

Mi Familia:
An Autoethnographic Experience of a Northern New Mexican/Southern Coloradoan Chicano
Family

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Defended March 27, 2013

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Abstract

Though the Latino experience has been studied through a large amount of works, there is a gap pertaining to the experience of Chicanas and Chicanos who trace their ancestry into the current-day Southwest United States. This Honors Thesis explores that experience, telling the stories of Jason Romero, Sr, Charlene (Martinez) Romero, Julian Romero, Sherry (Skelton) Romero, Eloveida Velasquez and Rudolfo Martinez before analyzing their connection to the larger Chicana/o community through issues of violence, education, religion/spirituality and roots. Using personal interviews with family members and a variety of literature pertaining to Chicanas/os and New Mexicans, this Thesis uses these stories to illustrate the continued presence of these issues, but also the importance of continued activism in addressing them. A secondary purpose of this Thesis is to explore and reflect upon the Martinez-Romero family's struggles and contributions that have ultimately culminated with my presence at the University of Colorado, experiences faced by others within the Chicano/a community that have also culminated with social progress and political radicalization that was visible through the Chicano Movement and other socially progressive movements. I argue that violence, low educational attainment, imposed religious institutions and the separation of Chicanas and Chicanos from their roots is a result of colonization, and must continue to be addressed through activism, which should build upon the organizations and struggles of earlier generations.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements..... Page ii

Introduction.....Page 1

I. Jason Romero, Sr.....Page 20

II. Charlene Martinez.....Page 45

III. Paternal Grandparents.....Page 65

IV. Maternal Grandparents.....Page 89

V. Conclusions.....Page 116

Bibliography.....Page 128

Appendix.....Page 133

Acknowledgements

Through this process, I have been aided by the support of a great number of people. First and foremost, I have to express my immeasurable gratitude to all members of my family, for it is their stories and their presence in my life that have made me who I am and brought me to this place, but especially to my parents and grandparents, whose stories are told here. The Department of Ethnic Studies and UMAS y MEXA, the two places that have provided me a home and a community during my time here at the University of Colorado. Dr. Arturo Aldama, my committee chair, whose support, guidance, and push helped me to make this project a reality and created the academic support I needed to complete my studies. Finally, I want to thank the activists who have opened the doors to Higher Education for people from disenfranchised communities and the youth, who continue to provide me with the inspiration and fire to continue the struggle, our *lucha*.

Introduction

The early 1990s were a time when Lowriding¹ was popular within the Chicana/o² community as a recreational activity, as it has been in the past and as it continues to be today. In the early 90s, my parents purchased a 1991 Chevy S-10 that was quickly stylized by members of the family and friends into an old-school mini-truck lowrider. The purchase of the “Little Red Truck,” as we called it, had a definite impact on my upbringing, and established in me an interest in Lowriders. I grew up seeing this truck in the garage nearly every day, and I clearly remember my mom saying to me and some of my cousins, “The first one of you to graduate high school with honors gets the Little Red Truck.” I have no idea how old I was, but I could always remember that notion. I knew that I wanted to own and drive that truck, and it was made very clear that school would be the way to get it.

I remember this piece of my childhood because it was one of the first things that got me to work hard. Over time, the strong work ethic that I developed for school stuck with me, and allowed me to do well in school throughout my younger years. After joining Taekwondo at 7, my work ethic and determination in school only grew more. Even though I wasn’t always focused on getting the truck, I continued to focus on my education, learning everything I could. Anytime I would get interested in any subject, I would throw myself wholeheartedly into it, whether it was Taekwondo, Pokemon, Star Wars, politics or any other of my interests. I craved more knowledge on these subjects, and that transferred into my school work.

Growing up in Pueblo, Colorado, I was always surrounded by family. For any holiday, the entire family would come together and celebrate. In the summers, I would go to my grandparent’s house and spend time with my Grandma, who was a high school English teacher. During those times, I remember my grandma’s encouragement of education and discouragement of military service. I could not understand what her intentions were at the time, but as I have

gotten older I have realized that her wise words ring true. While on summer vacation during my elementary school years, I remember reading nearly every day. In school, I did relatively well, but in music class I remember a teacher who it seemed could not be pleased. No matter how hard students would try, it became obviously apparent that certain students were heavily favored. While I didn't realize it at the time, I now recognize that the vast majority of these students were in some way involved with or connected to Pueblo's highly elitist art scene. Without this knowledge, I could not understand why this teacher did not seem to be as willing to work with me and some of my other peers. At the time, and even now, I am unsure of the reasons or expectations behind her actions. As a result, I mostly internalized the frustration I felt, which prevented me from being able to fully explore music during my younger years. I did start playing the Alto Saxophone in the 5th grade, mostly because my dad had played when he was younger. Through that outlet I was able to channel some of my frustration, and I continued playing into high school.

The Elementary School Years

In elementary school, I became a little more involved within the community, and I started playing in the city-wide Bantam league in the 3rd Grade. Playing football was one of the most long-lasting elements of my life, and I quickly developed friendships with my teammates when I began playing. I had been playing football at school far before I engaged in an organized league, and it was the venue through which I had met most of my friends from the West Side. Unfortunately, not very many of us from those teams would end up graduating from high school on time, if at all. Growing up on the North Side, I was not exposed to the same level of poverty

as many of my teammates, but I was, without question, one of them. I saw the problems going on, I saw members of my family struggling through difficult times, and I understood the realities of the situations that people surrounding me faced.

The Middle School Years

In 2003, I began attending Freed Middle School, a school known for mostly negative qualities. Located on Pueblo's west side and populated primarily by Chicana and Chicano students, the school was considered "poverty-stricken," and lunches at the school were free. This was a result of the high number of students who qualified for free and reduced-cost lunch. Looking back, I did not recognize my own privilege of coming from an economically stable family, which managed to allow me to identify and relate to my fellow students, who I did not see as "poor" or "underprivileged," as others I knew did. Instead, I viewed them as peers. I continued playing football, building bonds and friendships with students who were not placed in the same classes I had been.

During my first year at Freed, my math teacher offered a few students the opportunity to take math and reading at the 7th grade level. Originally, I was not offered this opportunity as I was not as outspoken about wanting to challenge myself as some other students. One of my friends was given this opportunity, however, and I was upset that he had been given this chance when I had not. After years of continuing to work with this teacher, I understand that she was not intentionally skipping over students like me. Instead, I would have been one of the students who would simply slip through the cracks without much concern from school officials. Very little was expected from society, but the expectations of my family were very different. I was constantly

pushed and tested by my parents, and as a result I knew that I was every bit as capable as the other students who were given this opportunity. To my own surprise, I asked the teacher about the situation, and expressed interest to her about further challenging myself. She was excited that I had approached her and quickly began working to get me enrolled in the same classes as the other students. At the end of that year, the class of mostly 7th graders that I was in was given a placement exam to see about potentially taking Algebra the next year. Only two of us who were among the five 6th graders passed, and we took Algebra for high school credit the next year.

In my first year at Freed, I was exposed to multiple drugs, an increase of gang involvement, and many more fights. I was only challenged to fight by one person, but my Taekwondo training had encouraged me to not resort to physical violence. I ignored the other student's repeated attempts to fight, and eventually he gave up trying to fight me. Several of my close friends got involved in multiple fights and were suspended at various times, but I continued to focus my energy into my schoolwork. In the 8th grade, after completing Algebra the year before, I was allowed to attend what would later become my high school to take a Geometry class, which was normally reserved for sophomores. I jumped on this chance and began earning the second of four math credits I needed before I even began attending high school.

The High School Years

In 2006 I entered my freshman year of high school already semi-acquainted with the school. What I was not acquainted with, was the politics that would present themselves in the school. Prior to starting classes, I went with my mom to talk to my future counselor about

altering my schedule. I wanted to enroll in an honors class, and when we raised the issue with my counselor, I clearly remember her reaction. Surprised, she immediately began lecturing me on the hard work I would need to put in and how these classes were no joke. She began telling me that I looked like a jock and asked if I played basketball. With masked frustration, I told her that I played football. My mom was extremely irritated by her comments, and asked her if she had even taken the time to look at my schedule. With a bewildered look on her face, the counselor turned around and began looking at the screen with my student information. Her original perceptions of a lazy, entitled and probably uneducated “Hispanic” jock immediately melted away after she saw which classes I was already enrolled in. Her reaction completely changed and she was completely willing to work with us and our requests after that. One of my very first experiences in high school, and I already felt as though I was being profiled and looked at in a very specific way.

When classes in the fall started, the situation was not much better. The administration was trying a new system to “build community” in the classrooms, which was known as the Core System. There were three cores—the D Core, the O Core, and the G Core. While the administration would never admit it, students were able to clearly see the divisions created by this system. Each core had an Honors Track, but the distribution of students in the cores made it very clear that it would develop into a tracking system. In the D Core, most of the students were the results of private or charter school educations. In the classes that were not a part of the Honors Track, most students came from a feeder middle school that was considerably better-off than Freed. The O Core was comprised of students mostly from a mix of the two public middle schools, Freed and Heaton, with the G Core being mostly students from Freed. While I was in the D Core Honors Track, I recognized that there were only three other students from Freed in

my classes. The vast majority of these students were Anglo, with only a small handful of us being Chicana/o. This was troubling as most of the other Chicana/o students were in the “lower” tracked cores, essentially being marked as inferior by the administration. I did not understand the complete scope of the situation at the time, but I did take notice.

That year I participated in a variety of activities, hoping to find some connection with other students, as I was not getting anything from those who were in my Core. I continued playing the Saxophone in band, I continued playing football and I joined the Junior Reserve Officer Training Core (JROTC), where I reconnected with friends from elementary school and met other, far more down-to-earth people. I hoped that by being involved I would not have to be in an environment where I felt unaccepted like in class. The following year, the Core system was dismantled, but the remnants remained. I enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and most of the students in those courses were also members of the D-Core, more evidence of the way the Core system was set up to advantage certain students. I was not enjoying my high school experience and felt as though I was not learning anything. For my AP classes I was required to purchase certain materials on my own, which I saw as problematic. Anything that was listed as optional, I refused to purchase or ask my parent’s to help me purchase. The other students did get all the materials, and this continued to contribute to the social division that I slowly was becoming savvy to.

Partway through the first semester of my sophomore year, all of the students were attending a required meeting to discuss our transcripts. During that meeting, I quickly made my way over to some friends I had known for several years. Bored, we listened to the counselors drone on about the importance of doing your best in school and preventing unnecessary absences and a host of other issues. One topic did catch the ear of one of my friends; the opportunity to

take classes at the community college for free, potentially being able to receive an Associate's Degree upon graduating high school. He told me and one other friend that we should apply, and the three of us excitedly promised each other we would go talk to the counselor about it. I was the only one who followed through, and went to go see my counselor, a different woman than the year before. Ms. Falcón, my new counselor, was excited that I was willing to look into this opportunity and set up a time for me to take a college entrance exam, in addition to helping me to get through all the paperwork. Fortunately, I tested at a high enough level that I was able to take three classes the next semester, which would prepare me to enroll full-time for my junior year. Excitedly, I took a form to my teachers that would allow me to withdraw from their courses. I clearly remember one of my AP teachers being visibly upset that I was dropping her course, but I knew that continuing to place myself in that situation would not allow me to grow and develop in a way that I felt comfortable.

Community College and the Awakening

The Spring 2008 semester was my first at Pueblo Community College, and I remember feeling so much more at ease taking classes there. I felt as though I was being challenged intellectually and I enjoyed being surrounded by people who were actually invested in their education. While I was only 16, classmates at PCC often thought that I was older, and treated me with more respect than some of my old classmates at the high school. I enjoyed learning about and from the people I met, and overall the experience I had at PCC encouraged me to forget about high school and focus on this new, engaging experience. In order to stay involved at the high school and with the people I knew there, I continued to enroll in JROTC, but quit

playing football because of multiple injuries I suffered in two years with the team, deciding that my body's health was more important than football.

That summer, in 2008, I had the opportunity to attend the National Hispanic Institute's Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session (LDZ) in Ft. Collins, CO³. The 8-day conference was meant to empower Latino Youth to be leaders in their community by getting educated and paying that education forward. Financially supported by Pueblo City councilman Ray Aguilera, I knew from the get-go that whatever I learned and came away with from this conference would have to be substantial enough to merit the support of someone like Councilman Aguilera. The first time I ever met the city councilman, he was speaking to one of my high school classes about issues facing the youth, and I remember that he would often speak about Chicana/o and Mexicana/o youth in particular. I later would find out that he was also a founder and former president of the Pueblo Hispanic Education Foundation. As a result of councilman Aguilera's involvement, I was made aware from the beginning I knew that the work I would be doing wasn't about me, but rather about my community.

The first day of the conference we were required to break up into small groups called caucuses based upon what we understood to be the biggest issues within the Latino community. Examples of these groups include; Public Health, Education, Business, Civic Engagement and Leadership. These small caucuses laid the foundation for what would eventually become one of the most empowering experiences of my life. During the 8 days that I was at the LDZ, I began to recognize certain obstacles in society that had hindered my progress in the past, in addition to realizing the same for so many people in my community. My initial reaction was surprise, anger and frustration. However, I quickly was told and made to understand that only having those emotions would do nothing to improve the situation. Rather, it would be necessary to take action

and work to erode these barriers. The LDZ focused on government and the democratic process used in the US Congress as a way to affect these changes. As a member of the House of Representatives I was one of three students who managed to push my resolution through the House, Senate and Executive branches to be signed into law. However, understanding what this process was, what it entailed, and the amount of time it takes to affect any kind of large change in this system was frustrating. I still managed to come away from the LDZ with a newfound confidence and sense of being empowered.

Upon leaving the LDZ I knew that I needed to do something positive to utilize the power of my experience and harness it in a positive way for my community. I considered running for student government but ultimately decided that I had already dealt enough with the beauracritic red tape that goes along with involvement in an organization that was set up in that way. This experience was the beginning of my inquisition into my identity and role within society, it was my first step in becoming a community activist.

The Emerging Activist

That fall, as I began my junior year, I was excited to continue being a part of PCC. I continued my studies there, but more importantly, began studying on my own about my community-the Chicana/o community. I had always grown up knowing myself as a Chicano, but not really knowing what that meant. I knew I was part Spanish, and I had heard family members saying we were part Indian. I was not aware what all these terms meant, I just knew that I called myself Chicano. With this knowledge, I began researching everything I could about the word Chicano-the history behind it, the people who identified as it, and what other people thought of

it. That passion for learning that I had developed since I was younger fed into my craving to learn about the Chicana/o identity, and I read everything I could about the Chicano Movement, which fascinated me, and continues to be an interest of mine. I took a Chicano Studies class after I had already acquired a large amount of information about the Movement, hoping to gain more knowledge. At the beginning of that year, my parents told me that they would give me the Little Red Truck. I was surprised, but they told me I needed a car to get across town to the college since they could not drive me as they had before, and that I was on track to be the first to graduate with Honors of my cousins. I knew that I could not let them down, and my resolve to perform well in school only continued to grow.

After delving heavily into everything that had to do with the word Chicano, I decided to put the organizational skills I had learned at the LDZ to use. A few students and I got together to work towards the redevelopment of a Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) chapter at our high school⁴. The chapter itself had some history as a strong organization, but over the years had just begun to be garnering less and less interest. We gathered several other students who were interested in moving forward with this project, and after several meetings we agreed that the MEChA chapter would be reorganized.

At this point I began to look heavily into the local history of the Chicano Movement in Colorado⁵. I was able to connect with activists from the late 1960s and early 1970s, and hear their stories to really get an understanding of what MEChA was supposed to do as an organization. We decided that our organization needed to bring ourselves, as Chicana/o students, out of the shadows at our high school. Even though we had a significantly large population of Chicana/o/Latina/o students, we were somewhat unrecognized in the public eye. In order to create more visibility in addition to supporting the larger community, we decided that the

majority of our work would not necessarily be focused on the high school, but rather in the community, as MEChA chapters had tended to do in the past. We quickly became recognized by others in the community and were able to plug into several networks that allowed us the chance to support the Chicana/o community of Pueblo.

I was accepted to the University of Colorado-Boulder in the fall of 2009, and soon decided that I needed to do something in my last few months at home. Through Theresa Trujillo, a regional director with the Colorado Progressive Coalition whom I had met through church activities, I was put into contact with Angela Giron, a former employee at the Boys and Girls Club of Pueblo. I soon found out that Angela was planning to run for the Colorado State Senate. She offered me a volunteer position to work on her campaign, and for the next several months I would work with both Angela and Theresa on campaign tasks, mailing letters, retrieving addresses and doing large amounts of fundraising. This was my first foray into politics since the LDZ, and I quickly began to understand that working within the mainstream political system, especially around campaigning, was not for me. I realized that while I was capable of working through this system, it is not where I truly wanted to be. Instead, I realized, my place was within a community, not in a distant capitol city. In May of 2010, as I began preparing for my college transition, I finished working on the campaign and instead began to focus my energy on my college transition.

College Transition

After graduation I began preparing myself to go to a new environment, something I had never been fully challenged to do in the past. Armed with an Associate of Arts Degree and a

High School Diploma, I dove headfirst into classes my freshman year of college. Prior to moving to Boulder, I had never been exposed to such a profound lack of diversity. As one of two people of color in my Resident Advisor's (RA) two floors, I recognized that I was suddenly in freshman year of high school all over again. Walking from building to building on campus, I can vividly remember the stares I received, the looks of disgust as I passed by and the seeming-confusion that people exhibited around me. I felt like sideshow, with campus security questioning me as to whether or not I was a student multiple times. To me, my presence on the CU campus felt like little more than a show for other students. I knew I would not be able to continue dealing with the tensions that were starting to quickly build inside of me. I joined the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) y MEChA⁶ very early in my freshman year because I knew I needed a space where I could feel as though I had family who looked like me, who talked like me, and who appreciated me. Over the next few years, UMAS y MEChA became a home for me. It was a space where I felt respected and as though my opinion and voice was validated. UMAS y MEChA, along with a few professors, is the only reason I have managed to stay at CU. Now, as I prepare to graduate, I can't help but reflect on the journey I have taken to get here.

Understanding Myself

During the course of my senior year in high school, as I decided to delve further into El Movimiento, I began collecting books, names, information and anything else I could get my hands on. I decided at one point to ask family members if they knew anything about the activism from that time, and they rewarded me with plenty of information, having been involved

themselves on some level. Now I was able to learn firsthand about the different organizations, involvement and communal aspects of the movement. It did strike me as odd that I hadn't started there, within my own family during my initial research. However, it did make something very clear to me- the importance of roots. I understood that by knowing the stories of ourselves, our families and our own roots, we would begin to comprehend and see things in a whole new way because we are able to see the ways in which those struggles that have been faced have shaped us. By understanding our own self more fully, we are able to more fully understand others and their experiences. So after finding out information and making new connections based on my research of the Chicano Movement and finding the roots of political activism for my community, I wanted to find out my own roots. I looked into my families stories and I saw the ways in which they had struggled to come to the place that they were at now, and I was able to see the way their interactions amongst each other, community, members, other family members and their environments and upbringings shaped them, and shaped me. I was struck however, by how I had heard the stories of my family before. I hadn't heard the full stories from them, but rather I had heard their stories during my previous research on the Chicano Movement. I saw that my family was one that was racially mixed, but that was no different than any other Chicana/o family. I saw the strength and importance of religion and spirituality in our lives, but that was no different than any other Chicana/o family. I saw the stories of migrant struggles within my family, again no different than the stories of other Chicana/o families. This phenomenon then, cannot be one of just coincidence, but rather a reflection of our culture and the society in which we live. However, our roots are those that are intertwined and allow us to maintain ourselves in a unique way and with the support of other community members as we

progress in this society. Our stories, the individual ones of our unique families and the larger ones echoed by the entire community, are those that give us a sense of place.

Theoretical Background

This work pulls on many traditions of writing ethnographic accounts, including James's Clifford's concept of the "self-reflexive fieldwork account" (1986, 14). These accounts, he argues, create a space for the discussion of a variety of issues, which are important in the eyes of the writer. In the case of a self-reflexive account based on personal family stories, I have the benefit of being able to hear about the lives of my family members who already have a trust in me, instead of having to gain that trust as an outsider. For family members, telling each other stories is quite different than talking about one's life with someone who that person may or may not be comfortable with. I have the benefit of being able to understand the context in which these stories take place and have personal insight about the individuals being discussed. However, I am also limited in that certain elements of the stories may be emphasized more or less, depending on the perceived impact they could have concerning familial relations. What a self-reflexive text such as this provides is a Chicano perspective on a Chicana/o story.

The experience of a self-identified Chicana/o family comes with a whole set of issues; but the perspective of a Chicano from within the family allows for the family's own lens to be placed on the story. While this could be viewed as a one-sided perspective, Renato Rosaldo argues that it is simply a subordinated form of knowledge, one that historically and contemporarily is excluded from what is commonly known as "truth" (1989, 1993). However, this idea of truth is typically used to justify the colonial power and knowledge structures that

exist, privileging Eurocentric standards and preventing subordinated peoples from being able to define their identities for themselves. Truth then, is larger than what is currently held within the academy, and includes the truths experienced by peoples from a variety of experiences, communities, and backgrounds. Truth is based on the knowledge and experiences of each individual person and community, challenging the idea that truth is stagnant and is monopolized by a very specific group of people. If truth is to be understood as objective and clearly defined, then, like the Cree hunter Clifford quotes, “I’m not sure I can tell you the truth...I can only tell you what I know” (1986, 8).

Anzaldua’s concepts of *conocimiento* and *autohistoria* also play a role in the formulation of this thesis. *Conocimiento* translates as knowledge, and is critical to understanding the power dynamics that are associated with knowledge (2002, 577). Typically, as stated earlier, knowledge tends to be understood from a Eurocentric perspective, failing to recognize the importance of the contributions developed from varying perspectives. These perspectives challenge the Eurocentric “grand narrative,” and as a result are often marginalized in society. Multiple *conocimientos*, however, are critical to understanding the world from the viewpoint of marginalized communities. By utilizing the Spanish word for knowledge, Anzaldua elevates the experience of Chicanas and Chicanos in the borderlands to the same level of “mainstream” knowledge. Recognizing the knowledge developed through a variety of experiences as legitimate is critical in the development of a fuller understanding of any subject.

Autohistoria also serves a key role in this thesis, as it is the model which I follow in writing it. Identified by Anzaldua as “the genre of writing about one’s personal and collective history...,” (2002, 578), *autohistoria* becomes a tool to be used to give legitimacy to the stories of all people, regardless of whether their perspective fits in neatly with the dominant society’s

ideologies, perspectives and epistemologies. My *autohistoria*, my family's stories, are the stories of a Chicana/o family with deep roots in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. It is a story that Chicanas and Chicanos throughout the southwest can identify with, and the story of my family echoes several of the important issues addressed during the Chicano Movement, shedding light on the importance and necessity of activism in the community to address some of these issues.

As my undergraduate career at the University of Colorado begins to wind down, I am in a position to reflect upon my experiences and the effects that my identity, as a Chicano student, have had on my college experience. I also begin to reflect on the work I have done as a Chicano activist as I begin preparations to develop a summer program that will work to educate, inspire and empower Chicana/o youth. These reflections of mine have helped me to understand the position I am in, and the importance of those who set the stage for me to be where I am. I look back at my family, and I see the ways in which their stories and experiences have shaped my life, but more importantly, I see the ways in which their lives are reflective of the larger Chicana/o experience. The struggles that they overcame are the struggles faced everyday by thousands of people in the Chicana/o community, and even though some members of my family were able to overcome these trials and tribulations, I understand that they are the exceptions, not the rule. So when people criticize the work and activism that I partake in, I let them know that my work won't be done until my positive experiences and opportunities become the rule, and not the exception.

Methods and Literature

As an autoethnographic text, my primary sources for this thesis are the stories of my family. I am privileged to have both my mother and father, in addition to all four of my biological grandparents alive and involved in my life, which has also allowed me to collect stories from all six individuals. The stories documented in this thesis have been collected through multiple discussions and conversations with my family members over the years, in addition to an informal “interview” where I asked all six individuals to tell me their story, as they saw fit. The result was typically an outline each individuals’ life, with a variety of scattered stories throughout. I decided to include the majority of the stories that each individual told me during our informal interviews, which may or may not have related directly to the argument of my thesis. However, in keeping with my desire to give voice to those who have historically not been listened to, I decided that if they deemed it important enough to warrant an extended period of time during our informal interviews, that I would keep it in my discussion of their lives. This was done with the desire of maintaining the voice and agency of the storytellers (individual family members), and in a sense giving legitimacy to their *conocimientos*.

In addition to the stories my family members told, I used literature regarding Chicana/o culture, history, activism and identity. Throughout these readings I began to see common threads regarding activism and issues within the Chicana/o community. Chicana/o-based theoretical texts have also been critical in my research, which, as mentioned previously, pulls on many aspects of Anzalduan theory. In order to narrow my research, I decided to focus on historical texts that either talked about Chicana/o history in multiple areas throughout the southwest or focused primarily on Colorado and New Mexico. Most literature focusing on activism was focused on the West Coast in general, and on California in specific. However,

important organizations like the Crusade for Justice in Colorado were discussed, but not as thoroughly as possible.

The Argument

The city I was born in is Pueblo, Colorado-The Home of the Heroes⁷. This city, with a population of over 106,000 is over 49% Chicana/o, according to the 2010 Census (). With an Anglo population of 45%, Pueblo is predominantly a Chicana/o community, which helped to shape the foundational years of my life, and during my 18 years living there, the strongest presence in my life was my family. I think often about my family now that I do not have the opportunity to be around them as much as I would like, and I recognize the ways in which I have taken them for granted in the past. It is solely because of them that I am in my current position, and the opportunities and encouragement they provided have been paramount in my ability to successfully navigate this complex university system. I recognize the contributions of my family, and this Honors Thesis is intended to pay tribute to my family, by telling their stories. In my family, a multitude of issues arise that have been targeted in the past by Chicana and Chicano Activists. While there are a countless number of issues that arise, this thesis will be focused on violence, education, religion/spirituality and the importance of roots in the shaping of a Chicana/o identity. These issues are existent in the stories presented in all four chapters, but, for the sake of clarity, the scholarly reflections will focus on one issue that is dominant in each story. I argue throughout this thesis that the issues historically faced by Chicanas and Chicanos, which are a result of (neo) colonization, continue in today's Chicana/o community. The issues then

must be addressed by continued activism, building upon the models used historically by Chicana and Chicano activists.

Chapter 1: Jason Romero, Sr.

Early Life

On July 4, 1970, in Montrose CO, Jason Julian Romero, my father, was born to Julio and Sherry Romero. Two years later, the family moved to Pueblo, Colorado and lived on Cameron Street near Lake Minnequa on the south side between an African-American man and a Chicano family. The family lived at this location for two years, which was in a very poor area of town, and dealt with several issues including problems with the neighborhood kids who would often cause problems with my dad. The family then moved to Pine Street in the Bessemer neighborhood, which was another relatively poor section of town. While living there, my dad remembers receiving his first bike, which would come to be very important during his childhood. The neighborhoods that the family lived in when first living in Pueblo were considered “rough” areas of town with high rates of poverty, and my grandma did not want her children, who consisted of my dad and his newborn sister Sara, growing up in this environment. Because of this, the family moved again to a small neighborhood next to the Fountain Creek. They rented a house in this small neighborhood which was not highly populated and was extremely rural compared with the rest of Pueblo. There was only one other kid in the area who was close to my dad’s age, even though he was still younger. The family lived here for approximately eight years, between my dad’s ages of 5 and 13, so this was the neighborhood where he spent most of his youth.

While living here, his cousins-Eddie, Randy, Ronnie- were his best friends along with Steve Armenta, a cousin through marriage. Since the area was separated from the urban center of Pueblo, there were vast prairies to be explored. Near their home was also an

abandoned house, a junkyard, railroad tracks and horses that belonged to the owners of the property my grandparents rented. The cousins would ride their bikes out into the prairies, build ramps to jump and generally spend time in the prairies having fun. Being little *traviesos*, they were subject to some mischief. They would go to explore the abandoned house and would get in trouble because their parents felt as though the house was unsafe. Sometimes, they would tease the horses, which were fed and taken care of by his parents, and cause them to charge at them. According to my dad, the horses would charge just like bulls and they got in trouble more than once for agitating the horses.

While growing up there, my dad also built a tree house that he remembers fondly. In 1976, shortly after my dad and his family moved into the neighborhood, the Pueblo Mall was built near them. This became the place where kids would go hang out as they got older, and the slopes on the cement bridges that were near “The Mall” were a popular spot for kids to go sledding in the winter, a common pastime for children at that time.

Prior to the start of his freshman year of high school, my dad and his family moved to Franklin Ave, on the city’s north side across from an elementary school and a few blocks away from Centennial High School.

Growing up, my dad and his sister had a consistent schedule that they followed. In the mornings, they would get up and eat breakfast, get ready for school, and catch the bus in their front yard to attend Somerlid Elementary and later, for my dad, he attended Freed Middle School. After school, they would come home, do homework and sometimes watch TV. Every night they would eat together as a family, which undoubtedly contributed to the closeness and importance of family, which was reflected in the way that holidays, birthdays and most celebrations incorporated the whole family. After bathing, they were allowed to read. My dad

specifically remembers that he “got” to read rather than was forced to, as it was seen as a privilege to read a book before bed. This was encouraged primarily by his mom, who would go on to become a teacher. Saturdays were set aside for chores and fun during my dad’s youth. In the summer when both parents were working, chores were especially important and the kids were only allowed to watch one hour of TV a day after they had completed their list of chores. As the older child, my dad received more responsibilities and had to take care of his sister as well. While he did most of the outside work, he also was responsible for doing some work in the house such as including vacuuming, cleaning and cooking, which would in many ways deconstruct several of the traditional gender roles that exist for many families. Self-sustainability was important, and both children had to learn how to cook, often by simply reading the directions on the box of whatever they were making.

Sports were also an important part of growing up in Pueblo. My dad played football and baseball primarily. Youth from all over the town would participate in YMCA and other youth leagues as a way to keep out of trouble. In addition to the YMCA, there was La Gente Youth Sports that served youth primarily on the East Side and in the Dogpatch neighborhood, areas that were heavily concentrated with Chicanas and Chicanos, and the Bantam Football League which organized in different neighborhoods throughout the city. Sports were seen as a way to keep youth out of trouble, and were embraced pretty enthusiastically by them. In middle school, football was a big sport and most of the boys played at some point. My dad played football until his freshman year of high school, and while he thoroughly enjoyed participating in sports and had a strong work ethic, he did not consider himself a great athlete. Prior to his freshman year in high school he began practicing Taekwondo, a Korean Martial Art. As a martial artist, my dad earned the rank of 4th Geup, or a Blue Belt with a Red Stripe, and participated in several

tournaments where he often did well, earning several trophies including a 1st place trophy in sparring.

Education

All throughout school, my dad attended public schools in Pueblo. He started school early and graduated at 17 as one of the youngest in his class, which he feels may have contributed to his difficulties in school. An intelligent student, my dad described himself as somewhat lazy and unmotivated for most classes, but definitely a capable student, being awarded the Honor Roll in high school a couple of times. As a student who wanted to focus on having fun and enjoyed being the jokester of his group of friends, my dad would often avoid school work until he would get in trouble, and then he quickly and easily raise his grades back to an acceptable level.

While living near the Fountain Creek, my dad began school at Somerlid Elementary, which served students from both the North and West sides of Pueblo. In addition to school work, my dad dealt with other issues with kids at the school. While in elementary school, he began getting into fights with other students. The fights at school, while physical, very rarely left any lingering senses of animosity. The fights would often end with kids being friends, or at least not enemies. This trend continues throughout my dad's experience in Pueblo's public schools. One of the first fights my dad got in was on the bus from school. Another student was provoking my dad, calling him names and otherwise trying to irritate him. The other student began to get in my dad's face, furthering his agitation. He got up and threw a punch at the kid, knocking him to the ground. The other student jumped up and while visibly furious, did not continue harassing my dad. My dad was surprised at himself at his ability to knock down the other kid so quickly, and continued "scrapping" with others throughout high school. The educational experience at

Somerlid was a decent one, nothing spectacular as can be expected from a poorly funded public school.

After attending Somerlid, my dad moved on to Freed Middle School for the 6th grade, a school on the West Side with a notorious reputation as a “rough” school. During the transition period, authority figures at the elementary school tried to scare the students and taught them to be afraid as they entered middle school. In the 80s, the “Just Say No” campaign was in full swing, and authority figures would discuss the dangers of tobacco, alcohol and drugs with students in an attempt to scare them away from trying any of these substances. My dad describes his experience at Freed as an “eye opener,” where he was exposed to a variety of social issues plaguing the community of Pueblo. Cigarettes and marijuana were present at Freed, though not especially common. Huffing of glues and paint thinners was also a method that students at Freed would use to get high. During middle school, my dad received his worst grades and began struggling with class work, which wasn’t easily overcome with the lack of strong quality teachers at the poverty-stricken school. There was also a rivalry within the student body that pitted students from the East Side, “East Siders,” against “West Siders” who were raised on the West Side. There was also tension between students that derived from musical taste, with students who would listen to Reggae (primarily Chicanos from the West Side) rivaling students who would listen to Rock music (primarily Anglo students, but also some Chicanos). At Freed, the student population was primarily Chicana/o, with very few African-Americans and a decent number of Anglo students. At the middle school, there were more students, more violence and fighting, more cussing and an increase in drug/cigarette use. While all of these social ills were present and becoming more pronounced, peer pressure to become involved was not really present. In fact, most of the tobacco/drug use occurred off campus near the cemetery. Fights

were common as well, and would occasionally take place on the football field where some students could serve as lookouts to see if any security guards or teachers were coming to see what was going on. While at Freed, my dad got into a few fights, with one instance occurring with a former friend from Somerlid. The other student was slightly older, and thought himself to be superior because of his new experiences at Freed. The two fought, and then became friends again, as was common at the time. Some of the classes that my dad took at Freed that he enjoyed included Construction and Woodshop, which focused more on actual skills that could be attained instead of on subjects like history or math.

In 1984, my dad moved on from Freed to attend Centennial High School, which was located just a few blocks away from their new house on Franklin Avenue, in between 8th and 9th grade, my dad took up Taekwondo, which caused other students to want to see how effective this was. This manifested itself in more fights, which were caused by other students who wanted to see how tough he was with his Taekwondo. Despite the multiple fights he got in, my dad walked away from several challenges, especially after learning self-control through Taekwondo. Fights would often be the result of some form of bullying which my dad would defend himself. Fights occurred about once a year, but my dad was never suspended by the school for any of the fights. This was because most of the fights would occur after school, sometimes on the football field, and were not often broken up the school monitors. Two fights remain prominent in my dad's mind from this time.

One incident during his 9th grade year occurred with another former Somerlid classmate whose dad was a cop. After football practice one day, my dad and the other student were agitated about something that had happened on the field, which escalated into a physical confrontation with the other student that left him with a large red mark around his eye.

Immediately after the fight my dad asked the other student if he was ok, and quickly questioned him about his dad, who was a cop. He was afraid of what might happen, but as usual, after the fight they were no longer angry with each other and the issue quickly blew over.

A second incident occurred with an East Sider after my dad and he bumped shoulders in the hallway one day. After bumping each other, the two would stare each other down every time they saw each other, which is known as “mad dogging.” Tim Romero, a friend of my dad’s who was also an East Sider, set up a fight with the other student, promising to be there for the fight. After school one day, the two met up, without Tim in sight, and began to fight. During the fight, while showing off some flashy Taekwondo moves, my dad slipped on the gravel and hit his head, temporarily blacked out. When he came to, the other guy was on top of him, repeatedly punching his head. Eventually the fight was broken up by some friends, and my dad left. The next day at school, he ran into the art teacher, who complimented my dad on his fighting prior to his fall. This surprised my dad who wondered why the teacher let the fight continue despite him being knocked unconscious. After the fight, my dad and the East Sider would nod and say “what’s up” to each other when passing each other in the hall, again without any animosity developing between the one-time opponents.

Despite the fights, my dad was able to be successful in school. At Centennial in the mid-80s, teachers would often reference college and make comments about students going to college, even though they didn’t seem to work with students to help them obtain this opportunity. Teachers at the school were better than those at Freed, but there were also some that didn’t care about the students. One history teacher that my dad had class with was extremely focused on getting students into college and made them do several projects a semester to encourage a strong work ethic. Other classes that my dad took included; Metals, Arts & Crafts, Welding, Woodshop

and other “hands-on” classes that focused on developing various vocational skills. These classes were engaging to students, especially my dad, which drove his desire to take them. The one class that he enjoyed the most, however, was Psychology. Because of his interest and desire to learn about the topic, he did very well in that class, which was a testament to the need for more material that is engaging to the students and pushes them to succeed in ways they wouldn’t be able to with material they are not interested in.

During high school, my dad decided that he didn’t want to attend college immediately after graduation, but he intended to return at some point. He did not enjoy the academic work of school; describing himself as more of a day-dreamer who would rather be doing something else. However, in the classes that he was interested in, such as Psychology, he did very well without much effort, which seems to be the case with many other students. While attending school, my dad focused primarily on what was going on directly in his life, and did not look too deeply into social issues and inequalities that existed. Rather, he focused on himself and those surrounding him. He would also ditch classes to hang out with friends like Steve Armenta, where they would hang out at Steve’s house, play video games, and roam the town looking for something to do. Even though he spent much time away from school, he made sure he did enough to graduate in 1988 at 17 years old and earn a free semester at Pueblo Community College for graduating. He attended the school, taking a machine shop course, but didn’t enjoy it enough to continue after the free semester.

Family/Personal/Social Life

In Pueblo in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a definite separation of different social groups throughout the town, but “gangs” as they are often thought of were not really present. Race was also not a huge issue in this primarily Chicana/o community; in fact, there were Anglo students who grew up speaking “Spanglish” just like the Chicanas and Chicanos. The two major groupings of youth that would eventually give way to a gang issue were the East Siders and the West Siders. There were some older members of the community who were a part of some more established cliques, like the Varrio East Side (VES) Locos, Los Carnales, and the Rexes, with the former two eventually becoming some of the more violent gangs in Pueblo. Originally, many of these cliques either started out as party crews or break dancing crews that would battle each other. While people who were a part of these groups called themselves “gangs,” they were not what today would be considered a gang, despite the occasional large fights that many members of these would take part in against each other.

While in high school, my dad would hang out with East Siders and West Siders, never affiliating himself with only one group and choosing instead to remain neutral and be cool with everybody. However, at this time, most East Siders and West Siders didn’t grow up with an ingrained hatred of the other side, even though some who did. Alcohol, Speed and Marijuana became more popular during the mid-80s, but primarily at parties, with some exceptions. As an alternative to these parties, many youth would opt to attend “The Teen Scene,” a high school dance club that also served as a way for kids from around the city to meet each other. At this club, my dad met most of his high school girlfriends, most of which were not serious. However, at 15, my dad became involved in a more serious relationship with a girl for about 8 months. My dad, his girlfriend and the group of friends, who were rarely my dad’s own age, would hang out together, keeping each other out of trouble. In addition to just hanging out, the group would also

cruise Main Street, the popular spot for cruising in Pueblo at the time. However, the relationship took a turn for the worse when my dad's girlfriend told him she was pregnant while he was 16. Scared, he began to try to figure things out, but came to find out that she had lied to him before he revealed the news to his parents. The couple broke up, and my dad didn't get involved with another serious relationship for the rest of his time in high school. At 16, my dad received his first car, a Plymouth Valarie, from his parents. The car, while not in the best shape, did get him to his job and back, and also put him in the position where he would be the one to drive his friends around, which he didn't mind.

In the family setting, his mom, Sherry, was seen as the educator and was the strict parent. His dad, Julio, was more laid back and allowed the kids more freedoms. The immediate family was very close and would do everything together, which provided a very strong and positive home environment. In addition to being a very close family, they were also very strongly tied to their Catholic faith, attending church every weekend and praying every night. Extended family was also important, and my dad's cousins, who visited often, were also some of his best friends. Steve Armenta was a cousin through marriage, who also became a part of the family. In addition to the family who lived in Pueblo, there was also extended family in Montrose, CO and Plymouth, WI. The family in Wisconsin was his mom's, and my dad, his sister and mom would travel there every other year to spend time with them. Unfortunately, his dad usually had to work and couldn't make the trip. Every time they returned home, however, my grandpa would have completed some project during the time he was alone, which included many different things like a picnic table, shelves and other small projects.

In Wisconsin, my grandma had a younger brother named Mike who was only three years older than my dad, having been born when she was 18. My dad's Uncle Mike became a good

friend and they would spend time together every time my dad and his family traveled to Wisconsin or they traveled to Colorado. My grandma's parents were also the stalwarts of a strongly Catholic family. Alcohol played a large role in their lives and they would drink, but rarely would they become drunk. My dad's Grandpa Jerry was also somewhat of a joker, often telling jokes to get a rise out of the kids. He also would take Mike, Sara and my dad to go fishing or attend stock car races. In Montrose, my grandpa's family was widespread. There were several cousins around my dad's age to play with, and they would often go play in the fields throughout the day. His dad's mom, Juanita, was a typical housewife, and would be up early in the mornings cooking. Her husband, Carlos, was also a drinker like my dad's Grandpa Jerry, but he often would become drunk and when he would, he became louder and occasionally angry. In an attempt to hide his drinking from Juanita, my dad's Grandpa Carlos would take his grandkids on a walk to the store and buy them candy, telling them to not let their Grandma Juanita know that he was buying beer, too. Needless to say, the kids never told. A native Spanish speaker, he would attempt to speak to the kids in English, but after drinking would often give up and just speak Spanish, leaving my grandpa to translate. My dad's Grandpa Carlos also referred to him as Jesse, unable to properly pronounce the name Jason. This would have implications later on as it became adopted into my name as well.

As a kid, my dad was always involved in something, which included Cub Scouts until middle school and sports throughout his youth. As a boy, my dad also was very involved in the church, attending catechism and mass every weekend in addition to being an Alter Server. At 14, he began working for the church doing odd jobs like pulling weeds and cleaning the parking lot. During high school, he also played the Alto Saxophone, and became the First Chair, or lead, Saxophonist for a time. In high school, my dad's friends were rarely his own age; instead they

tended to be younger than he was. After moving to Franklin Avenue, my dad began to deliver papers, having to get up early every morning. Prior to his senior year, when he began to work at McDonald's, my dad hung out primarily with Steve Armenta, his cousin through marriage, Frank Montano, Danny German and Daniel Romero, other students he had met through school. As a senior, he began to spend more time with other kids in the neighborhood, including Mark Ayala, who introduced my dad to his brothers Steve and Tom, who continue to be some of his closest friends to this day. Through them he met Frankie Garcia, who eventually would become my brother Manuel's padrino. At 17, my dad also received his first tattoo, a cross on his back that was given to him by a guy named Louis, who was known as "Tattoo Louie." Over the next several years, he received several more tattoos all over his body, most of which were religiously inspired.

Later Life

In the early 1990s, and to some extent in the late 1980s, gangs in Pueblo became more developed, organized and violent. It is no coincidence that at this time, cocaine and other hard drugs were becoming much more common in the streets. During this time, gangs, like the Latin Aces, had members who began to carry weapons, including knives and guns, but originally these were primarily for show and to instill fear. As time went on, however, this began to change as gangs got more violent and organized. Most of the gangs, like the 8 Ball Posse, still were not heavily organized by the early 90s, but they were beginning the processes of gang development. Some of the more violent crimes that occurred during this time were spurred by the heightened drug and gang activity.

In 1988, at age 17, my dad graduated from Centennial, and in the fall began his free semester at PCC, where he met many people who were significantly older than he was. At 18, he decided to move out of his parent's house and got an apartment with Steve Armenta on the West Side. While living here, he would often have his younger friends like Steve Ayala, Mark and Tom come over. After living together as just the two of them for some time, Steve Armenta's girlfriend, Stephanie, or "Steph", moved in. Both Steve Armenta and my dad worked at McDonald's while living in this apartment and were doing well for themselves, paying all their bills and enjoying their lives. Unfortunately, my dad's car at the time, a 1979 Pontiac Grand Prix, broke down and he was not in the financial position to fix it. Because of this, he moved back in with his parents until he could get back on his feet and buy another car, which would be a Buick Regal that he paid for himself, as he did when he bought his Grand Prix. Once established again, my dad moved back in with Steve Armenta and Steph, who now were living in an apartment on the East Side. At 19, he got a job at St. Mary Corwin Hospital in the Patient Transportation department, which bumped his wages up from around \$3 an hour (minimum wage) to about \$5, which was a significant increase. Soon, Steve and Steph moved out, leaving my dad with the whole cost of the apartment. In order to prevent another return to his parent's home, he asked BillyJo Martinez, a coworker who was living with his parents, if he wanted to move in. He agreed, and they became good friends during their time as roommates. The two would go to work in the morning together, return home, work out and relax together. They would also party and drink together, which was the beginning of several years of drinking for my dad. On the East Side, cars would often get broken into and in one incidence, the seat covers were stolen out of BillyJo's car. The constant crime around them, however, was not something

brand new to the area, and continues to be common to this day. Despite those issues, my dad remembers these times as the time when he was living life “young and single while having fun.”

After my dad had been living alone for some time, Mark and Steve Ayala’s cousin, Paul Valdez, moved to Pueblo from Phoenix. During one visit, he asked if he could stay with my dad and BillyJo for a couple of weeks. After talking it over, they agreed and Paul moved in, with the intention that he would leave soon after getting on his feet. However, this happened much slower than anticipated, and Paul ended up living with BillyJo and my dad rent-free for a time. While he would clean and help out around the apartment, it was difficult for the two to support him financially. Eventually, Paul moved out and years later, after having a similar experience with someone else, apologized to my dad for free-loading and the two continue to be good friends to this day.

While working at St. Mary Corwin Hospital, my dad met several good friends including BillyJo, Gil Montoya, and “Disco Dave” Martinez. While still friends with all three of them, “Disco Dave” became one of the few friends my dad had who he felt was interested in knowing about his family and seeing him on a much more personal level. While many of his friends were fun to party with, Dave and my dad learned to help each other through many difficult situations and saw each other as one of the few people that they could really talk to and actually trust to help out. Dave was fired from St. Mary Corwin Hospital a few years later, but the two remained friends and Dave eventually would become my sister Larissa’s padrino. Prior to turning twenty, my dad also met a CNA from New Mexico named Charlene Martinez. After a few months passed the two ran into each other while out one night, and eventually began dating. While dating her, my dad always had thoughts in the back of his mind that this woman would be the perfect mother for his children, and, while still 20, asked her what she would do if he asked her

to marry him, to which she replied “Well, are you asking me?” After thinking it over, he responded that yes, he was asking her. She told him that she would have to think about it, but eventually agreed. After some time dating, he met her family, which she had made sound very intimidating, but immediately got along with all of them, feeling like a part of the family already.

On October 6, 1990, after being engaged for several months, the couple decided to hang out separately with their own friends for a night. Charlene, my mom, went out with her friends to Colorado Springs that night and my dad decided to hang out with his friends and cruise around Main Street that night. He met up with Steve Armenta, their friend Frankie Montano, BillyJo, and three of his friends from the small community of Boone, which was just outside of Pueblo, who were known as Booners. That night, they were all cruising on Main Street before parking in a parking lot right off the side of the road. While there, some of Frank’s friends from the Dogpatch barrio arrived and the whole group was just talking and hanging out, not causing any trouble, but rather just enjoying the night. Soon, however, carloads of members of the 8 Ball Posse from Bessemer and the Four Corners from Colorado Springs began causing trouble. Soon after they arrived, they got in an altercation with someone on the street and ended up stabbing him. The victim began running and yelling that he had been cut or stabbed.

Then, one of the people who had been with the newcomers walked up to my dad, asking if he had a problem with his friends, accusing him of staring them down. Oddly enough, the man who approached my dad had recently helped one of my dad’s friends who were being jumped in Bessemer, breaking up a fight. He didn’t recognize my dad, however, and initiated what would become a life-changing experience for my dad and would alter the course of our family. At some point, BillyJo, Frank and the Booners left the scene and only my dad and Steve Armenta were left in the parking lot. The carloads of 8 Balls and Four Corners began blocking all the exits

from the parking lot with their cars, and Steve told my dad he had heard them saying they were going to come after him next. My dad told Steve to go get the Regal and bring it to the 7-11 that was a block and a half away from the parking lot. Steve left, and my dad saw the other people creeping towards him. Heart racing, my dad tried to make a run for it, but got caught. He blacked out, and then woke up in excruciating pain and unable to move his foot.

Getting up in the middle of the street, he felt excruciating pain throughout his whole body and assumed his leg was broken because of his inability to move it. Quickly, he tried to hobble to the car where Steve was waiting. He got in the driver seat but without a functional foot, couldn't get the car going. He then got out and laid down in the back seat. Before they had a chance to leave, the man who had jumped my dad came back with a knife, threw open the back door and began swinging wildly trying to kill my dad, tearing up the interior of the car in the process. My dad, still in pain, reached under his seat, opened his tackle box and pulled out his Buck Knife that he used for fishing. He swung it at his assailant and managed to get him to back up. The assailant slammed the door on my dad's now-crippled foot and several of the attackers began fleeing the scene, jumping on the hood, roof and trunk in the process, creating the feeling for my dad that he was in a tin can. After the attackers left, Steve got out to check on my dad. Steve asked my dad, who was now standing next to the car, if he was ok, to which he responded that he thought they broke his leg. Steve then saw blood soaking my dad's flannel, and suddenly, unable to support his own weight, my dad collapsed against his car and slid down the side, painting it red with his own blood. At this point Steve realized what had happened, and told my dad "Aw shit, you've been stabbed!" Up until now, nobody realized the severity of the injuries, but Steve immediately pushed him back into the back seat and proceeded to speed toward Parkview Hospital a few blocks away.

While trying to get my dad to the hospital, Steve ran over curbs, passed through red lights, and sped past cops, who did nothing to interfere. In the back seat, my dad kept telling Steve and Frank, who my dad doesn't remember coming back, that he was going to die and that he couldn't breathe. His friends tried to assure him that he wouldn't, pleading with him to hold on just a little bit longer. By the time they arrived at the hospital, my dad had lost so much blood that he was unable to move. His friends ran in and got a nurse and a wheelchair to help get him into the emergency room. They came out and tried to help him get out of the car, which he was unable to do without falling to the floor unable to move whatsoever. Frank and Steve lifted my dad into the wheelchair and the nurse began rushing him inside. His leg began dragging on the pavement, and he was unable to move it back onto the wheelchair. Luckily, Steve saw what was happening and lifted his leg back up after making the nurse stop for a moment. Soon, he was in the emergency room with doctors asking him questions, cutting off his clothes, putting IVs in his neck and putting in a chest tube to drain fluid and blood from his lungs, which could only happen after the doctors intentionally punctured the lung, which brought on a whole new pain. During his time in the emergency room, he kept telling those around him to "Call Charlene, get her over here," which he repeated several times as that was the only thought on his mind at the time. They told him that they had already contacted her and that she was on her way, but he wasn't so sure. While in and out of consciousness, his parents and other friends arrived at the hospital. Doctors did not anticipate his survival from 14 stab wounds, partial paralysis of his arm and leg, a lost kidney and severe nerve damage, and therefore told his parents, who were in shock and extremely scared of what was going to happen, to contact a priest to administer him the Last Rites, the sacrament bestowed upon those dead or dying by the Catholic Church. While he

doesn't remember the priest, being present, he does remember being wheeled to the operating room and seeing the fluorescent lights above flashing by.

The next morning, my dad woke up, surprising the medical staff and his family. Upon awakening, his hands were tied and he was connected to tubes all over his body. After barely surviving the night, all he wanted to do was see Charlene, his fiancée. Finally, she arrived. During the ordeal, he realized then what he really wanted in life and recognized the positive influence my mom had on him. He wanted a family, kids, and a reason to live. Prior to becoming involved with my mom, my dad had been going through a period of depression and didn't feel that he had much to live for besides having fun. After meeting her, everything began to change for him, and the thought of her, according to him, was the only thing that allowed him to miraculously survive. For the next month, he had to stay in the hospital on the road to recovery. Charlene's presence was what kept my dad going through this time as he learned to walk again and dealt with all the feelings and questions that come along with such a traumatic event. According to him, just seeing her smile when she entered his room would lift his spirits and make him feel better. My dad's therapy was centered on him learning to walk again, albeit now with a brace. He started by taking three steps, after which the rehabilitation team made him rest for fear of overexertion. In about a month, he was able to complete the final milestone of his rehab, which consisted of him walking up a hill in a nearby alley. Also while in the hospital, my dad learned more about what happened and found out that his assailant was a member of the 8 Ball Posse, and was high on cocaine that night. One of my dad's coworkers, a woman named Ramona, was the assailant's cousin and donated blood for my dad, rejecting the actions her cousin had committed.

After returning home, my dad dealt with many conflicting feelings, feeling sorry for himself and questioning why it happened to him. For nearly a year, and in some ways longer, these feelings were extremely powerful. A couple months after the incident, Charlene became pregnant. This began to make my dad reconsider things, who was confident that this child would be a son. In October of 1991, exactly one year after the stabbing, I was born and named after my dad-Jason Jesse Romero, Jr. The day of my birth, according to my dad, was one of the happiest days of his life, and it caused him to reconsider everything about his life. He realized that while he will always remember and continues to deal with issues that stemmed from that night, that he now had another life for which he was responsible.

Religion/Spirituality

After being stabbed and having the wake-up experience of becoming a father, spirituality began to take a stronger hold in my dad's life. As he got older, he became more interested in spirituality rather than focusing on specific tenants of Christianity and Catholicism, although those traditions did strongly influence his beliefs. My dad, without a doubt in his mind, wholeheartedly believes in a higher power, whom he refers to as God, and an afterlife. Not only are these beliefs influenced by his childhood, but more importantly, by his experiences.

As a child, things were black and white-there was heaven for good people and hell for those who weren't. As he has gotten older, however, he believes that those lines have become somewhat blurred as things get more complex. His understanding of God as an almighty presence is heavily influenced by Catholic teachings, but he also accepts different labels for God that are from various traditions, believing that what many New Age spiritualists call "The

Greater Good” (and other names they have for a supreme force or creator) is the same Presence as the Catholic and Christian God, just being called in different names. He rejects religious superiority, believing that it doesn’t make sense to try to put different religions on pedestals and claim that each different way is the “Only Way.” He also believes that spirituality comes from more than just the Bible or going to a church service. To him, real communion with a higher being, God comes through personal attempts to connect. Although he doesn’t believe in the necessity of attending mass and receives more spiritual benefit from individual prayer, he does go to support his wife, Charlene. What solidifies his belief in God and makes it unquestionable for him are his belief in miracles and his belief that he is a living one, after having survived his stabbing.

After being stabbed, the nurses at the hospital and many other people told him he should have died, they couldn’t believe he was still alive, and that it was a miracle that he lived. Others hinted at a higher purpose as his reason for living. For him, hearing that he should not have lived really made him consider things. He questioned why he was given the opportunity to live despite so many medical professionals predicting the opposite. He also remembers that while being operated on, the doctor made a comment about a tattoo of Jesus Christ on the right side of his chest, directly underneath one of the 14 stab wounds on his body. Working in surgery now, he sees many doctors operate on patients with tattoos, but they never mention them. The combination of his surgeon mentioning it and the way the scar sits directly above the image of Jesus on his body gives my dad no doubt in his mind that there was something more powerful behind his survival. The prayers of family members and the priest over him during that difficult time and his subsequent survival and recovery gave him renewed confidence in the existence of God in addition to making him question his purpose and the reasons why he had survived. He

never questioned why it happened, but rather adopted an idea that his Grandma Skelton believed that every person has their cross to bear, and he assumed that this incident was his cross.

As far as other forms of spirituality are concerned, my dad is constantly looking into new belief systems and learning about different ideologies because of his curious and inquisitive nature. Based on various forms of research and personal feelings from within, he believes in drawing his own conclusions, which are heavily rooted in his personal experiences. Death is an issue that my dad has a unique perspective on, and that perspective has been developed through an organic process influenced by several of his life experiences. In his eyes, death is not something to be feared or resistant towards. When somebody passes away, my dad believes that they are no longer in pain, but rather that death is an escape from the pain and suffering that has become so commonplace in this world. During funerals, he tends to be the stoic and strong one, believing wholeheartedly that while grief is natural, it is not grief for whoever has passed that we feel, but rather it is grief for ourselves that we feel since those still alive will be missing the deceased. That said, he is not against the mourning that is a natural part of losing a loved one, but he chooses to take death and look at it in a positive light, almost as a form of liberation.

Scholarly Reflections

The story of my dad's life and the violence he experienced is not unique in the Chicana/o community. While there were several influences throughout his life that transformed him into the figure who I call "Dad," the horrific experience he had in 1990 radically altered his life, along with the lives of his entire family. The violence¹ he experienced at the hands of another Chicano man is an experience that has steadily been increasing in frequency throughout

Chicana/o communities, changing its face along the way. My dad's story is the story of a survivor of brown-on-brown violence, speaking to and representing the larger issue of violence in the Chicana/o community. Brown-on-brown violence is an issue that has been addressed in the past by various activist organizations, like the Brown Berets², with some degree of success. While there are several forms of violence that affect Chicanas and Chicanos; the physical violence of beatings, stabbings, and shootings are those which create an unsafe environment in the larger community. These are the forms of violence that have historically drawn strong attention from activists, especially those who work in urban and inner-city environments. While violence is often portrayed as a "gang problem³," the effects of the violence are not limited to members of street and prison gangs, but rather, the effects spread into the larger community and contribute to stereotypes of Chicanas and Chicanos as inherently violent, a stereotype that tends to include several groups of impoverished people. However, in the case of my dad, violence and gang responsibility do come together, with his stabbing having been at the hands of a person with some level of gang involvement.

The violence occurring in Chicana/o communities throughout the Southwest is a result of several societal factors. Gang activity and drugs are often pointed to as primary causal factors of violence, but these factors only scratch the surface when talking about violence in the Chicana/o community. Larger, societal factors are often not looked at when discussing violence, but in order to truly understand the root causes of brown-on-brown violence, which my dad was a victim of, the importance of social factors cannot be underestimated. In contemporary times, the social situation in which Chicanas and Chicanos live has developed conditions that are conducive to the creation of street gangs, which often have resorted to violence as a means of dealing with the frustration that has been developed as a result of the poverty and racism faced

by the community⁴. Unfortunately, the frustration felt by members of the community has no outlet, and is unleashed upon the community that is already dealing with the lack of economic opportunity⁵, further distancing this group from mainstream society, which sees the violent actions happening as a result of the people and not the situation in which they live.

Another societal factor that contributes to violence in the Chicana/o community is the lack of educational opportunity⁶. When schools in Chicana/o communities lack the resources necessary to educate students, other avenues appear far more appealing for youth⁷. In a society like the United States where a person's position in society is directly related to economic and material wealth, Chicana and Chicano youth recognize that their education in public schools is not adequate in giving them the skills necessary to progress to the next level. While this recognition is not always conscious, one only needs to be involved with Chicana and Chicano youth to understand that they realize that other schools prepare students better for the next step, which is typically seen as the pursuit of a college education. With a sense of disenfranchisement, Chicana/o youth, but especially Chicano boys, will often be pushed out of schools. Once removed from the educational system, there is a lack of opportunity for these youth, and gangs are typically seen as a space for Chicano youth where there is a sense of community and support. Upon joining gangs, the violent acts committed tend to increase in frequency and scope.

Historically, activism has been an important component of the Chicana/o community's response to the violence in their communities. Organizations, such as the Brown Berets and the Crusade for Justice⁸, have typically worked to reduce violence, especially between gangs, throughout the Southwest. In order to reduce the violence, groups have provided alternative outlets, positive role models, and education⁹. Specifically, in the case of the Brown Berets, Chicana/o community members who have been typically seen as violent or gang members have

been afforded the opportunity to join the militant organization as a means of working to improve, rather than destroy, their communities. Creating a sense of dedication and service to the community was and is a critical component of the Brown Beret's mission, and often Berets were former gang members who had developed a belief that the Chicana/o community's safety was of utmost importance. Victor Rios and Patrick Lopez Aguado discuss the lack of economic opportunity and argue that those who adopt specific elements of the cholo and gang style would be willing to alter certain elements of that performance based on better economic opportunities (Aldama, *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, pg. 396, 2012). By establishing the importance of the community, violent acts enacted upon other community members would be viewed as detrimental to *la causa*¹⁰.

In addition to establishing importance of the community, Brown Berets view themselves as protectors of the community, and actively work to reduce violence committed within and upon the community. Police brutality continues to plague the Chicana/o community, and Brown Berets are committed to preventing attacks on the community, whether they are from within or without and regardless of authoritative roles. Role models have also been of utmost importance in reducing violence within the Chicana/o community. It is an unfortunate reality that there is a lack of positive Chicano role models for young men in the community, especially in urban and inner-city environments. As a result, images of masculinity are largely distorted and have developed in mostly negative ways, with Chicano masculinity seen as hyper-violent and hyper-sexual. There also exists a strong influence of machismo¹¹, and the way it is portrayed has taken on a decidedly negative connotation. However, with positive Chicano role models, the mainstream understanding of machismo can be changed and it can move away from the violence and aggressive sexuality that it is known as.

Education has always been a critical component in reducing the violence in the Chicana/o community, even though the education provided by community organizations is not a “formal education¹².” By allowing members of the community to recognize the implications of their actions and the shock waves that ripple through the community have a primarily negative affect. By becoming more conscious of their actions, those who have been involved in the perpetration of violence on the community are afforded the opportunity to critically engage and begin to understand the larger social issues that contribute to their situation. Once this has been understood, it becomes easier for members of the Chicana/o community to heal and begin working to eradicate the root cause of the negative situation instead of taking out their anger on each other.

Throughout my dad’s life, violence has taken its toll. From small-scale school fights to a near-death stabbing, violence manifests itself in a variety of ways. The role and progression of Chicano street gangs in Pueblo played out throughout my dad’s life, as it has in my past. Though neither of us have been directly involved, we have family and friends who have been caught up in *la vida loca*. The lack of educational, economic and social opportunities for youth in Pueblo has contributed to gang involvement, which has also contributed to violent acts in the community. However, my dad rejected the lifestyle that had nearly cost him his life and instead began to engage in what I argue is his own form of activism, being a Chicano father and role model for his family.

Chapter 2: Charlene Martinez

Early Life

In July of 1967, in Los Angeles, California, a baby girl was born to Rudolfo and Eloveida Martinez-Charlene Martinez, my mother. Less than a year later, the family moved to Minturn, Colorado, where my grandpa Rudy worked in the mines. Once she was in Kindergarten, my mom was attending school in Avon, Colorado. Shortly thereafter, in 1974, the family moved back to their original home in Las Tablas, New Mexico. On the trip home, the family brought back the trailer that they lived in while in Minturn. Unfortunately it got stuck once they were in New Mexico and so the family stayed with relatives in Petaca for a few weeks. Finally they were able to pull the trailer out from where it had been stuck and finished moving it to Las Tablas.

During the first year that they were in New Mexico, my mom's family lived in the trailer they had pulled from Avon as they built their home out of adobe. The entire process took several years, and throughout her childhood, my mom remembers making adobe every summer for additions to the house. The process of creating the house consisted of my grandparents and their oldest children gathering all the materials and preparing them to be mixed, while the younger children, my mom included, would be responsible for mixing the materials and putting them in *adoberas*, or adobe-makers. After, they would haul the adobe, dump it out and allow it to dry in the sun for a couple days, when it would then be turned over so that it could properly dry in the summer New Mexican sun. After allowing the adobes to dry, they would be piled up and my Grandpa Rudy would get to work laying them, with my Grandma Eloveida and their

oldest son, Carlos, hauling the adobes to him at the location that the house was being built. The support for the ceiling of the house came from trees in the areas that would be cut down and skinned before being taken to become part of the roof. During the time that the family was constructing their home, any time friends, relatives, or other company came over, everybody would help to make adobes, and often times it was seen as a friendly competition to see which family could make the most adobes throughout the day. The hand-made finished product was a small, two-room adobe structure with a kitchen and one room for the family to sleep in that was finished in 1976. For the children, all of this hard-work was not really seen for what it was, but rather its what they felt like was their play-time since they were able to be outside and have fun with all of the *primos*. Playing in the mud and mixing the adobe with bare feet was a good time for them, and if they poured a couple hundred adobes throughout the day they were allowed to go swim in the little river that ran through the land that they lived on.

After the house was completed, there were three families that lived in the canyon in Las Tablas, all of them related. A quarter mile from the newly built home was my mom's grandparents and just on the other side of them lived my mom's aunt and her kids. Through this little area of Las Tablas ran one power line, which the different families would all connect their homes to using extension cords and the like. Because of this, my mom's family was always very cautious of their electrical usage, limiting time in front of a t.v. to one or two hours a day. The heater in their home was a wood-burning one, known as a *fogon*.

The kids would all have several chores to do, with the two older boys doing primarily outside work and the girls doing chores inside the home. Some chores, however, like hauling water, were done by all of the children. And even though the jobs were separate, on some occasions all the kids would help out. For example, even though the girls were the ones who

usually cooked, the boys knew how to as well and would sometimes help out. Likewise, on cold days the girls would go outside to help the boys haul in wood, which was not usually their job. In the early mornings, my mom's brothers would have to go help their grandpa feed the animals and do other small things while everybody else had to clean the house, sweep the floors and make breakfast before 7 a.m. so that everyone could get to school on time. After getting home from school the kids would all have to go haul wood and water back to the house before making dinner.

There were two sources of water that they would pull from. One, the *ojito*, was natural spring water that would be used for drinking, and the other was the river, from which they would get the water they used for cleaning, mopping and doing laundry. Both were about 100 yards away from the house and at the bottom of the hill upon which they lived. The kids would bring the water to the house in 7 gallon buckets, carrying two at a time except for the youngest son who could help out, who would carry one at a time and the oldest son who would carry larger 10-gallon buckets. The cleaning buckets would be left outside for later use while the drinking water would be brought inside immediately. The kids would have to be on the lookout for lama, which would grow in the *ojito* and make sure to not bring any of that back with them in the drinking water. On laundry days, which were every Saturday, the kids would have to haul extra water and put it into the washing machine where their mom would wash it by hand and the girls would hang it out to dry the clothes. This was repeated three times for dark, light and white clothes, all being washed separately and with separate water, which led to the kids having to take multiple trips to get water. While the girls would usually help with laundry, the boys would be out chopping wood to get a good stockpile ready for the cold winter months when the only heat they had was from their *fogon*.

Only after all of the household chores were complete could anyone do homework or anything else. Growing up, neither my mom nor her siblings had a bed-time, but rather would just go to sleep after a long day of exhausting work. Growing up, the kids would take full baths once a week where they would all share the same water, just adding a little bit more hot water for each new person. Every day, however, they would make sure to clean up and wash themselves with soap before going to school. The clothes that everyone wore were handmade and often hand-me-downs, especially for the girls.

In the summer, the kids would have to get up early in the morning to go pull weeds in the large garden that all three families shared. In this garden, the family grew all the food they needed—beans, corn, potatoes, green bean, carrots and plenty of other vegetables. The only time they traveled into town to buy food was for things like macaroni, rice and flour. All of the meat the families ate came from the animals on they would butcher; turkeys, chickens, cows, goats and pigs.

After several years, the family slowly added to the house and eventually it grew to have what was originally supposed to be two extra rooms and a bathroom. Because of a lack of money, this was never fully completed and for some time only half of the floor in the addition was actually flooring, the other half being the earth. During this time my mom and her sister lived on the “dirt side” of their house and would be required to keep that place clean, even though that was difficult since it was dirt. Eventually, this was completed and there were more rooms, so my mom moved into what was originally supposed to be the bathroom. This space was only large enough to have a twin bed and a small closet.

Education

In kindergarten through second grade, my mom attended a small school in Avon, Colorado. In second grade, my mom and her family moved to New Mexico where her real memories of school begin. While living in Las Tablas, my mom and her siblings attended school in Ojo Caliente, which was over 20 miles away and took over an hour to get there. . In the mornings, they would walk about a mile to the *placita* where they would be picked up on the bus by their dad, who was also the bus driver. On some days, because both of the parents worked and their youngest son was still a baby, the older kids would have to take turns staying home to take care of him if the weather made it difficult to carry him with them to the *placita*. My mom would often try to make up any excuse to not stay home because she didn't want to miss school, and usually her sister, Annette, was willing to take over for her. For their family, it wasn't that school was unimportant, but rather that family took precedence over anything.

The school my mom and her siblings attended when they first moved to New Mexico was a K-8 school that was attached to the high school. In one section was the administrative staff, and another section held First through Fourth Grades, which served Fifth through Eighth graders. Kindergarten was housed in trailers and both high school and younger students shared the cafeteria and gymnasium. Because of this, most Physical Education for the younger students was held outside, regardless of the weather. Class size was typically around 20 students per grade level, and would usually be taught by one teacher. During this time, corporal punishment was acceptable and multiple teachers engaged in physical discipline of students. Teachers at the schools also tended to be from the area and didn't speak "proper" English as reflected by one English teacher would often tell the class "You guys better *put* attention!" Nearly every teacher in the school did speak Spanish however, as did all the students. Spanish was the dominant

language in the area and students were not punished for speaking Spanish as they were in other parts of the country. In fact, students were encouraged to speak Spanish and even the few Anglo students who attended school in the area spoke fluent New Mexican Spanish. This pocket of continued Spanish-language dominance was not just in the highly rural areas of northern New Mexico, but also in some of the larger towns like Española. For some students in the area, school could be a difficult adjustment transitioning to speak bilingually because even for families that were US citizens, Spanish was often the dominant home language. While my mom herself spoke bilingually when entering school, her younger brother was a monolingual Spanish speaker entering kindergarten.

Once students reached high school age they were allowed access to “the other side of the gym,” which to them was a huge milestone in growing up. Further than that, for my mom, it meant that she could take more challenging classes, which she pushed herself to do in an attempt to achieve the honor of being Valedictorian. Education was her primary concern throughout her high school years and she always tried to help the other students around her, often by sharing her work with other students to help them pass the class. By the time she reached high school my mom did not know anybody who had attended college after graduating, with most people just staying in the area and starting families. Because of this she wanted to go to college and to do so she pushed herself. As a freshman, she took a math class that was made up mostly of seniors, including her older brother. In addition to taking academics seriously, my mom was heavily involved in sports, citing them as her primary way to stay away from home. During high school she played softball, basketball and ran track, all of which were offered for free. There were however, several social issues affecting students. Teen pregnancy was an issue in the community that often caused high school girls to drop out of school before graduating. One

example was my mom's best friend growing up, whom we know as Auntie Berta, who got pregnant during her and my mom's junior year, in 1984. The only drug prevalent in the area besides alcohol and tobacco was marijuana, with harder drugs not really coming into play until the area began growing and attracting in people from outside of the local communities. While my mom's freshman class consisted of over 50 students, only 19 graduated. Most students who didn't finish high school would be working to help their families make ends meet while a few would drop out because of early pregnancies.

College preparations at Mesa Vista High School were highly inadequate, with one counselor serving the whole school. The counselor did not provide proper guidance for students trying to attend college, but would give resources to those who took the initiative to ask about it. Instead of college recruiters coming to the school, military recruiters were common. The recruiters would offer promises of seeing the world and free education, and surprisingly, they were relatively unsuccessful at bringing in students from this area. My mom considered this career path for a short time before deciding to go directly to college after graduating. My mom, who wanted to be a nurse, let the counselor know that she wanted to go to school in Colorado or New Mexico, and was given two applications, one to Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado and one to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She was accepted to both schools and was offered multiple scholarships, including a full ride to UNM. However, not really understanding the financial aid packages or implications and without the proper guidance, she elected to attend school at Adams State. She felt that to have better opportunities she needed to get farther away from home in the extremely rural mountains of northern New Mexico. While my mom performed very well academically, ranking third in her class for academic performance, she felt unprepared for college.

Family/Personal/Social Life

The family life for my mom and her siblings was very strict. Their dad, my Grandpa Rudy, was extremely strict with all of the children, including my mom's *primos* who would often spend time at their house. Anything that was done wrong or anything that made my grandpa mad would result in the kids being hit. All of the kids were subject to this physical discipline that included the usage of anything as a hitting tool, ranging from belts to shoes to cords or anything else that was lying around the house. . Often, the strikes would leave welts and bruises, but the kids didn't see this as "abuse," but rather discipline. The best thing the kids could do to lessen the pain was just take it, because if one of the kids tried to run it was just a matter of time before my grandpa would catch up to them and hit them even harder. Even while attending school, my mom would be self-conscious of the marks on her body and would occasionally choose to not change for gym class to prevent her classmates from seeing the markings. Of all the issues the family faced from poverty to a poor education system, physical discipline would turn out to be the one challenge that would separate the family.

For my mom, the most important thing about growing up was finding a way to make her dad happy and proud. One Saturday morning during her junior year, she woke up early to make breakfast in an attempt to make him and her mom happy. While she was peeling potatoes, her dad woke up and started yelling at her because she hadn't swept the floor before cooking. Immediately she dropped what she was doing, grabbed the broom and began sweeping the floor. Then, her dad started yelling at her for being barefoot, which was definitely unallowable especially while cooking. So she quickly ran to put her shoes on then ran back to wash her hands

to begin cooking again since her dad had picked up the broom and was sweeping. The yelling continued, and my mom gathered the courage to say something back, which was unheard of because the kids knew that talking back would undoubtedly result in their being hit. After looking to the door and gauging the likelihood of her beating her dad to the door to get away, she decided to say something. She then yelled at him, “You do it yourself then!” before throwing the knife and potatoes down and bolting for the door. Her dad immediately ran after her, but she managed to escape him and go to the “hiding spot” where the kids would disappear to if they got in trouble. All of the siblings knew of this hiding place, in contrast to the adults so the kids knew where my mom was. Since it was Saturday, it was also laundry day and soon all the kids were out hauling water from the river to the house. After one brother and her sister brought her breakfast, my mom sneaked away from her hiding place and helped her brothers and sister haul water to the bottom of the hill, where they would take over and take it back to the house so my mom wouldn’t get caught. For her and for all the siblings, doing chores was expected and they would feel guilty if they weren’t helping out. Often, they would still be out hauling wood and water even when they were sick, so it was no surprise that my mom was willing to help her siblings out in this instance.

After this was done, my mom went back into hiding and was just walking around to kill time when her brother and a couple of her *primos* came up to find her. They told her that she should go back to the house, which confused her. They let her know that her dad was packing his things in a suitcase and getting ready to leave. Immediately they started heading back towards the house, and soon she saw her dad in the garden and she became afraid once again because of what had happened earlier in the day. They made it back to the house and soon her dad returned, calmly asking her if she knew where his belt was. This shocked my mom, who

was expecting to get beat after returning. After that encounter, her dad got his suitcase, took it out to his truck, got in and left.

During dinner that night her mom asked the kids what they thought about her getting a divorce because she couldn't stand watching her husband beat their kids anymore. The older kids advised that she do whatever she felt was best, and she followed through and got a divorce. After the divorce was finalized, the family moved into Ojo Caliente, where they stayed until my mom graduated from high school. Even though the kids were often hit severely for trivial matters, my mom never remembers her dad laying a finger on her mom, a testament to the violence being used solely for disciplinary purposes.

After the divorce, my grandpa Rudy would not speak to my mom, even when she would get on the bus to go to school. Eventually, my grandpa broke the silence when he invited his kids to go to Romeo, Colorado to go visit his mom, who was dying. After the initial contact, my mom and her dad began to reconcile and become close once again and he never became violent with his children after the divorce.

In New Mexico, a state that has high poverty and unemployment rates, very few outsiders choose to come to the state. Because of this, many of the people, especially in the northern part of the state, have families that have been established in the area for centuries. This is evidenced in part by the fact that Spanish was still the dominant language as recently as the 1980s, and to some extent still today, and the way people of the area defined themselves. For my mom's generation, they were not Hispanic, Latino or Mexican. They identified themselves as Chicanos and understood themselves to be very different from immigrant or Anglo families, with many of them being able to trace their ancestry to either the Spanish or the Native people of the Pueblos.

While my mom was growing up, Mexican immigration to the area began to increase. However, men were primarily the ones who would come into the area to work on some of the larger farms and Mexican families were few and far between. For those who identified as Chicana/o, Mexican was an offensive word to be called because there was a strong sense of pride involved in being from this area and because Mexicans were seen as very different. There was prejudice toward Mexican men, who were accused of stealing Chicana women, which would lead to animosity between the two communities. The word Hispanic was used only on government documents where there were no other options, but in everyday spoken conversations, the people of northern New Mexico identified themselves as Chicanas and Chicanos. Even older members of the community, such as my grandparent's generation, identified solely as Chicana/o. The sense of identity that came from being Chicanas and Chicanos was one that was infused with strong senses of pride for the people of the area, who had very little besides themselves, their families, and their stories to hold on to.

La Raza Unida was a popular organization in the area and many of the Chicana/o families in the area, including my mom's, would attend the events they hosted. These rallies often ended with picnics or barbeques and essentially became gathering places for members of the community who may have been separated by long distances over the course of the week. While politics were often a topic of conversation, the community element was much more important, especially for the younger kids who would usually be uninterested in political conversations and saw the rallies as a time to go hang out and play with other kids. My mom, who was very young during La Raza Unida's rise to prominence, did not recognize the political nature of the organization. Instead, she understood the community building that occurred at La Raza Unida

events. For her, and others in her family, the political interests of La Raza Unida were secondary to bringing members of the community together.

Later Life

In 1985, a year after her parents' divorce, my mom graduated from Mesa Vista High School in Ojo Caliente, New Mexico, where she played basketball and excelled academically. Ranked 3rd in her class, my mom was offered a Presidential Scholarship, a merit-based full-ride scholarship, to attend the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Without having even seen the campus, she declined the offer because she knew that she wanted to get out of New Mexico. As a senior, my mom had also applied at Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado, where she was also accepted. Alamosa became her new home as she began a new chapter in her life, pursuing a degree in nursing. During her college search, my mom was not afforded the resources necessary to take an in-depth look at schools to find programs that matched her interests, and after spending a year in Alamosa at Adams State, my mom discovered that her school did not have a bachelor's program in nursing

After finding this out, my mom and a new friend, Lucy Martinez, decided to transfer to Mesa State College of Colorado in Grand Junction in 1986. What she had expected to be a new positive experience turned out to be a far more negative situation. In Grand Junction, my mom remembers the looks she was given and the feeling of not belonging as she attended classes and explored the city. Rather than continuing to put themselves in a place that felt unaccepting, my mom and Lucy decided to once again change schools, and selected Pueblo Community College in Pueblo, Colorado, as their next destination. The two found an apartment to share, and

continued their classes to obtain their Associate of Science in Nursing degrees. Over the next couple of years my mom worked in the classroom, focused on completing her education. In 1988, while still finishing her degree, my mom began working at St. Mary Corwin Hospital in 1988. In 1989, a young man named Jason Romero was hired in the transportation department. Though the two didn't interact often at work, one night when they were both out, my mom approached him at a bar, and the two began dating shortly after.

Eventually, my mom began working at Parkview Medical Center, where she started as a nurse in the neurology department, working with patients who had head injuries, and then transferring to the Rehabilitation Unit. In October of 1990, a short time after my mom and Jason became engaged; he was stabbed in a vicious attack. Throughout his recovery, my mom stayed with him, supporting him and helping to nurse him back to health. A year after this incident, my mom gave birth to her first child, myself. In June of 1992, just a few months later, my mom and Jason were married in a Catholic ceremony that featured a large wedding party, Zoot Suits, and homemade dresses at Christ the King Parish, which was followed by a wedding reception presided over by a band from New Mexico. For the next several years, my mom continued working at Parkview, and gave birth to her second son, Manuel, in 1995.

In the fall of 1998, my mom began attending school at the University of Southern Colorado, working to complete her Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. Over the next two years, my mom's days consisted of work, class and studying. As a young child, I wanted to be with my mom often, and she encouraged me to "help" her study, which I was excited to do, according to her. In this way, my mom began encouraging education for her family from a time when her children were very young, and essentially made us understand that college wasn't an option, but rather an expectation. During the two years that my mom was

working on her Bachelor's degree, my dad would help out around the house, even cooking for the family many times. In 2000, my mom completed her Bachelor's Degree and graduated from USC. In 2004, she began a new job at District 70 as a School Nurse, where she continues to work. That same year, my mom gave birth to her third and final child, her first daughter, Larissa.

Religion/Spirituality

During my mom's youth, mass was a special occasion that was held once a month, on the first Tuesday of the month. In northern New Mexico, one priest was required to serve several of the small mountain villages. During these years, the priest would have to commute to the various churches he served, and in the case of inclement weather, would often not be able to hold mass. As a result, there would be some times when mass would not be held as scheduled, and the community would lose out on their monthly mass. When the priest was able to have mass, he would do the entire thing by himself, without the assistance of a Lector or Alter Servers. In addition to being poorly staffed, the Catholic Churches in the small communities like Las Tablas were tiny in comparison to the Cathedrals of Santa Fe. In Las Tablas, the church was a small structure with only 4 or 5 pews that was heated by a small wood heater. Because of the size of the church, everybody who attended knew each other which helped to build community in these small rural towns. Wedding ceremonies could not be held at this small church, so couples often had to travel to larger cities like El Rito or Espanola to get married.

In Las Tablas and other communities like it, the vast majority of people were Catholic, and their faith was extremely important. People from the area often wore religious jewelry and

hung rosaries from their rearview windows. My mom's family loved going to church, and they would always walk to get there. While her parents didn't always go to mass, my mom and her siblings always did, and were usually accompanied by their mother. For my mom, a huge step in her faith occurred when she made her First Holy Communion while still in elementary school. Because of the understaffed church, my mom and her siblings had to go to Denver, Colorado to take the required classes and receive their First Holy Communion. While she always wanted to get confirmed, my mom was unable to during her youth because her family couldn't afford to take her to the classes, which lasted for at least one full year. After moving to Pueblo in her early 20s, my mom decided to receive her confirmation there.

Growing up, the most important time of religious life for my mom and her community was Lent. In addition to an increased presence of *Penitentes*, who led funeral rosaries and were often called upon to administer Last Rites along with other men and women in the community who were believed to have the most faith, there was the pilgrimage to the *Santuario de Chimayo*¹ that my mom and her siblings participated in. Every year on Good Friday from a very young age, my mom and her siblings were told to walk to the *Santuario* as penance for their sins. The pilgrimage to the *Santuario de Chimayo* is attended by thousands of people from across the United States, but holds a special place in the Chicana/o community in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. During the Good Friday pilgrimage, thousands of religious pilgrims walk miles to the small adobe church, carrying crosses and other religious objects. The prayers of believers are directed towards healing, the process for which the *Santuario* is most known for. Usually, their parents would not walk with them, but would be travelling just ahead of them in the car, making sure that they didn't get lost or involved in any other trouble. To them, the pilgrimage was done because they were bad children, but once my mom got into high school, she

began to have a different perspective on it. At that time, the pilgrimage took on a deeper meaning for her and after she graduated high school and moved to Colorado for college, my mom would return annually to take part in the pilgrimage. During these return trips, my mom's mother began walking the pilgrimage every year as well, which developed a closer relationship between daughter and mother. To this day, my mom continues to make the annual pilgrimage to Chimayo, bringing her own family to participate in this tradition from her childhood.

Scholarly Reflections

After growing up in an extremely rural area of northern New Mexico, my mom decided to pursue a higher education in order to create more opportunities for herself. In the Chicana/o community, higher education is typically seen as difficult to attain, but in increasing numbers, members of the community have entered the university system². K-12 education is also a place of stress for the Chicana/o community in the way that students are typically subjected to an inferior educational experience than members of the dominant society. In lower income areas, which are made up of larger proportions of people from marginalized communities, schools receive less funding from property taxes, which is a detriment as local taxes have historically made up the largest slice of school funding³. In different sectors of the Chicana/o community, like urban and rural areas, obstacles that students will face in their educational experience in the K-12 system and in higher education. Within the Chicana/o community, a common complaint is the lack of college preparation that students receive⁴. The lack of preparation has affected not only my mother and me, but several of my peers here at the University of Colorado. All of these

obstacles and challenges, however, are simply the results of educational inequity, a reality which is pervasive throughout the Chicana/o community.

Among several issues that create a difference in the educational achievement for Chicana/o students is the economic disadvantage faced by members of the community. However, the story is much larger than that and in order to understand the root of educational inequity, it is necessary to look at the social institutions and actions of those institutions, specifically in the way that they systematically exclude members of the Chicana/o community. For my mom, being in an economically disadvantaged situation in a rural community in New Mexico, the public education system was not designed with her success in mind. In the K-12 system, the focus on standardized testing, which assumes among other things that all people come from the same knowledge background, is detrimental to the success of students from marginalized communities⁵. The culture of standardized testing has had several effects on the classroom and educational policy, which include legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act⁶. Beyond this, however, is the lack of proper guidance for Chicana/o students. Chicana/o students historically have been tracked away from university educations, instead being encouraged to join the military or pursue a vocational education⁷. This was the case for my mom's school, which hosted more military recruiters than college recruiters.

While the failure of the education system is extremely detrimental to the Chicana/o community, it is the repercussions of these failures which have the greatest effect. In rural communities, work and family life are seen as more important than school, which does very little to prepare a person for the life they are expected to live. Because schools in these areas are not relevant to the lives of the communities, they are not going to be seen as important. The lack of education that arises as people see education as less important becomes a powerful tool in the

continued marginalization of members of the Chicana/o community. In urban settings, the expectations that students will do well and be successful are nonexistent⁸, which creates lower standards for Chicana/o students. Again, this disenfranchises students, who do not want to participate in something that they are told their whole lives they will be unsuccessful, whether directly or indirectly. For those students who do manage to make it to an institution of higher learning, they are first forced to overcome a variety of obstacles, and once present, are expected to be prepared and on the same level as their peers who come from more privileged backgrounds⁹. For my mom, the lack of preparation was a major source of frustration. After graduating near the top of her class, she had come to expect success in regards to education. After taking many classes and receiving her first “C,” my mom understood that she had not received many of the same benefits and preparations as other students.

All of these factors lead to lower and lower educational attainment as Chicana/o students progress throughout the educational system¹⁰. While education is not necessarily garnered solely through a formal system, the tools needed to mobilize and recognize that organic education for what it is, and harness it in a positive manner, do often come from the education and experiences that come with receiving a college degree. The lack of access to these tools that the Chicana/o community faces plays a large role in the difficulty that the community experiences in its ability to progress in a positive manner.

In the past, activism has played a critical role in working to challenge educational inequity and make institutions of higher learning more accessible to members of the Chicana/o community. A powerful example of this lies in the creation and work done by the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and other Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs) at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the late 1960s and into the 1970s¹¹. Through their work

throughout the state of Colorado, UMAS was able to exponentially increase the presence and retention of Chicana and Chicano students at the university at that time. In doing so, UMAS was able to contribute to the respectability and acknowledgement of the Chicana/o community as an intellectual force. UMAS was also able to indirectly create a new generation of leaders from the Chicana/o community, most of which ended up also being leaders *for* the Chicana/o community as well, which should be the overall intention of education in the first place. How is the Chicana/o community supposed to reject their inferior position in society without first recognizing their position and then critically engaging with it? Those who are able or taught how to engage with the world on this deeper level are those who will work to challenge it and education ought to be seen as the vessel that gives people the tools necessary to do so. In order to continue to progress, I believe that along with the implementation of programs similar to the EOPs that were successful in the past, curriculum that allows students to truly critically engage the world and their individual and community's position in society is necessary.

As a first-generation college student, my mom experienced several of the issues associated with attaining a higher education as a Chicana woman. Coming from an impoverished rural community, my mom has been challenged with educational inequity from a very young age. In addition to economic disadvantages and the distance to school for my mom, the situation was not set up to contribute to her academic success. She was able to obtain a college degree not because of her educational experiences, but in spite of them. My mom's experiences in Grand Junction are similar to many of the struggles I have faced in Boulder, but we chose different routes in addressing those struggles. While I chose to remain in a difficult environment, my mom decided to place herself in a situation that was more conducive to her success and transferred to Pueblo Community College. My mom overcame the educational

inequity she experienced without the assistance of activist organizations like UMAS, but her experience would have been radically different had there been this type of support. With the support of advisors who knew the educational system, it is likely that my mom would not have spent extra years in college and would have been able to graduate much earlier and with much less debt.

Chapter 3: Paternal Grandparents

Sherry Skelton

Early Life

In 1948, Sherry Kathleen Skelton was born to Jerome and Mildred Skelton in Plymouth, Wisconsin. Jerome, a World War II Navy Veteran was Irish and worked for the Kohler Company and Mildred was of German descent. During her childhood, Sherry, my grandma, was raised with very traditional and religious values. Also, for her, the German and Irish sides of her family were very different, with her mother's German family being very organized and serious and her father Irish family being very different. This was exemplified by an Irish wake that my grandma attended when she was young. The wake was very joyous, with lots of laughing, drinking and dancing, which drew a stark contrast with the seriousness of her German family. While there was no real clash between the two families, there was some initial weariness about the cross-cultural relationship, as expressed when Mildred asked her dad about marrying Jerome, to which he replied, "Well, You know he's Irish don't you?" The families did, however, get along and there were no serious conflicts between them.

Family was important growing up, with both sides of her family living somewhat close. My grandma and her parents lived above her Grandpa and Grandma Spradau, her mother's parents. She would often stay with them while her young parents would go out and she became very attached to them at a young age. Her dad's parents lived 5 miles away on a farm in Cascade. She would visit them on weekends occasionally, but remembers these experiences, which were without siblings or other family members around the same age, as lonely ones in

which she would only be able to play with her grandparents' dog, Major. There were some instances when she was able to be around more of the farm animals, but at such a young age these experiences were limited. One such instance was the singular occasion on which my grandma rode on her grandpa's horse as they went to herd his cows.

Growing up, she attended a Catholic school that was a short walk away and up a large hill. At this school, she was taught very strict values from the nuns and learned about the Saints, which is an education that she feels is not emphasized anymore. While she was young she wanted to become a nun, and once she reached high school, this desire became much more pronounced. She begged her parents to let her attend a convent, but her mother was very resistant to this idea. In an effort to convince her mom, she prayed to become a sister "in both ways." She prayed for a younger sibling, which she hoped would distract her mom and make her focus on that sibling, in turn allowing her to become a nun. While it didn't exactly happen in that order, both of her desires were granted. Her brother, Mike, wasn't born until she was 18, but prior to her 10th Grade year, my grandma's mom relented and allowed her to go to the Convent. She attended the convent, which focused on teaching and nursing, for the next year and a half. However, her goal was to become a social worker and she eventually decided to return to a traditional high school.

Upon returning to high school, she was very shy and didn't talk to many people. At this age, her mom wanted her to go out more, but because of her shyness, my grandma didn't want to and resisted. At one point, a minister's son asked her out, and once her mom found out she got extremely excited and pressured her to go out with him. She relented and went out, but didn't have fun and didn't go out with him again. In 1966, she graduated from high school and decided to attend the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Education

From kindergarten all through elementary school, which continued through 8th grade for her, my grandma attended a Catholic School. The reasoning her mother sent her to this school, according to her was to teach her the Catholic values that her mother, a convert to Catholicism, didn't know how to teach. The nuns who taught these values, which included prayer and modesty among other things, were extremely strict. The curriculum at the school prioritized academics, especially English, and allowed classes like physical education to fall to the wayside. In fact, there were no physical education classes at the school. After one year of high school, my grandma attended a convent, but returned to a public school in the middle of her junior year. During her year and a half at the convent, she remembers clearly walking through a tunnel when it was announced that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated, an event that sent shockwaves throughout her small Catholic community that had heavily supported Kennedy. Upon returning to high school, she was incorrectly placed in an advanced geometry class. At the end of the year the teacher told her he would give her one letter grade higher than what she had earned to compensate for the incorrect placement.

The school reflected the demographics of city of Plymouth¹, and the student body was entirely white. My grandma remembers the students as either German or Irish, with a small number of students of Italian descent. Students at this school were primarily working-class, and very few had any aspirations beyond working at the factories after graduation. This was reflected in the attitude and actions of the counselor and the small number of students who attended college. While the counselors at the school were available, they were not especially helpful in encouraging students to pursue a higher education, though they didn't do anything to

discourage it either. Most students who graduated in Plymouth did decide to begin working and start families shortly after graduating, but my grandma was one who decided to go against the grain and go to college. Without any help from her counselor, she managed to get accepted to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in an attempt to get into a bigger city and see more perspectives. In 1966, she graduated and began school at the University. While in college, she was exposed to people from all walks of life and opened her eyes to the vastness and diversity that comes with a college experience. During her time at the University, she came across a booth for the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program², and being a young college student who wanted to change the world, signed up.

Family/Personal/Social Life

During her upbringing, my grandma was subject to the rules set in place by her mom, a break from the traditional patriarchal idea of a man being in charge of the home. In fact, her mom was the one who came up with the rules and enforced them. The only time her dad became involved in discipline was to spank her, which her mom wouldn't do. Mildred was a stay at home mother, which could help explain her role. Being a young mother, Mildred did try working for a time as a waitress, but that only lasted about six months because of pressures from her husband and her own apprehensions about it. One memory of my grandma's that emphasized her mom's role happened while she was very young. One day, her mother came to her questioning her about something she had done wrong. Unfortunately for my grandma, she had done two things that day that would get her in trouble and she was unsure about which one

she was talking about. She kept quiet despite repeated questioning and finally got into trouble for not telling the truth by her mom, and eventually was spanked.

Education was not pushed by her parents, but rather was a value instilled in her by the nuns. As soon as she would get home, she would immediately go to her room and do her homework, not because her parents encouraged it, but because she was afraid of what would happen when she would get in trouble with the nuns. Sometime during her high school year, my grandma developed a strong sense of social justice and a desire to help create equity for all people. During a Young Democrat meeting, she heard for the first time, views that were opposed to and criticized the Vietnam War. These critiques rang true for my grandma, who after talking to her mom about the meeting and those ideas, was shut down by her mom, who told her, “Oh, those are probably Communists.” Despite that, she continued developing those ideas, and was inspired by the leaders of the time, people like Dr. Martin Luther King. She also credits a generational shift that was occurring, and the movement away from prejudiced and racist ideas.

During this time, she would often discuss issues of prejudice with her parents, who held some of those beliefs. Her dad, especially, began to come away from those ideas after a long time. Her mother also had some of those prejudices, encouraging my grandma to stay away from the canning workers, most of whom were Latina/o, warning her that they could be carrying knives. All of the prejudices within the Anglo community were troubling and very frustrating for her. In order to escape these ideas, she decided to go away to college, where her eyes were opened and she was introduced to people from a variety of diverse backgrounds, which helped her growth and perspective develop in new ways.

Later Life

While in college at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, my grandma signed up for the year-long program called VISTA. Before completing her education, she was sent to a six-week training in Denver, Colorado where she would learn about her assignment and the people she would be working with and around. During the training, they were sent to the small community of Romeo, Colorado where they were placed in a situation meant to make them “experience” poverty. While the VISTA volunteers did not have as much as they once did, my grandma recognized that this experience was by no means “real” poverty, as she had resources and the ability to get away from the experience, a privilege unafforded to people who actually live in poverty. By recognizing her privileged situation, my grandma understood that she was not experiencing true poverty, but that didn’t deter her from her desire to follow through with the program.

The purpose of VISTA, according to my grandma, was to help people realize and understand their rights and utilize those rights to prevent others from taking advantage of them. Originally, my grandma wanted to work in an inner-city, urban environment, but was told that she was far too naïve to work in that kind of an environment. Instead, she was sent to Montrose, Colorado to work with the Colorado Migrant Council. In this position, through secondary efforts, she would work to help start a GED school with adult basic education for those who weren’t afforded the education necessary to be literate, help provide daycare for migrant workers in Alamosa and work with a large migrant population. The main area of focus for my grandma however, was an area of Montrose that was “on the other side of the tracks,” a community known as Tortilla Flats. In Tortilla Flats, an entirely Chicana/o neighborhood, there were several social issues that negatively impacted the community. One of those issues was juvenile delinquency, and as a member of VISTA, my grandma was required to help prevent teenagers

from getting into trouble. In Tortilla Flats, fights, burglaries and other alcohol-related issues were common and several of the youth from the community would end up in jail or prison.

During her service with VISTA, my grandma grew to love the people of Tortilla Flats, who she described as some of the most gracious and giving people she had ever met. Some of the work she did in service to Tortilla Flats included talking to church groups throughout Montrose about the situation faced by people from that community, which was unknown to the vast majority of the people there because it was “on the other side of the tracks.” Lawyers were also brought in to speak to the community about their rights, and students were pushed towards pursuing a higher education after graduating high school, which hadn’t been a priority in the past. My grandma understood her role in VISTA as working to raise awareness of the issues faced by the community in order to empower the community itself to tackle those issues. An example of this is the Yearly Festival, which was started during my grandma’s time in VISTA with the support of a local priest. However, community members soon took on the project themselves and moved the event into a park in Tortilla Flats, instead of in the parking lot it was held in that first year. When VISTA volunteers came to the community, they brought with them the Coors Boycott. While this was at first rejected by the community, as evidenced by the common crossing off of the “n’t” on signs that read “Don’t Drink Coors Beer,” members of Tortilla Flats soon became educated on the boycott and embraced it themselves, as it was an issue that directly affected them. After some of this initial push from VISTA and from elsewhere, Tortilla Flats increased its political activism, even seeing a chapter of the Brown Berets form for a short time.

After finishing her commitment to VISTA, my grandma intended to complete her college degree in Boulder. She loved Colorado, and didn’t intend to return to Wisconsin immediately.

However, after dating Julio Romero for a few months, he proposed to her and shortly thereafter, the couple was married. The courtship lasted less than a year, and she put off her goals of finishing college for a time. After marrying Bayo, as he was known to his family, she continued living in Montrose with him. She tried to continue her education at a community college, but her husband was resentful of this because of the difficulties it caused in trying to juggle a family, work and school. She quit, but always had the intention of finishing her education. While Bayo was working full time to pay the rent, she began working part time at a GED school and worked other small jobs in Montrose, including being a waitress for a short time. However, because of low wages and a family to support that now included a son, Jason, my grandma and her family moved to Pueblo for work.

While her husband worked full time, my grandma took care of their son and worked part-time when he was home. After working a couple different jobs, including stints at Sambo's and Parkview Medical Center, my grandma was hired by Father Blonde at Christ the King Parish as a secretary. In order to get the job, she had to be able to type which led her to take a refresher course and remind herself how to type on typewriters. After a time, Father Bill Gleeson became the priest at Christ the King and gave her a raise. By this point, her son and daughter were older and a little more self-sufficient, requiring her to do less for them, and so she began taking night classes at the University of Southern Colorado.

While at USC, she began studying to become a teacher, realizing that education was a way to break the cycle of poverty and would afford her the opportunity to still spend time with her children during vacations. As she got closer to obtaining her degree, Father Gleeson worked with her to give her breaks so she could go to class during the day, and with the help of Father Gleeson, she was able to graduate from USC. Eventually she had to quit Christ the King so she

could perform her student-teaching, which occurred at Risley Middle School on Pueblo's east side under Gloria Falcón, a woman who was involved in the activism of the Chicano Movement and eventually would become my counselor at Centennial High School. As a teacher, Falcón was very strict, but would not accept that her students, who were primarily of working-class and Chicana/o backgrounds, could not learn.

My grandma adopted this mentality when she began working in 1992 at Pueblo County High School. At this rural school, there was a division between the Anglo "Cowboy" students and the Chicana/o students and an obvious achievement gap, which tended to have the Chicana/o students testing at lower levels, though not always. Most of these students didn't have college on their radar or did not plan on going because of a lack of resources and expectations that they would not be able to break the cycle of poverty that they lived in. Teaching was a challenge and more than a full-time job for my grandma, but she did what she could to help students out and encourage their education.

During the summers from 1992 until 2004, my grandma took care of her grandchildren while their parents were working. For several years I was the only grandchild she had, and during the summer she always emphasized several things. Chief among those were the importance of education and a commitment to social justice. Education was extremely important, and my grandma encouraged reading as a means to spark a desire for education. Prior to the start of classes in the fall, she would bring us into her classroom to help set up and talk about college as if it were an expectation, not an option. Social justice was also extremely important, and my grandma would often take time to talk about equality and treating people well. On several occasions she would talk about figures that she grew up hearing, like Dr. Martin

Luther King and encouraged an embrace of the ideas espoused by him and other figures involved in social activism.

Religion/Spirituality

For my grandma, who was raised Catholic, religion was an essential part of her life and a part of the traditions her parents passed down to her. Her mother, who was a protestant as a child, converted to Catholicism as an adult when she married her husband, Jerome who was a member of a strong Irish Catholic family³. Growing up, my grandma and her family never missed Sunday mass, which was enforced by her dad. The importance of attending mass for Jerome extended beyond just my grandma's upbringing, as exemplified by his calls after she began attending college in Milwaukee. During one call, he asked if she was going to mass, and she once told him that she wasn't going every Sunday, to which he responded that she needed to go every weekend. She began going consistently, a tradition that continues to this day. In addition to church on the weekend, Catholic spirituality was present throughout the week for my grandma through her Catholic educational experience and the memories she has of her mother praying the Rosary often.

Her family was raised with strong Catholic values⁴, and those values and Catholic traditions have been able to maintain a strong presence because of my Grandma. As a Catholic, ideas of social justice that appeared to be central to the Catholic faith have informed her life and have been major reasons behind her pursuit of equality. While in college, her commitment to Social Justice was informed by the Church, but was not strictly limited to the Church's interpretation. My grandma has chosen to allow the idea of charity and working with

impoverished communities to become central to her life, and the importance of these issues led her to sign up for the VISTA program, which placed her in a position to live her values.

For several years, my grandma worked as a secretary for Christ the King Parish in Pueblo, Colorado and pushed her children to be involved in the Church. As a result, both of her children were raised Catholic and have been involved in Church masses or events throughout their lives. She continues her commitment to the Church through her own volunteer work and by serving as a Lector in masses. The importance of the Catholic Church cannot be questioned for my grandma, but this does not mean that she blindly follows the teaching of the Vatican. In fact, she sees several issues within the Catholic Church that have not been addressed, including issues surrounding the role of women in the Church. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Priest in Albuquerque, New Mexico who focuses on a more spiritual approach than is accepted by mainstream Catholics, is seen by my grandma as an inspirational reformer within the Catholic Church whom she agrees with more than she does with “traditional” Roman Catholic views. The views expressed by Rohr and my grandma are far more progressive than the beliefs spouted by the Vatican, which leads to many of the similar conflicts that cause many to leave the Catholic Church. However, maintaining a Catholic identity is also extremely important to my grandma, who sees this as a way to maintain her connection with her biological and married families.

Julian Romero

Early Life

On December 20, 1948, Julio Adelio Romero was born to Carlos and Juanita Romero in Espanola, New Mexico⁵. Four years later, the family, despite deep roots in New Mexico in places like Los Brazos and Canjilon, decided to move to Montrose, Colorado to pursue economic opportunities. In 1952, the family consisted of the two parents and four children-Carlos, Julio (my grandpa), Patsy and Reyes. Over the next few years the family grew with the birth of seven more children-Dolores, Leroy, Jenny, Carmela, Larry, Bobby and Connie. While living in Montrose, the family lived in a small two bedroom house, with one room for the parents and one room for all 11 children. Juanita never worked and instead was a stay-home wife who took care of the children while Carlos, my grandpa's dad, worked for little pay, especially when considering the size of the family. Due to the financial constraints, there was no money for many of the excess material objects that other children had. For instance, on Christmas, my grandpa and his siblings would hang their stockings without the expectation that they would be receiving toys, instead they looked forward to the candy they would receive in their stockings on Christmas morning. With only one parent working to support the family, toys and other wasteful spending were completely out of the question. Growing up, they did have some toys that would be shared while they played outside but for the most part resources were extremely limited.

Growing up, my grandpa never liked the name "Julio" or the way it sounded, so he opted to be called Adelio, his middle name, while in school. His family developed the nickname "Bayo" for him, which may have been the result of his younger siblings mispronouncing Adelio.

The name Julio, according to Juanita, his mother, was given to him by his *madrina*, Victoria Lopez. At home, the family spoke primarily Spanish, which led to my grandpa and his three other siblings who were born in New Mexico not being able to speak English when they entered school. Despite the potential complications this situation could cause, all the kids quickly learned English and figured out how to adapt to this new community with all the different challenges it posed.

Carlos, my grandpa's dad, was the extremely strict patriarch of the house and the disciplinarian. Things would get especially difficult for the kids when their dad would get drunk. If he didn't pass out, he was either very generous or very mean. During the angry mood swings, he would use the belt to physically discipline his kids, especially Carlos Jr, the oldest and among the most ornery of the kids. When Carlos Sr. would get violent Juanita, my grandpa's mom, would intervene and stop him from hitting the kids. Other times when Carlos Sr. drank, he felt very generous and would give them curfew extensions and occasionally he would give them a little bit of spending money. The work Carlos did required him to wake up early in the mornings to prepare for work. While getting ready, Carlos Sr. would often loudly play his radio, waking up the entire house and preventing anyone else from sleeping while he got ready.

The community that my grandpa and his family grew up in while living in Montrose was known as Tortilla Flats⁶, and was primarily a Chicana/o barrio. It was comprised of mostly southern Colorado families, with a few others being from New Mexico. In the neighborhood, kids would play together and one of the favorite games of the time was "Cowboys and Indians." As young kids, my grandpa and his siblings would often play outside with small toys that they shared. Many of the kids also enjoyed the outdoors, and my grandpa was one of those who really enjoyed fishing, and he would sometimes bring his brother Reyes along with him. Reyes also

became my grandpa's closest friend and my grandpa often would invite him out to some of the parties he went to as he got older. Once my grandpa and his siblings grew older and were allowed to go out more, strict curfews were enforced by their dad.

In Montrose, Anglos consisted of the largest ethnic group with Chicanas and Chicanos as the second-largest population. The population of Chicanas and Chicanos was small in Montrose compared to other places in southern Colorado, and there were even fewer Mexican people in the city. In addition to a low rate of diversity, the city itself was extremely segregated, with most of the Chicana/o population living "on the other side of the tracks" in Tortilla Flats and others dispersed in small enclaves in other parts of the city. The city of Montrose offered little in the way of activities to keep youth busy, and this led to problems with alcohol and underage drinking. Many youth began drinking by age 16 since there was little else to do, with some starting even earlier than then.

Education

My grandpa's parents were hardworking people, but they had quit school at a very young age in favor of working and tending to their family responsibilities. With this experience as the basis for their knowledge, my grandpa's parents didn't make education a priority for their kids. They didn't look at report cards or grades and didn't make their kids go to school, but rather allowed them to stay home and help out around the house if they wanted. In some cases, they were even told that they had to stay home to help out.

As previously stated, my grandpa and his three siblings who were born in New Mexico did not speak English when entering Kindergarten. However, they were able to pick it up fairly

quickly and it didn't affect them in very overt ways. While in school, my grandpa asked to be called Adelio and continued to be resistant to being called Julio. All through school, my grandpa expressed how difficult it was for him to focus and pay attention in school when he was not even interested with what was going on. In the 4th grade, my grandpa missed enough days of school to justify him being held back, which he was. In junior high, school still was not interesting and helpful to my grandpa. For him, teachers were not very helpful and even though they were respectful enough, they never encouraged people from that community to consider reaching for a higher education. The problem was all the more pronounced in Tortilla Flats where the rate of going to college was extremely low.

Because of his dislike for school, my grandpa continued to cut classes to hang out with his cousin Junior. Once the two cousins were accused of defacing a school bathroom, despite the fact that they were not present at school at the time of the incident. When not in school, my grandpa and Junior would go around Montrose and just hang out wasting time, sometimes looking for a person to buy them alcohol. A short time later, at 16, my grandpa dropped out of school, following the footsteps of his older brother and his parents. Out of all 11 kids in my grandpa's family, only four-Reyes, Connie, Leroy and Carmela graduated from high school. The rest of the family dropped out, believing that if their parents didn't care about education than it must not be important for them to care about either. However, in 1972, while his wife was teaching a GED course, my grandpa enrolled and earned his GED. Despite his dislike for school, there was some intention on the part of my grandpa to go to college. However, eventually those desires faded away because of his dislike for school and because he felt as though he might not be smart enough to graduate from a college.

Family/Personal/Social Life

Around age 16, my grandpa began working in the fields with his cousin Junior for a man named Clyde Miller. Most of the work they did consisted of picking onions and potatoes, and the money they earned from their labor helped to purchase school clothes for themselves, reducing the burden on their parents. A couple of years later, at 18, my grandpa began working at a Saw Mill owned by Carr Lumber with Junior and some other friends. Though the wages were low, it was a job and my grandpa was grateful to have something. In 1969, my grandpa and grandma, who had only been dating for three months, got married. The next year, they gave birth to a son on July 4, 1970-my dad Jason Julian Romero. After his birth, the family moved to Pueblo to allow my grandpa to work at Parkview Medical Center. A few months later, the family decided to go back to Montrose because they didn't like the city of Pueblo. A year later, however, another opportunity presented itself in the form of a new job. The family accepted this opportunity and decided to come back to Pueblo, and their situation was different than before.

The second time living in Pueblo was not as bad as the first time around for the family. Upon moving back, they lived on Cameron Street in a duplex on the South Side of town. The neighborhood was small but there was a group of kids in the area who were trouble makers and would pick fight with other kids. After moving away from Cameron, the family moved into the Bessemer neighborhood⁷ on Pine St. Because of the neighborhood, the family soon moved out and rented a property on East 40th Street, which was an underdeveloped and rural area near the Fountain Creek. They lived there for eight years before moving to Franklin Avenue on the North Side.

Throughout life, my grandpa has straddled a variety of identities, especially considering his name. To him, the name Julio was unacceptable and he absolutely hated the name, which is why he went through school going by his middle name of Adelio. After moving to Pueblo, however, he began to go by his first name for the sake of simplicity while applying for jobs. Eventually, however, my grandpa legally changed his name to Julian, adopting the name he gave my dad for his middle name and that he had also heard used in place of Julio in the past. In 2007, his name legally became Julian Adelio Romero, a name he was much more comfortable with.

In the last 20 years, deaths have become more common in my grandpa's family. In 1994, his father, Carlos Romero Sr., died from complications due to emphysema. Five years later, in 1999, his closest brother Reyes died of stomach cancer. This death was extremely difficult for my grandpa, who watched his younger and closest brother wither away. Most recently, his mother Juanita passed away in 2011 from kidney failure. The recent string of deaths that are close to home have obviously affected all of his siblings, and my grandpa is no exception to the raw human emotions that come with the losses of those who are among closest to him.

Later Life

After moving back to Pueblo, in 1972, my grandpa worked for a few different companies that eventually closed down because of a variety of issues that presented themselves in the early 70s in Pueblo. The first of these jobs was at Multiport, a company that built modular homes, where he worked for a few months before the company closed down. After Multiport shut down, he began working for Fuqua Homes in the sheet metal department. While working here, he would put siding on the homes, among a variety of other tasks. He worked at Fuqua Homes for

about one year, until 1973. At this time a group of workers, including my grandpa, decided to strike without the support of a labor union, which had not developed at Fuqua. The leader of the strike was a Puerto Rican man named Mike Gonzalez who was also a supervisor for the company. The chief grievances of the 15-man striking group were; bad treatment from supervisors, low pay, and the lack of a union presence. After initiating the strike, and picketing in front of the company for a time, the whole group was fired. Immediately they began considering their options and decided to enlist the help of attorney Joe Ulibarri. Despite the fact that the strikers had proceeded without the protection of a union, Ulibarri was able to get the entire crew hired on once again. However, after, being fired by Fuqua my grandpa began looking for another job and got hired on at Dana Corporation, a company that built pistons for vehicles, in the foundry. Eventually he was called back to Fuqua to begin working again. After receiving the call, rather than quit one of the jobs, he decided to leave his schedules alone and go back to Fuqua. On his first day back, he was scheduled to start at Fuqua at 6 am and Dana at 7 am. He arrived at 6 am, to Fuqua Homes only to find out he had been placed in a completely new department. After a very short time decided that he wasn't going to continue working there, so without telling anyone, he got up and walked out, arriving at the Dana Corporation's Piston Plant by the start of his shift at 7 am. Unfortunately, he left his lunch at Fuqua so he returned to pick it up, and once again, without a word walked out of the plant. His decision to continue working for Dana Corporation was a smart choice since shortly after the strike was resolved; Fuqua Homes in Pueblo closed its doors.

For the next 21 years, until 1994, my grandpa would continue working at Dana. While there, he was a part of the United Steelworkers of America union and participated in two strikes. Near the time the previously negotiated contract was set to expire, union members would meet at

the Union Hall to discuss the upcoming contracts. The first strike was successful in bringing the workers a 10-15 cent raise, but the second strike was a failure and the workers returned without any additional pay raises or other benefits. According to my grandpa, he enjoyed his time working at Dana, but the plant in Pueblo closed down in 1994. After the closure of Dana, my grandpa worked a few odd jobs to make some extra money and finally was given a janitorial position at Pueblo Diversified Industries, the local Chemical Depot. Soon after being hired, the supervisor resigned and my grandpa was promoted. While at PDI, my grandpa supervised mentally challenged individuals while also performing his own janitorial duties. He worked there for five years, and during that time and as a result of the decades of wear on his shoulders, he found out he needed to have operations to fix them. In the end, because of the injuries he began receiving disability benefits and decided to retire at that point. A lifetime of hard manual labor had finally caught up to my grandpa, and in the end he was unable to perform those types of tasks anymore.

Religion/Spirituality

Growing up, my grandpa's family was not a particularly strict religious family, and he himself never felt the urge to delve into religion or spirituality. During my grandpa's early years, the family didn't regularly attend mass. In fact, my grandpa talked about how mass was difficult to understand with all the various rituals and actions that were going on throughout. For the community of Tortilla Flats as a whole, religion didn't seem to be incredibly important until religious holidays. Most families in the area didn't attend weekly mass, though there were some that were firmly entrenched in the Catholic religion. Despite not regularly attending mass, my

grandpa was able to make his First Holy Communion because of the nuns from St. Mary's church, who would wait for students outside of their elementary school to bring them to catechism in order to prepare them for a life encompassed by religion.

The lack of emphasis on religion would change soon however, as Carlos Sr., my grandfather's father, joined the *Penitentes*⁸, a society of lay religious personnel that has existed primarily in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, in the late 50s when my grandpa was only 10 or 11. The house that they lived in at the time was on top of a hill. At the base of the hill was a small river or creek running through the area, and near that river stood *La Morada*⁹, a small structure that housed funerals and Lenten observances performed by the *Penitentes*. For the kids, *La Morada* was a place that instilled fear especially at night because of the secretive actions of the *Penitentes*, the spirit of death surrounding it from the funerals, and the fact that a river ran close to *La Morada*, playing into the tale of *La Llorona*. During Lent¹⁰, the *Penitentes* spent much of their time at *La Morada*, practicing their secretive rituals and singing their *Alabados*¹¹, adding to their sense of mystery as a form of spiritual preparation for *Semana Santa*, Holy Week. The leader of the *Penitentes* and head of *La Morada* was a Chicano named O.C. Casias.

During Lent, *La Morada* and the *Penitentes* were arguably even more important to the Chicana/o community than the actual Catholic Church. Potentially, this is a result of the Church's failure to provide enough spiritual support for the people of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. The fact that the *Penitentes* were made up of members of the community made their presence all the more important and contributed to an enhanced sense of community that developed especially during Lent. Currently, my grandpa attends Catholic mass weekly as a

sign of appreciation toward his wife, even though he feels connected spiritually through his own private prayer, where he feels freer to express himself.

Scholarly Reflections

In the Chicana/o community, religion and spirituality are of extreme importance. For my family, this is extremely clear in our continued embrace of the Catholic faith. Traditionally, most Chicanas and Chicanos have been Catholics as a result of the Spanish colonization of Latin America and the modern-day US southwest¹². Since Spanish missionaries came to the Americas, Catholicism has maintained a dominant presence in the Western Hemisphere. As colonial subjects, Chicanas and Chicanos have adopted the Catholic faith as their own, often resisting the norms established by the Vatican. As a result, Chicanas and Chicanos often practice a form of folk Catholicism, with heavy influences from both European and Indigenous traditions, which give birth to something unique within the Chicana/o community. While every individual has personally held beliefs that may not fall in line with the larger community, there is enough commonality among Chicana/o Catholics and their beliefs to assert that their idea and vision of the Catholic Faith¹³ is inspired by their environment, in much the same way that various groups, like Irish Catholics, and that these groups can and have worked in conjunction with each other to challenge an imperialist society as exemplified by the *San Patricio* Battalion¹⁴.

While having a sense of faith is important from a religious perspective, the presence of Catholicism is inherently flawed concerning the Chicana/o community. The church's presence is a result of colonization. However, the role played by the Catholic Church has changed over time within the Chicana/o community. While it has had a tendency to be slow in reacting to modern

day issues, the Church, during the Chicano Movement played a more direct role in the community¹⁵. During that time, the church was seen as an asset, as providing for the community. During other times, however, it has been the very force to stifle the progress of the Chicana/o community¹⁶. Definitively, the role of the church in the Chicana/o community conflicts with itself in many ways, but it has played an important role in story of the community. It is critical to question why the roles of the Church and of the Catholic faith have changed over time and how they have been most effective in supporting the community. During the early years of the Church's presence on the American continents, the mestizo racial identity that would eventually evolve into a Chicana/o identity was born. During that time, those mestizos who would eventually become Chicanas and Chicanos hundreds of years later were looked down upon and neglected by the Church. As a result, unique culturally distinct forms of Catholicism were developed, which were seen as having pagan influence and were considered illegitimate¹⁷. However, the spiritual message delivered through the Church did provide some hope for the community, and eventually people were able to organize and build community through the Catholic faith.

With such a longstanding presence in the community, it is no surprise that the Catholic Church plays such a large role, even to this day, as it has been present since the time of the first mestizo people. The Chicana/o people of mixed racial heritage have grown as a community since the Church established its presence on the American continents, making their fates and stories necessarily intertwined. This enforces the notion that Chicana/o people as a community have a strong sense of spirituality, which often will morph and develop but maintains a presence.

One of the well-recognized symbols of Chicana/o and Mexican culture is *La Virgen de Guadalupe*¹⁸. Her presence and importance during times like the United Farm Workers and

Chicano Movements was a rallying symbol for the community. While many people have varying interpretations of her and her role in the community, the Virgin Mary is a powerful symbol to both Catholic and non-Catholic/religious people within the Chicana/o community. The use of churches during the Chicano Movement as planning spaces was critical to the ability of Chicanas and Chicanos to organize, giving them a communal place where they could be supported. Also, organizations such as *Católicos por La Raza*¹⁹ developed to address the needs of Chicanas and Chicanos within the Catholic Church.

In recent times, the Catholic Church has begun espousing far more conservative ideas, which has caused many to consider and follow through on disassociating themselves with the Catholic Church. While that is a respectable decision, there are others who choose to remain within the Church, and work from the inside to make it more responsive to the needs of the community, as it once was. This task is without question difficult, as regressive ideas have become a powerful force within the Church and have been espoused by the Vatican. In order to change this however, and make the Church more responsive, it is up to members of the community who choose to remain within the institutionalized Church to orient it more towards a message of social justice and equality for all people, especially marginalized communities. Liberation Theology²⁰ is the development of these ideas within the Church and has developed from a perspective that is representative of marginalized communities. Lay organizations that identified as part of the Catholic faith, like the *Penitentes*, were another form of activism meant to orient the Church towards the community. In my family, this was the most common form of spiritual activism, as members of both my maternal and paternal families had some relationship with the *Penitentes*. Continued focus on the development of theological perspectives utilizing Church teachings, in addition to challenging the norms of the institutional Church, are two

important elements of Chicana/o activism within the Church that need to be continued and embraced in order to return the Church to serving the community once again.

For both of my paternal grandparents, the Catholic religion has played a critical role in their development. Informed by Irish-Catholic traditions, my grandma was exposed to the Catholic religion in the same way many members of the Chicana/o community are exposed to it through family. Irish Catholicism, which is informed traditional Celtic beliefs in addition to the institutional church, is in many ways similar to Chicana/o Catholicism, in that they both are influenced by traditional indigenous beliefs that were viewed as pagan by the Roman Catholic Church. My grandpa's experience with Catholicism is reminiscent of many Chicanas and Chicanos, with a connection to the faith but one that goes beyond the confines of a church building. With a father who was a *Penitente*, spiritual activism was present during my grandpa's youth, whether it was recognized as such or not. Despite challenges to certain institutional elements of the church, both of my grandparents recognize the role that faith has played for them in their lives. As a result, the importance of Catholicism has continued in my family, and we are amongst those who are still involved in the church despite continued disagreements with certain institutional aspects of the Catholic Church.

Chapter 4: Maternal Grandparents

Eloveida Velasquez

Early Life

In 1945, Eloveida Velasquez was born in Las Tablas, New Mexico¹, a small community in the mountains of Northern New Mexico. The fourth child in a family of 10, she would be raised in a very traditional way. Her immediate family was very large, and included her parents Senida and Reynel, and her nine siblings (from oldest to youngest) Irene, Lilian, Reynel Jr, Josie, Della, Isidoro, Alice, Eliza and Jenny. In Las Tablas there was not a large population, and the entire community saw each other as family, regardless of blood ties. Most of my grandma's family also lived in this community, but older neighbors who were not related to her by blood were still referred to as Tias and Tios. Everything that happened in Las Tablas was communal, and neighbors would go out of their way to help each other. Children, who at the time were taught to be extremely respectful and performed large amounts of manual labor, would have to help other members of the community with various daily activities. For example, if an adult was seen going to get water, one of the kids would be expected to go help them out, regardless of whether or not that person was capable themselves. For the community of Las Tablas and my grandma's family, that was an issue of respect.

Growing up, my grandma was raised to do everything her parents said without question. As a child, she and her siblings had many chores, and were expected to do them without causing trouble. If anything wasn't done or done properly, there were consequences. Once, during her youth, Senida told my grandma and her other kids to wash the dishes or she would throw them

out. The kids didn't believe this and didn't follow through. Soon, however, Senida began flinging the plates out the door angrily into the dirt and told the kids that they would have to find something on their own to eat on because they didn't listen. Consequences for not listening were serious, and the kids knew after this incident that their mother was not to be taken lightly.

The small community included a large number of my grandma's family, and next door to her lived her grandmother, who she described as "a nice lady who spoiled the kids a little bit more than my parents." My grandma developed a close relationship with her grandma, whom she would often visit and bake cookies, pies and cakes for. According to my grandma, at the beginning of the month her grandma was very nice to all the kids, but as the month wore on, she would become grouchier, sometimes throwing logs at her grandkids for crossing in front of her home while doing chores, telling them to go around the back when they were doing their chores. While my grandma does not know what caused the mood swings, she remembers them vividly and despite them, my grandma fondly remembers her own grandmother, who she cared for and spent much of her time with.

The importance of community and family in Las Tablas cannot be overestimated, with people always willing to look out for and help each other. In multiple instances during my grandma's childhood, community members would raise each other's children if the situation was proving too difficult for the family. In addition to her own 10 children, Senida raised two of her much younger cousins, Linda and Jerry, who were around the same age as her children. At the time that Senida took them in, she was breastfeeding her nine month child. As Jerry was young, Senida weaned her child immediately and began breastfeeding Jerry. In another case, a woman in the community raised a set of twins that another family was unable to support after already trying to raise a first set of twins. The woman who took on these children was barren, and in this way

the members of the community supported each other, with a woman who wanted children raising the children of another couple who couldn't properly support them.

With such a large family, it was important for all the children to help out with the chores, which included fetching water, chopping wood that their dad would bring, cleaning the house before school, and taking care of their younger siblings. As one of the middle children, my grandma took on all these responsibilities and trained herself to work hard, even though she felt as though other members of her family didn't work as hard as she did. The women were primarily responsible for the home, and this was evident in the work that Senida and other women did. While the men would be responsible for other things like hunting deer for their meat, women in the community would be responsible for cooking for their entire family, as Senida did. Because of the size of the family, it was difficult to cook all the time for everyone, so she would occasionally make excess food that could be stored overnight for later use. However, they had to be careful to not cook too much, as they didn't have any refrigeration system to store food for the long term. Because of this, Senida would can any food she could get a hold of, which included cooked beans and other vegetables like pumpkin, squash, and corn, which were grown in their garden. With a lack of refrigeration, my grandma's family had to be extremely careful in their preservation of food, and her mom would often prepare and store food throughout the year for winter, when the garden they depended on for food would not be producing. In addition to growing their own vegetables and hunting their own meat, my grandma's family got their milk from a cow that belonged to another family.

On some weekends, my grandma's older sister, who had already moved out of the house, would visit, which meant an increased workload for my grandma and some of her other siblings. On the days that her sister would visit, the house would have to be cleaned and breakfast had to

be made by 9 AM. At this time, my grandma's sister and their mom would go visit someone in the community, and by the time they returned at noon, the dishes had to be done and lunch had to be made. They would leave again and by either 4 or 4:30 p.m. when they returned, dinner had to be prepared. The only time the family would go to mass would be on those days that their sister was there, and even then it would only occur once a month since the priest who served several communities in northern New Mexico was only able to make it to Las Tablas once a month.

Growing up, my grandma's family was financially poor yet Reynel made very little money driving the school bus and Senida worked primarily around the house. The clothes that the children wore were homemade, with the money used to purchase the cloth needed earned mostly by Senida, who would mud plaster different buildings to make a little extra income. In addition to her sister's home, Senida worked on other buildings, including the local post office. During her entire youth, my grandma only had one store-bought dress that she had to earn money to purchase by herself.

Another way that the family made money was through the picking of piñon in Petaca, another rural New Mexican community. After picking piñon, the family would give it all to their dad, who would turn around and sell it, keeping all the profits and using the money for himself. My grandma didn't feel this was fair, and asked her mom why she let this happen. Senida simply told her that her dad needed the money for his things, and life continued on in this fashion.

Education

Growing up, my grandma spoke primarily Spanish, but learned English through school. The school in Las Tablas was a small two-room structure, with one room housing students through the 5th grade and the other being reserved for those in the 6th-8th grades that was just a short distance away from my grandma's home. Each room only had one teacher, and the entire population of the school was Chicana/o. While attending school in Las Tablas, my grandma would go to school for two to three hours in the morning before returning home for lunch, where she would eat the meal her mother had prepared while doing little chores during her break. After lunch, my grandma would return to school for a few more hours of class. After completing the 8th grade, my grandma began attending high school in Ojo Caliente, where she would stay at the school throughout the day.

Once in high school, my grandma had to pay for lunch since she couldn't simply return home for a short time like she could before. Her dad would give her 25 cents at the beginning of the week, expecting that to last through the whole week. However, meals were 22 cents a day and the money her dad gave her only lasted one day. Luckily, her school provided free lunches to those students who agreed to work in the lunch room. Anytime this opportunity presented itself, my grandma and her siblings never hesitated to take advantage. When they were unable to work, they would find other means of stretching their money through the week. My grandma and one of her cousins, Linda, would sometimes go to a convenience store and buy small items that they would be able to save and eat for lunch throughout the week. One of the items that they would often get would be lemons, which the two would share, splitting one between the two of them during lunch. On some occasions, they would charge a lunch, but if they did so their dad would get mad, telling them that they couldn't be doing that and that they had already received their 25 cents for the week.

My grandma's family was important to her educational experience, which was common in the area, and also influenced her social life. In the area, drugs were not a common problem, though alcohol was, and respect continued to be of the utmost importance. Despite her desire to be involved in the social life at her school, my grandma's dad refused to allow for that, not allowing her to go to sports functions or dances at school. At this time, college wasn't a readily available option for most students, but it was beginning to become present with some students. My grandma enjoyed school and received good grades, with her favorite subject being Biology. Because of her drive, intellect and love for biology, one teacher approached her while she was in the 10th grade with the idea of going to college, even offering to pay for her studies. Deservedly, my grandma was ecstatic about this opportunity, and discussed it with her family. Her dad immediately shut the idea down, telling her that she had to stay home and she couldn't go to college. After this unfortunate prevention, my grandma decided she wanted to join the Navy. After speaking with a recruiter, she talked to her mom who told her that it was her decision. She approached her dad with her new goal, and once again, he rejected it telling her that the Navy was for men, not for girls.

Without anything else to strive for as far as education and her future prospects were concerned, my grandma dropped out after completing the 10th grade, deciding it was pointless to return in the fall for 11th grade. Immediately, she got married and had children. As her first son, Carlos, got older, my grandma would tell him that when he was getting ready to graduate, she would go back to school and graduate with him. He never believed this, and as he was preparing to start his junior year of high school, my grandma went and registered for classes. Carlos was surprised, and told her that if she went back to school he would not. She simply replied that if he was going to drop out, that would be his decision to make. Shortly after, Carlos approached her

again, asking if she was really going to follow through and return to school. My grandma replied that she did intend on obtaining her diploma, and he relented, telling her he too would continue going to school. Immediately, my grandma picked up where she left off, and felt as though her classes were mostly review. She managed to earn the grades necessary to be on the Honor Roll, which inspired her son. Prior to this, Carlos had been an average student, but once he saw his mom performing at such a high level, according to my grandma, he decided that he couldn't be shown up by his own mother. He began studying harder and working with my grandma, managing to make the Honor Roll himself.

As she was preparing to graduate with Carlos, my grandma felt proud and accomplished, having gone to school with her four oldest children-Carlos, Annette, Charlene and Rod. In 1982, she graduated from Mesa Vista High School at the age of 34. After graduating, she enrolled at a community college with plans to obtain a nursing degree. For a year, my grandma and her oldest son went to community college together, but her husband didn't support that decision. He began complaining, calling her an unfit mother and telling her that her kids needed her at home more. To please him and stop the complaints, she quit school for the second time due to men asserting their patriarchal roles within her family. Despite this, she still enjoyed her time in school and did think about returning to school some day when her kids were older. While it was not her choice to quit, she did feel that it was necessary at the time. Throughout her life, the men she was involved with, especially her dad and husband, were never fully supportive of education. In the case of her dad, he never received a formal education and didn't feel as though it was an important endeavor. Even now, she wishes she could return to school, but doesn't feel as though she can learn the way she was once able to.

Family/Personal/Social Life

Growing up, my grandma didn't have the opportunity to know many of her dad's relatives besides her grandpa and her *Tio* Benito. Her grandpa died when she was four, and one of the only images she remembers of him was at his funeral, when she tried to wake him up from his coffin. Her *Tio* Benito, however, was someone who she remembers fondly. In addition to spoiling her, my grandma's *Tio* Benito used to give her pennies so that she would sing a song to him. He was in the military, and she was saddened when he had to leave to go to war. Upon his return, he found my grandma a little bit older, but still willing to sing to him for pennies. Out of all the members of her dad's family, her *Tio* Benito was the one with whom she built the closest bond.

In contrast, her mother's family lived close by in Las Tablas and other communities in the area. She had several cousins on her mom's side who were close in age, and she grew up very close to them. It was with her mother's family that my grandma would often go to pick *piñon*, and she remembers the kindness expressed by her Tia Linda's husband, who helped her during one trip.

During one trip when she was seven, she developed a rash that made it difficult for her to pick *piñon* on the natural ground. Her *Tio* got her a rug, and placed it under a tree where there was plenty of *piñon*, a prime spot for anyone who was picking, and told her to call him after she had finished so that he could move the rug for her. Throughout the rest of the week, he continued to do this, always placing her near large amounts of *piñon*, which made her able to continue contributing to the harvest, which was what she wanted to do.

While she does have many fond memories of her family, one event did disrupt that pattern. When Jenny, my grandma's youngest sister, was only two or three years old, Senida decided to get a divorce from Reynel. For a time, he had stopped coming home and was causing problems for the family, leading several of Senida's family members to encourage her to get a divorce. Finally relenting, she went to the courthouse to file the necessary paperwork, only to find out that divorce papers had already been filed 10 years earlier, before the birth of her three youngest children. The paperwork had been forged, and Senida had been divorced for a decade without knowing so. Immediately, Reynel left and didn't return. Senida decided that she would raise her three young daughters herself, as her next youngest child was already 18 and out of the house. Several years after the "divorce," Senida started seeing an in-law's brother, whose name was Joe, and married him when she was in the late 50s. They then moved to Denver, leaving her home of over half a century. Joe was more of a father to my grandma and her siblings than Reynel, and accepted all of them as his own children, endearing him to them all.

Later Life

At 17, after dropping out of high school, my grandma married Rudolpho Martinez to the objections of her father, who claimed that Rudy was not from a good family. Ignoring her father, she married him and moved out of the house. At this point, my grandma was tired of dealing with her younger siblings, being told no to her dreams, and was ready to move out and start a whole new life. At first, her marriage was good and the two of them were getting along well.

After working and living in Las Tablas for a while longer, my grandma moved with her husband to Leadville, Colorado so he could find a job in the mines. At 18, my grandma gave

birth to their first son, Carlos. The family soon moved to the town of Avon, where they stayed for several years, and my grandma had her second child, a daughter named Annette. While in Avon, my grandma worked in housekeeping. In 1967 or 1968, the family moved again in pursuit of work, this time travelling to Modesto, California and finding work in the canneries. My grandma had a brother who was living in Los Angeles at the time, and so the family moved there to be close to other family members. For the two years that they lived there, my grandma worked as a cook. While living in LA, my grandma had her third child, my mom, Charlene. At this point, Rudy's parents became sick and the family moved back to Las Tablas to be with them. In Las Tablas, Rod was born, and much later, Henry was born.

During their time as a migrant family, my grandma registered to vote as a Republican because of her husband's political beliefs. In New Mexico, another political party was on the rise-La Raza Unida², which was started in Texas by Jose Angel Gutierrez. In New Mexico, however, the leader of the party was Reies Lopez Tijerina³, known simply as "Tijerina." After moving back to Las Tablas, community members and friends encouraged the young couple to go to Raza Unida rallies, which were led by Ike Vargas, who my grandma knew as "the biggest drug dealer in all of New Mexico." According to her, members of the leftist party didn't believe in the government or the President, and this rubbed my grandma the wrong way. She was always weary of the party, especially since their political pull allowed for their members to get away with crimes simply because of their affiliation with the party. People who were suspected of crimes that ranged from small thievery to arson would be taken to Tierra Amarilla, and according to stories, simply had to say they were a part of La Raza Unida, and would be let free. These stories made my grandma very weary, and she did not support the organization, but her husband did. Members of La Raza Unida hailed from all of the small towns in northern New

Mexico, but the town of Sevilleta was especially well represented in the party. Despite the political implications of La Raza Unida, many people were members because it served as a way to build community with other towns throughout the state and strengthen ties within individual communities.

Over the next several years, my grandma settled into her role as a housewife and mother. Despite all her hopes that moving out of her parents' home would make things better, she found herself in the same position now that she was married with children. For her, this was difficult because she desired something different and didn't want her life to continue with her being simply a housewife. At times she regretted her marriage, which she felt was rushed, not because of her children but because of the lifestyle she was living. As the years wore on, her husband wanted to be "married at home, but single in the streets," and became abusive towards their children, which caused significant tension in the family. As their youngest son, Henry, got older, Rudy told him he didn't have to go to school if he didn't want to. He wanted to take advantage of this and began rejecting school, becoming the only one of my grandma's children to not graduate, though he later earned his GED. Eventually, the tensions in the family rose to the point that sometimes Rudy wouldn't come home, and at this point, my grandma decided it would be best to get a divorce⁴, and Rudy left the house that they had built together with their young family.

The marriage to Rudy was extremely difficult for my grandma, but now that he is remarried, they get along much better. They are now able to talk on the family about their kids and grandkids and how they're doing, which was not always the case, especially immediately following the divorce. After being single for a time, my grandma moved to Eagle and eventually chose to remarry, and got a second divorce just a few years later. At this point, she decided that

she would be better off on her own and moved to Pueblo, where her two daughters lived. While she does have some lingering regrets about her marriage to Rudy and sometimes wonders how things would have turned out had she listened to her dad when she was 17, she is grateful for her children and grandchildren, who she feels she raised in the best way she could. Now, while living in Pueblo, she is raising two of Henry's children, Jose and Destiny, and one of her great-grandchildren, Esperanza. In doing so, she tirelessly works to instill in them the values that have made her who she is and she strongly emphasizes the Catholic religion and the importance of education, which has been reinforced with the help of her now-adult children.

Religion/Spirituality

Growing up, my grandma was raised Catholic, going to church once a month when the priest, who also served El Rito and the other small rural communities, would make the trip to Las Tablas to hold mass. In her youth, my grandma was told by her own grandma and mother that as a girl, she couldn't go to mass with her head uncovered. The older women often wore hats, but as a little girl she didn't have any way to get her own hat. Knowing this, her grandma had a box of Kleenex that she would allow the young girls to use. They would fold up a sheet of Kleenex and attach it to their hair with bobby pins, fulfilling the requirement that their heads had to be covered.

Another requirement that all the children had to fulfill was making their First Holy Communion before they turned 13. To do so, they had to go to catechism to learn their prayers and a few other "Catholic things," with major emphasis placed on the prayers, which my grandma felt as though were the "real" requirement to get their First Holy Communion. She was

able to successfully learn her prayers like all the other children and received her First Holy Communion with her cousin Linda, her sister Josie and other kids from the community.

During Lent and the Easter season, an organization of Chicano men from the area known as the *Penitentes* became extremely important to the Catholic community. During Lent, the *Penitentes* would do the Stations of the Cross publicly and would spend most of their time in *La Morada*. One of the more intriguing aspects of the *Penitentes* for my grandma was their *Tinieblas*, which translates literally as “darkness.” During *Semana Santa*, the week immediately preceding Easter, the *Penitentes* would practice their *Tinieblas*, on Wednesday, Thursday, and most importantly, on Good Friday. During the entirety of *Semana Santa*, the *Penitentes* could not leave *La Morada*. Their stay would conclude with a Rosary that was held on Saturday morning, marking the end of another Lenten season. While the actual practices of the *Penitentes* are shrouded in mystery, it was said that they would whip themselves and engage in other form of self-mutilation as a way of performing penance and coming closer to Jesus Christ. During *Semana Santa*, the *Penitentes* would gather a variety of materials, including chains and tubs and bring them to *La Morada*, where they had a 9-tiered candelabrum. At night, the *Penitentes* would ritualistically extinguish the candles, and prior to extinguishing the final candle, a *Penitente* would say a small prayer or chant, and then blow it out. After the final candle was extinguished, screams and other loud noises would emanate from *La Morada*. This ritual was done multiple times, and screams could be heard coming from *La Morada* for several nights during *Semana Santa*. It was also said that spirits of the dead would visit the *Penitentes* in the dark at *La Morada*. It is unknown to members of the community who were not the *Penitentes* themselves what actually happened at *La Morada* during *Semana Santa*, but that did not diminish the significance of the lay brotherhood in the community.

Every year, a new family was selected to feed the *Penitentes* for the next year, and this responsibility was seen as an honor. My grandma remembers when her family was responsible for feeding them, and remembers her grandma making massive amounts of vegetarian food for the *Penitentes*, who didn't eat meat during the week that they were in *La Morada*. Because the *Penitentes* were members of the community, they were strongly supported by the people, even though the Church refused and continues to refuse to acknowledge them as a legitimate Catholic organization. The *Penitentes* were especially important in the way that they were able to bring the community together in the absence of a strong or consistent presence from a priest or other ordained clergy.

To this day, my grandma still considers herself Catholic, though now she regularly attends mass as opposed to once a month during the time she lived in Las Tablas. She raised her children in the same way, emphasizing a Catholic belief system. While living in Las Tablas, my grandma never had the opportunity to be confirmed in the Catholic faith. After moving to Pueblo, however, she was afforded the opportunity and took advantage of it, being confirmed in her 60s. As my grandma continues to age, she feels as though she is more fully able to appreciate the Catholic Mass and faith, and believes that she will continue to practice it as she gets older. As a lifelong Catholic, Catholicism is a part of her identity and her religion is one of the few constants in her life.

Rudolpho Martinez

Early Life

In 1942, Rudolfo “Rudy” Martinez, my grandpa, was born in Romeo, Colorado⁵ as the fifth child of Isais and Francis Martinez. Growing up in the bilingual and predominately Chicana/o community of Romeo, my grandpa spoke primarily Spanish at home and English when around others. Despite his mother giving birth to 10 children, my grandpa grew up as one of seven children, with three other siblings dying in either childbirth or early infancy. His siblings, Esther, Dalio who was known as “Joe,” George, Bobby, Elevinia, and Martha were all born at home, with the exception of Martha who was born in a hospital. In between my grandpa and his sister Elevinia, his mom gave birth two separate times to daughters who passed away. After Martha, his mom gave birth to a son named Alex who passed away eight days later, due to what the family believed to be the mishandling of him at the hands of the midwife. During the early years of my grandpa’s life, the family was relatively comfortable living in Romeo, but that changed in 1948.

One night in August, his father Isais went out to buy a bottle of wine, that his wife had given him money to purchase. After buying the wine, Isais began drinking with a few other men in town at the county corral. Around 9pm, according to Saladonio Maestas, the clerk at the liquor store that evening, Isais came back to the store asking to purchase three bottles of wine on credit. Maestas said that while Isais was drunk, he also seemed to be frightened. He then told Isais that he could only sell him one bottle on credit, to which Isais replied that he needed three. Maestas continued to refuse to give him three bottles, offering instead to give him one and then

take him home. Isais refused this offer saying he didn't want to go home, but did eventually take the bottle. Sometime after Isais left, the local police officer came into the store and Maestas told him what happened, noting that Isais had seemed frightened. Worried that something may have happened, the two began looking for Isais. As they searched the town in a vehicle, they came close to the county corral where Isais had been drinking earlier. As they rounded a turn on the curvy road they saw a body in the road and before they were able to break, ran over what they assumed to be a dead body. They got out, and surprisingly found Isais, with between 14 and 18 stab wounds, still alive. They quickly pulled him into the car and began speeding towards Alamosa, the closest city with a hospital. Unfortunately, Isais passed away in the car, and the liquor store attendant and police officer took him to the mortuary before returning to my grandpa's home to give the family the news. After receiving the news, my grandpa remembers the only time he saw his mother cry. Without any leads or money to pursue the case, nothing eventually happened, though a woman in town later revealed that her uncle had been with Isais and a few other men that night, causing many to speculate that it was someone in that group who had stabbed Isais.

From that time forward, my grandpa's mother struggled to raise such a large family, with poverty something that was synonymous with my grandpa's earliest years. With only one person bringing in any sort of income, which was extremely limited, there was some times that each person in the family would have one tortilla for breakfast and one for dinner. To make money, his mother would take on various odd jobs, doing anything from cleaning houses to canning food for other people. During this time, my grandpa and his older siblings had to take care of the house-cleaning, doing dishes, watching the younger siblings and cooking. When his mom was making more money, the family would have beans and potatoes and the children had to learn

how to cook those, seeing as their mother was working all the time. During these years, without the money to afford new clothes, the children would either get clothes from a peddler who sold used clothes and shoes, or their mom would fix the clothes that they already had. While it was difficult growing up in this environment, in 1953 Francis remarried and relocated the family to Las Tablas, New Mexico.

Education

Through the first few years of school, my grandpa attended school in Romeo, Colorado in a two-story building that hosted students, who were primarily Chicana/o, on the first level and a large gymnasium on the second. However, when he was in the third grade, my grandpa's school burned down and students had to relocate to Manassa, Colorado for my grandpa's fourth grade year. While attending school in the predominately Mormon and Anglo town of Manassa, students were not allowed to speak Spanish by their teachers. The school in Manassa was also considerably larger than the one in Romeo, which was rebuilt throughout that year. Despite the religious and racial differences, with Chicanas and Chicanos being mostly Catholic and Anglos mostly Mormon, students did not have any major conflicts because of their shared struggles in small, relatively poor communities and the consistent contact between the two groups. In the fifth grade, my grandpa and other students from Romeo returned to classes in their rebuilt schoolhouse.

Halfway through that year, my grandpa and his family moved to Las Tablas, where they stayed for the next several years. The school in Las Tablas was much smaller than the one in Romeo, with only two rooms and two teachers for all students prior to the ninth grade. With

very limited transportation and the small size of Las Tablas, students would have to walk to school, in my grandpa's case, over a mile. In the winter, when there would be large amounts of snow, my grandpa would have to walk in front of his younger sister, clearing a path through the snow for her. His feet would often be wet and freezing by the time he got to school, but he does remember one of the teachers who would go out of his way to help him and some of the others out by drying their feet and making sure they wouldn't get sick, pointing towards the importance of community members watching out for each other that existed at this time. After finishing the eighth grade, students would be bussed to Ojo Caliente for high school, but my grandpa decided to move to Arizona to live with his sister Esther and her husband Fernando.

The summer before beginning high school, my grandpa moved to Morenci, Arizona where he began attending a school that was exponentially larger than any he had ever experienced to this point. The school building was four stories high, and contained, according to my grandpa, thousands of students. For him, the school was so large that during his first few weeks of classes, he would routinely get lost and would show up late to classes. Despite this massive shift to a much larger school, my grandpa loved attending school in Morenci, saying that if he had the opportunity to graduate from there that he may have even been able to continue on into college. However, during his junior year, after three years of living in Arizona, his mom called him and told him to come back home because she needed him there. He returned home to New Mexico and began attending school again, this time in Pojaque. He did not like the school, and less than a month later decided to stop going. He wanted to return to Arizona, but his mom wouldn't let him go back, encouraging him to stay. A year and a half later, one of his sisters told him she was going to finish school, and encouraged him to do the same. He enrolled in the high

school in Ojo Caliente where most of the students from Las Tablas went, but he decided once again that he didn't like the school and quit, opting to work instead.

Family/Personal/Social Life

In 1953, while my grandpa was a teenager, his mother married for a second time. Elisandro Romero owned over 100 acres in Las Tablas, New Mexico, and the family moved there that same year. Life began to change after that happened, and my grandpa and his siblings looked up to Elisandro as their own father, who took them all in graciously and treated them like his own children. On the farm there was a garden and plenty of livestock including cows, chickens, turkeys and pigs. This ensured that the family would not have a difficult time coming across food anymore, which was much fresher on the farm.

During the school year, my grandpa lived at home in Las Tablas, helping out around the farm and taking care of his siblings. In the summer, however, he would go to places like Monte Vista and work in the fields. Crops that he picked included potatoes, beets and onions. In 1959, after returning from Arizona, Elisandro, his stepdad, asked my grandpa and his brothers if they would mind not going to the fields that summer and instead help him build a third room for their small two room home. They agreed and spent the summer working to build a foundation for the new room. After that first step had been completed, they would cut thick branches from trees that they used to build the frame for the room. After the frame had been finished up to about three feet, they filled it in with dirt and hay, using the same materials as they would for adobe. However, they would not build the bricks individually, rather putting the mixture in the frame as it was. They built the frame up to its full height and repeated the same process, creating an

extremely insulated room before building a roof and mixing cement that they used to create the walls of what would originally be a bedroom but eventually a kitchen. After building the room, my grandpa lived with his mom and stepdad for a time before marrying Eloveida Velasquez, a woman from Las Tablas, in 1963.

Later Life

After working for most of his teenage years in the fields, my grandpa decided it was time for a change of pace. In 1962 he began dating Eloveida Velasquez, and married her a year later. For a time, the couple lived in Las Tablas but soon moved to Tres Piedras to work in a saw mill. Wages at the mill were low, and soon the couple decided to move to Colorado, where my grandpa worked in the mines near Leadville. While there, they lived in Minturn where they had their first two children- Carlos and Annette. They moved into a larger house to fit the larger family, but shortly after that moved to California where they lived in Modesto for a few months. In the winter, the small family moved to Los Angeles, closer to one of Eloveida's brothers. In L.A., my grandpa worked at St. Francis Hospital for three years, during which time my mom, Charlene, was born. The family then moved back to Minturn and my grandpa returned to working the mines. He then got a job in construction, where he worked for a year before moving the family back to Las Tablas after his parents began to get sick.

After moving to Las Tablas, my grandpa and his family began work constructing their own adobe home, a project that took several years to fully complete. For money, he drove the school bus to Ojo Caliente, even giving his kids a ride to the high school as they got older. In Las Tablas, he became the father of two more sons, Rodney and Henry. Throughout the years,

many tensions began building up in the home, and it all came to a head in 1985 when he and Eloveida got divorced. After the divorce, he moved back to his hometown of Romeo, where he lived for one year. During that time, his three youngest children would visit and stay with him on the weekends. In the summer of 1986 he moved once again to Minturn where instead of being in the mines, he worked construction and then at the Holiday Inn.

Years later, he was plagued by the first of several ailments that would negatively affect his health. Dr. Kellen, a doctor in Alamosa, told my grandpa that based on x-rays and other tests, he had lung cancer and would likely only live for six months, at most. He told my grandpa that his smoking was to blame, and encouraged him to stop, advice my grandpa didn't follow. He then moved in with his son Rodney and his wife, Becky, for what he thought may be the remainder of his life. During that time, my grandpa took care of Rod and Becky's two young children, Tenae and Rodney Jr., while the couple was at work. A year later, my grandpa's health had not deteriorated any further, and he returned to visit Dr. Kellen, who was shocked that Rudy was not only alive, but just as healthy as he had been during the last visit. The doctor admitted the obvious misdiagnosis, and my grandpa returned to live with Rod and Becky for a short time before moving to Glenwood Springs. He would later be diagnosed with Diabetes and eventually had to be put on supplemental oxygen, which he still uses to this day.

After some time in Glenwood Springs, my grandpa moved to Gypsum, where he lived for three years before returning to Glenwood for the next 14 years. During his second stay in Glenwood, he married a Mexican woman named Alicia in 2009, and today, they are still married. In 2010, my grandpa decided to return closer to his hometown to be closer with his siblings, of which none had passed away since their childhood. He lives now in Sanford, Colorado, and visits with his siblings often. He also now has 18 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren,

who he loves to spend time with when he has the opportunity to visit Pueblo or Gypsum, where most of them live.

Religion/Spirituality

Growing up, my grandpa was Catholic, though only during his teenage years in Las Tablas was it practiced strongly. In Romeo, his parents did not go to church often and never really emphasized church as important. After moving to Las Tablas, my grandpa would attend mass every month. When the priest would come to do mass, my grandpa served as an Altar Boy, helping the priest out with some aspects of mass. During Lent, the religious component of life would become especially emphasized and the *Penitentes* became very visible in the community. During *Semana Santa*, the *Penitentes* would host Rosaries throughout the week in addition to the ceremonies they performed behind closed doors. My grandpa always attended these Rosaries and the *Calvarios*, Stations of the Cross, which were also hosted by *Penitentes*. One year, four of the young men in Las Tablas became *Penitentes*, inspiring my grandpa to want to follow the same path. In addition to the others who he knew becoming *Penitentes*, my grandpa truly appreciated the service they provided the community and enjoyed the beauty of their ceremonies. After sharing his plans with his mom, she immediately shut them down saying that his dad, Isais, had been a *Penitente* and warned her that if anything ever happened to him that she would not let their sons become *Penitentes*. He never gave a reason for this, but my grandpa honored the wishes of his parents and didn't join the Brotherhood despite his desire to do so.

To this day, my grandpa considers himself Catholic, with his home decorated with cultural identifies⁶ such as *rosarios*, *santos*, crosses and other religious symbols even though he

doesn't often attend mass. He prays at home often, and doesn't feel it necessary to go to church, especially since he began suffering from several health-related issues. During his lifetime, many people have tried to get him to convert to other forms of Christianity or Mormonism, and even though he briefly contemplated leaving Catholicism, he ultimately decided not to do so. All of his children except for one are Catholic, and his mother remained Catholic until she died despite many outside influences. For him, seeing his mom's resilience in the Catholic faith has become an example for him and he chooses to remain Catholic as a way to honor her and stay in touch with his upbringing and his family.

Scholarly Reflections

An important element of my mother's maternal grandparents' story is their rural roots⁷ and the connection those roots give them to their identity. Growing up in small towns like Romeo and Las Tablas, their experience was vastly different than the experience of a Chicana/o growing up in Los Angeles, for instance. This environment has several unique elements that help to inform Chicana/o identity and create a unique Chicana/o experience. Like many members of the Chicana/o and Mexican communities, my mom's parents had to experience a migrant lifestyle⁸, moving around several times before finally settling down back at the place of their roots. Once the family settled down, they chose to do so where they were amongst family, in their own little *pueblito*.

Rural roots have been essential in the development of the Chicana/o community. For Chicanas and Chicanos, rural roots are a commonality, as many of our families come from *ranchitos* and other rural communities at some point in our family's stories. With a strong

presence of rural roots, it becomes necessary for Chicana and Chicano people to critically engage and understand their roots, which inform their very existence. When roots that connect to small communities are explored, those communities are given voice once they are recognized. In doing so, it is easier to understand the development of identities and understand the processes and stories that have placed people in their current societal position. The embrace of rural roots includes the embrace of the thoughts developed in those small communities, which tend to privilege the community over the individual. Communal gardens⁹, like those shared by my mother's family, are a reclamation of certain traditions and beliefs that are rooted in the land, which has been critical to the survival of all people who need to utilize the land to subsist. The necessity of the land is much more direct in the case of rural communities, who tend to lack modern amenities and large grocery stores, increasing their dependence on their ability to coexist with their land.

What this means is that the rural roots and migration of a family, who in my family's case chose to return home, play a role in the Chicana/o community that is not typically seen in the dominant society. Strong, recent connections to these roots is going to make them more visible within the Chicana/o community, which tends to pride itself in part on their connection to the community and to the land of their ancestors. The migrant story is represented throughout history in a variety of contexts, including the Bracero Program¹⁰ and the United Farm Workers (UFW)¹¹. In the case of the Bracero Program, migrants, most of which came from rural communities, were brought into the United States to work in the fields and on farms, establishing the presence of Chicana/o and Mexican people in rural spaces. Several years later, the UFW was established to work on defending the right of people working in the fields. Subsequently,

the political activism and organizing by low-wage workers who were employed in the fields and in factories became some of the first sparks of the Chicano Movement¹².

The challenges that a rural family confronts is vastly different than the obstacles faced by a family in a more urban environment, with some notable similarities. In rural communities, access to a quality education is limited¹³ as it often is for Chicanas and Chicanos living in urban environments as well, rural schools face the challenge in a different way. The lack of formally trained teachers is a huge issue in rural communities, affecting their effectiveness in the classroom. Another issue fairly common in rural areas is the distance between home and school. In the case of my grandma, the school she attended was over 20 miles away in a neighboring town. This increases the likelihood of students being unable to find adequate transportation, especially in winter months when large amounts of snow would accumulate.

In addition, all family members in rural communities are expected to contribute to the everyday well-being of the family, potentially making it more difficult for certain political and social actions to occur. This occurs especially when the actions in question will not assist the student in creating economic opportunity that has been equated to survival for themselves or their families.

Poverty in rural areas also looks vastly different than poverty in urban settings. While low-income people in urban areas often have the opportunity to at least live in government subsidized housing, people in rural areas are not afforded the same opportunity. As a result, people in rural environments are required to be more innovative and create other solutions. The building of a house by hand out of adobe is an example of this. The resourcefulness, knowledge and work required to accomplish a large project such as this has been critical in the survival of Chicana/o populations in rural environments. This occurs especially when Chicana/o populations

are confronted with the struggles that are created by a lack of economic and educational opportunity that unfortunately often go hand-in-hand with these communities.

Activism has been an important element in the role of addressing the presence of rural roots within the Chicana/o community and the identity that develops as a result. Not only is it understood by the community that Chicanas and Chicanos tend to hail from these rural roots, but by creating awareness of their importance, activists have been able to harness this identity to create positive social change. The UFW, led by Cesar Chavez¹⁴ and Dolores Huerta¹⁵, played a large role in organizing the Chicana/o community to fight for the rights of farmworkers. The recognition of Chicanas and Chicanos as a part of this identity at some point in their history has been able to assist in the creation of a shared identity for the community. The Chicana/o identity itself is necessarily rooted in the rural roots of the community, whether that is the Indigenous roots¹⁶ that have had a presence on this continent for thousands of years or the European roots¹⁷ which have been present for the past 500+ years. In both cases, rural lives were the roots and foundation of their societies, which did also develop urban centers. As urbanization has increased, the connection to these rural roots which inform Chicanas' or Chicanos' very existence has decreased. Activism to bring awareness and recognition to these roots, whether that occurs through political organizations or other mediums such as art¹⁸, is essential in informing the Chicana/o community of its traditions as part of a communally based people who would look out for each other rather than work against the progression of the community.

The roots of my family, which are focused in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, are the roots that give us our identity. As rural members of the Chicana/o community, my maternal grandparents both hold a special connection with the land that their ancestors have called home for centuries. In these rural communities, poverty is high and education is low, two

issues that have repercussions that extend far beyond individual members of the community.

Over recent years, my family has seen a shift in living environments. While historically rural communities have been the home of my family, recent generations have begun to urbanize. As a result, we begin to lose certain elements of our identity. My maternal grandparents, however, continue reminding us of their stories and where they have come from, reinforcing an understanding and appreciation of our roots. Continuing to be connected with their roots and their self-identification as members of the Chicana/o community are my maternal grandparents' challenges to dominant society, and this is their form of activism.

Conclusions

On February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, effectively establishing the United States southwest and starting in motion a chain of events that would culminate in the development of the Chicana/o identity. Approximately 160 years ago the Treaty reclassified the citizenship of over 80,000 people, who were Mexicans one day and Americans the next (Nostrand, 19, 1992). My family was among those who were caught up in the reclassification of the southwest, and our presence in the United States continues to be challenged. Not only have urban elements of our culture been demonized, like Zoot Suits and Lowriders, but even some of the most fundamental spiritual elements have as well. The Penitentes arose from a unique Chicana/o religious experience, only to be dismissed as savage and brutal from mainstream society. Our communities have become increasingly violent as our educational attainment and experiences continue to be lacking. Since the southwest has been subject to colonization for centuries by both the Spanish Crown and American government, the people of the southwest have been relegated to simply subjects in these larger political structures. A response from the community that has, in the past, has been extremely effective is activism. Therefore, in order to truly challenge the issues in the Chicana/o community and work to make positive social progress, continued activism is necessary.

Reflections

The continued (neo) colonization of Chicana/o peoples comes in a variety of forms in contemporary times. Four distinct forms of (neo) colonization that have manifested in the stories of my family are violence in the community, the lack of education, the struggles of religion and

spirituality, and the separation of Chicana/o people from their roots and identity. Activism has been, and will continue to be, critical in addressing these elements of (neo) colonization and dismantling them in order to create a more just and equitable society.

Violence is (neo) colonization in that its existence within Chicana/o communities is a primary factor in the negativity that surrounds it. When members of the Chicana/o community are committing these acts of violence upon themselves, it speaks to the lack of respect we have for each other. The concept of “In Lak’ Ech,” which essentially declares “You are the other me,” is a concept that has developed from indigenous roots within the Chicana/o community as a challenge to the violence in the community. This concept in and of itself is decolonial, drawing on Pre-Columbian roots and presenting a stark challenge to violence. This is one form of activism, drawing upon the roots of the community, to challenge the violence that is a result of (neo) colonization is a powerful factor in working to improve the community.

In addition to violence, the lack of education is another critical factor that impedes the progress of the Chicana/o community that is a result of (neo) colonization. It has been well understood throughout history that those who control knowledge also control power. For Chicanas and Chicanos, education is not only needed from public schools and institutions of higher learning, but knowledge must also continue to be developed from the community.

During the Spanish colonial period this was exemplified in the burning of indigenous texts, effectively erasing their knowledge. Contemporarily, the (neo) colonization of education takes place through the lack of access to quality education, but also through the invalidation of certain cultural and life experiences. The willingness of Arizona’s legislature to pass a ban targeted at Mexican-American Studies shows the threat that people with an education pose toward certain oppressive power dynamics and structures. In order for the knowledge developed

in the Chicana/o communities and shaped by Chicana/o experiences to be recognized as valid, it is critical that people continue to fight for increased access to higher education for members of this particular community. By adopting a more expansive view of knowledge and education, experiences from various communities will be validated, and knowledge will not be restricted to one perspective.

The struggles of Chicanas and Chicanos in regards to religion and spirituality are also a form of (neo) colonization which must be addressed by members of the community. Religion's complexity lies in that it is a colonial force in and of itself, having functioned as an arm of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Over time, however, Catholic views have evolved within the Chicana/o community, often times fusing local indigenous beliefs with Roman Catholic perspectives. The *Penitentes*, in my mind, function as an incredible example of activism through religious beliefs that have evolved to play important, positive roles within the Chicana/o community and also serve as a form of activism within the institutional Catholic Church. While typically rejected by the church hierarchy, *Penitentes* continued with their traditions, asserting their identity. Others have chosen to reject the church entirely, which in many cases can lead to separation with the larger Chicana/o community for some individuals. This can also be seen as activism, completely rejecting the institution which has served as a colonizing force in the past. Chicanas and Chicanos can argue the politics of each decision, but in order to continue the forward progress of the community, I believe that it is critical to recognize activism as applicable to those inside and outside of the Church, as long as the individuals continue to assert their identity and refuse to compromise those elements of oneself that makes us who we are.

In separating Chicanas and Chicanos from their roots, (neo) colonization continues to reshape the community. While urbanization is a common process that makes access to education

and resources far easier, it becomes problematic when it functions as a process of severing members of a community from their roots. Rural roots play a large role in the stories of Chicanas and Chicanos with ancestry on both sides of the political border between the US and Mexico. However, once we begin to forget those roots or are separated from them, we are left in a situation in which we struggle to identify ourselves.

While completing this thesis, I have come to recognize that my roots, the stories of my family, are integral to my understanding of my personal position within the world. As the physical distance between myself and those roots increases, I find myself questioning my own identity and existence more. Only through Ethnic Studies courses and the process of writing this thesis have I been able to reconnect with these roots and recognize them for their role in my life. The act of reconnecting with our roots is a form of activism that allows us to recognize our identity, an empowering act for those who have done so.

One final reflection about my family that I have based on the process of this thesis is focused on the role of men and women within the Chicana/o community. Typically, Chicano men are known as synonymous with *Machismo*. We have a reputation as “players” and misogynists that is undoubtedly earned by many members of the community. I look at my family with this in mind, and I cannot help but express gratitude and thanks towards most of the men in my family. Unquestionably, certain members of my family represent the stereotypical *Machista* image, but several others, specifically those who have played the largest role in my life, do not. Respect for all people, including women, was especially emphasized in my family, which was influenced in large part by the strong women of my family. The strength of the women in family demands respect, and it is justly given and reciprocated. I have a great amount of thanks and respect for the men who have never pushed a *machista* perspective on me and have

always functioned with respect to all members of my family, regardless of gender. The masculinity that I grew up to understand as “correct” was based heavily on the family. It was about being a part of the family, rather than the sole leader of the family. This is what I understood as “Chicano masculinity” because it was the masculinity that I grew to understand as the most fair and accepting, in addition to its practice by the Chicano men in my family.

Continuing La Lucha

As I was finishing the first draft of this thesis, another incident occurred on campus which I felt as though my identity and legitimacy were under attack. One Friday afternoon I drove my Lowrider truck to campus, and parked in one of the parking lots located near the University Memorial Center. I sat inside for a couple of minutes to respond to a few emails and messages, and while I was sitting on the plush velvet seats, I heard the words “Cholo,” “Lowrider,” and “Scholarship” coming from outside. Immediately I knew who the people were referring to as there were no other Lowriders in the area.

Looking through my tinted windows, I saw two Anglo students, dressed in professional suits and both easily over six feet tall. As they were walking away I heard them hurling negative words that I would rather not repeat towards my truck and its owner, “some Cholo on a scholarship.” I could feel my face flushing and I could feel the anger beginning to boil, but I managed to keep myself in check and not lose my cool. Had I decided to physically engage with these students, the only option running through my mind at the time, I would have lost everything I had worked so hard to gain over the past several years. I did not react at the time because I knew that I would only do something that would harm me in the end, but I cannot even

begin to explain the way those words cut deep. I was aware that I would not be really accepted before this incident, but hearing those words from the other students made something very clear to me.

Regardless of whether I am writing an honors thesis, got accepted into Teach For America, graduated high school with an Associate's Degree, or have served as a member of the National MEChA Coordinating Council, to some people I will always simply be "some Cholo on a scholarship." But that is the very reason I am writing this thesis. That is the very reason I applied to Teach for America and have worked so hard to accomplish what I have. I am not simply "some Cholo on a scholarship." I am Jason Jesse Romero, Jr, a Chicano from southern Colorado with roots in New Mexico who is going to continue my education and my activist work so that someday in the future when my children choose to attend a Tier-1 Research Institution like the University of Colorado-Boulder, they will not have to deal with the same negative views and stereotypes that I have. I want their story to be one of acceptance, positivity and dedication to their community and family. I want their experience to be decolonial and more than anything, I want them to live in a society where they can express themselves and their identity without judgment or shunning from others.

I recognize that my family has been a continual presence throughout this journey, and that their stories are what shaped my own. Everything that has occurred throughout their lives and the decisions they have made have been for the betterment of our family. The sacrifices they have made, the struggles they have overcome and their reactions to their life's struggles have shaped them, and in turn, myself. I understand their desire for a better life, a common desire for those who have migrated, and wish to migrate, to the United States. That desire has manifested itself in me as the desire to better the lives of all people not just myself or the Chicana/o

community. However, my family's experience is the Chicana/o experience, which is critical to understanding our position in society. The Chicana/o experience is the experience of the colonized in the United States, and it has been Chicana and Chicano activists who have sought to challenge the systematic injustices that have affected the Chicana/o community. I am just another Chicano, and my family, *mi familia*, is just another Chicana/o family who are seeking the betterment of our lives, living out activism in our own ways.

Notes

Introduction

¹ The role of Lowriders in the Chicana/o community is unique to this community. Through the development of custom cars, members of the Chicana/o community are able to avoid involvement in more dangerous lifestyles, including gang involvement. The cost of building a Lowrider is often quite high, especially if one intends to enter their vehicle in car shows, which means that Lowriders can be tied to social class and standing. These vehicles often hold a special place and a specific meaning in the families that build them, which gives them a strong connection to their owners. For Lowriders (those who own the customized vehicles), their vehicles are often an extension of themselves. For a more in depth reading of Lowriders and their place within Chicana/o culture, please see chapter 4 of Bright, Brenda Jo, and Elizabeth Bakewell, *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 1995) pages 89-123.

² The term “Chicano” can be understood multiple ways, but it is used in this thesis to specify the cultural identity of members of my family. Traditionally, the term “Hispano” has been used to describe people who have long-standing ties to the areas of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, but members of my family reject that term in favor of Chicano.

³ The National Hispanic Institute’s Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session is an 8-day program that brings together Hispanic/Latino youth from around the United States and other Latin American nations to create a functioning government system, modeled on US state-level governments. Through this program, the intention is that students will gain the skills necessary to become a part of the next generation of leaders in the Latino community.

⁴ For more information regarding *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan* (MEChA), please see Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011) 310,333, and 344.

⁵ For a further discussion regarding the Chicano Movement of the 1960s-70s, please see Chapter 13 of Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011) pages 286-325.

⁶ For a discussion regarding the origins and early activities of what was then the United Mexican-American Students (UMAS), please see Elisa Facio’s chapter in Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Enduring Legacies* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011) 347-364. Since the 1990s, the UMAS and MEChA chapters at the University of Colorado have developed a coalition and work together on nearly every issue in contemporary times.

⁷ Pueblo, Colorado is a city of nearly 100,000 in southern Colorado with a large Chicana/o population. During the Chicano Movement, it was home to chapters of MEChA, the Brown Berets and several other Chicano-based organizations. It is also known as “The Home of the Heroes because it is home to the largest population of Medal of Honor winners per capita in the United States. “History of Pueblo,” *Pueblo.org - Pueblo, Colorado*, City of Pueblo, n.d, 5 Feb. 2013. <<http://pueblo.org/history>>.

Chapter 1

¹ Violence in the Chicana/o community is typically attributed to gang activity, which is explored in depth in Victor Rios’ chapter “Pelones y Matones.” Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) 382-401. For a specific look into gang development activity, violence and activism in Utah and Denver, please see Durán, Robert J., *Gang Life in Two Cities: An Insider’s Journey*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) .

² For a discussion on the Brown Berets please see chapter 2- Chavez, Ernesto, *Mi Raza Primero!* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and the discussion of the Brown Beret’s primary goals as discussed on pages 85-86 of Muñoz, Carlos, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* . (Verso, 1989).

³ For more information on gangs, especially concerning their role in the lives of male Chicano youth and the processes of criminalization associated with the cholo style, please see Chapter 20, “Pelones y Matones.” Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) 382-401. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) and the discussion of the creation of gangs as a form of resistance to oppressive institutions and groups found in Chapter 7, “Racism, Resistance and Repression: The Creation of Denver Gangs” Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Enduring Legacies* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011) 121-138.

⁴ Poverty and racism are two of several factors that James Diego Vigil argues can create an increased likelihood of gang involvement. He states, “Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, economic dislocation, divorce,

single-parent households, and racism place severe stresses on many families," which in turn, can lead to an increase in the likelihood of gang involvement. *A Rainbow of Gangs: Street Cultures in the Mega-city*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2002) page 22.

⁵ For a thorough understanding of economic opportunity and the roles of Chicanas and Chicanos in the economy please see discussion on Chicanas and Chicanos position in the economic condition of the United States, found in Chapter 8 "Intact Stable and Social Order." Vigil, James Diego, *From Indians to Chicanos* (Waveland Press, Inc, 1998) 179-230.

⁶ For a discussion on the issues Latinas and Latinos face through the public school system and education in general, please see. Irizarry, Jason, *The Latinization of U.S. Schools* (Paradigm Publishers, 2011) , which includes issues of identity, perspectives and reliability of teachers, methods used on students, among other things.

⁷ The role of schools in the criminalization of Chicana/o youth is exemplified through the discussion of Francisco on pages 384-385 of "Pelones y Matones," Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) 382-401. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012)

⁸ For more information on the Crusade for Justice, please see pages 308-309. Acuña, Rudolfo, *Occupied America: Seventh Edition* (Longman Publishers, 2011), which discusses the history and role of the Crusade for Justice in the Denver community and the larger Chicano Movement.

⁹ One of the most common alternative outlets that develops especially in prison populations is literature. This is exemplified through individuals like Jimmy Santiago Baca, who's story is explored in addition to the role of political literature in prisons by Olguín, B. V., *La Pinta Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2010). For the discussion of Jimmy Santiago Baca please see pages 65-92. Robert Duran argues that the gangs themselves are not the problem, but rather that the direction in which their energy is focused is. In order to challenge the violent structure and stranglehold gangs have on their communities, he suggests a form of "Barrio Empowerment, which is discussed in Chapter 7 of *Gang Life in Two Cities: An Insider's Journey*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) .

¹⁰ *La Causa* literally translates as "The Cause" and has been used to identify those goals for which Chicana and Chicano activists struggle for equality in US society

¹¹ For an analysis and understanding of Machismo, please see pages 213-215. Maciel, David and Isidoro Ortiz, *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads*, (The University of Arizona Press, 1996), which focuses on the construction and role of Machismo in the Chicana/o community, for further discussion regarding masculinity within a gang context, please see pages 395-396 of "Pelones y Matones." Aldama, Arturo, ed., *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

¹² I define a "Formal Education" as that which is received through classroom instruction in public or private school Systems

Chapter 2

¹ For the website of *El Santuario de Chimayo*, which discusses the history and role of the *Santuario* in the Chicana/o community of northern New Mexico, please see "Welcome to El Santuario De Chimayo Website" 2013, <<http://www.elsantuariodechimayo.us/Santuario/windex.html>> (accessed December 19, 2012).

² For an understanding of Chicanas and Chicanos roles within higher education and the university system please see Part Three, which includes pages 157-204, of Maciel, David and Isidoro Ortiz, *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads*, (The University of Arizona Press, 1996), which discusses the evolution of Chicana/o activism in the realm of higher education.

³ For further information on the role of property taxes, please see the discussion of property taxes and their role in society, including in education, please see Tyer, Charlie B, "The Property Tax: Why It Persists," (The South Carolina Policy Forum Magazine, Vol. 4, no. 2 Spring 1993)pages 12-21.

⁴ According to research performed by Margaret Ortega, even Chicana/o students who are placed in advanced classes often feel unprepared for college-level material. *Children of the Sun: Academically Promising Chicano Latino High School Students and Their Aspirations for a Four-year College Degree*, (La Verne: University of La Verne, 2009) page 134.

⁵ For more information on how standardized testing is detrimental to students and "reproduced, reinforced, and sustained practices of social control and regulation," please refer to Chapter 4 of "Testing, Inequality and the

Brain” of Darder, Antonia, *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012) pages 65-78.

⁶ The No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2001, continues to serve as a source of controversy in regards to its effectiveness in closing the achievement gap.

⁷ A common occurrence throughout the southwest was large military recruitment in Chicana/o schools, exemplified by Sal Castro’s quote, “We may not have had college recruiters coming..., but we sure as hell had military recruiters” García, Mario T., *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011) page 122.

⁸ For a discussion on the way in which teacher’s standards play a large role in student achievement, please see pages 17-19 of Darder, Antonia, *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012)

⁹ For further discussion regarding college preparation in relation with Chicana and Chicano students, especially in the way that “this preparation is focused on the required knowledge of state policy,” (151) as opposed to focusing on the development of proper skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a college setting, please see Valencia, Richard, *Chicano School Failure and Success: Past, Present, and Future*, (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2002).

¹⁰ For further reading on the rates of Chicana and Chicano students at various levels of higher education, please refer to Valencia, Richard, *Chicano School Failure and Success: Past, Present, and Future*, (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2002) pages 120-140.

¹¹ For more information on the organization known as UMAS, especially its history and role in the Chicano Movement as a precursor to MEChA, please see pages 300-305 of Acuña, Rudolfo, *Occupied America*, (New York: Longman, 2011).

Chapter 3

¹ Even in 2010 the population of Plymouth, WI was over 96% white. U.S. Census Bureau “State and County QuickFacts,” 2013. < <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>>

² VISTA is a program that was sponsored by Americorps that sought to place young people in high needs area to do service work for a one year period of time, similar in ideology as programs like CityYear, though VISTA also worked in rural communities.

³ Irish Catholicism, much like Chicano Catholicism, is a unique form of Catholic beliefs that are informed partly by the indigenous Celt community. For further reading on Irish Catholicism, please see Taylor, Lawrence, *Occasions of Faith* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995)

⁴ Examples of Catholic Values in the context of grandma’s story include the modesty of women, regular attendance at mass, consistent prayer, etc.

⁵ Espanola, New Mexico is a town in northern New Mexico with one of the longest standing populations of Chicana/o peoples in the southwest United States. In 1900, it was one of only a handful of cities that contained a “Hispano” population of over 1000 (Nostrand, Richard. *The Hispano Homeland* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) page 206

⁶ Tortilla Flats is one of the Chicano barrios in Montrose, CO. During my grandpa’s youth the community consisted mostly of people from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

⁷ Bessemer is a neighborhood on the south side of Pueblo, CO. It is primarily a Chicana/o community that was at one time a separate city. For further reading about Bessemer, please see Blea, Irene, *Bessemer: A Sociological Perspective of the Chicano Barrio*. (New York: AMS, 1991)

⁸ For a further discussion regarding the *Penitentes* and their practices, please see Pulido, Alberto, *The Sacred World of the Penitentes* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2000). For a historical background on the *Penitentes*, please see Chapter 14 of *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*- Gutierrez, Ramon, “Crucifixion, Slavery and Death: The Hermanos Penitentes of the Southwest” (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) pages 253-271.

⁹ For more information and images of several *Moradas*, please see Archuleta, Ruben E., *Land of the Penitentes*, (Pueblo West: El Jefe, 2003)

¹⁰ Lent and Holy Week were extremely important times for the *Penitentes*, who saw “(Lent) as a time of preparation for Holy Week” (159). The celebration of *Semana Santa* for the *Penitentes* is discussed in Weigle, Marta, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: The Penitentes of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1976) pages 162-166

¹¹ *Alabados*, the Spanish word for hymns, were sung as an integral part of Penitential rites, and had meanings which changed over time as the Brotherhood evolved Gutierrez, Ramon, "Crucifixion, Slavery and Death: The Hermanos Penitentes of the Southwest" (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) pages 260-261.

¹² The role of the Catholic Church in the colonization of the Americas has led many to reject "Catholicism as an essential element for self-determination" Medina, Lara, *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) page 6

¹³ In this context, I feel that it is important to make a distinction between the institutional Catholic Church and the Catholic Faith. The Church itself is led by human beings, and as history shows, is not immune to the effects of greed and imperialism. The Catholic Faith however has a message meant to inspire hope in oppressed, or "poor," communities and is designed as a call to unity rather than the divisiveness of certain elements of the institutional Catholic Church.

¹⁴ For more information regarding the San Patricio Battalion, please see Hopkins, G. T., *The San Patricio Battalion in the Mexican War* (Washington: U.S. Cavalry Association, 1913)

¹⁵ According to Lara Medina, "Chicana/o and Latina/o religious leaders, sisters, priests, and laity fought valiantly in the struggle for civil rights and self-determination" *Las Hermanas*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) page 6

¹⁶ The role of the church in oppressing the Chicana/o community, especially the roles of women, is discussed in depth in Lara Medina's " *Las Hermanas*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004)

¹⁷ The negative response of Catholic clergy members to folk Catholicism, specifically regarding the *Penitentes*, can be found on pages 57-68 of Weigle, Marta, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: The Penitentes of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1976)

¹⁸ The role of La Virgen de Guadalupe is greatly contested, seen by some as a liberator and by others as a symbol of oppression Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011) page 25

¹⁹ For further reading concerning *Católicos por La Raza*, please see pages 131-171 of García, Mario T., *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas, 2008)

²⁰ For a further discussion of Liberation theology, including its ideology and origins, please see Berryman, Phillip. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and beyond* (New York: Pantheon, 1987) pages 9-28 and 125-137

Chapter 4

¹ Las Tablas is a small settlement located in the Carlson National Forest in northern New Mexico. Las Tablas and the areas surrounding it have been home to my mother's family for generations.

² For more information concerning *La Raza Unida* political party, which was created by Jose Angel Gutierrez in Texas, please refer to pages 330-331 of Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011).

³ For the autobiography of Reies Lopez Tijerina, which describes in depth his struggle over land grants in New Mexico, please see Tijerina, Reies, and José Angel. Gutiérrez, *They Called Me "King Tiger": My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights*, (Houston, TX: Arte Publico, 2000)

⁴ According to Deena Gonzalez, women were afforded several rights in courts and had the right to divorce, which they "had few qualms about petitioning for dissolution of marriages." *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) page 31

⁵ Romeo, Colorado is a small town located near the southern border of the state near New Mexico. Originally, it was a Mormon settlement known as Mountain View. Simmons, Virginia McConnell, *The San Luis Valley: Land of the Six-armed Cross* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Pub., 1979) page 132

⁶ The use of Religious cultural identifiers in the Chicana/o community is widespread even amongst those who do not identify as Catholic. My own family members who have, in the past, renounced the Catholic faith continue to decorate their homes with rosaries, saints and other Catholic images.

⁷ In northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, those communities which boast long-standing Chicana/o populations are primarily small, rural communities. While there are notable exceptions, it is these rural roots that seem to have influenced Chicana/o culture in the state for longer periods of time.

⁸ While my family has not immigrated internationally, it is still important to understand the role of migration from Mexico and Latin America in addition to Chicana/o migration throughout the southwest. For a detailed history and

discussion of migration and the role of Mexicanos in the United States, please see Gonzales, Manuel G. *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999)

⁹ Contemporarily, communal gardens have found a new home in urban spaces as a form of resistance, but in my family's story, the communal garden being discussed was maintained and utilized by members of the family through an joint effort. Growing their own food and keeping livestock were two of the ways that people in the community were able to survive on extremely low wages.

¹⁰ The Bracero Program, established in 1942, brought Mexican workers into the United States as a means of filling jobs that were newly opened up because of the onset of World War II. For further reading on the Bracero Program and its implications, please see pages 170-175 of Gonzales, Manuel G. *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999)

¹¹ For a further discussion of the UFW and its influences on modern day social activism and labor movements, please see Shaw, Randy, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008)

¹² One of those early strikes was the "Salt of the Earth Strike," which is discussed more fully on pages 274-275 of Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011)

¹³ Lack of quality education has been a continuous problem in the Chicana/o community for decades, evidenced by political activism meant to improve the schools. An example of activism in public schools in the East L.A. Walkouts, explored further in Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2011) pages 302-303

¹⁴ For a biography of Cesar Chavez, please see Bruns, Roger A., *Cesar Chavez: A Biography*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005)

¹⁵ For a biography of Dolores Huerta, please see García, Mario T., *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2008)

¹⁶ Chicanas and Chicanos from all over the American continents have indigenous roots that reach back prior to the colonization of the Americas by Europeans. Indigenous identity differs widely depending on the location of one's origins. In New Mexico, Pueblo people, Navajo (Dine), Ute, Apache and other native nations have long histories in the territory.

¹⁷ In addition to having indigenous roots, it is important to recognize the European roots that also are present in the lives of Chicanas and Chicanos. For most of us, these roots can be traced back to Spanish conquistadores, but other European peoples have mixed with people whose origins are in the southwest. In the case of my family, this includes both Irish and German roots in addition to Spanish ones.

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion on art and its role in Chicana/o politics and identity formation/recognition, especially considering graffiti, murals, lowriders, and other "folk arts," please see Bright, Brenda Jo, and Elizabeth Bakewell, *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity*, (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona) 1995.

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Appendix



Jason Romero, Sr



Charlene Romero



Jason and Charlene's Wedding
June 6, 1992



Julian Romero



Sherry Romero



Rudolfo Martinez



Eloveida Velasquez



Santuario de Chimayo
Chimayo, New Mexico



The Family Lowrider in the Fiesta Day parade
Pueblo, Colorado



The house that my mom and her family built
Las Tablas, New Mexico



"Grandpa Joe" and Senaida Herrera
Eloveida's stepdad and mother



Jerome and Mildred Skelton
Sherry's Parents



Carlos and Juanita Romero
Julian's Parents