or the thinking—a large number of students still had a high school mentality and behavior. And I was just like, this is ridiculous. I’m beyond that shit. This isn’t high school. Take your life seriously!

So hanging around students who were more adult—and they were, they were in their late twenties to early forties. Some of them were returning vets. Some of them were just people who were older, whose thinking was more mature and had a broader life spectrum. Once I started getting to know them, I started taking a full load, and then I ran for student council and I got on student council. But it wasn’t because of faculty or counselors. It was because of Rosa. She was my hero. I would look at her and think, oh my God, I want to be Chingona (laughs) just like her, you know. And she’s still my hero. She’s in the community college district. She was chancellor of Evergreen Community College. She’s just done wonderful things in education, all at the community college level. That’s her. That’s her love. She just happened to be there and I met her. That just turned my whole world around. She was my peer and I loved what she was doing. I

respected and admired her so much. I thought, yeah, I want to do what you're doing. I want to be like you. (laughs)

Zepeda: Yes, yes.

Sánchez: So she was one of those people who was instrumental in my really turning myself around. Because I was pretty lost. I didn't really see college as an option for me. Once that happened, I became fully involved and I really liked it. I really liked what I was doing. I finished a whole semester. It was a lot. I was going to school, doing student council, working.

And then right around that time I decided that I was going to move out of my house. Holy Moly! My mother disowned me. She forbid my sisters to speak to me.

Zepeda: Oh, Elba.

Sánchez: And it was so hard. I was barely—I was struggling to make it because that's my family. And for me to not be able to talk to any of them was like (sighs heavily) wow! My mother was mad. You don't do that. The only time a woman leaves her family's house is if she's married. So you're going from your father's house to your husband's house. It was like, no! I want to know myself somewhere in the middle of that, you know, somewhere in between. You know.

For them it was, *El qué dirán?* What are people going to say? It always came down to that. "What are people going to think? What are people going to say?" I would get to the point where I'd say, "I don't give a shit what people are going to think or say."

Zepeda: Right. (laughs)

Sánchez: It's my life! But they were from another school. So that was a constant clash. I clashed, but I would always back down. I was not the kind of person that would slam the door. That wasn't me. I always hated conflict, I have to say. I hated conflict. So I would bend. I would bend and I would at least let them think I was following their rules, even if I wasn't, just because I felt that was the only way for me to be able to do what I was doing.

When that happened, when she cut me off from the family, it kind of threw me off. It made my life even more challenging. And then this guy started chasing me and telling me he liked me. Ach! I made a terrible mistake and fell in love with him. And then that totally threw me off— So I pretty much gave up school, where I was going. I dropped out of the spring semester. I finished the fall semester but I dropped out by spring. I wasn't going to school for a while. I got with this guy and we ended up living together, which was—can you imagine? Oh, my God! Now my name was really mud. (rubs hands together and laughs) I had given up on talking to the family because that was already out the window.

But after living together for less than a year, he asked me to get married. "Well, okay, we'll get married." All of a sudden, my mother was talking to me again but I have to say by that time I had lost so much respect for her that when she started talking with me again it actually didn't mean that much to me at that point. I thought, how hypocritical. I was really upset with her and, I don't know, kind of tired of that whole way of punishing your child. I know that my parents were

trying to do the best that they could but there were some things that I thought were just—but you know, that’s just the child in me. (laughs)

Zepeda: Yes. Hmmm.

Sánchez: (laughs) They are who they are and they had their own forces that shaped them. So I can’t be really down on them. That’s what they knew. They were trying to do the best by what they knew. But we did have our conflicts. And that made it really hard for me at some point to be respectful, or have a relationship. Of course, I loved them, but I was somewhat distanced too because I had seen how they would treat me if I didn’t agree with them. So it was hard. But like I said, I did not like conflict, especially with my mother. My mother was a very strong woman, very opinionated. She had her ideas.

Zepeda: No. And at this time was your father still working in the hotel?

Sánchez: He worked at the hotel until about 1965, about five years after we arrived. Then he got a job as a janitor. That was his job for the rest of his life. My mom never worked in Mexico. My parents never finished school. My dad finished the fourth grade. My mom finished fifth grade.

My dad was pretty much a self-taught man. He loved—maybe that’s where my love of history [comes from]—he loved history. He would read on his own. He would read encyclopedias, history books, biographies. He was an eclectic person. When it came to music, he loved ballet, classical music; he loved the music of pachucos, the zoot suit music, and big bands of the forties, romantic trio Los Panchos music. We would hear all of that. My mom sang rancheras. So I had all

these different kinds of music when I was younger. Early on, my ear started becoming educated about all kinds of music, and other musical expressions. That was really nice. I really appreciated that from my dad. He always wanted to share what he was reading or what he was learning or knew about.

My mom never worked until we came to the U.S. All the time that we lived in Mexico, even when our family struggled with one salary, with my dad's salary at the factory, she never went to work. When we first came here, it was clear that we were not going to make it unless my mom worked. My dad's salary as a bus boy was really not going to do it for us. I mean, they had three growing girls. So my mom started working at a maquila sewing because she didn't speak English nor did she have any work experience. Of course, that didn't last very long. She hated it. My mom felt like she was being humiliated and treated like an "animal" every day. "Working in those places is horrible," she'd tell us. "They call you names. You have no rights. You are totally exploited." She had never had that experience. I remember her crying. She'd say, "I have never been treated like this. I hate this place! I'm not going to work here. I have to learn English."

My mom was very motivated. I have to say that is a wonderful example that she gave me. She was extremely motivated. She wanted her dignity and she wanted to be treated like a person. She worked at the maquila and then signed up to learn English after work, at night. And then once she learned English, she decided she was going to become a beautician. So she'd be going to work at the maquila and take cosmetology classes at night.

So all that time, I was the mom. My dad was working at night. He was the house husband in the daytime and then he would work in the evening at his janitorial job; my mother would work all day and then go to school at night. So when we sisters got home from school, I was in charge, until my mother got home at 10 o'clock at night. And that's how we did it.

Once she learned English, and started cosmetology school, she decided she was going to open up her own beauty shop. Her sisters were like, "Huh. *Estás loca,*" you know. "*¿Tú quién piensas que eres? Si acabas de llegar.*" But my mom did it, and she was like, "Oh, yeah?" She was a decided woman. If she set her goals on something, she did it. She opened up her own beauty shop about six or seven blocks from where we lived. After a year or two of being in business, she was earning much more money than my dad was. Of course, with both of their salaries, our family was doing much better. My dad and my mom decided to buy a house in the city. But it would have never happened had my mom not put in as many hours and time and energy into her own development and training.

My parents were doing this all for us. It's not like they were going out to work and spending the money, or getting drunk. I have to say I'm lucky my parents were not abusers of alcohol or physical abusers. They were all about bringing up their family and their kids and doing the best they could for us. My mom had to sacrifice a lot to do what she did. Of course, it was everybody. Everybody sacrificed. But she was the prime mover of her own change in her existence. What a wonderful—I mean, when I think about it, I think of the model that she was. She didn't know the language, so she learned the language. (laughs) That was not going to stop her.

Zepeda: That's powerful.

Sánchez: Yes, for me it was a wonderful lesson. It was probably the best lesson, to be able to observe that, and to see what she was able to do to change her life. I have to say, through that process, through the process of her earning more money and everything, she definitely gained more confidence in her womanliness and in her role because I think she came to realize she was really the prime financial backbone for our family. And talk about switch! You know? Not that my dad would be mad at her or anything. They had a good relationship at the beginning. But she would get mad at him because at one point he was offered a position to be a supervisor of the other janitors. And he did not take it. She was so angry. She said, "Don't you want to improve yourself?" And he said, "You know what? This job is not worth it. It comes with a lot more responsibilities, very little pay, and I don't want it."

Zepeda: I'm wondering if you want to take a little break?

Sánchez: Sure.

Zepeda: Okay, so coming back in to our interview, I want to ask you about how learning English shifted your relationship with Spanish. And also, starting to go into how you arrived on the UC Santa Cruz campus.

Relationship with English and with Spanish

Sánchez: Oh, yes. English—because Spanish was my first language and Spanish was already strongly embedded and was a part of my young, creative, spiritual, intellectual self. To this day, multiplication tables, simple division, all those kinds

of things I learned in México, I do in Spanish. That's the first thing that comes into my mind, Spanish. I don't do those things in English, because I learned these in Spanish. English never took over my expression because I am way too proud of my language to give it up; English could not possibly take over. It could only be in a balance with Spanish because that was what my life was already. I was doing translation, going from one to the other, pretty much all day long.

Spanish came first. That was my mother tongue and I would put that above English. Even as I grew older: Spanish and then English. English was reality and survival. Spanish was—and this also, I think, is somewhat reflected in my work, with poetry anyway. A lot of the poems I've written that had to do with memories of Mexico, experiences in Mexico—those poems were born in Spanish. I noticed that when I got angry, the poems came out in English! (laughs) I was like, well, this is very interesting.

Zepeda: (laughs) That *is* interesting.

Sánchez: But that's kind of how it breaks down. Except now I've started working on fiction. I haven't written poetry in about two years. I went through a period of—well, we can get to that later—but I stopped writing poetry and now I'm working with fiction. I taught a flash fiction class at Holy Names University. And that just got me going. I thought, I'm going to do a flash fiction story. Are you familiar with flash fiction?

Zepeda: No.

Sánchez: Flash fiction is very, short, short stories. It's anywhere from 500 to 2500 words. That's it. So you have to tell your story in a very compact [form]. But you know what? I found there's something really liberating about that. (laughs) Because it has a very determined beginning and end. You have to cut it off. And so with poetry, what I did with poetry is—first of all, I don't like long poems. Because I think you forget what the poem's about. You remember little bits and pieces but you don't really remember the unifying theme because it's too long. So my poems have always been short, brief. I try and compact them as much as I can so that they're just a little mouthful and you go, oh, okay. (laughs) Because if it's too much you will not be able to digest it. So that's how I think about it.

I want my readers to be involved and engaged readers. I don't care for lazy readers. (laughs) I'm sorry, but you get so much more out of it if you're engaged. If you don't see any reason to engage, then don't bother. I think that sometimes that happens with people who are not willing to educate their ears or their eyes. There is a certain kind of education that needs to take place when we are reading literature that is introducing us to a whole language, a whole culture, a whole other world and reality—we need to be somewhat “educated” in that cultural matrix. We need to be a little bit more patient. We need to reread to make sure we understand. That's the kind of reader that *I* want. I want people to go, “What? Wait, I need to go back again. Did she really say that?” (laughs) You know?

Zepeda: (laughs) Right.

Sánchez: Because it's more thoughtful; the process is more thoughtful.

So English, for me, what's happening with my stories is, I started out with a lot of Spanish, one little flash fiction story and tons of revisions I've made on it now. As I went back and revised and revised, there was hardly any Spanish on the first page. And I thought, it's missing something for me. So I'm trying to pepper it as much as I can with what I feel is me, or feels like me. I got a rejection letter and I thought, where's *Revista Mujeres*?

Revista Mujeres came to be at an orientation reception for Las Mujeres—it was actually a reception at the beginning of the year. Las Mujeres organized a reception for all the Latina and Chicana students on campus as a way of connecting with each other, como mujeres. At that very meeting, one of the graduate students came and said, “You know, I'm really frustrated. I don't know what to do. I've tried to get my work published but it's rejected over and over again because it's got “too much Spanish,” or it's “too ethnic,” or it's not this or it's not that. But it's really about rejecting even the way that we present and think, as being different.” The faculty and the graduate students in the group, everybody agreed that this was a major challenge for them. The Chicana/Latina faculty and the graduate students, as you know, need to publish to survive in academia.

So we thought—this is how bold we were—we thought, “Well, there's nothing out there! We're going to make it.” (laughs) And that's how *Revista* came, because we wanted to get our work published. We figured once we were publishing people might be more open. We were trying to break down the doors and make a space, make a space for writing and publishing for Chicanas and Latinas. That's what forced us to start thinking about *Revista*.

Zepeda: And that was in what time frame?

Sánchez: That was in the late seventies and eighties.

Zepeda: So at a time when it was needed, there was very little.

Sánchez: Oh, there was very, very little! I mean, I'm so grateful. During that time, late 1970s, and then in the eighties, when people started catching on, certain people started catching on that this [writing by Chicanas and Latinas] was a nascent literature that we need to support, then publishers were asking for material from Chicanas and Latinas. At least at my level, they were. They wanted poetry. They wanted to publish us. It was a very brief period when the doors started opening a little bit. And of course, wonderful people like Gloria [Anzaldúa] and the women from Kitchen Table Press—I mean, the early, early *mamás* for us, our models for printing and publishing—they were working at it too! Just like *Revista Mujeres*, I am convinced that Kitchen Table Press came together because of the difficulty of publishing feminist work.

And then there was a whole talk of, “Are we going to publish in English? Are we going to publish in Spanish? Is it going to be bilingual? Who is the audience?” There were all these questions that came out. We agreed, from the very beginning, of course it's going to be bilingual. If people want to do something totally in Spanish, we're going to publish it. If people want to do something totally in English, we're going to do it in English. If they want to do Spanglish, we're going to do Spanglish, because that's real and we have to honor it. This is the way that people speak. Because there are those linguists that are so classist, “Well, hablan español chicano!” There's always been this *menosprecio* because

it's not the standard. And that's a lot of what we did in Spanish for Spanish Speakers, is, "Lávensela cabeza" This is classism. This is linguistic classism, elitism, and we're not going to accept that. (laughs)

Zepeda: That's powerful.

Sánchez: We're *not* going to accept that. It is *very* powerful because it's critical to legitimize a regional language that is a genuine expression born of reality—I mean, talk about Freire. Freire talked about people using valued words that define their reality. And that's what Spanglish is for people. Spanglish defines a reality. Talk about living between two worlds, living between—all the racism, all the phobias that come up, immigrant phobia, the homophobia, anti-women—all that.

Sometimes you can't translate things. Sometimes you say something in Spanish and no matter how great a translator you are, it doesn't have the same flavor or meaning in English. That's just what happens with languages, the reality of languages. So it's really important that we express ourselves exactly in the language that feels true to us given the situation or real context, *el ambiente*, that is real. Because otherwise it's not working. It's not real; it's not you. It's not genuine.

Zepeda: Right, it's not capturing—

Sánchez: Exactly, the reality. I love my Spanish. There are some things that when I say them in Spanish I can taste them. I can touch them. You know, the whole thing just comes alive. The same thing happens with English too. I've learned

that there are some expressions in English that are so—like, they just describe exactly—and you can't translate those into Spanish either. So both languages have their complexity, their many layers. I think it's wonderful to respect, and go, whoa, yeah, that's a *great* word. (laughs)

Zepeda: I love that.

Sánchez: But for me, because I had a very strong identity, language was never an issue, either. I knew that my Spanish was so valuable and so beautiful that it expressed for me very emotional and very memory-driven kinds of writings and that those have their place, too. They're very nostalgic. Then English comes in (slaps hands together) and hammers the reality. (laughs)

Zepeda: Earlier you mentioned starting at community college and then leaving that space. So then how did that transition into—

Sánchez: Mm. UC was kind of an accident. When I moved down to Santa Cruz in the late 1970s, it was because my then-husband was going to school at UCSC. That was the only reason I found myself down in Santa Cruz. When I first came to Santa Cruz, I did not think of going to school. Even though I had just had this fabulous semester, semester and a half, I did not think of school, I think maybe because I didn't feel prepared, for one.

Working as a Bilingual Counseling Aide at Santa Cruz High School

I started working at Santa Cruz High School. I was a bilingual counseling aide. But what happened was they didn't have a full-fledged counselor who spoke Spanish. I remember one counselor who, because he didn't want to pronounce

the students' names in Spanish, he would change their names into English. I would go to him and say, "That's *not* his name. His name is— Can you say that?" He was being disrespectful and racist and horrible with the students. That made me mad, so mad. I was doing the work of the counselors but not getting paid as counselor and worse, I had no real power to help the Mexican students.

I just thought, you know what? This sucks. I don't want to be a party to this. If I want to do counseling, I want to have my own credential to counsel and to really be effective, because I'm not being effective right now. I don't have any power. I have no way to change people's paths or help clear their path. Part of my work at Santa Cruz High School was to get tutors from the university to help our students because they were in classes just like I had been, where they didn't know what the hell was being said in class. So they would spend a whole semester not understanding English, not learning anything. Classes were crowded and they didn't have enough ESL classes—they had maybe one or two at the high school, so high school students were placed also in the adult ESL classes.

So I went to UC to look for tutors. They had a tutoring program out of Stevenson College, and Paco Ramírez, who was a Spanish lecturer, was the coordinator of this tutorial service. So he and I got together and identified students from the university who could come down and help students at the high school. That's how I first started finding out about UCSC. Paco and Paul Lubeck, I don't know if he's still there, he was in sociology—Paul Lubeck was another person who really encouraged me. He started to say to me, "Why aren't you at UC? Why aren't you going to school?" I said, "I don't know if I have enough credits." Then

he connected me with people on campus. He told me, “Go and talk to this person in EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] and see if they can help you.” I started looking into it.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz as a Student

Eventually, I was admitted. I was a Special Admit student because I didn’t have enough units to be accepted as a junior transfer student. So I was going to be kind of watched for a while (laughs) but I was able to get in, and that’s how I started going to UCSC. Paul was very encouraging in that way. So once I started making the connections with people up there, the EOP office was very helpful. They helped me through the whole process of admissions and through the whole Special Admit process.

Once I was accepted, I started going, but it was a really different experience for me than for the other students, in the sense that I was married and I was living off campus. I had a three-year old child and I was working part time. But doing all of those things did not allow me to participate on campus as other students did. I missed a lot of the connections that students make when they’re living on campus. I wasn’t able to do a lot of socializing with a lot of other students. I was a commuter student, not really connected with the activities on campus, and really not much time because I also have a family.

Another challenge was my fear, my own insecurities about my academic background. I kept thinking, God—what am I doing, you know. I don’t know what the hell they’re talking about. And so there were a lot of things that felt like that for me. Maybe this wasn’t the right place for me. Maybe I hadn’t done

enough preparation. Maybe I wasn't smart enough. You know, all those things. I was confronting myself. I would sit in class and profs would be talking—and I'd be writing down all kinds of words that I'd go home at night and look up in the encyclopedia so I would at least have some basic understanding of the topic, because I had not studied that. Mostly, especially at first, I felt a lot of huecos—spaces of a knowledge-base that I had no experience with. There was a lot of extra hustling that I had to do.

The same thing happened to me in graduate school because I went from Latin American studies into a literature PhD program, not really having had literature as a major as an undergraduate. So when I came into it, it was like, oh, there's this whole world of literature out there I wasn't familiar with. Even a lot of the vocabulary, I was not familiar with. So I was doing the same thing, going home and writing notes and trying to catch up. Things that were so obvious to other people were not to me, because I didn't have that in my background.

Zepeda: And how did you choose Latin American studies and later literature?

Sánchez: I chose Latin American studies because I felt like in Latin American studies there would be an opportunity—there was no Chicano studies [at that time]—and I felt that at least through Latin American studies I would be able to explore my Chicano roots and the history of Chicanos through that process, through that medium. I felt that eventually I would find people I could work with. So that's why I chose Latin American studies.

And then when I went into literature—it was all about necessity in my life—because I had already worked a full year, my senior year I had already been

talking to Professor [Roberto] Crespi the year before about Spanish for Spanish Speakers (SPSS). The program's first year was my senior year, that's when he hired me to start working in the program as a tutor. So that's how I got into literature, because literature was the only MA that I could do without going away. By that time I had two kids, and I was divorcing my husband, and I did not want to leave Santa Cruz. I wanted to be near my kids. And Roberto Crespi says, "Just do literature. Just go in, pretend you're doing the PhD, and get out when you've got your MA. You'll be able to teach [in SPSS] with your MA. You don't have to go anywhere."

I'm so grateful because he told me about that option. They didn't talk about it in literature. They don't want you to get the MA. You get the MA along the way to the Ph.D. But for me, that wasn't going to work. I just needed to get the MA so I could get out and do what I needed to do. So that's how I ended up in literature.

Zepeda: So when did you have your children?

Sánchez: My daughter was born in '73. So she was born before I even started school.

Zepeda: Wow. So you started school with her.

Sánchez: Yeah, it makes it really hard when you're a parent, and you're doing school, and you're working, and you're not living on campus. Undergraduate living is a whole other world. That was not my reality. My daughter was already a couple of years old when I went back to school. And then my son was born in '77. Children made my student life a little bit different than other students.

Zepeda: I remember you mentioned that you did oral history as your senior project for Latin American studies, so I wanted to ask you about that.

Sánchez: Yes. In my junior year, I met up with a couple of other students—we were all oral history buffs. We thought oral history was the original voice of the people. So we were supporting each other in our projects. There was this guy who was really into it and doing this really interesting project on workers from Michoacán and the whole immigration cycle for them, and how that was impacting their families and their towns. Because at that time, I don't know if it's still the same, but when he was doing his research, he found that there would be entire towns, little small towns in Mexico that all of a sudden there would be no men around during certain parts of the year. And it was because they had all migrated and were working over here. So that was his project and we would talk about his project.

Immigration has always been an important issue for me, being an immigrant myself, so I wanted to do an oral history of a family that was from the capital in Mexico. I didn't want to do my own because I thought it was too close. I thought, oh, God, no. So I met them [the family from Mexico City] when I was working at the high school. I met their family when I was the bilingual counseling aide. They were really sweet and we just clicked. Eventually I asked them if they would mind being a part of my project and they were great! So I conducted a study of their immigrant experience, through oral history, and some of what they lived through before they came to the U.S. Oral history has always been such a unique, and for me, important and powerful way to relate history. It was really

good, because among us there was this love for the same thing. Basically, we were supporting each other and shared tips about interviews and everything.

Zepeda: So you're saying that students were your support group. So would you say that during your time at UC Santa Cruz—and you were saying that you were a nontraditional student and you had these other ways of being there—would you say that you got a lot of your support from other students, or did you have mentors who were really significant? Where did you find your support? And then also the climate of Santa Cruz.

Sánchez: (laughs) That's a whole other story!

Zepeda: That's a whole other story. Maybe we'll go—

Sánchez: Yes, let's talk about the mentors part. Yes, I think the students were, we were our own best supporters and mentors. Some of us had more experience than the others. Faculty in Latin American studies—I respected Roberto Crespi. A lot of the other faculty, not just in Latin American studies but throughout UCSC, were too busy doing their research to spend time with the students. A lot of undergraduate students and even graduate students worked with me later on because their own faculty advisors were not available to them, or were not giving them enough feedback, or were not really being supportive. I found that myself.

So amongst ourselves, the people that we knew that were doing a similar project—we were helping each other finish, complaining about—oh, my God, the transcribing!—all this work, because we were in the thick of the project.

My advisor was Roberto Crespi. A lot of people didn't like Roberto Crespi. He was a Trotskyist. He would tell you exactly what he thought of you, and more. (laughs) But you know what? He made me work so hard in his class and I learned so much from him. And that's the kind of teacher I respect. I respect someone who makes me work for my learning. And not only that, I'm proud of the work that I did. That's an important feeling to have as a student, and to learn as a student.

Our first class—he was doing an advanced syntax class in Spanish. And I thought, oh, I want to learn grammar in Spanish—because I felt really good about my language but I knew that I hadn't studied it since fifth grade and there was this vacuum in between. I thought, I need to study; I want to know all about the grammar. I remember I turned in the homework. And it would come back—he corrected in red. It literally looked like a bloody pulp. It was just like, oh, God! I'm in serious trouble here, bleeding, bleeding. (laughs) So my thing was, okay, next time I turn in my homework, it's going to have less blood. So I would work really, really hard to get what I was supposed to get so that my next homework wasn't as red. And man, I never worked so hard in my life as I did in his classes.

I also liked him because he was such a Trotskyist and because he told it like it was. He introduced me to a lot of writers that I never would have found. Oh, maybe I would have found them. I read [Franz] Fanon, [Albert] Memmi's *Colonized and Colonizer*. All the anticolonial literature that there was to read. History books. Marx. I got into Lenin. I got into Trotsky. Just all kinds of— And they made sense to me. I was like, yes! These guys are talking to me. This *speaks* to me. And other things did not. But he opened up a whole world.

Unfortunately, I did not find any kind of support, or that kind of support, or people who made me work as hard as he did. I came across a lot of faculty who, overall, were not a supportive presence for me. A few people were. And they were not people who worked in my field. For example, Aída Hurtado—I love her. She’s wonderful. She’s been very supportive, always, from the very beginning. She came as faculty and just took all of us into her heart. She’s so charming and wonderful and sunny and funny. Hard working. Has her head screwed on right. People like her. I love her. She’s done so much for Chicano/Latino students and staff. And then there’s other people—they come, do their thing and that’s it. They’re not interested; they’re checked out.

When you’re an undergraduate student, sometimes your own peers, I think, are your best support because faculty don’t give the kinds of hours that they need to give to the undergraduates. And if you don’t have a good connection with a lecturer or a grad student, you pretty much are lost. At least that was my experience when I was here. UC may be good at recruitment but their record for retention of students of color is pathetic.

Zepeda: That makes sense to me, standing where I am. And I wonder, just to go back, were the other students that you were connecting with also Chicano/Latino. Was there an identification?

Sánchez: No, they weren’t necessarily all Chicano/Latino, but they were all Latin American studies majors and there was a sensibility. For example, this fellow that I was talking about that was going down to Michoacán every year, was very, very sensitive and very respectful, and the way that he spoke about his

findings made me trust him. I thought, this guy is good. He's genuine in his work and he's respectful of the people that he's working with. And he's understanding that maybe he inhabits some ignorant spaces and he's willing to fill those in slowly, in the process of his work. So all of the students that we worked with—there were maybe four or five of us. And I would say half of us were Chicano and half of us weren't. Larry was not Latino and then there was a mexicana, a woman, Martha Moreno, I think was her name. They were both wonderful. We just hit it off. The fact that we were all doing oral history was what got us together.

Zepeda: That was the glue.

Sánchez: Yes. It really was.

Zepeda: So I want to ask you a little bit about the climate of UC Santa Cruz. I'm curious, because you were telling me about your high school years and being super political and being out there and finding your way to doing that work, going to the Safeway, and also the political climate of the time. It seems like that might have come with you in your time at Santa Cruz and influenced the way that you were moving in the world at that time.

Sánchez: Yes, my—I don't want to say activism—but my early involvement and my early wanting to learn more, wanting to make a difference, I think is something that has followed me everywhere.

In Santa Cruz, one of the many things I noticed when I started teaching is that the second year, the sophomore year, is the hardest year for undergraduate students.

The second thing I found out is that undergraduate students are looking for something to ground them. Because the experience up at UCSC is so foreign. I mean, most of my students in Spanish for Spanish Speakers were from LA, urban kids, kids from *barrrios* where they had helicopters flying overhead at all kinds of hours of the day and night. They would tell me, "I can't sleep at night. It's too quiet. I need to hear the traffic. I need to hear the helicopters. I need to hear the sirens."

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: This is what they grew up in. They came from Garfield High School, most of my students. Most of the population that they were recruiting from was from the LA area, Southern California. So most of the students in Spanish for Spanish Speakers were coming right from that urban area. This campus was such a foreign place to them. It was like a country club. I would say to them, "It's important for you guys to do community work." But then some of them would get so much into community work, they forgot the academic part. So I would say, "You can't do that. What you do is you use the work that you are doing out there as a way to fortify what you're studying in school. Look at what you're learning in school and try and apply the models you're learning, to what you see out there. Do those models work in that community's reality? Is that *really* working? Is that *really* how it is? Be analytical, critical; start looking at what you

are doing and seeing how you can connect it academically, whether it is to make your work stronger, you need to expand your own knowledge so that you can do a better job. But you have to have a balance between academics and community work.

I think having that grounding, doing some of that community work, really did help a lot of those students to sustain themselves, because they were missing that important part up at UCSC. It's so different when all you're involved in is: books, books, classes, books; classes, books. That's really different for a lot of them; they're used to doing family and *barrio*, community and school stuff. Without that—I don't know what happens, but it destabilizes the student if they're not doing something that they believe in.

I really, truly think that that's a part of an important process for young Latinos and Latinas; Chicanos and Chicanas in the academic setting. They have to not forget *why* they are there, how they got there. The reason why they're there, is that everyday work, what they confront in their communities, what they see the community going through. That's what helps you keep going. That's what helps you to remember *why* you are here *and* how you got here. I always encouraged my students to do that.

When I was in Santa Cruz, there were all kinds of demonstrations. There was the anti-apartheid movement, in which I got involved as faculty because I felt we had to do it. We got arrested in our institutional robes. When they had the strike

of all the cannery workers in Watsonville, oh, my gosh.³ We were down there. We got arrested. I got arrested with about twenty students; most of the students were from our classes. That activism was always a part of us.

And for me, it was grounding. You've got to keep grounded. This is your community. Your community is not necessarily the one where you live. You have to be flexible enough to open yourself to all communities of need. It can't just be Chicanos all the time; it can't just be your gente all the time. You need to learn from all kinds of gente. And you need to be open to see that your contribution is much broader. We have to be multicultural. We have to be multiethnic. We can't just be nationalists. That's not the way to go. I learned that, too. Nationalism—it got warped in the Chicano movement. So we have to be much more open than that. We cannot be narrow-minded.

If I can impart some of that *conocimiento* to a young person, I hope that it makes a difference in their life, too. And my encouraging them—"Come down and picket." (laughs) It's because I felt like they were going to learn something or *remember* something. Sometimes we get out of our context and we start forgetting. Danger, danger. So a lot of them would come back and go, "That lady reminded me of my mother." And I'd go, yes!

Zepeda: Was it mass arrests? Is that why that arrest happened?

³ September of 1985, over 1,500 Teamster-organized cannery workers walked out on the two largest frozen food companies in the United States — Watsonville Canning and Richard A. Shaw Frozen Foods. The strike lasted eighteen months and was a defining moment in the growth of Latino political power in Watsonville. See <http://www.elandar.com/back/www-oct95/andar/cover/cannery.htm>

Sánchez: What happened was Watsonville for many years was so oppressed. Watsonville is *mexicano hasta las cachas*. The power was all in the hands of a few whites who had lived in the town for so long. They had the political power. They had the financial power. They had all the power. *Y ahí está la pobre gente mexicana, como siempre*; here they were the farmworkers, cannery workers, middle managers at most. Nobody represented them in city council meetings or in their own unions.

Big things happened when the union, when the women went out on strike. First there was a change, a shift, because Watsonville was a cannery town. All its life it had been a cannery town. Maybe not so much now, but for the longest time it's been a cannery town, dependent on labor of Mexican immigrants, mainly. When the Mexican women—because it's all women in this union, in the canneries—98 percent of the labor is women, very humble women, *todas mexicanas*, they started getting upset because there were conditions in their workplaces that nobody was paying attention to and they were sick and tired of them. And they started going to the union meetings.

But the union did not have translators. It was like this old fart guard of the union *no se movían para nada* and the people, the *mujeres* were sexually harassed at work, they had no breaks—the usual stuff. When they started going to the union hall, and there was nobody to represent them, they started getting upset. There was this young guy, Joe Fahey, who was also in the union. He started saying that what the women were complaining about needed to be heard. He, with his broken Spanish, attempted to translate for them so that they could have a voice. Then the rift, the conflict started getting bigger because the old guard started

being threatened by the fact that this young dude was now helping the Mexican workers state exactly what was going on. Now it was being done in English! (laughs) So the union started fighting back. The old guard was basically going to get pushed out. The women were on strike for nineteen months. You need to read up on that. It is *such* a heroic, heroic labor movement! By women.

Zepeda: Powerful.

Sánchez: Powerful, powerful. So they were able to—oh, I got emotional—(crying) they sacrificed so much. What a wonderful model. I think they changed the face of politics in Watsonville. As part of the struggles for them to be heard to and to be represented, a lot of the politics started shifting. And what they were demanding at work, people started saying, “Well, how come we don’t find that in our city government; how come nobody represents us?” So the forces started to shift. So it wasn’t just about the strike. It was about being heard, participation. And for the first time in Watsonville’s history, after the strike a Latino councilman was elected.

Zepeda: That’s huge.

Sánchez: It is *huge*. Since then, politics have shifted some. The canneries shut down, pretty much. So all those women had to either move somewhere or find other work. But what they did was phenomenal, phenomenal! Something to be so proud of, these mujeres.

Zepeda: (breathes out) Yes, thank you for sharing that. I feel like that’s a good place to stop. What do you think?

Sánchez: I think so.

Spanish for Spanish Speakers

Zepeda: So we're continuing here with Elba Sánchez in Oakland. So if you could share about what the Spanish for Spanish Speakers program did for you.

Sánchez: I think my almost fifteen years of experience there were, so blessed, really. I never worked harder in my life. Every weekend I was correcting, giving feedback, thinking and planning assignments, planning future curriculum, finding new language-level appropriate articles or other writings. It was constant. My kids were like, "Are you correcting again?" That was my life during the school year. It was just like boom-boom-boom. And then, of course, there would be the breathing space, and I needed those, boy. And it gave me so much back because the students—to see their growth, to see the trust, the students' achievement.

That was a rare experience, I think, in an academic setting, to be close to your instructors, to feel like you could go to their office anytime and talk about whatever, whether it's a personal problem or an academic thing, a challenge for a paper they're working on, or whatever. I think they knew that we were there for them. And it was a wonderful reciprocal, supportive kind of an admiration society. We admired them and they admired us. (laughs) The premise for all of us is we were all trying to survive in that environment, and of course to learn some things along the way that would help us to be stronger or more effective or do more directed work. I call that the golden chapter because, truly, it was a golden chapter in my professional and personal development. It helped me to

grow tremendously as an instructor, as a teacher, a counselor—because I was a little bit of all of those. And, of course, gain confidence and improve and all of that good stuff.

It helped me because I always felt that my students were also my teachers. Just as I hoped to share with them something that they're learning and can use for the future, I always learned from them. I think staying open to that learning had very positive kinds of effects and consequences. There was always a sense of respect and admiration because we were both working to survive. And we both were doing a good job because there we were. We were still doing it! That was proof. So it really was a very inspiring, challenging, trying—mostly with university administration issues. In terms of the students it was always a great learning experience, as well as a wonderful, supportive experience.

Zepeda: And so in terms of the university, you've mentioned some of the challenges, like funding. But how did those challenges manifest for Spanish for Spanish Speakers.

Sánchez: I think our program costs were really cheap for what UCSC was getting. I don't think they appreciate what they were getting or even understand what they were getting. Because you consider the salaries of two lecturers—I found an old check stub of mine, where I was earning, I think it was 36,000 a year as a lecturer when I first started. I'm thinking, that's damn cheap, honey. And lecturers, as you well know, at least at that time we had to teach eight classes to be considered full time.

Zepeda: Oh, my god.

Sánchez: In my case, for being the coordinator of the program and for working with students individually, I was given two course relief. So as director or coordinator of the program and then lecturer in the program, I had to teach six courses a year. The other faculty in SPSS had to teach seven courses because they were only being given one course equivalency for their language lab work. That's damn cheap! Even if you have three lecturers, you're not spending more than \$100,000, basically. And tutoring aides, half of that. So we definitely were not past \$150,000 mark, maybe the \$200,000 mark. Staffing was the biggest expense.

There were over 120 students signed up for our intermediate-level classes. At that time we had the freshmen and the transfer students. At the upper-division level, it was our students who had completed the intermediate sequence but it was open to anybody on campus that had reached Spanish 15 level, which is already a more advanced level for non-native speakers. So anybody at that level or above could come into the upper-division classes. The upper-division courses were conducted in Spanish; the work was all in Spanish.

But I think that our contribution in lieu of that budget that they had to set aside, was the retention of all of those Latino students. I know that if it had not been for the program being there—and I'm not just talking about the classes of the program—I mean the *presence* of the program. Because aside from teaching, we *were* instigators, cultural instigators. We were encouraging our students to write poetry, to publish, and read their poetry. We were always having poetry readings, cultural nights. We had a gallery. We had all these visual artists in our classes, so we had a gala night where we did an exhibition of the artist's work.

We were promoting and supporting so much creative expression. I think that that was also really exciting.

We went through different phases. The creative part, the poetry, was there from the beginning, the short story, the teatro, whatever it was. It was either reflected in the curriculum; we talked about it; we saw something. I mean, it was there. Students experienced the arts before even coming to UCSC. Teatro, poetry, is very much an integral part of our communities. You have a political meeting; you have poetry to start the program, or you have a poem at the end. Somehow there's always some cultural connection to whatever work it is that we're doing.

So it wasn't just the classes that we were teaching. It wasn't just the relationships and the strength, and leadership that program tutors were building and modeling for their students, or the confidence that the students were gaining in the classroom or in the program, through the classes and the collaborations with their teachers and tutors. It was our presence. It was the fact that we were there. Students knew we were there. Faculty knew we were there. We were making a difference.

I'm really sad that the university never really saw to it to highlight us, or put a spotlight on us, or say, "Hey, you know. These people are doing pretty good work. Maybe we should—" There were never any stories written about what we did. Maybe we didn't know how to promote ourselves. I think part of it was we were so busy just teaching and trying to survive that, honestly, we never talked about how to promote ourselves. It was all around curriculum and how do we help students, what do we do to strengthen their academic skills. We weren't

self-promoting types of individuals. We just knew what we were doing was important and that students felt it, and that we were growing too, all of us, as students, tutors, and instructors. All of us were growing from that experience.

Zepeda: That is wonderful.

Sánchez: So at this point, whether they chose to acknowledge it or anything is kind of like a moot point for me because I guess in a way I never expected them to, given the institution and the administration, who they are. I think the more important recognition came from ourselves.

Zepeda: Mm, that's wonderful. That's almost the best recognition because you feel it.

Sánchez: Yeah! Because we knew that what we were doing was the right thing. The audience was going (makes accelerating motor sound) and we were going too (makes the same sound). (laughs) We honor you. We honor our students.

Zepeda: And that is rare in the university.

Sánchez: Yeah. And to this day I swear, any student that was in the program that I know of is working in the educational institutions being a principal or teacher, or lawyer with a nonprofit, or—I mean, we have so many—I wish that—I remember that, in the SPSS magazine that I gave you,⁴ in the back, we were talking about trying to set up a database because our idea, back in 1994 we knew that there were a lot of students coming through our program and they were

⁴ TAHUÍ: Saludamos a las Cuatro Direcciones, Español para hispanohablantes, Spanish for Spanish Speakers, UC Santa Cruz, Oakes College, Primavera 1994.

going on to graduate studies. We knew that we had something to do with that. And we wanted to keep track of where all these students were going but we didn't have the resources or the people power to follow up. That would have been a whole other branch of work, but so important, because my gosh, I would venture to say that any of those students that came through our program are doing something significant, something significant. By significant, I mean that they are aware of themselves. They are knowledgeable in the sense that they know what they are doing is important, is contributing, is making a change, that kind of work.

Zepeda: That's beautiful. It's connected work because they did the work to connect, within that program.

Sánchez: And within themselves. It's connecting to yourself. That's where you come from. That's where you are. That's who you see everyday if you're still living close to the barrio. And even if not, you're going to visit your parents there! (laughs) You maybe moved out to the suburbs but you still got to go back—you know: mirror; mirror; mirror.

Zepeda: I love that. So I wanted to ask you about curriculum because you mentioned that at one point in the intermediate class you used the *FEM* magazine from Mexico, the journal. So I wanted to ask you whether there was any other curriculum that stood out, that was central?

Sánchez: You know, I'm glad you brought that up because I was thinking, when I was sitting here that finding language-level appropriate curriculum was really

one of our biggest challenges. You would think that it would be easy to find almost any article in Spanish, but that was not the case at the time.

When we started putting together our class “readers,” it was a struggle to find appropriate language-level text that we could use in the classroom, that provided good context, history, analysis. For example, there was a lot written on Chicano history, but it was English and we were promoting and cultivating reading in Spanish. We would not include things written in English because then we were totally defeating the purpose. And that’s why we ended up going to the *FEM* issue on Chicanas, because we could not find anything produced by Chicanas on Chicanas in Spanish! We had to go to Mexico; *FEM* dedicated a whole issue to Chicanas and translated the work that Chicanas had published. We were able to use those articles for our class. They were written somewhere in the late seventies or early eighties.

I wish I saved my readers so I could share them with you. But we used one article that was called “*La Chicana*.” It was just a very brief introduction but we thought it was very good because it was brief. It was just like a little pill, a little seed. It presented an opportunity, how to unpack it. This could be the introduction and then we could start asking questions: what do we know about this, and build on that. It was really, really hard to find those appropriate articles. But we finally did. There were some things that were translated. Aurora Levins Morales did a wonderful essay on mujeres. We used hers. We referenced other writers, bits and blurbs of literature.

We did not want to be literature-focused. We were multidisciplinary from the beginning, with history being a very important part of that multidisciplinary outlook at the lower-division level courses. Our students were not literature majors, so why would we focus on literature? You know what I mean? If they wanted to take literature, they'd take a lit class. We wanted to be interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary. Maybe it had to do with my own Latin American studies background. I love multidisciplinary perspectives. I cannot be so narrow as to solely look at literature, especially the way they look at it in most institutions, it's just literature. They're not looking at any historical context. How can you do that? A work, a piece of creative writing, fiction, whatever it is, it has a context. You can't look at it as this dangling fish over here! That fish has a whole eco-environment, and you have to look at that environment to understand how it shaped the fish. So for me it never made sense just to look at literature as literature.

We have students who are living every day harsh realities. One of our students shared with us that he couldn't sleep at the campus because it was too damn quiet. We laughed at first and then we thought, oh, wow, this is real shit. You are talking about a student who lived in a hostile, violent environment, having to look out for his life or her life, and then you put him/her up here, in this country club? And you give him nothing. There's no support system, no program, no mechanism, no nothing! You just plop him up there on this Santa Cruz campus. How does that make sense? How do you support this student to succeed?

Zepeda: Yeah.

Sánchez: So, no. People in our classes had to know what is my and our history? Why are we here? Why aren't we there? Why this; what that? (laughs) And then if you know some of your history, then you might want to know literature. Then you might be interested in other things. You have to have a little bit of everything. Plus, this was really basically literacy-oriented, but it was much more than that. We were doing subversive work, honest. Our program was a subversive program. Maybe it was a good thing they didn't discover us. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs) That's what I was just thinking, maybe that was a good thing.

Sánchez: They never bothered. They probably just thought, oh, yeah, they're teaching their language courses for Spanish speakers over here. They did not know we were arming students with knowledge, self-knowledge, which is to me the most valuable of all. It is not just knowledge, general. It's starting from the self. Once you have that, nobody takes that away from you. You're standing independently and differently and strongly. So yeah—

Zepeda: I'm just imagining that it would be so great if that study could happen at some point, finding those students.

Sánchez: They're in their forties now. It's hard for me to look at because you realize, oh, my God, I'm getting old. But really, the students that you see here are in their forties now. My friend Carolina's daughter is—and she's got a son that's going to medical school. And then her daughter is just starting junior high school. They're in their forties. My friend Teresa, who was also a tutor, her kids are in college. And she just won a seat on the school board in San Jose. I'm so

proud. Yeah! The generation that came after them, they're in their thirties—I'm sure they've grown families as well.

Zepeda: I'm just noticing the title—what is the title?⁵

Sánchez: Tahuí is greeting the four directions.

Zepeda: Thank you. So is there anything else that you would like to say in wrapping up about Spanish for Spanish Speakers?

Sánchez: No, I think that's it.⁶

⁵ TAHUÍ: *Saludamos a las Cuatro Direcciones, Español para hispanohablantes, Spanish for Spanish Speakers*, UC Santa Cruz, Oakes College, Primavera 1994.

⁶ This note was added by Sánchez during the editing process: "I do want to say that those years that I was working with the Spanish for Spanish Speakers Program were the most exciting and challenging and best years in terms of my professional, personal, and cultural development. I believe in the work that we were doing. I know that the program made a difference in the academic and personal lives of our students, that we provided support, a refuge, an anchor, the possibility of survival in an indifferent ambiente, that we challenged them to a high academic standard; that while they were students in the program they were exposed not only to themselves but to the histories and expressions of their classmates, as well as to published and unpublished artists, writers, poets and others, in our own UCSC community and beyond. I think what we had, when we existed as a program, was unique and critical to the retention of Chicana/o and Latina/o students who were recruited mostly from urban settings and ended up at UCSC. We had an opportunity to work with over 100 students (per quarter) at the intermediate level, and in addition, through the beginning and upper-division levels, another sixty students or so, each year. I hope that all those students are doing well and giving back. And, of course, the staff came in with their talent, dedication and persona, and added to the tenets of SPSS language pedagogy and contributed to the creation of relevant and academically challenging curriculum. All this, created in an environment and spirit of true collaboration and support which I have just not experienced since then. During those years, our students were at the center of our efforts. Truly, my work with SPSS was a life changing experience, my great teacher. I know I couldn't have survived if it weren't for the supportive Chicana and other faculty at UCSC—Aida Hurtado, Katia Panas, Rosie Cabrera, Pedro Castillo, Roberto Crespi, etc. y etc. They also made a difference for the program and the students. I'm grateful to all the great colegas I was able to work with throughout the years and also the many students who so patiently taught and tutored me throughout. Okay, ahora sí, thank you!"

Process as a Writer

Zepeda: Next time we will talk about *Revista Mujeres*. But in this time that we have here today, let's get a sense from you of your own writing. I notice that there's poetry in there. Last time we talked a lot about writing and language. So if you would like to share a bit about your first book, or your process.

Sánchez: I think I'd like to talk about my process, my process as a writer.

Zepeda: Yes! Thank you.

Sánchez: I think there's always—I don't know how, but in families, you know how you feel like you're the weird child?

Zepeda: Oh, yeah.

Sánchez: You think differently. You do things differently. I was the weird child in my family. I can remember being like maybe eight years old or nine years old and writing things on those little tiny pieces of paper, and then hiding those little tiny pieces of paper that had been folded so many times, way back in the back of my drawer. I don't remember what I wrote. I just remember that it was something I had to keep to myself. I don't know when I stopped but I wasn't really doing anything with my writing, in terms specifically of writing poems. I had a diary with a lock on it in high school. I wrote as often as I could about my feelings, thoughts.

The first poem or writing experiences I can remember were in high school. I think I told you that I came to the U.S. in 1960. 1964 was my first year as a freshman [in high school]. I graduated in '68—during those years there were a lot

of important things happening politically in the United States, and I wasn't understanding of all of them because I was still pretty new here and I didn't have much U.S. history background. I didn't really understand what was happening in terms of the civil rights movement at first, but I knew it was something really powerful, a movement that had great implications. I remember being very impressed by the images that I saw and knowing that even though I wasn't Black, I was somehow part of the suffering they were enduring, and knowing that I was as vulnerable as they were. I had that knowledge when I was maybe thirteen.

What I remember writing in high school were, what I would call my first poems, and they were poems that had to do with what was happening. My senior year I decided to publish a poem in the Presentation High School yearbook. The poem was called "The Price of Color," and it's about prejudice. I still have it. My girlfriend copied it out of the yearbook for me. She copied it. Oh, my God, I had a voice back then! I just didn't think I had a voice. Nobody told me I had a voice. Rosie and Tony, my friends, liked poetry, like me. I just knew that it was something I had to get out because it was burning inside me and then once I got it out it was okay. It was, okay, I feel better now. (laughs) So I was happy that Winnie found this poem for me, my expression at an earlier age.

And then I remember the little pieces of paper. Of course, I was curious. I wonder what I was writing then? I'm sure as a kid I had my share of things to write about. But even if they were just sentences about, "I had a horrible day!" or whatever it was, it was a way for me to put out my feelings or my thoughts.

Finding that poem was like—I even rhymed in there and I thought, well, that was pretty good, my high school poem.

I didn't write poetry again for a long time, until I was at Santa Cruz the first year or so, just starting to come across literature and readings I didn't know about before. Crespi—I loved all of the stuff I read in Roberto Crespi's class. I read Poniatowska there; I was introduced to Eduardo Galeano there. I met the classics, (Juan) Rulfo talking about the revolution. A lot of that stuff awoke something up in me and I started writing journal stuff again because I didn't know what else. And I really didn't have a lot of time to, at least I didn't think I did, to be writing anything else. I was trying to survive as a special admit EOP student here.

I started to write more when a colega poet came on campus and a critical mass of (Santa Cruz, San Jose, San Francisco) writers and artists gathered. There were so many networks, all these publishers. He was a member of a group of poets and writers in San Francisco, Chicano/as, salvadoreños, and other Latinos. There really wasn't a lot happening in Santa Cruz. So he said, "Let's go up to the writing workshop up in San Francisco; you have to take a poem." "I have to take a poem?" "Yeah, you can't show up without a poem." I was like, okay, you gotta push yourself; you gotta get something down on paper; you gotta show it; share, and get feedback. I didn't really know what was going to happen. I just kind of had a vague sense. I knew it was going to be scary, but whatever the workshop was, we were going to have fun, too.

That's where I met Victor Martínez, who's passed on now; Juan Felipe Herrera; Rodrigo Reyes, who also passed on: Martivón Galindo and several other salvadoreño artists and writers. We didn't have a lot of women, Lucha Corpi—she's still around. But we started to get together and for me it was like, oh, my God! Manna from heaven, okay? It was like something that nourished me in the way that nothing had before. It wasn't just the fact that I was pushing myself to write, that I pushed myself to write my poem. I don't even remember what the poem was that I first shared. It was the wisdom and sharpness and love and support that was shared around the table in that cold small loft space. We were there to cut, edit, nothing was personal. It was all about the word, about the work—serious, mature, thoughtful work.

Sitting around the tables and giving each other feedback was like, wow! There was so much to learn from that process itself. It wasn't just about what happened when your own poem came up for discussion. It was all the other discussions that took place before and after your poem, which were equally exciting and equally thought provoking, and all the wonderful, positive things that you can think of. It was a couple of hours of not just looking at my own work, but learning from the whole process how to edit, and seeing other people's work and then thinking, oh, really? They did that? Oh, I could do that but I would do it this way and that way.

Because I was sparked, I got ideas. There's this little chispa that just goes zoom! You know? And then it goes through you and then it goes to—you know, you can just feel it. You can see it in people's eyes, in their reactions. I felt like, oh, my gosh. This is how everybody needs to write. You need to set up a round table of

colleagues who are there to help you do the most clear, most precise, most powerful writing that can be done. So it was such a wonderful light, really. It just really was a light.

We gave ourselves homework. “Okay, for next month, two poems. Everybody comes in with two poems. And so we were like, “Yes!” It made me set time aside, make time to produce something because I wanted to show something. I wanted to get feedback; I wanted to continue learning. Here was this great opportunity. You’re working with other writers of various experiences. Wow, what a privilege and what an honor to be the new girl on the block. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: And it was great because they were all bilingual. So if you wrote in Spanish you were going to get feedback; if you wrote in English you were going to get feedback. And it was just open. If you wanted to write Spanglish, you could write Spanglish. There were people in the group who were experts in each of those categories. Just being there and listening to them and how they worked and how they read a poem and what they were thinking, “Well, why did you write that?” Then I found out what was the creative spark behind their production.

So that’s really what got me earnestly back into writing. It was having that opportunity, that workshop opportunity. I think all of us who were participating in the workshop were equally excited. We were being productive; it felt like we were doing the right stuff.

I have to say, there was also a flavor in the air because in the eighties, back in the early eighties, there were publishers that wanted to publish Chicanos and Chicanas. That's how I got a lot of my first poems [published] I got into the University of Arizona anthology. I got into many anthologies because they wanted our work. They were looking for our work. So it was like, okay! I'll send you something.

It was really exciting because not only was I writing and feeling good about writing, but I could do something with it. This happened after several years of *Revista*, when there were actual publishers *and* also there were Latinos and Chicanos who decided, "You know what? We're going to start our own publishing company, small press. There was—como se llama—este Nic (from) Bilingual Press in Texas? Nic (Nicolás) Kanellos. He's one of the biggest Chicano Lit publishers. People like him started doing their own publishing and so there was a little bit more of an opening for young Chicana writers.

So we went through an opening phase in the eighties, I don't see that opening there anymore, but in the eighties big publishers wanted to publish Chicana/os and Latina/os and small publishing houses also wanted to promote and publish Chicanos and Latinos. That was wonderful because you knew there would be an opportunity to get your stuff out somewhere if that's what you wanted to do.

So all of that time, connecting with the network of poets helped push me and encourage me. So I just kept writing poetry and reading it.

Zepeda: So would you say that those are the folks who inspired your writing, the artists who inspired your writing? Or would you say that there are other artists who inspired your writing?

Sánchez: I think they certainly were some of the folks who inspired my writing. I learned a great deal from them. There were some that I especially liked. I especially have always appreciated Victor Martínez's writings. The last book he published was *Parrot in the Oven*, a novel for an adolescent audience. Few writers are writing novels for Chicano youth! We don't have enough Chicana/o Latina/o literature being published. Our children and our youth need that. The protagonists in his novels were Chicano youth in Fresno. To me they're real. I could touch them. You know what I mean?

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: They're real! His work always portrayed real people. He speaks to me. Victor's work speaks to me a lot. I liked some of Pancho's work. One of the things I learned from him was to be brief in my poems and to really minimize the words. I have to say I really like that. I'm never one for long poems. Long poems lose me. With long poems, I rarely remember what the poem started with. I remember maybe parts of it.

I love free verse. That's great. I love other things like haikus. But I don't go into sonnets or that real old form stuff. (laughs) I love the freedom and the creativity and the sense of humor and the non-tied up free verse—free—verse. There's something wonderful about that. It's just—it's not restrictive. You just let your voice speak.

Zepeda: That's wonderful.

Sánchez: Yes! So the free verse is the best for me. And the brevity of the poem. I think it's harder sometimes to write a brief poem. Because with a long poem you can go on and on and on and give all the details that you want. But with a brief poem, you have to really choose your words more carefully—where you start, where you finish, all of that stuff. I don't know, there's something about that shorter format that I like.

After leaving Santa Cruz, I engaged in administrative positions. (makes retching noise) That was the worst mistake of my life. I don't know what I thought. I did think that as an administrator I would have more power than I had experienced as a lecturer or coordinator. So I was looking for more power, a position that would give me a stronger position for negotiation and decision-making. And I don't know—something did not jive for me in administration.

[Next] I taught a class at HNU on the Latino/a short story and flash fiction. I was not familiar with flash fiction before. It was a new genre for me. What I love about the flash fiction is that it's very short. It has to be between five hundred and twenty five hundred words. It can't be more than that. So in that, what is it, about two pages and a half, double-spaced, in that brief space you have to tell a story. It was the challenge of the poem, to be brief but to tell your story in a poem. I thought, I want to do this! I did not feel intimidated. When I started writing a story before, I was so intimidated. I'm not used to this, there's a plot and all this stuff. I thought of flash fiction as a long poem. (laughs) I thought you

know, I think I could do this. I'll just take a story from the real and fictionalize. Maybe that will help me.

I've been doing a lot of personal introspective work these last couple of years. I turned my whole world around, because I would often let my work consume me. It was hard to find the balance. This was the opportunity to let go of all of the shit I was carrying, basically. I was finally working on my own shit. I know I'm not the only one who's spent all my life either running from that because we don't have the time, which is another way of running from it (whatever the issue is). I just had not worked on myself. Well, as I got older—I don't know if this is everybody's process—but as I got older I thought, you know, you've got a lot of homework here you need to look at. And I think it's time. I think all the elements have shifted for you to be able to start looking at some of your stuff.

I've been looking at some of my stuff. So some of my stuff came out in my first flash fiction story. I told my wonderful friend, Olga, "I'm writing a story. I want to send it to you. It's flash fiction. So I sent it off to her. She said, "I like what you're trying to say. I like the story." And then she helps concretely, editing it. So honey, I have a file this big of my different versions of that story. But you know what, after all that editing, I still like my story. So I said, okay, this is good! If I still like it, it means there's something there. I still consider it a draft but it's more finished, but who knows?

I sent it out and then I got my first rejection. And then I thought, oh, God, I hate rejection. (laughs) Even if they send a cute little note, it's still rejection. I'm going to read my story, I thought. I hadn't read it for a couple of weeks. After revising

and editing myself, I thought, well, I guess I see why they rejected it. I would have rejected it too. I'm a tough editor. So back to the drawing board. I'm working on it again. But I'm still liking it. Since then, I've started all these other stories.

Zepeda: Oh, wow. That's so exciting.

Sánchez: I don't know where they're going to end up or how they're going to end up but I'm going to write a collection of flash fiction stories that tell the story of my family. I'm kind of excited about it. I don't know how they'll come together or if they'll come together. But I'm at the point in my life where I trust myself, the creative *chispa*, more. I see how things come together when I'm writing and doing creative work. The muse and the beautiful spirits, the voices, *las historias*, everything that lives within us, just pushes us, Sometimes we're touched and open and I see something for the first time. I feel like this is good, this is what I need to do. I'm just going to trust that as I keep going through this process it's going to reveal itself. Because it will. I just have to keep working at it, trusting. It's a process, working, working, churning, churning, writing, writing. *Y a ver qué pasa*. I'm trusting my process. I'm in no hurry to write poetry for a while. I have a need to fictionalize things right now.

Zepeda: What an amazing place to be and what amazing knowledge and wisdom to have.

Sánchez: But you know what it is, too? I think I'm finally learning to trust myself. And that also has to do with the personal work that I've been doing. All these things are converging, all this work and non-work, the things I've left

behind, the new work of the personal things. And then mining all the memories and all the stories that have come before. I think it's all just kind of converging at this stage of my life. It maybe just has to do with my age, or just has to do with what's happening in my life, or where I am in my life. But I'm trusting it. I know if I just keep plugging at it. I've been trying to be disciplined. I have to figure out how to organize my time. I don't want to resent my volunteer work. And I want to write. I want to make sure that I'm making time for my writing. And I want to not get down on myself because I'm not a very organized writer. We all have different ways of working. I trust my way. Some days I'm organized and some days I'm not. That's okay. That's just the truth of my life. One day you get enough sleep and the next day you don't. (laughs)

Zepeda: Right.

Sánchez: A former student from UC Santa Cruz, Indelisa, is a children's book illustrator. She tells me, "Let's get together. I'm working on a children's book." I say, "That sounds exciting." A couple of weeks ago, she runs across a publisher, and they're putting out a series of books for bilingual classrooms, for kids that are in immersion classes like my grandkids. And Indelisa tells me, "They're looking for stories!"

Zepeda: Oh!

Sánchez: Exactly. So I told her, "You've got to get that story together." She had already set up a spreadsheet to keep track of her manuscript submissions. She also gave me a copy of guidelines for how to write kids stories. I've always wanted to do that. So I've started writing my first story. I'm working on that

story and then I decided I'm going to work on another story about our dog, because our dog was a rescue dog from the street. He's a pit bull. I'd like to bring up the issue of pit bulls, and how they are negatively stereotyped and portrayed. So who knows where kids will take it, but eventually I hope that some little kid takes it to, you know, "Oh, is that what happens to people too? People think that because I'm Mexican—" Or whatever.

Zepeda: Wonderful.

Sánchez: Yeah, I want to write that one. It's called *El Perrito Perdido*. So I've got those two stories for kids that I'm working on. I'm determined I want to get a children's story published. Or more than one.

Now that I'm going to LA I'm going to give my friend the template. Do you want to write a kids' story [to Susy]? I can make a copy and send you a copy. You know what? This is my thing. There's a need and we need to fill it. And who best to do it but people who come from that experience. We have stories we want to share. A cultural nuance that only we can express. It's not easy but it's also not that hard. It just means a little bit of work and dedication. I'm going to bring it or I can send it to you. I wish I'd brought it. I'll send it to you in the mail. When I came across that I was like yay! (laughs) So I'm into my story. Mine is actually a chapter book. (picks up a book to show Zepeda) It's this kind. My grandson is reading these. Okay? And this is exactly what that outline is. Ten chapters—that's the little formula. And in the first chapter—I love this. So now I'm taking my grandson's book apart and looking carefully, so how did they start it? How did they end it? How did they introduce it? I'm trying to figure out how can I

produce the best—this lady, her name is Mary Pope Osborne, published forty of these suckers. I'm like, I can do it! We can do it. There's a need.

Zepeda: There is a need.

Sánchez: There is a need for our kids to be able to read wonderful, not translated stories about themselves. Because mind you, Mary Pope Osborne wrote all of her stories in English. They were not intended for our kids. I want literature that's intended for our children, not just translated, but intended.

Zepeda: (sighs) Intended.

Sánchez: Yes. I think that intention is important. So now I'm working on kids stories.

Zepeda: Yay!

Sánchez: I'm going to send you that document on how to write a chapter book outline.

More on Spanish for Spanish Speakers

Zepeda: So it's March 1, 2013 and I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project and we're here with Elba Sánchez in Oakland, California. Today we're speaking about Spanish for Spanish Speakers.

Sánchez: I really feel like going back and reviewing a lot of that work makes me feel really good. Because I think it was such good work that was being done. And I don't know if it will ever be replicated. I would hope so. From our program,

there were a couple of tutors—I was so proud of them—who ended up getting teaching jobs at the high school level and instituting programs of Spanish for Spanish Speakers in their own settings. That was so exciting, to see that they felt that the curriculum, what we had done in the classroom, was needed and was going to be beneficial for younger students at the high school level. Manuel Colón, one of our tutors, was one of the biggest spokespersons at the high school level for Spanish for Spanish Speakers, such an expert, I was like, “Mira!” (laughs) “Mira tú!” He went to Mexico in the Education Abroad Program and talked to the instructors down there. He was a wonderful ambassador, talking about what he learned and what was good and how we should do it—

It felt good to see that at the high school level they were starting to think about the importance of SPSS and how to put it across to students. I think, for most Latino students who grow up in the U.S. there is no opportunity to study your own language. You can’t go into a Spanish class. That is not appropriate for you at all. You can speak everything, understand everything, but not know a single thing about the structure of your language—the verbs, or the sentence, or the parts of the sentence, the terminology— And you know what? It’s important to own all of that, to not be scared of it, to know that you can handle it. This is just the technical little pieces behind the beauty of it all, you know? But we all can learn what all those little names are and how they work in the sentence, why they work. Because then you truly own your language. Then nobody can come at you, “Well, yeah? How do you do this?” Because that was my thing when I was in school. They would say, “We have to conjugate these verbs in the preterit.” And I would be like, “What the hell is the preterit?” And then they would say,

“You know those verbs, *comí, canté?*” I go, “Oh! I can conjugate any verb you want. I just didn’t know that it was the preterit. I didn’t know how the preterit functioned. Or why use the preterit instead of the imperfect.” I was afraid of grammar because I had never been taught. There was always this shame: (whispers) “I can speak it but I really don’t know how it works.” (laughs) That’s a terrible thing. Because that’s a big chunk of your confidence, and your knowledge, self-knowledge and everything else.

We wanted to say to students, “You know what? It doesn’t matter what regional variety you speak. They are all equally correct given their context and environment. And what we’re going to learn in class is the standard variety, which you can add to the variety that you already know. It’s not necessarily better. It’s not necessarily worse. All it is one variety that is used in a certain environment. And that standard is used for interviews, job interviews, any kind of a professional meeting, you’re going to be speaking in standard Spanish. So it’s important to be able to switch, just like you speak standard English and nonstandard English. It’s the same thing in Spanish—standard Spanish and nonstandard Spanish. And you know, given the environment, which variety is the most appropriate. You’re not going to go into your neighborhood and start talking like you do in school, because they’re going to look at you and go, ‘What the hell is wrong with you?’ (laughs) You’re smart enough and wise enough to know, given the environment, you know what language code to switch to or use, what language you’re going to communicate in so you fit and feel like you’re a part of the group and people are understanding what you’re saying. It’s an

additional variety that's going to expand your knowledge and ability to mix in different groups. That's all it is."

Zepeda: That's really powerful.

Sánchez: Yeah.

Zepeda: So can I ask you how you got involved with Spanish for Spanish Speakers? You were part of creating it, right?

Sánchez: Well, I was a senior at UCSC. It was my last year. And I had started, I think the year before that, I had met Professor Roberto Crespi. Roberto Crespi was the only Latino teaching at UC Santa Cruz at that time who was real people, gente. Students could talk to Crespi. He'd swear—but he had total understanding of what our situation was on campus as Latino students. He had been one of us. He was this lone Puerto Rican kid at Harvard, so you can imagine what his experience must have been. And he was a student much earlier than we were. I think that things must have been really tough for him. He was smart, really smart. And he was not afraid to fight. He was muy peleonero and muy mal hablado. Anybody who came near him he would start [makes yelling sounds] And there was something about that, that I just thought, you know what? That's kind of what you have to do around here. Because otherwise—

So I admired him (laughs) and he really excited me intellectually. He's the first one that started talking about Marx and Lenin. He's the first one that had an analysis that made sense when talking about my Chicano/Mexicano community, and why the Latino community was where it was, and why they didn't want us

to learn about ourselves. So he opened up my mind in a very political and analytical way. And I guess I was really ready for it, because I was (makes drinking sounds) just sopping it all up. And feeling like, yes, this makes sense, yes, this appeals to me.

When I first came across him, he made me work hard in his classes, he was like one teacher that, because he inspired me and he also was very demanding academically, and I loved that—there's something inside of me that—I like working hard academically. And so he really—it was like oh, my gosh. This is great. So I started working with him. I think he saw that I was working hard. The Spanish syntax class is where we really started talking. Because he noticed my writing skills and he noticed all the mistakes that I was making, that a lot of the English-speaking students who were studying Spanish were not making because they had studied it formally. I didn't have knowledge of any of the standard grammar.

When he would return my homework assignments, oh, my God—accents, everything was red ink, red ink everywhere. I was like, oh, no! It would hurt me to see so much red ink. So I thought, okay, I'm going to learn this because I'm not going to make that mistake again. And it made me work, work hard. And we started talking. I started asking him, "Can I ask you this—?" "Well, come to my office." So I started talking to him in his office. His office really was the steno pool. He used to hang out in the steno pool in Oakes.

So we used to go in there and talk, you know. He started telling me about this plan that they had had out of Merrill College at some point. Because at that point

Merrill was the Third World college. That was the college I was affiliated with when I was a student. Merrill was where Latin American studies was housed at that point, the major, and a lot of the literature profs were there, but Crespi was at Oakes.

We started talking and he said that they had this plan where they wanted to do a bilingual college. And Merrill was seen as that bilingual college. And everything, everything would be taught in Spanish. So that you could have physics, biology—everything that you could think of you could learn in Spanish and do your research in Spanish, teach in Spanish, be truly bilingual. That was the whole construct, to produce bilingual individuals in all majors and walks of life. That was just phenomenal. And part of that component was something that he had first seen was really important from the very beginning, and that was Spanish for Spanish Speakers. Because he was coming across students like myself whose needs were so different than students who were learning the language for the first time. So a big part of that proposal ended up being his part, which related to Spanish for Spanish Speakers courses, for Chicano/Latino students.

Well, the will of the university, bureaucracy, burrocracia is what I call it. You know, it took forever, and nothing really got done, and oh, the funding. That's the most famous phase for not doing anything.

Zepeda: Mmm, hmm.

Sánchez: Nothing happened except that Roberto fought like hell to at least carve out the part for Spanish for Spanish speakers. He gave up teaching his literature classes to direct the program and get that whole program started. It was during

my senior year, the year before the program was supposed to start. And I think he was already trying to scout where he was going to get some of these tutors to work with him and, start building a cadre of people who had a specialized, or were beginning to shape a specialized methodology on Spanish for Spanish speakers. And he asked me, "Do you want to be a tutor in the program?" And I said, "I need so much help myself." He goes, "Well, the students that are coming into the class are going to know even less than you." But still—I just felt like I needed to know more. But I thought, well, this is the way to learn. So after that year, because I took as many classes as I could from him, prior to when that program started. And then my senior year came around and that's when I started working as a tutor for the program. And he hired a former student of his to be one of the first instructors in the program.

So that's how I started. I started working as a tutor for Spanish for Spanish Speakers. It was a wonderful experience. A lot of times I felt like I wasn't really prepared, like I was learning everything—I mean, I went to all of the classes that he was teaching because I wanted, first of all, to learn how he was presenting it, and second of all, what he was presenting. Taking copious notes so I could remember all these things. And taking the notes with me and using them when I needed them myself. So I think that year was a wonderful process for me just in terms of learning and observing. And I also observed—it takes a certain dynamics in the classroom.

And one of the things that happened was that that instructor that Roberto had hired was a very bland personality. I mean, it was like night and day. Roberto was dynamic. He'd make jokes. I mean, he was a presence in the classroom. And

the other instructor was boring. I was really concerned because I realized how much the instructor had to do, at least in that particular environment, with the teaching and the success of the class. That instructor was just not being able to get across the same kind of expectancy, the same kind of energy, the same kind of dynamic. I think nobody could be a Roberto Crespi, but you needed to have a little bit more oomph, you needed to be able to make a connection with students and it really was not in his skills. I think Roberto kind of saw that it wasn't working out and the instructor left after the first year. We had to find someone else.

So Roberto, at that time, started encouraging me, because I was working as a tutor but I could not teach in the class. I could only work with a group of students. He wanted me to teach in the program and he wanted to encourage me to get back to school so I could at least get an MA. I wanted to teach in the program. I was really excited about that. And I wanted to get out of the way what I needed to get out of the way in order to do that. He's the one who said, "You should just go into the literature program and pretend you're going for the PhD, but after the first year and a half, when they ask you to write a paper, te atorgan el MA me dijo, in the process of the PhD. And I said, "I want that." So I did that. Ours was the last class that was able to get the MA before the Ph.D. After that, administration changed it so you would get the MA, but after they gave you the Ph.D.! ¿Para qué necesitas el MA at that point? You know what I mean? So anyway, we were lucky because we were the last grad students—phew—we made it, we got what several of us needed, and after that, they changed the rules.

But for me it just meant that the following year I could teach in the SPSS program. And that's how I started. When I was in grad school, Roberto gave me a class of beginners. My name was not on the schedule of classes. His name was on there but I was doing all the teaching of the class. Of course, he was reviewing what I was doing and he had his little spies in the class. (laughs)

Zepeda: So first you were tutoring and then you were teaching. So was it mostly language that you were teaching, or was it identity, culture, history?

Sánchez: Well, identity, culture, and history were a part of everything that we were teaching. So whether we were teaching the introductory class, which meant you were starting really from the basics—from pronunciation, to vocabulary, really everything. Because what it meant was that you grew up in a family, this is for a lot of my beginning students, you grew up in a family where your parents had very difficult racist experiences for being Spanish speakers. And students would share how their father was put in a corner with a dunce hat because he couldn't speak English. Or, girls were punished because they were talking Spanish in the yard and they were not supposed to. There was racist bullshit that a lot of parents experienced and they were trying to save their kids. So these parents decided, we're not going to teach our children Spanish because we don't want them to suffer what we suffered. These were students that grew up hearing a word here and there, so their ear was in tune to the language somewhat, but they had no vocabulary. And mind you, they would come into the class and they were pissed off. They would be angry at their parents. I wish I'd had a psychology degree at that time because I think, in general, the introductory class

had a very complex psychological language trauma frame. They had admit a lot of things to themselves by sitting in that class, okay?

So you can imagine a lot of pain in all of these young people. Their parents—how could their parents not teach them? They were indignant. I said, “Well, let’s talk about that.” I said, “I’m wondering if the anger is misplaced. Let’s talk about why you think your parents didn’t want you to learn Spanish? What was their experience with the language? What happened to them? Or, did they live—” And then little things would start coming out. You could see the foco turning on (makes a bing sound). My part was to summarize. I would listen and then I would say, “So, these schools were not open to the language. Your father and your mother were being punished for speaking Spanish. And they were being humiliated by being made to wear dunce hats, or singled out or whatever.” So I said, “That must have been a little traumatic, don’t you guys think? Imagine how you would feel if you were in that situation? I wonder if your parents were trying to protect you?” There were so many possible discussions.

So we’d go through that whole thing until finally they could sort of start thinking, you know, it really was not their parents’ fault. Their parents were little children victimized by a huge racist educational system that did not accept their language, their background, their color, their everything. I said, “So we have to look at the system because it’s not your parents. Your parents did not have the power. But this system, this educational system, has the power. So we have to start looking at that. We have to stop blaming our parents and we have to change the institution, the system. Our parents had no control over that. And our parents love us and they don’t want you to suffer what they suffered.”

Zepeda: Yes.

Sánchez: So they could relate to that. They heard that. They knew that. But we had to start from there because we could not get into the language teaching until some of that pain and anger could be kind of looked at and either understood a little bit better or somehow worked through so that you could get to the language learning part. To me that level has a very—it almost requires a different approach at the beginning, to acknowledge all of that pain and trauma.

And the other side of that coin, we had blond kids sitting in the classroom who considered themselves Latinos, who had grown up in Latin America because their parents were this or that or whatever, but they were not accepted by the other kids because they weren't brown. It was all these things, all these psychological traumas and rejection, all this stuff that really needed a psychological component to it in some ways. At first I didn't get what was going on. What the hell? What is this all about? And then finally it was just like open up the discussion and—whoo all this stuff came out. And then I realized, this is what you've got to do every year when you start the beginner's class. Because if you don't start there, exploring some of that pain and rejection the going is to be difficult.

It was amazing, sometimes students—they couldn't say words or they couldn't—it was such a trauma they were—it was like it had numbed them or tied their tongue, you know. That's where I felt like, oh, my God! Language is serious. It's serious business. Through language so much is conveyed that is either negative or positive. And a lot of these students had had very negative relations when it

came to their own language, their native tongue. And then there were of course all kinds of degrees of knowledge—from people that knew one or two words to people who could understand it but could not speak it.

Zepeda: And how big was the class?

Sánchez: The class was small. The beginner's classes were always the smaller class. They were anywhere from fourteen to maybe eighteen students.

Zepeda: So it was a nice conversation.

Sánchez: It was small in comparison to the intermediate. The intermediate level had the biggest classes. The majority of our Latino students are intermediate students at the university level. They speak it. Again, some have more knowledge than others. But they speak it, they understand it. Some of them have read some. Others are too intimidated to read it, to write it. But the core of them, the core of them can communicate and can understand. And so those classes, the intermediate level classes were—We started out with one section and it was packed, thirty-something students. So we ended up opening another. And that section kept growing, and growing each year. So we ended up with, I think, three sections of intermediates with an average of twenty-five students per class.

Each of us was teaching one of the sections of the intermediates. I usually taught the beginners class. And then much later, when Sylvia Casillas, a former instructor at Cabrillo College, came to teach with us she handled some of the beginners' classes.

But that's how I started integrating myself into it. And that's how I integrated other people. Because really, more than anything, it was about the attitude, understanding the varieties and not rejecting the way that students spoke. A lot of times students would use words like *muncho* and *ancina*—forms of words that are so old, antiguos. They are words used in fourteenth-century Spain. A lot of those students who came in with those varieties in their regional expression are from rural areas/backgrounds. My mom would say, "Ese es un español ranchero. Nosotros no decimos eso—" You know, there is this linguistic elitism about the regional varieties spoken by the poor people that worked in the fields. Their variety is much more traditional words rooted in the Spanish spoken by the conquistadores—*ancina* was an old Spanish word. Since there is less interaction for rural than city folks, their language is less tainted with foreign words, it sticks far more to the very traditional forms spoken for generations. Whereas we urban kids—we're mixing, we're changing, we're inventing and reinventing words and expressions.

Zepeda: Yes.

Sánchez: And that's a very different experience. We city folks are much more [snaps hands a few times] popping and changing, influenced by other cultures and languages, adopting and adapting as well. That's the urban experience as opposed to the rural, more constant experience. Understanding all of that was important for me. It really illuminated all that stuff that my mother was hung up on, and a lot of Mexicans, too. Mexicans can be very elitist, you know. They have this horrible notion: "Chicanos, eww. Chicanos are—" [Imitates mocking tone] "No, no, ni hablan español!" That was always their way, put them [Chicanos]

down or badmouth them. And I was doing education with Mexicanos too and I would say “excuse me.” I would have to do the same thing, “So why do you think they don’t speak Spanish?” And then go back through the whole history. And hello? Unas cachetaditas, (makes rapid sound) tienes que ser más respetuoso. ¿Cómo vas a comunicarte con un chicano si no lo respetas?

You have to understand—if you don’t understand history, you end up committing a lot of faux pas’ throughout your life. If you are ignorant about history—history to me is the most important thing to teach if you are trying to get ideas across. You need to offer a historical context to what you’re teaching. Otherwise things are not connected—they’re seen as isolated events. They’re not connected to real cycles and movements of peoples. So you have to talk about history, no matter what you’re teaching.

What we started doing with the intermediate level—that was the level where we could do all kinds of wonderful, fabulous things because the knowledge of the language was at a higher level than of the beginners. The beginners were dealing with very basic structures and sentences and things. Intermediates—we could go into reading. They were petrified of it. And it’s hard reading in Spanish. It really is. It’s nothing at all like the spoken word. Until Chicano writers started writing— And then of course a lot of the Chicano writers were and are writing in English. There’re very few Chicanos writing in Spanish. You can count them on one hand, the published writers. Miguel Méndez—we’re talking the old-timers. In the younger generation? I’m not sure.

Zepeda: I don't think so. I think they write with some Spanish words mixed in but not a whole—

Sánchez: —text. Yes. And so for students it was challenging but we wanted to challenge them. They had a tutor that they worked with individually for an hour a week and they could get together with other students and discuss the readings. The whole idea is to open up minds. Get the questions started. Get students to take some interest. Basically that was it. How do we wake them up so that they are active participants in their education? Because a lot of them coming into school—I remember how it was when I first went to UC Santa Cruz. I would sit in a class and there would be nobody that looked like me. And all of a sudden some question came up about people of color and then everybody looked at me. As if I was the spokesperson for all of us—you know. That used to drive me fucking crazy! What am I? I'm just one person. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs) Yeah!

Sánchez: And you have to take so many things into consideration when you hear my perspective on anything. Because I am not speaking for entire peoples. That was just so fucking annoying. And it happened to all of us when we were the only person of color in the class. It would make me angry, resentful, that I was the only person of color in the class. It was scary, to open your mouth because many times I found out later the notion or assumption was I was a spokesperson for an entire people.

It was a frustrating experience being a solitary Chicana in some of those classrooms. And in our classroom we wanted students to not be frustrated that

way but be able to talk about, not just grammar, but to be able to see the grammar in poetry, or to be able to see the grammar in a historical article, or an op ed piece, or whatever—to be able to see beyond the grammar and getting to the content itself, and putting the two things together and how if you didn't have this verb tense it would change the whole meaning of what the writer is trying to say, why the preterit is much more important than the imperfect, that kind of stuff.

Roberto Crespi wasn't too much into that. He was into the self-knowledge, the identity piece, but he didn't like to integrate it as much into the curriculum as the women that started coming into the program did. I have to say that he made a commitment to the program, to fight for the program and to be the director for the first year. But he did not want to be *the* only person working in the program. He wanted to get back to other classes. I guess he didn't want to be pigeonholed just into SPSS. Because it was seen as language teaching. So he pretty much stepped out of the picture once the program got going and once I started teaching. He stayed on as director for a year and then he stepped out.

Zepeda: And what year was that, sorry.

Sánchez: '83 is when I started teaching. So it probably was around '85 when he stepped out. And then there was this succession of instructors that were hired and that didn't work out for various reasons. One reason is that Spanish for Spanish Speakers pedagogy, curriculum, etc. was new. We really were a pioneering program. There was no other program that existed in the state at the university level trying to do what we were trying to do. There just wasn't. And I

think, unfortunately, that some of the instructors that came into the program had the same backward notions that the students did. When we first started at UC, the Chicano/Latino students thought that coming into Spanish for Spanish Speakers was going to be easy. “Hey, I already know how to speak it. I can read, I can do it!” (laughs) Surprise, surprise. Se dieron cuenta en la primera semana de clases que no sabían de lo que estaban hablando.

We wanted to do language, but we also wanted to do literature; we wanted to do history; we wanted to do current events and developments. And it was like, oh, my Gosh, how are we going to do this? We decided to divide the yearlong intermediate level into three interrelated grammar-focused and thematic links. There was no way that we could keep students past the first quarter. It’s an elective. But we wanted to give them topics that could keep them. Because it was to their benefit to stay with us for the whole year. First, because students felt they belonged, they had a place, a home, where they felt good and they could grow. Second, because we were doing academically what few other classes were doing. They had wonderful writing classes, but writing is not just ideas! You have to give Chicano students concrete tools to strengthen their writing. We found out that many students had no idea how to structure their essays. These are students from Garfield High School, from Roosevelt High School in Los Angeles. Many of them were “A” students there but when they got up here they were struggling. We realized there’s a great divide in terms of academics and we wanted students to get writing skills down. We felt that if they stuck the year through at the intermediate level that they were learning transferable concepts, were gaining confidence, and solidifying their knowledge of grammar, reading, and writing.

The verb tenses were presented bilingually side by side. This was a great help to students. And we were always making comparisons in the classroom, so that students would know that if I'm saying, he llegado I'm saying: I have arrived. Did you guys see this? He llegado, I have arrived.

So we would make those connections for them so they understood what they were doing in English. And then there was the whole identity thing, that if you are not strong in your history and your identity, oh, my gosh. The chances of your making it in that kind of an environment—they're cut, majorly cut. So we felt that we were doing all of these things that were going to empower all of our students to survive that kind of environment, to be able to sustain and pass the second year, the sophomore year that seemed to be a big hump for our students. We were trying to figure out how to do this comprehensive curriculum, all these texts and ideas and arts stuff. So we decided that we'd organize the intermediate level into three different sections and hope that we could convince them to stay. And we'd start with "*Quien Soy Yo.*" That was the for fall quarter.

Our student population changed. From the first years of the program, most of our students were Chicano/Latino students, mostly Chicano students from Fresno [in the Central Valley] and other rural areas in the state, some from LA. In the eighties, with the war in Central America, our whole population changed. Suddenly we had this surge of Centroamericanos, mainly salvadoreños, some guatemaltecos. Do you remember all that horrific stuff that was happening down there?

Zepeda: Yes.

Sánchez: Y uno que otro nicaragüense, but mainly salvadoreños and guatemaltecos. So suddenly what was Chicano-centered curriculum before had to change to accommodate all this new wave, right? So then we're like, okay, but nobody's going to be dropped [from the curriculum]. Everybody is staying in there. We have to talk about what we have in common more than anything else, especially because we found out from our students that back home in L.A. hostilities were growing between salvadoreño students, salvadoreño youth and the Chicano/Mexicano youth! It's lack of history. Again, we are not understanding that we are manipulated and exploited by this capitalist system and we are much more connected to each other. So we changed the curriculum. We still kept the *¿Quién Soy Yo?* because we knew that was important for everybody—no matter where you came from and what you did, that's where you gotta start, your own roots and explore your background. And so the articles for that were something that was identity related, but not necessarily something Chicano. It could be salvadoreño. It could be. Because then of course Mexicanos could read that and go, "Really? El Salvador?" And that's what we were looking for, connections, connections. And then the second quarter we got into the conflict in El Salvador and Nicaragua. We looked at Guatemala. We talked about why there were wars. And boy, did we get: "You guys are communists! Commies. You can't teach this stuff." Our own students were like, "Oooh."

Zepeda: Wow.

Sánchez: Many of their families came to the US as a result of that conflict. Their families witnessed disappearances, tortures, all kinds of horrible things.

If you look at the history of that war in El Salvador, there was probably not one family that was not impacted by that whole seven years of conflict, funded by the U.S. government, all instigated, promoted and orchestrated by the U.S. government. But it's like, we need to study and analyze to know why this happened. Why are you here? Did your family have to come here? Because nobody wants to come here. Nobody wants to leave their families, their land, their networks, their relations. Nobody wants to do that. People are pushed out or they have to leave because they have nothing to fall back on because they have to feed their families, to survive.

We took an analytic approach to that whole conflict and I think overall it had some really positive, very positive outcomes. And students were able to learn and talk about something that they couldn't even talk about at home. It was really important for us to be able to do that, to be able to include the experiences that more than a third of our students had gone through, and explain why they were here in the classrooms with us and why the face of LA was changing. We learned much as we looked at that. And of course, among many of the Central American refugees—there were renowned artists and poets. So we worked to connect with these artists and they came into the classroom and they talked to the students, and they told their stories, or read their work. There were some really important connections that were made.

And then the last quarter of that year, we would finish off with *la mujer*. (laughs)

Zepeda: Nice.

Sánchez: Because hello, we're over half of the world. And we carry a big weight and we just want to let everybody know our history as mujeres. So we had a whole quarter and reader dedicated to women. And we used a lot of the articles from *Fem* in Mexico about mujeres. They had an entire issue dedicated to and about Chicanas. The issue caused an uproar, due to the cover: a Chicana's painting of La Virgen de Guadalupe with high heels and a short skirt. And you know what that must have been like for some Mexican circles. (laughs) So that caused this big stir. It was Chicana images on the cover and throughout the issue, the *revista*. We focused on women in the last quarter because it needed to be. That was the balance.

And we pretty much tried to maintain that quarterly focus in terms of the content. And then the grammar, we also divided up into three consecutive quarters. The SPSS staff met once a week to talk about issues of concern, classroom curriculum, updates by instructors and students, reactions to the curriculum, individual situations that tutors wanted/needed to discuss, suggestions or recommendations by SPSS staff. Our tutors were dedicated. They were wonderful resources. They had a mission. (laughs) And they were leaders, they were natural leaders. They were natural leaders in the classroom and many of them were neighborhood assistants in their colleges. They had excelled as former intermediate-level SPSS students. Their role wasn't just Spanish for Spanish Speakers language lab instructor (tutor). They were active, participating in various communities and they were role modeling in so many ways for the incoming students.

Zepeda: Because they were students themselves.

Sánchez: Yes, yes. And I think that was part of the effectiveness, having them as language lab instructors. They are peers. They run into each other in the hall on the third floor over at Merrill. That kind of stuff. Or they would talk or ask about other things or they would do things together. Or maybe they were into poetry. There were connections made in the program and outside the program as well. Students were building a real strong network outside of the classroom, which I wonder if it would have been there had it not been facilitated by SPSS's presence and process as well.

Zepeda: Yes. And did students hang on for the three quarters?

Sánchez: Yes, for the most part we were successful in keeping the students that started in the fall. Sometimes some would have to drop out for some reason, and we rarely added students in the middle of the sequence. We really discouraged people from coming in the middle of the sequence because there's too much grammar to cover and it can become daunting.

Zepeda: And what was the response from the community? Did other people see the effects of Spanish for Spanish Speakers on the students?

Sánchez: Like faculty, you mean?

Zepeda: Mm, hmm.

Sánchez: I think they did. There were certain faculty that we were close to and were very supportive of the program. Aida Hurtado shared a lot of our students. She was at Stevenson, and a psychology professor, and got to know some SPSS students. But she'd say, "Oh, I have so-and-so in my class and—"

And then what we also did to try and link ourselves up—because we were kind of in an isolated situation, we always felt attacked. The reason why Crespi did not want Spanish for Spanish Speakers to be a part of the literature program or the language program is because he feared they would eat us alive. He insisted they had no interest in what we were doing. They did not believe in it. They did not support it.

And I think in the language department, people were jealous because when we did get started there was support, financial support for us to get started. And I think that there was some bristling. But being separate also made us vulnerable. We had no department protection. We had no one to look out for us. And as much as Roberto was peleonero because he was such a peleonero, he was also isolated. He had isolated himself from other faculty because he was just too much of a peleonero. We came up with an idea of having a committee of faculty somehow related to what we were doing that could serve in an advisory role and in some way protect us. But that didn't really work either, because there were faculty from different departments but there was no cohesiveness there either. And within their own departments some of these faculty may have had no power or influence. But we did try and link up with faculty that we thought had clear connections with what we were doing. Psychology, Aida [Hurtado] was definitely one of those. Pedro [Castillo]'s focus was Chicano history. We had people like Jorge Hankamer in linguistics. He was a part of the committee but not much of a spokesperson for us.

But I didn't see a real—I guess what I was hoping for is some faculty from psychology or from linguistics would find out what we were doing and say,

“Wow, that has tremendous implications for— Is there a way that we could—” Because we needed to show that our program was successful and was making inroads in terms of people’s academics, retention, whether it was their confidence or whatever. Our benefits were anecdotal and we needed real research-based information. You know how it is up there. If you don’t have that, you’re just like a little rowboat dando vuelta en el agua, you know.

So we knew that we needed research-based findings. But it was really hard to find that kind of a faculty commitment, a faculty vested in researching SPSS pedagogy. There was no one really hired specifically interested in that area that would be able to take up our program as part of their research. It would have to be something that any of those people that we talked about would have to take on as an extra. And nobody likes to do anything extra like that. So even though we had this committee, you know—

The committee did do one thing. They did personnel evaluations on myself, because I needed to have an evaluation of my work and once Roberto Crespi passed away there was really nobody that could do that. And so the committee took on that role. They would come into the class, observe, and write up my review of my teaching, and then it would become part of my file. But in terms of them advocating for us or helping us put together a research plan, or some kind of a way to begin documenting what was happening to our students, there was nothing like that.

So all we have, and all we had, are the anecdotes of the students themselves. “This is what happened to me as a result of coming into this program.” Or, “This

is how I improved in the program.” Or, “This is how I changed.” It was their stories. Their individual stories are so powerful. But there was no channel for them to go. And so we would hear them amongst ourselves, or they would tell us in the classroom, or they would tell a tutor, but it was just something that we heard. It was never able to get out somewhere else. I’m sure some of these students talked to their instructors about what they were doing in the program, or how positive they felt about it, but nothing really came out of it. And that was frustrating for me because not being part of an official department, knowing that we couldn’t be part of an official department, made it feel like we were out there on our own, kind of swimming, swimming, swimming. And we were. We’d kind of tread water and try to figure out how to sustain ourselves.

Because in the eighties, I guess it was around the mid-eighties, there were some major cuts to the university budget. And that was the first inkling that we had that we were going to be looked at carefully, “Oh, all these tutors. It’s costing all this money.” That was one of the first things they always wanted to cut, was the tutorial component. We kept saying, “No, you can’t do that. This is an integral part.”

Zepeda: That was the whole lab.

Sánchez: Yeah! You know, do you realize what that means? All this individual attention that students were getting at their level that was helping them to keep up with the work and to understand what was happening and to challenge themselves, or to feel connected, that they could go to someone, if they couldn’t get it. That was an anchor. If you lift that anchor up, what happens? Students

don't have that. We couldn't do it all, certainly, as instructors. Imagine three sections of intermediates plus whatever other classes we were teaching as part of our assignment. So that was hard. That was hard because I felt especially towards the end of my time there, the last five years or so, I was spending so much more time writing the memos, and we need this, and we can't cut that. It was a struggle to keep ourselves afloat.

The stress started to be too much for me. I started getting really sick. And that's when, towards the end, like around '94, I started thinking, it's either your health or your baby. You're going to have to start really thinking about this because it's getting to you and this is not good, you have to decide. You have to decide what you're going to do. So I had to give up the baby. I had to give up the baby. I figured, well, I did what I could in the almost fifteen years that we kept the program afloat.

Zepeda: That's amazing.

Sánchez: It is! It really is amazing. And I feel sad for that campus because they never fully appreciated what was going on there for Latino students and the fact that Latino students were feeling good about going to school and were feeling supported somewhat and were feeling better about what they were doing and were feeling like there was a connection.

Culturally, oh, my gosh. It was flourishing! We also had a great deal to do with that. Both that and *la Revista* because we were trying as much as possible to encourage students to express themselves creatively too. And helping them polish their work. Because I always say, "The first time is like a throw up. Okay?"

You just go (makes retching noises). Everything that you carry around in your head finally comes out. It's not pretty. Then you have to go back and clean it up. You have to say, 'oh, what do I really want to save? What is not savable? And do a second version. And maybe a third or a fourth or a fifth.'" But your work is not finished just because you spit it out. That's just the first part." Because I think it's not a good idea to think—you know, with whatever we do—the same thing with any essay. Don't think that your first write up of anything is going to be the one. Rarely. I mean, sometimes there's this wonderful, magical, organic thing that happens. But that's so rare. That's like the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe.

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: You might be waiting for a while. (laughs)

Also I think lecturers in the University of California hierarchy are the most oppressed of instructors. So there's more of—I think we have a different perspective because we're looking at things from the bottom up and they're looking at things from the top down. And so they can hardly see us. (laughs) "What, lecturers? You mean they're down there somewhere? Oh, okay. Let's give them another class to teach."

Zepeda: (laughs) So how were you able to sustain yourselves for fifteen years there? You said in the last five it was—

Sánchez: It was hard. It was really hard. I think the first ten years I had no problems. When I first started, I was really excited. I was really excited about

growing curriculum, and just learning myself, and feeling more confident about my own teaching skills, and seeing my confidence grow. And also very excited because, even though we had a couple of distasteful *encuentros*—and now that I think about it, they were male *encuentros*, faculty that were hired into the program that did not work out, first of all because they didn't understand what we were trying to do and they came into the program trying to change it. I'm sorry! You cannot do that! So then they resented me because here they were, hired as the director, and this upstart lecturer was telling them what they were going to do and what they were not going to do with regards to the sequence curriculum—especially men did not take well to that. You know?

So the couple of men that were hired into the program within a year didn't work out. One person—this should have been a clue—don't ever hire anybody that says, "My name is blank, blank PhD. This is very revealing, I have come to learn. This man could not do anything without the PhD attached to his name. I thought it was so colonized, the mentality. And, of course, I rubbed him the wrong way because I said, "No, we're not changing the curriculum. This is what we've been doing. Give us more ideas or give us new things that we can add. But you will see when you get into the program why—" He did not take to it well. The man had no control in the classroom. That was the year where our program got some bad rap because he totally lowered the academic standard. I would never support that. And you have to have discipline in the classroom and you have to have organization. If you want your students to come in with their homework prepared, you'd better do your own homework because there's no respect there if students see that you're not doing your job. We're modeling here. We have a

big responsibility. We have to raise the achievement level. They will rise up to the challenge, if we expect them to. And that, for me, was proven over and over each year. I expected my students to do well—homework is not turned in late. I don't want any excuses. You know when it's coming. You get it done. You know? That was it. Because they were not going to take this lightly. This is serious. This is your language. This is your history, your culture, your people, if you want to take it that far. You also have a responsibility—once you're in this class, that's it, our commitment.

And the other thing too was, it was a challenge for some of us female instructors in the classroom because guys, young and older, thought—you know, upstart women. (laughs) And especially upstart, intelligent, and just like, with it, you know?

Zepeda: Yeah.

Sánchez: I had some wonderful teaching experiences. Clara Lomas stayed with us for about six years. She was wonderful. We worked well together. It was really, really good. So there were some teachers, females, that came in that, man, they got it. They did it. It was great. Sylvia Casillas was another example of that. She transferred from the community college to the university level, which was a little bit of a change for her in terms of the pace and everything else. But she got into it. She did it. And she was Puerto Rican, which was nice, to add a Puerto Rican flavor to our mix. It was good to have her. Clara was Chicana. It was wonderful. There were some experiences that really were the best and they just happened to be women. Clara and Sylvia were, by far, the most successful. Then

we had the guys in between that didn't work out very well. But it was kind of a challenge working with people that were coming in from the outside and had the title of director but didn't know anything about the program, the pedagogy of SPSS. That was something else for us to be challenged with and have to deal with.

Zepeda: And did you help in the hiring?

Sánchez: (laughs) Not always. A couple of times.

I think after that challenging year with Mr. PhD, I was in the interview with Clara when we hired her. I knew things were going to work out because of her style. She was very direct and talked about her work with Latinos. I just thought, oh, yeah, this is good. She stayed with us for a while but she left because she'd gotten her PhD and she wanted to have a tenure track position but there was no way that they would give SPSS a tenure track position. We weren't even a department.

As a result of Clara's departure, Carolina Martínez, who had been a student in the program, and then a tutor, ended up teaching in the program. I thought, wow, this is cool. Because I was the first generation to come from the classes, in the program's birthing throes. Carolina taught with us the last two years that I was there. And it was wonderful to have her because she had been a student, so she knew the program from the classroom side, as students, and could talk about and could see how her program experiences had impacted her. Caro is good and she's funny and I could tell that she was going to do great in the classroom, too.

Zepeda: So what were the aspirations for the program? When you formed the program or thought about it, did you think, oh, this will help the students do *x*?

Sánchez: Yes, when we were looking at the classes and the curriculum, we were looking at the history part, which was very important, and the identification piece, which was very important. And the critical thinking skills were always part of the program. It didn't matter which class you were in, you had to be a critical thinker. Ask questions. Look at what you're reading—does this theory really apply to my life, my family's life, the life of neighbors in the barrio, or whatever.

So we knew we wanted students to come away with critical thinking skills, confidence in writing (that was critical for us), confidence in their own speaking abilities, and feeling good about their own language and culture. And we wanted them to gain knowledge, historical knowledge, self-knowledge, and community, Latina knowledge. Like some base, you have to have a base. We hoped what we were doing in the classroom was going to be a part of their professional and personal lives. Because critical thinking skills, tell me who can't use critical thinking skills. Writing skills—tell me which job you're going to get with a BA and beyond that does not require writing. Speaking skills and translation skills, which many of our students were asked to do in their own communities—all of those things you're going to fortify, solidify, come away with more knowledge and confidence.

Those were core, core areas that students were going to get in the classroom, that they would use no matter what they decided to specialize or major in. And the

upper-division SPSS classes, they were electives, they counted towards different majors—education, Latin American studies, community studies, literature, some psychology. We had the gamut of majors and we felt that whatever major—environmental studies—it really doesn't matter because for us it was about the language that you're going to need to speak. If you're in this class it's because you want to be able to give information in that language, whatever your job, whether you're a lawyer or a teacher, you're in here because you're going to be giving back to your community. To be able to give back you need to be able to communicate. That is respectful, that is a wonderful connection to make, and that's supported. With those core values, anything else that came along was great and wonderful and we were happy for them. But really, we felt that those areas were necessary.

The University of California fails our students tremendously and all kinds of students of color, and working class students, who are coming into the university. How are you going to help them succeed academically? How are you going to help them survive those four years at the university level? It's ridiculous. They're setting them up for failure, is what UC is doing. That's a crime against our communities. Because you are not preparing our students to do—can you imagine graduating with a BA and going out to get a job and then you can't write? What are you going to do? We need leadership, in order to do the best job for our students.

Zepeda: Exactly. That's part of it.

Sánchez: And it is hard work that you're doing. You're building. You're building on skills and confidence. That's what it's about.

I cannot stand it when any institution hurts our students by not having any expectations of them, not assessing their skills, to help them, to help them maneuver in that academic world. Otherwise, I'm sorry, you're just setting us up. I don't want to hear how vested you are in diversity. Give me a break. That just makes me want to throw up. And that's one of the reasons why I couldn't stay there. It just eats me up, the hypocrisy. They're such liars. How dare they call themselves a public institution? When I was a student, I knew this was not a public institution. You look at San Francisco City College, a public institution, and you look at UC—there's no comparison. None at all. They have no interest in students of color or working class students. Their focus is faculty and their research. The good ole boys gang.

Revista Mujeres

Zepeda: Okay, we're here with Elba Sánchez. It's April 5, 2013. Thank you for joining us today.

Sánchez: Oh, you're welcome.

Zepeda: I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project. Today we're going to be speaking about *Revista Mujeres* and the project of *Revista Mujeres* on the UC Santa Cruz campus and beyond. So let's begin with asking how you got involved with *Revista Mujeres* and how that started?

Sánchez: Well, I was involved with Las Mujeres the first year on the periphery. I realized when I went back to read this, that the year that *Revista* started was when I entered graduate school. So with the very first issue I was not as involved because I was having a hard time adjusting to graduate school. (laughs) I'll be really honest. The women were just wonderful. They were being really supportive and they said, "Do what you need to do and just check in with us every once in a while so we know you're okay."

I was always involved with Las Mujeres because of my faculty contribution but also because Las Mujeres was a way for us to connect, no matter who we were on campus, to kind of be witnesses to our community. At that point in Santa Cruz, there still were not a lot of Chicano/Latino students. It was wonderful to see each other. We wanted to know who we were. We wanted to be supportive.

Las Mujeres always had a welcome reception at the beginning of the year, which was really wonderful. Come and spend five minutes, as much time as you have. It was just, introduce ourselves—what are you doing; how did you get here? It was a way to break down some of the walls and give us an opportunity to know each other and extend our hands to each other, to create community. That's really what it was about. It was about creating community and how do we *survive* in this environment? How do we move forward in this foreign, very unwelcoming, I think for the most part, environment? So Las Mujeres was crucial, a life-saver. For me, if it hadn't been for that I don't think I would have made it. In fact, I know I would not have made it. Having that opportunity to come together as mujeres and to create that community was like—

As mujeres we had major issues. A lot of us had to really struggle to get there. I'm talking about daughters whose fathers—and I had this happen to me over and over again when I was teaching, female students would come up to me and tell me their family is not speaking to them anymore because they decided to come to school, or their father is not speaking to them anymore. So some of this stuff would come up at the beginning of Las Mujeres because you carry that with you. For some of them, it was such a wound. It's so difficult to focus on your studies when you know that your dad's not speaking to you anymore, or your family's not speaking to you. That's your lifeline! So all of a sudden, not to have that. That's why Las Mujeres was important, for all of us this was an anchor.

At the beginning, Las Mujeres was much more active. I think what happened was that with *Revista* a lot of Las Mujeres who were kind of like the natural leaders within Las Mujeres organization started working to try and get *Revista* going. We saw *Revista* kind of as an extension, in terms of the communication and creating community. And the other thing that was important about *Revista*, and this came out—*Revista* came out of one of those orientation meetings that Las Mujeres had. I remember we were at Oakes. It was the beginning of the year reception. Graduate and undergraduate students came and faculty came. Unfortunately, we didn't have a lot of staff represented. It was a lot more difficult for some staff to make it to events. But they did try to participate in other ways.

At this welcome reception, I believe it was Katia that asked, "What are some of the issues that you are facing, or that we should know about, or that you want to share with other folks?" And some of the graduate students started talking about

how frustrating it was for them to get their work published. They could not find outlets to get their work published. And what editors were telling them was that they didn't want to deal with bilingual issues, where writers are writing in both languages. Or that what they were doing was too ethnic and the general audience would not understand or that there wasn't an audience for our writing. It was always, "It's too ethnic. It's too much Spanish, or not enough Spanish. It's too bilingual. It's too this; it's too this; it's too that." And they were saying, "There's no way for us to get our stuff out and we really need that. It's part of our graduate expectations."

And so we just kind of looked at each other. I think the faculty, more than anybody, understood that. Because we had faced that already. And so it was like, we discussed and concluded, well, if there's no outlet out there, then we're going to create an outlet.

Zepeda: Wow. That's amazing.

Sánchez: (laughs) You know? Because we wanted to respond to that need. I think everybody felt like, wow. We thought a journal that we could publish, where both undergraduate and graduate students could publish their work. We could bring some of these issues and dialogue into a classroom. We thought the whole idea of a journal as something that would solidify the community and offer an opportunity to discuss issues at a deeper level, a more analytical level, with more research in the background, so then we could have real intelligent discussions, whether it's culture, or the Church, or the family—whatever it is that we're looking at. And so we decided that's what we were going to do. I

don't know why we thought, nothing is going to stop us. We'll get the funding. Y ahí, Las Mujeres.

The first couple of issues, and really pretty much all of them, were a struggle. We had to go around to different colleges to ask for money because at that time the provosts had discretionary funds. So we could go to the provosts. Since most of our students came from all over the campus, we tried to hit each provost. We told them, "We want to do an issue. We will distribute it free to all of the Chicano-Latino students, faculty, and staff on campus. It's for building community. It's for bringing up issues that are important to us. It's for giving graduate students an opportunity to publish. We need it! We need it."

We got some money. The first issue, as you can see, was really small. And we were like back in the stone age when we were doing this because we had light tables and the print would be put on these sticky sheets and we had knives to cut out the printed text carefully. Oh, my God, it was just so tedious. It took us *forever* just to do the first issue because we were learning. None of us had experience putting this together, so it was like, oh, my gosh! It was definitely a time-consuming, learning experience.

When we first started, we thought about doing one *Revista* per quarter. Well, we realized as soon as we finished the first issue, there's no way that we could do an issue each quarter. Because we were all volunteers. That's how we were putting this together.

Zepeda: Mostly faculty or—

Sánchez: No, it was some staff, some graduate students, some faculty, mostly from SPSS. Some undergraduates. But it would wane. Sometimes we'd have nobody except for Katia [Panas] and me. And other times, other mujeres would come in. So it was kind of uneven. It depended on who was doing what. They gave me license with this first issue to absent myself. "You go do your graduate study adjustments and then come back to us. We're going to take care of the first *Revista* pretty much. You can just come in and read and—" I was one of the ones who checked the Spanish.

So that's how it started. It was a total response to a need that we had as a community and also as an academic community, on both levels. Our intent was we wanted students to feel pride in their work. We knew then and we know now for a fact that when you're a writer, when you're a poet, when you're an academic, the most important thing is to get your work out. For lots of reasons. One, because that is your passion and that is what you feel inside. Two, because a lot of times it opens up doors and you start communicating with someone else that says, "Oh, you know what? Something similar happened to me and this is what I felt—" Or, "Thank you for reading that. It really touched me." So that connection is so crucial for the writer because it gives them the sense and the knowledge that their experience is not solitary. It's not an isolated experience. There's a community out there that identifies with that experience. And just seeing your work in print is like, "Oh, my God! That's me." (laughs) It's like seeing your own image. It gives you such a sense of pride.

When the same students took the *Revista* home, people at home wanted to publish. We had brothers or sisters of students who had a drawing or poem that they wanted considered for publication.

So that's how we started. We had a lot of we-can-do-its and a lot of dreams about it. I think we did a really good job for the many years that we did it. But you can tell towards the end, because we went from two issues, then to one towards the end. Because it really—it was so much work. We were getting burnt-out. We were not getting, especially towards the end, the kind of help or support that we needed. People would be very sporadic in coming in. Funds were not trickling in. Pretty much it boiled down to Katia and me doing the majority of the work, from putting out the call to putting out the end product.

Katia wrote all of the mini-proposals to get our funding. She would go to the provost. She would go to the deans. She had clout. And so it really was helpful to us. And then she recruited other people that probably would not have been a part of it, from the outside. I'm talking about Marta Morello-Frosch, who was a literature prof.

The challenge for us really was because we could not get a fixed amount of funding, every time we were going to do an issue, we would have to go back and—we hit the same people or tried to find new ones because the other ones didn't want to give us any more money. That made it much more of a struggle because we didn't have financial support. Nobody in administration really saw the importance of this. Instead of highlighting it, you know, and saying, "Chicanas in Santa Cruz . . ." No. They never *once* saw the value of what we were

doing or acknowledged. It was individual provosts or deans that were giving us \$500 or whatever. But that made it so much harder for us, and especially because all the work was volunteer. Toward the end, on top of putting out the call, reading all the submissions, putting this whole thing together, we also each time had to go out and look for the money.

So it was a lot of work. You could just see. We started out with a lot of enthusiasm. I think we were doing really excellent work. I think it was really important for Las Mujeres, and for the women who learned about it and started writing and submitting things to us, and who were published in the *Revista*. And it would have been so much nicer—I think it would have survived, and grown maybe even, if there had been some support, if there had been some money set aside for it, and if there had been encouragement.

Zepeda: Instead of keep having to ask.

Sánchez: Yeah, instead of us having to beg every single year. It's undignified. I'm sorry. Look what we're doing and you don't even want to acknowledge it. So it just started feeling like one of these things where you look at all these people and you go (growls) You can't help it. You know. You can't help it. Because they're like leeches. They'll use you. They'll suck up everything that you have and claim it when it's convenient for them. That was a challenge for us. It was a real challenge. And like I said, I think that *Revista* would still be in existence if there had been more support.

Zepeda: I read that it was a first in California for bilingual Chicano/Latino writers and visual arts. So that's—

Sánchez: There was nothing in the whole state that was like this, produced by a collective of women, not just staff or faculty. Because we really, from the beginning, we loved the fact that we had undergraduates, graduates! It was such a wonderful, organic mix of women. And it was wonderful for the undergraduates to be able to establish relationships with graduate students and with faculty outside of the classroom. They weren't used to doing that. It was a whole other culture that we were trying to create and cultivate, where we wanted to make a space to have undergraduate women feel comfortable and have women feel confident and, "Oh, wow. There's my professor. I can go and say hi to her." Or, "That's really interesting that she's talking about her personal life." Maybe they never would have known that if they hadn't come to that working meeting.

So it really was, more than anything, about—how do we sustain ourselves here? How do we survive this experience and not lose ourselves in the process, which can easily be done. Or you're so discouraged because you feel like you don't belong there and you're kind of made to feel like that over and over again, that you leave. Eventually the message gets to you. So we wanted this to make a change, to make a difference in the lives of women who thought of themselves as writers, or as poets, or as artists, and we wanted to give them a venue so they could see their stuff and they could say, "Oh, my gosh. Yes, I've been published." (laughs) That was the whole intention.

Zepeda: And when it came out did you all have some sort of celebration?

Sánchez: Every time that we had an issue come out, we had a reception with food because that brought lots of students. We would have a reading by the featured writers. People worked hard. I don't know how it is for students nowadays. This is an aside, but Cecilia Burciaga just passed away.⁷

Zepeda: Mmm. I heard.

Sánchez: She's like a hero to me. She was one of those women that fought for us. And I don't think she got all the acknowledgement and the recognition that she should have gotten. She fought some pretty serious fights, both against UC's and the CSU's, took them to court, both of them, and won.

Zepeda: Wow.

Sánchez: But I think it took its toll on her and towards the end of her life she was doing consulting. I think there's a whole generation that is leaving the campus, lots of campuses throughout California. Because we are of retirement age, those of us—the Chicanos that were able to get in after the civil rights struggles and demonstrations and all that shit went down.

I want to know that there's generations coming after and I want them to know that there's a history. It's important for them to make community, to dialogue, to challenge each other intellectually and as community. There's a lot of things in our community that need changing for the positive. And we can be those agents of positive change. I've always believed that.

⁷ Cecilia Preciado Burciaga, who worked at Stanford for twenty years, passed away on March 25, 2013, at the age of 67.

I like the fact that *Revista* is published. It's paper. There's something about holding it in your hands, and when you see it and when you recognize that, oh, my god, there was nothing else in the whole state being published by women for women, bilingually. This is historical.

Zepeda: It is definitely historical.

Sánchez: And to not have any acknowledgement of that. It's sad for women.

Zepeda: Yes, it is. Mm, hmm.

Sánchez: And it's sad for our community because our community doesn't know about this. I think it is important for our community to know. I think it makes you feel proud. I think it makes you feel better. I think it does something to strengthen us. So I'm really proud. Like, this morning when I was here I was thinking, we kicked ass. (laughing and crying)

Zepeda: Yes, definitely.

Sánchez: You know? And I'm glad that we thought we could do it. I'm glad that we were bold, and we said, "Yeah, we're going to do it. We're going to put this journal together!" (laughs) without really knowing what we're getting into. Because had we known we would have probably said, "Oh, my God. Forget it." (laughs)

Zepeda: But how amazing, to not have known but to have still continued to go through with it, and then to continue it for years, and to continue that process of documenting so many different types of stories, so many different types of

genres of writing, so many different communities together. And like you're saying, it's in print. It's there. It's bound in McHenry and it's also in Special Collections. People have their own copies. That's powerful that it continues to exist. But I think your point is right, that this historical memory of bringing it to the newer generations—

Sánchez: Yes, and also just in terms of our history and our development because I think as Chicanos, as Chicanas, our literature is in baby steps. We've done a tremendous amount of work in the last ten years in terms of getting more Chicano/a and Latino/a writers published. But for the longest time we were just taking little, tiny baby steps and we couldn't get our stuff published. If it wasn't because of Kitchen Table Press and small presses like that, that were run by women, that started publishing Gloria [Anzaldúa] and Cherrie [Moraga]—if it hadn't been for them and all the hard work that they did. Thank god. Now they've become so well known, their contribution is so significant.

Yeah, and it's such a struggle. I think *Revista Mujeres* has contributed to the growth and the strength of our literature, of our research, of our sense of self as community and women and writers. I feel glad. I feel really happy that we did that and that there were women who came out of here and felt like, "Oh, my gosh. I was published." They were undergraduates or they were graduate students who had been struggling to get their work published and now finally had an opportunity to do that. And even our faculty. I was reading today [in an old issue of *Revista*], there was an article that Aida [Hurtado] submitted about stereotypes and images. It's great to have all those perspectives, so many voices.

At first *Revista* didn't have specific themes or topics for issues. We just would publish whatever would come in. And a lot of times we were shocked and amazed by how, after we put the magazine together, my gosh, it just all jelled so well. It just seemed to powerfully come together. What had seemed like very disparate topics at first ended up being part of a whole, each and every time. We were always like: how did that happen? How did we do that?

And then we decided, well, maybe we should have one issue that is focused like say, on farmworker women. And then the other issue can be general so people can send it whatever, whatever strikes their fancy, or whatever they're thinking about and working on. So that's why we started dividing up—we gave up the *Revista* per quarter idea after the first one—and then we were more logical and just thought of a beginning and an end—at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year. And then we decided one issue of *Revista* would be whatever we get—and then the second issue of the year became the focused or topic-specific issue. That was really helpful. Actually, our writers and contributors started asking us themselves. So it was like, “Hmm. We're kind of both thinking the same thing. We should do it. Okay, we'll do it.”

Zepeda: Like they wanted a theme.

Sánchez: They wanted a theme. “Are you guys going to do theme issues?” So we decided—we had a talk among the *Revista* board and we decided, yeah, we should do that, that would be good. So I think it was like the third year? I think it was the third year. [rustling through issues of *Revista*] Yes, because this is our campesinas issue. This was the very first one.

Zepeda: And what year was this one?

Sánchez: This is '85. So it's the year after we first started. So, each year there was something new that we were trying out, or we were thinking about. Even if we didn't have money we'd always figure, "Let's do a color cover! Well, how are we going to get that money? Oh, we'll worry about that later. Okay." (laughs)

Zepeda: Staying creative with it.

Sánchez: Yeah! I think we just were bold. (laughs)

Zepeda: Nothing to lose, also, because there was nothing there. It was all building.

Sánchez: Exactly. Yeah, let's try it. We'll just ask for more money, that's all. (laughs) And as long as we didn't have to do that part of the work.

After the first year we no longer worked with a light table and tried to cut and put all the little pieces that would stick on these sheets that would then go to the printers. After that, we learned a more modern method.

Zepeda: Oh, good.

Sánchez: And so we kind of grew with *Revista* too, in terms of our publishing skills, our technical skills. It helped so much to move away from the way that we put the first two issues together to a more modern, technological approach. Because when we went to computers, oh, my god, that was so great! (laughs) When I was starting this with the Mac, I had a little personal, square Mac and thank God for my Mac. Because now we had a disk and now we could revise and

edit all in the disk. I mean it was just like, wow! Yay! We're getting smart about this. We were learning how to bring ourselves to the present future in terms of the technology of putting the journal together.

We always had a wonderful discussion when we were considering a submission. And when we saw a research paper or anything looked like it had a lot of possibilities but needed work, we would sit with the person and we would work with them. We would say, "Here's some feedback from the editorial board. Do you have time to do this? Because if you don't then we need to know and we can make the place for somebody else. So are you ready to make the commitment because we like your piece but we need to work on a couple of things. Or it's too long, or needs clarity here, etc."

Zepeda: So you were part of the board, of course. And then was it other graduate students?

Sánchez: Yeah, again, there was a mix. And they would come in and out depending on, again, what they were going through in their own academic—like, if they were getting close to defending their dissertation, nobody is going to be showing up to help us. So it would be graduate and other students who would come in and out. Rosie Cabrera was always a part of it, pretty much, Rosie, and myself and Katia. Towards the end, even Rosie pulled out.

I think that's why it just got really hard for Katia and myself to continue. At the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm and there was a lot of support, a lot of actual physical work done by everybody. And then as things kind of continued, it would wane. We kept doing it because we believed in it, we wanted to. And

then maybe Pat Zavella would be interested in helping because she liked the topic and so she would come in and she would send us student papers.

Elena Taylor was with us the first two years. She was a graduate student in the *sciences*, mind you. I was like—(laughs), totally amazing. Undergraduate students would come in and help. It was always wonderful because it gave us an opportunity to work with different women and them to work with us. We were all learning and sharing our skills with each other. We did try and keep some consistency in terms of help because when you have to train and retrain people, that takes a lot of time too. Sometimes, honestly, it was easier for me and Katia to do the work then to have to bring in a whole bunch of other people and [train them]. So that was part of the challenge and part of the frustration and part of the good stuff, too. It was kind of all in one little sandwich, you know. (laughs)

Zepeda: That's a good way to put it.

Sánchez: Yeah. I think publishing anybody's work is sacred work. I think it's blessed work because what we were trying to do is open people's minds, open people's views, inspire people, raise them up. All those things are so positive to me. And even if what they read is painful and it shocks them or whatever, it's okay. Because sometimes that's what it takes for you to wake up and to be aware of something. I think the thing is to become aware, to begin to understand, so that you can have compassion, so that you can go, "Oh, man. I totally understand where you're coming from. Or, I don't really understand but I support you." I think that's what it was about.

For the longest time. I wanted to collaborate with other women on campus because I felt like, oh, gosh, you know—I don't know, I guess African American students and staff could have done the same thing that we did with a journal. I felt like we needed to collaborate. We needed to reach out to other women on campus.

To me, the largest group that I could identify were the African American students. So I thought, let's do an issue together. *Revista* gave us an opportunity to look at things and question things that we hadn't seen before, that we hadn't thought about before.

And this potential collaboration was, for me, a part of that. I wanted to know: what do we share? What are some common themes and issues that we share as women of color, as communities of color? And where do we diverge, where do our experiences and our perspectives differ? That is so important. It was a way for our community to also grow beyond themselves, to learn and to reach out to another community. Because even though we've coexisted on campus, there had never really been an opportunity to really work together, or really get to know each other. We didn't have *Las Mujeres* and the Black Women come together, which, now that I think about it, would have been really powerful. But this was a baby step. And it was kind of like a baby step just in terms of talking to the other women, seeing how they felt about it, having them agree to collaborate.

I think it was a really good issue. What we realized afterwards was, man, we women shared a lot of issues around our fathers. And there's a lot of issues of physical abuse that came up. A lot of the articles, the journals, the poetry

submitted were really painful, very painful stuff. We were like, oh, my God, I wish we shared something else in common. (laughs) It was just so intense. Physical, sexual abuse, oh, my gosh. It was really painful.

Zepeda: And how was it to receive that, as an editor? I mean, painful, but also, how was that energy managed? Because it's like receiving their work and then also honoring it and wanting to put it out. So how did you manage that?

Sánchez: Well, first, in the practical sense, we're limited by the number of pages. We're limited by the length of the paper, some papers were so long and we were trying to publish as many people as possible. As a board, we decided to pick some of those very painful articles. But we also wanted to have some kind of a variety. We didn't want to put out an issue where it looked like all we were experiencing was that. Because that's also a skewed perspective, even though it seemed to be the larger, most common of the experiences that people had voiced. For me, that would have been uncool, to just publish one shared experience.

So we had to pick and choose. For particular issue, Professor Carolyn Clark and some African-American graduate students helped us. And somebody on staff—I don't remember her name now. She used to work in EOP, Michelle Handy. So they were on the editorial board also. Because it couldn't just be us. Everything changed for this issue, from the beginning. The call had to be put out by both of our communities. The board had to be established at the very beginning, where we had equal number of African American and Chicanas/Latinas on the board. And we shared with them what our guidelines were in the past and they kind of followed our guidelines. When we looked at all the work, the board was like

(makes gulping sound of overwhelm and intensity) so now what are we going to do? So we decided we're going to try to choose a little bit of everything, try to give a variety of topics. Because it wasn't a thematically focused issue. If we had decided, we would do it on violence, then we'd have had more than enough. But we decided that because it was the only one that we were doing, because it was an introduction to both of our communities—it was an introduction for the African American community who were looking at *Revista* for the first time and it was an introduction for the Chicana/Latina community, who were looking at the contributions of African American women as part of *Revista* for the first time.

Zepeda: Wow. Powerful.

Sánchez: It was. I wanted to do more like this. I wanted to do another one with Asian women and Native American women on campus. But we didn't get that far because this really just ended up being the last one. I think we were kind of like at our wits end by the time that we finished this one in June of 1993. I'm trying to think of when the civil rights case against the university happened. I think that must have been in '94.⁸

Zepeda: That makes sense.

Sánchez: Because I left the year after. Yeah. That whole other thing just changed everything.

Zepeda: You mean the civil rights case?

⁸ See Julia Armstrong, "Letter to John Palomino, Regional Civil Rights Director, Office of Civil Rights, United States Department of Education concerning sexual discrimination at the University of California, Santa Cruz, April 29, 1994."

Sánchez: Yeah, the Title IX civil rights suit that came out of the assault of a Chicana freshman from Oakes College. Because it affected the Latino community in such a powerful, direct way. There was a split in the community and some people were taking sides. The university handled it *horrifically!* The women were not getting the support that they needed and the Chicano-Latino faculty on campus pissed the hell out of me. We needed a man in academia to say, “This behavior by the young male perpetrators is *not* going to be tolerated.” We went to the highest ranking Chicano administrator, the women. We said, “We need your leadership *as a man*. We need you to stand up and say, “This behavior is not going to be allowed.” You know what he did? He took the boys under his wing. I was so fucking frustrated because none of the men on campus except some male students came out and said anything. None. It was—oof, it was terrible. But by that time we kind of knew how people were going to act or not act. And you could cut through the tension. The young woman was totally traumatized, students were taking sides and threatening each other.

It would have been nice to keep the *Revista* going. It would have been nice to have had a space.

Zepeda: So when you started speaking about the *Revista* right at the beginning of our conversation, you mentioned Las Mujeres. So Las Mujeres put together activities like the Chicana conference, the Third World Women’s Workshop, and on ongoing, monthly, sometimes quarterly meeting, which you mentioned.

Sánchez: Yes.

Zepeda: The Chicana conference was held May 13, 1978. And then the Third World Women's Workshop was held in spring of 1982. That one had women from UC Berkeley, Stanford, and other Northern California colleges, universities, and communities. Does that sound familiar?

Sánchez: Yeah. Las Mujeres kept going. So what happened was Las Mujeres was the only organization on campus for Latina/Chicana women, from what I know. Las Mujeres was doing all those things, including the receptions at the beginning of the year to welcome all of the new students, faculty, staff, etcetera. And then when *Revista* became its own project, Las Mujeres kept going and *Revista* kept going. We were on similar tracks but doing our own stuff. Obviously, we collaborated. We wanted Las Mujeres to tell everybody, "*Revista* is looking for work. Send your work." We definitely went to all the receptions. We were part of Las Mujeres, it's just that we were working on another project that had been born out of the discussions at our Las Mujeres meetings. I think that kind of gives you a sense of how important the role of Las Mujeres as an organization was. And again, important because it wasn't just undergraduates putting this thing together. It was faculty. It was staff. So all the women at the different levels on the campus saw this as something important that could bring them together.

So the work of Las Mujeres continued even while all this stuff was going on. I wasn't as involved because now we had this baby. I would still go to events. I was not--not that I was ever an organizer. I was more of a participant until *Revista* came and I wanted to take care of this one and nourish this one. And then Las Mujeres kept going. A lot of it I think—Rosie and there was another woman, I think her name was Anna, she was from Fresno, an undergraduate student.

And she definitely—you know, there were some undergraduate students that for the four or five years that they were there, they were always doing something. Anna was one of those people that had been a part of that organization, Las Mujeres, and just continued organizing.

So there were people that had their own areas of focus as mujeres. And thank God, because that way we were able to keep different things floating. (laughs) And each of them had its own important contribution. So yay us!

Zepeda: So, I'm curious about the overlap in the name mujeres and how *Revista Mujeres* was the chosen name for this *revista*?

Sánchez: Well, I don't think we had any other name that we could have put on it. Because we had decided from the very beginning, it was going to be for women, and by women, and about women—*everything women*. We weren't specifically thinking about Las Mujeres as the organization. We didn't think that people would get it confused. That was never—and they never felt like, oh, you guys are taking our name. That issue never, ever even came up. When we said, "We want people to know it's about mujeres, so what are we going to call it?" somebody said, "How about *Revista Mujeres*?" And we said, "There you go!" We all laughed and laughed. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: I mean, it was just like that. It wasn't a big issue or anything. We just wanted something that was very clearly part of the name so there would be no confusion. This is mu-je-res. And that's what it's going to be about.

The motivator was the graduate students who had attended that reception and said, “We can’t get our work done because we put in a couple of words in Spanish and they tell us it’s too much Spanish,” we decided, it’s going to be bilingual. We want people to be able to write in whatever language they want. If they want to write in Chicano Spanish, that’s what it’s going to be. If they want to write English, English. If they want to write all in Spanish, all in Spanish. But we want to make sure that anybody who wants to write something can write it in a combination of those languages, or one, whatever their preferred mode of communication is, that they’re going to get across what they need to get across. So those two things were really clear for us: the focus on mujeres and the language was either English-Spanish, bilingual, or Spanglish—

And the last thing was that we didn’t want to charge people for it. From the very beginning, we gave everybody on staff, all the janitors, the people who worked in the cafeteria—if you had a Latino last name, you got your *Revista*, honey. (laughs) You’re a member of the club. We had labels for all the students and it would be sent to their mailbox. If for some reason the student wasn’t there anymore it would come back to us. And I would just hand them out to whoever wanted an extra one. Because everyone got only one copy. That’s all we could give. I don’t even know what people did with it. I would be curious to find that out.

The intention was to have everyone on staff, everyone who had a Spanish surname get a *Revista*. We knew what it was for students, both graduate and undergraduate, and we knew even that faculty, new Latino faculty on campus, mujeres, they were like, “Oh! Thank goodness you’re here.” That’s how I met Pat

when she first came on campus, Pat Zavella. Aida [Hurtado]. All the new faculty, they came to a Las Mujeres reception. That's how we met. That's how things were built. That's how things came about. All those festivals and get togethers of women from the different campuses, that's again, Anna's organizing. "We need to do this. We're going to do it!"

Zepeda: Wow.

Sánchez: Don't you love us? (laughs)

Zepeda: Yes! I do. I do love you all. It's such an amazing vision, such an amazing vision. And so then the call was through networking.

Sánchez: Networking. We did put out announcements, calls for papers, ads, etc. "*Revista Mujeres* needs your work." We would post the announcement all over campus. If it was a specific focus, we'd say, "We're writing about education," or "campesinas," or we're writing about whatever. It would have the deadline date, brief guidelines, and contact info if you had questions. And that was it. And then, of course, Aida, Pat, any of the faculty, we'd say, "If there's any papers that you think are particularly good or any students that you think should submit stuff, please encourage them." That's really how some work was submitted. When we had our first reception and we introduced the readers for the first issue, that's how people started learning about us, too. They would come to the reading and, "You put out this magazine? Oh, my gosh. I want to publish in it." "Well, okay be on the lookout. You're going to get one, or you already got one." Or, they would be like, "Why did I get this?" I said, "Aren't you glad? (laughs) You're so lucky. And it's free."

Zepeda: And it reflects you. (laughs)

Sánchez: Exactly! There was nothing on campus that reflected students. Well, there was TWANAS, the Third World newspaper, which I think is also such an important contribution, of both creative and analytical and political work. But TWANAS was more like a newspaper type of—their format was newspaper. So it was a little bit different.

We wanted to give the *Revista* more polish. We wanted to acknowledge our work as important. We wanted to do something you could hold in your hands like a book because we felt that was going to give the work both respect and recognition. We wanted our graduates, our undergraduates, our faculty—everybody to have their work treated respectfully and be acknowledged.

There were certain things like the formatting of it and the bilingualism of it, or even our distribution of it. Because we didn't want to just distribute it to women. We wanted guys to read it: "You want to know what we're thinking? Here." (laughs) "Do you have something to say about it? Go ahead and publish it." We did publish some guys' work when the subject was women.

Zepeda: Oh, so there were some men. I remember Francisco [Alarcon]—

Sánchez: Not a lot of it. But some. Because we were not going to be taken over by men. (laughs) Basically. It's about women. They belong to the boys network—the big boys or little boys, whatever, there's networks for them. But there's not enough networks for women and especially Chicana and Latina bilingual women. So we knew very clearly—you can read it and you can contribute, we

will consider it, but it's got to be about women. We don't want to hear anything else. If you're writing about women, if that's your focus, send it in.

Zepeda: Okay. Perfect. So you spoke about how it was this unique space of undergraduates, graduate students, staff, faculty. So how was that managed, how—was it just these are the people who arrived because of being Chicana/Latina and the network?

Sánchez: Yeah, it was whoever came, came. Obviously, Katia and myself and Rosie and Elisa were the people that had the most experience. So in some ways we did have a little bit of a leadership role. But our focus, or our aim was to bring in students, undergraduate and graduate, so that they could learn and help us. We really wanted to train a cadre of other women that would kind of fill in. Because initially Katia and I and some of the other women thought of this as something that could be maybe handed down from one group to the other. But we realized that that was not going to happen. It was too difficult, consistency is needed, or it would be like starting over each time, which would make it much more of a challenge. So that didn't really pan out.

We worked so well. We never, ever had a fight. No big arguments about this article or that article. No. There was never like, "I'm a faculty and you're staff and I decide." No. We were all equals in that room. "Qué piensan" was the question.

Zepeda: (exhales breath) Wow.

Sánchez: We women worked fabulously, for the most part, when we have focus and we know that we're all doing it for—when our intentions are good, (makes sound of motor) we're phenomenal. My experience was always wonderful. Can you imagine? If we had to have arguments and fights, I would not have continued. It was too stressful. With all the other stresses that we had just in putting it together, getting the funding for each issue, that would have been too much.

So I don't know how we did it, but we managed, when we came in that room and we actually got together to read stuff, or to actually do the work, it was like, "Okay, what can I do?" We knew what we were there for and nobody was above anybody. Obviously, like I said, some of us had a little bit more experience, so people were coming to us and saying, "Well, what do I do about— And somebody else would say, "Well, this is how we've handled it in the past." That would be about it. So those would be the only instances where you could say, oh, yeah, well, some people have more authority— But it's just experience and we were sharing it. We were not into the power part of it. We were all publishers. Everybody in that room was a publisher. We were all doing—like I said, I feel it's sacred work, giving voice, planting understanding And I think in some sense we all felt that. It was a wonderful experience.

And the other wonderful experience, was like, when we finally put it together, when the first one came out it was like, "Oh, my God! What a big baby!" (laughs) Each time after that we were birthing another baby. And who is the madrina this time? It's another baby. So they were all babies, some with more difficult labors than others. But I think we totally related as women because it is, it's a labor of

love to put all that energy and time into bringing this *Revista* birth, really. We were giving birth each year, at the beginning and at the end of the year. It made it so much easier having camaraderie. You had a sense of: we're all in this together. We're all doing this together. How wonderful, you know.

I think that's kind of what kept us going, is the fact that we felt the importance of it. We had wonderful relationships amongst ourselves and like I said, we never fought. We never had any major disagreements of any kind. The people that came in and out, like Pat Zavella, or Aida, or Marta Frosch—they'd come in and they'd go out. We were grateful for what they could do and knew when they slipped out, they had to. We realized that they're on a different level in terms of their pressures. We have different pressures than they do. So we all kind of gave each other space; we understood that there were times when we would be more committed than others because of our other responsibilities on and off campus. Everybody was like, it's okay. You just get through it and then come back. (laughs) It was a very supportive environment that we created.

Zepeda: That's amazing. And I love it because it seems also that everybody was learning their skills.

Sánchez: We all were.

Zepeda: And developing.

Sánchez: Yeah, we were all coming for the first time to do something like this. I don't think we had anybody—oh, I know. Somebody did have experience. Elisa Davila had some experience in putting a journal together. She was the only

person that did. But again, it wasn't like she was the authority. Everybody had ideas and went to work; they wanted to contribute. So it was really wonderful. And the issue itself in the end would end up being this really organic—wow! How did that come just like come together like that? But it did. It had its own life and creative juices. I think it's creativity. There's something about creativity. You just mix it, stir it up, it starts bubbling. And then you go, wow, I did that? Okay! (laughs)

Zepeda: So next to the written word, the visual art was really key to the *Revista Mujeres*. Each cover has a beautiful image that takes you somewhere towards a journey of entering it. I wonder about that. How did you all find the visual artists? Did they also come in with the calls?

Sánchez: Yeah, they also came in with the calls. And the first couple of years we could only do black and white, as you can see, because of the cost of color printing. Until we decided, we want something with color. (holds up issue of *Revista*) This is Inés Hernández, perhaps a more developed artist than some of our young artists. Pilar Agüero was an undergraduate student, Darlene Vaca too, they did beautiful work. Pilar's work graces *Revista*— This is Juana Alicia. She's also a very established muralist, artist. These are both hers. Here's Pilar, a later view of Pilar. See? So what we were doing is helping students to grow, giving the space for artists to grow even in their own work. I don't think we realized we were going to do that. This is Martivón Galindo. She was a graduate student at Berkeley. She was a poet and artist and knew of the *Revista* work that we were doing and when she found out—this is the issue on the 500 years [quincentennial

of the invasion of Americas] issue—she had a drawing she wanted us to consider, and she sent that in to us.⁹

So we tried to highlight on our covers the work of undergraduate students very especially in the beginning because we wanted them to see and to talk about how their work was featured and what it felt like. And we wanted them to encourage other Chicanas and Latinas around them that maybe would consider it, even if they hadn't ever before. So that's what we were doing. And I think all of these (looking through covers of issues of *Revista*)—yeah, these were all student contributions.

Zepeda: Amazing.

Sánchez: Yeah, really beautiful. These are both darling. Sylvia Carvallo, this is a woman in her sixties, who was teaching at Cabrillo College, and submitted her work. This was Sue Martínez. She was also an artist from Santa Cruz. She lived in the community. We can appreciate *Revista's* reach outside of the campus community as well.

Zepeda: Okay. Wonderful. I wanted to ask you if you happen to remember the numbers of distribution. Do you remember how many were printed?

Sánchez: Oh, my gosh. No. I wish I could. But there were lots printed. If you consider the Chicano/Latino population at each of the colleges. And then we were giving to the Chicano/Latino staff, including the groundskeeping and

⁹ *Revista Mujeres*, Volume 9, October 1992. La Portada (Cover) "To the Memory of a Mayan Woman Devoured by Dogs," Monoprint. Martivón Galindo.

kitchen staff. Chicano/Latino faculty—a handful, maybe a dozen, plus friends of *Revista*. The majority went to the students and the staff, basically. And then, because we had to continuously seek funding, we, of course, gave copies to all the deans, and all the provosts, college administrators who had contributed, or who might at some point want to donate money to *Revista*.

Zepeda: So, rounding out our conversation about *Revista Mujeres*. I wanted to ask you about the social and political climate as *Revista* was being put out and about, the importance of this being a site of reflection. Did you see any changes as *Revista Mujeres* was out there, in the social and political climate, or the community of Chicana/Latinas?

Sánchez: Well, I think there were lots of changes. I don't think that *Revista Mujeres* had anything (directly) to do with it. I think *Revista* was a reflection of what was going on for mujeres and communities outside, and the politics within the campus itself, too. For example, there was a tremendous change in Chicano/Latino student population in Santa Cruz in the mid-eighties. A wave of Central American students from the LA area.

When I first was a student, the majority of the students were being recruited from the rural areas. So they were coming from Merced, Fresno, Hanford, Manteca, little, tiny towns. And then when I was working as a lecturer, they were recruiting in the urban areas. They had moved their recruitment focus from the rural to the urban, and focused mainly on LA. So the majority of my students, I would say about 85 percent, came from the LA area. And what I saw was totally

influenced by US politics, this wave of salvadoreño students coming into the campus, which for us immediately meant changes in terms of our curriculum.

For *Revista*, we had more contributors not solely a Chicano perspective, other voices, which was wonderful. I don't know about the campus, like how the campus felt it. Within the colleges, I'm sure it was felt because the colleges are small communities. And you either get dropped either at Merrill, or at Oakes, or Porter, or wherever you end up. But that's where you start to create your community. By far, the largest college communities when I was teaching, were in Oakes or in Merrill. The Chicano-Latino students had moved to Oakes. When I was an undergraduate, the majority of them were at Merrill because Oakes didn't exist. Merrill was supposed to have a Third World focus—which never really—none of that stuff that they talked about ever really came to be, in terms of the focus of each college. That didn't work. In the late eighties and early nineties, the larger Chicano/Latino community ended up at Oakes. And that's where the program Spanish for Spanish Speakers was located. That's where Crespi was, too.

And *Revista* was where I went. (laughs) So I was either at Oakes or I'd be going to Katia's over at Porter for *Revista* business. She was at Porter. She was the counseling psychologist for the whole campus, and the only Chicana that was a counseling psychologist in all the time that I was ever there. Thank God they had at least one. It was a lot of work for her, a heavy load. And they did have one male counselor much later. I don't know much about him.

It would be hard for me to measure how *Revista* influenced or maybe had an impact on others. It's hard to know. I think we were all impacted by what was going on outside. A lot of the politics of funding—because in the eighties—they were out to cut, cut. So we, as a program, and as *Revista*, were undergoing a lot of that pressure of cutting, cutting, cutting.

Katia did a fabulous job of establishing certain links and connections with the administrative folks. They respected her a great deal. Whether they were cutting or not, it didn't matter—she would go and she would ask for the money anyway. We would manage to somehow pull out the money that we needed. We never not published because we didn't have it. We just felt like, it's going to come. It's just going to have to come.

It is amazing, now that I think about it. It is amazing. But I think it had a lot to do with the tenacity—Katia was a very tenacious lady. She's passed away, unfortunately. But she was a very strong, very determined, very respected Chicana. Her devotion and dedication was very, very helpful in terms of *Revista*. She had her network established and she knew how to work her network. And thank God, thank God that she took on that responsibility. Really, I never worried about that. She just took care of that. And then she'd say, "Oh, we're getting such-and-such amount from —" "Oh, okay. Thank you." (laughs) Yay!

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: But really, that was a hat that she took on without ever, ever complaining, without ever asking, can somebody else do this please? I think it got to the point where she had her letters; she would change the date; she would

change the amount—(laughs) but basically it was the same thing. She had established a protocol and timeline for herself and she knew it was time to send it out. But that was great because that's what she did.

Her work made our work easier because none of us had go begging for money. Everybody in *Revista* was ready to do what was needed. And they were willing to learn, do the best that they could, and that was it. I think that was really special and a significant contribution. She also submitted each and every *Revista* issue to the Library of Congress and other institutional depositories.

Zepeda: That is very special.

A Cultural Effervescence

Zepeda: Excellent. And I wanted to ask you, as a writer, and here you were an editor and also published pieces within it—how did the experience of *Revista* come together with your writing, with your process as a writer, development as a writer?

Sánchez: I was really lucky because I was there. I was where I was, at the time that I was.

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: It was really, really lucky. Because—do you see that? (pointing at another journal) Right there? That's part of the wonderful flavor and the essence of what was happening. *Quarry West* Issue 26. That was an example of in the eighties, the Chicano/Chicana poets and writers like Lorna Dee Cervantes,

Francisco Alarcón, Jose Antonio Burciaga, are like, let's do this. We're all into ceremony and rito, which I totally, totally agree with. I mean, that's what it's all about. You have to create; you have to make your own space. Nobody is going to do it for you. So it was like all of a sudden all this space was being cleared, and not just *Quarry West*, but other publications (local, national, regional) were interested in our work as Chicano writers. *Revista's* presence was felt. It was one of various journals seeking work by Chicana/Latina writers and artists.

So, can you imagine? I was just really beginning to write again. I had written as a kid and coming across other women writers, Chicana writers, and having all this stuff bubbling; this was exciting, stimulating. There were a lot of things happening in the City [San Francisco] around the Mission Cultural Center. We were there with the salvadoreño artists and salvadoreño poets. And we were all coming together. And then, "Oh, [Eduardo] Galeano is coming to town. Okay, let's bring Galeano." "Oh, Manlio Argueta is coming into town." Manlio came to our classes at UC Santa Cruz to talk with our students about his novels, *Un día en la vida* and *Cuzcatlán*.

There was this effervescence of culture and cultural events, just all kinds of things popping. It was a beautiful time. It was maybe about five to eight years, where really, there was so much happening, so much cultural flowering.

We were *making* the space, were creating the space. *We* published and *we* had an event where *we* acknowledged our work because nobody else was going to do it. We had to make a big deal. "Yes! This is ours. This is something to be proud of. Who wants to contribute next time?" If you see it in your hands and you touch it

and you go through it, it's a different feel, you know? It's enticing. We were in a do-it mode. Our community needs to be in a do-it mode *all* of the time. All of the time, we have to consistently be bringing in the next generation, the next wave of do-ers.

The Dreamers are our do-ers right now. I see them as our do-ers; they're the conciencia of our communities. They are our conciencia, not just for all the other folks, but ours too. Because there's so much even among ourselves, within our own community, there's the classism, the stereotypes, the prejudices, "Oh, *them*." And I'm saying that because my own parents said, "No, we're not like them" [campesinos]. Give me a break.

With the creative space we carved, we experienced an effervescence that was felt and that made for this flowering. And this! And readings. And shows that we would put on. Because nobody else—*we* wanted to do it. *We* wanted to—I think what we saw was that when we were doing these things, it gave us courage, it gave us enthusiasm, it gave us something to strive for as community. It was like, "Yay, we did it!" It gives us the opportunity to want to do it again. "We can do this. Let's do this again. Remember what we did last week? Well, we're going to do it again." It's like somebody took the ball and threw it and then we were all playing. (laughs)

Zepeda: (laughs)

Sánchez: We were all in there kicking and having a good time, and things were coming out that were really inspiring. So we were doing some more, because inspiration is a wonderful thing. That creates a certain energy where we feel

things needed to be done and we could do them. Then we felt really good, so we continued doing them because it felt really good, and because we were seeing that it makes a difference. It makes a difference for a young poet to see their stuff published. It makes a difference for a young artist to see their work on the cover of a journal. It makes a difference.

That's what we wanted to do. We wanted to encourage people to do more writing, to do more artistic, visual stuff, to take us in our minds, in our imagination, someplace else. To write poetry. To sing, dance, whatever your passion. There was so much talent. And it wasn't just *Revista*. On campus, our program [Spanish for Spanish Speakers] was always doing things. Our students, our tutors were leaders in their own communities, in their colleges. They were organizing things in their colleges. There was this constant effervescence of activity that was reaffirming and encouraging at the same time. You could feel it simmer.

And there were a lot of collaborations. I mentioned that we got together with the salvadoreño poets and writers. That was all as a result of the eighties, when we experienced the population shift within SPSS classes. People were forced to immigrate to the U.S., who had been artists, architects, engineers, teachers, all kinds of professionals in their own countries. They had to leave for political reasons because they had already been arrested, tortured, jailed, whatever—or they'd lost their family. People were in trauma. It was like the Chileans in the seventies and then there was a whole—I mean, you could see these waves of people and the traumas that they carry. And with that trauma, comes a need to heal and to say, "This is what happened to me." To speak their truths and stories.

And so that also comes in and washes our community. It *drenches* our community and we are like (makes sound of wave). And then we all react. And then another wave. Because unfortunately, the fucking U.S. keeps getting into our faces every time. So it's inevitable. (slaps hands) We have to come up against them all the time. So it's the chilenos; it's the *compañeros salvatruchos*— And those waves or population shifts were reflected on the campus, in our communities.

For me, it was about, we have lots of things in common with this community. We need to embrace this community. It's our community too. We're them; they're us. (laughs) Already people see them and they say, "Oh, Mexican." That was a funny thing. They'd come into class and they'd say, "Yeah, everybody says I'm Mexican." And I'd say, "And why don't you want to be Mexican? And we'd explore that and provide historical context and acknowledge racism and express some gratefulness for where you are because it took a lot of struggle to get to where we are here. And now that they see *you* as one of those *mexicanos*, you better know that history, because it's a part of you now."

Zepeda: Wow. That feels like an important historical lesson, or memory that we're not holding ourselves accountable to in this moment.

Sánchez: Yes. And I think that was important because of some issues that students brought up. Tutors in the program were saying, "*salvadoreño* students are fighting with Chicano students in the high schools. They're seeing each other as enemies." It just blows me away to see gangs. "Hello, you are not each other's

enemies. The enemy is outside.” But we still haven’t seen that. We still have a hard time seeing through all of that fog.

Zepeda: Exactly. Wow. (exhales) So is there anything else that we should say about *Revista Mujeres*, make sure to mention? I know that people were interviewed, profiled for the *Revista*.

Sánchez: We did that towards the end. I don’t remember doing it at the beginning.

Zepeda: I think Pat Zavella was interviewed.

Sánchez: Yes, she was interviewed early on because she was being welcomed onto the campus. We didn’t have that many Chicano-Latino faculty and when she came on campus it was really nice to have a new faculty member. We wanted everybody to know her. We wanted to welcome her. We wanted to make sure people were going to show up for her classes, that people knew that she was there and what her specialty or focus was. I forget when she was interviewed. She looks so young in that picture! Did you see her? She looks like this young, little chick. (laughs) We were all young, little chicks at one point.

I’m trying to think of what do I want to say? Well, I want to say that in spite of all these obstacles that were placed in our path, in spite of the lack of financial and other support, we are very tenacious people and we find ways to pull ourselves ahead, make community, which I think for us is really, really important. Speak truth to power—we’ve always spoken truth to power and I think we will continue to do that. I think the [Spanish for Spanish Speakers] program and the

Revista and all the things that I was working on, were united, working together, I'm so grateful as I look at that in retrospect, because they were very important elements and they were part of a whole of my life. I think they made me a much more complete person, a much more whole person, and I hope that that was the case for other SPSS students and faculty and tutorial staff.

I think it's really important for us to continue to do this kind of work. I don't think that there's enough of this kind of work being done. And unfortunately, we're still not being supported. We're still being discriminated against, but we need to continue. We need to continue to fight for every single thing—rights, relevant classes, equality. Because nobody is going to give them to us. Nobody ever has in the past and nobody ever will. We have to fight for every single thing.

But we know there are—like *this* [*Revista*], this was such a good fight. This was a great fight. We had the arms to prove it; we have the words; we have the images. So we know it was a really good fight to fight. And we know that there were lots of winners from this fight. And that's what we wanted. We wanted confident writers. We wanted pride. We wanted community building. We wanted challenges to old ways of thinking. We wanted to learn; we wanted to learn from graduate studies that are being done, new things that are being learned. All of those things became a part of the *Revista*.

We wanted to encourage the sisters or the little brothers of the kids that were at school because we know that those generations keep coming, and we want those generations to keep coming. And we want them to see that there will be some

kind of community when they get here, that they're not going to be alone. Their sister or their brother made it and they're going to be able to make it, too. In some ways, recruiting was also our intention when we were sending these *Revistas* home. We were hoping that the work would not just stop with the student right there, that the student would take it home and be able to share it and a younger sibling can see him/herself here at UCSC.

Zepeda: Amazing. Thank you. Thank you, Elba, so much, for your work and for this interview, but for your work at UC Santa Cruz and beyond, and for inspiring so many of us and so many people published in there and their families and all the workers who received the work. I think it's very powerful.

Sánchez: I do too.

Zepeda: Yeah. Muchas gracias. Muchas gracias.

Sánchez: You're welcome.

About the Interviewer: In 2012, Susy Zepeda earned her PhD in sociology from UC Santa Cruz, with a designated emphasis in Feminist Studies and Latin American and Latino Studies. She is currently Visiting Assistant Professor, Women and Gender Studies at the University of California, Davis and is a Social Justice Initiative, Mellon Fellow.