

**U.18 Long Civil Rights Movement:
Heirs to a Fighting Tradition**

**Interview U-0588
Mary Zulayka Santiago
September 17, 2010**

**Field Notes – 2
Transcript – 4**

FIELD NOTES- Zulayka Santiago

Interviewee: M. Zulayka Santiago

Interviewer: Luke Hirst

Interview Date(s): 09/17/2010 (interview one of two)

Project: Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists

Location: Downtown branch of the Durham County Library, Durham, NC

THE HEIRS PROJECT: “Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists” is a multi-phased oral history project which explores the stories and traditions of social justice activism in North Carolina through in-depth interviews with fourteen highly respected activists and organizers. Selected for the integrity and high level of skill in their work dedicated to social justice, the interviewees represent a diversity of age, gender, and ethnicity. These narratives capture the richness of a set of activists with powerful perspectives on social justice and similar visions of the common good. These are stories of transition and transformation, tales of sea change and burnout, organizing successes and heart wrenching defeats. These are the stories of social change through the eyes and experiences of leaders in the movement. All of the oral histories will be archived in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and will be a valuable addition to the modest amount of literature about contemporary social justice activism and the contemporary organizing tradition in the South.

THE INTERVIEWEE: Currently Zulayka serves as the Program Officer, Health Disparities with the NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund. Prior to this, Zulayka served in a number of roles all focused on contributing to social justice and equity. Although the majority of her work is rooted in the nonprofit sector, Zulayka has also been a small-business owner and a freelancer. She received her BA in Pan-African Studies from Barnard College of Columbia University and a Master of Public Administration from UNC Chapel Hill. She is a 06-08 William C. Friday Fellow for Human Relations.

THE INTERVIEWER: Luke Hirst grew up in Merritt Island, Florida, and came to North Carolina in 2000 to attend UNC-Chapel Hill. After graduating with a degree in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2004, Luke interned at local newspapers and magazines, and took film and oral history courses at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. From 2006 to 2008, Luke worked at Durham's El Centro Hispano, a community center for Latino immigrants, and from 2008 to 2010 Luke worked at Traction, a non-profit seeking to energize and connect the base of young progressives in the region. Luke currently works at an accounting firm focused on non-profit organizations, and serves on the Oral History Work Group of the Heirs to a Fighting Tradition project. Luke has also been active in LGBTQ issues for several years and currently is a member of Southerners on New Ground, a regional organization centering on working class, people of color, immigrants, and rural LGBTQ people.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: For both interviews we met at the Durham County library. Originally we were going to meet at Zulayka's home in Chatham County, but she had to come to Durham for some meetings, so we decided to meet in Durham. There was a small meeting room in the library where we met, but there were some background noises, and a particularly distracting vibration and banging that happened every time someone walked on the stairs above our room.

Zulayka and I have known each for several years and are friends, but had not discussed a lot of the intimate details of her life previously. She was open and engaged, but I feel that it might have been a better atmosphere for the interview in a less formal setting. From my experience, she tends to be open in many areas of her life, so this was not especially unusual for her.

I told her at the beginning that we could do the interview in English or Spanish, it was up to her. She chose English, but there are some times when she uses Spanish words to explain certain concepts. Zulayka is very animated when she talks, both with her physical gestures and her voice. Unfortunately, a lot of this cannot carry over into the written transcript.

TRANSCRIPT— MARY ZULKAYKA SANTIAGO

Interviewee: Mary Zulayka Santiago

Interviewer: Luke Hirst

Interview Date: September 17, 2010 (Interview 1 of 2)

Location: Durham County Library, Durham, North Carolina

Length: 00:77:23

START OF INTERVIEW

[noise of recorder moving, squeak of door]

Mary Zulayka Santiago: FYI, you have to go upstairs to pee.

Luke Hirst: Really, those bathrooms are closed?

MZS: They had told me I had to go upstairs. Are there bathrooms here? [laughs]

LH: [laughs] Yeah.

MZS: I asked and she said, “Second floor!”

LH: Maybe these ones down here are only open for events or something. ‘Cause I’ve used them when I’ve been in that auditorium. Alright, can you just talk about what you had for breakfast? [to test out the recorder]

MZS: Ah, what did I...? I had corn tortilla strips that I made. They were good.

[laughs]

LH: [laughs] Okay. Are you ready to get started?

MZS: Sure.

LH : Alright. Can you start by telling me – Oh, the other thing I didn’t say. I’ll probably ask you some stuff that I already know or that’s on your sheet but just, you know –

MZS: Of course, yeah.

LH: [laughs] So it's not like, "Luke, I already told you that!" [laughs] Okay start with telling me your name and where we are and today's date.

MZS: Okay. My name is Mary Zulayka Santiago, and we're at the Durham Public Library, and today's September 17, 2010.

LH: And I'm Luke Hirst with the Heirs to a Fighting Tradition project, and I'm here interviewing Zulayka. Is there a story behind your name?

MZS: Yes. [laughs] With a name like Mary Zulayka Santiago, there's bound to be a story. My mother got the name off of a soap opera. It's a Russian soap opera that was dubbed into Spanish that she used to watch in the Dominican Republic, and the title of the soap opera was "*Cásate Conmigo, Zulayka*," which means, "Marry Me, Zulayka." And she loved the name and so I got it, and my family has only ever called me Zulayka, but when we moved to the United States, my name got separated. So it's Mary Zulayka and it got separated as first and middle, and since in the United States they only use your first name, for-- from age 6 to 27 I was Mary Santiago to the outside world, and my family, again, only Zulayka. And then I moved to Sedona, Arizona, and it was like a coming of age for me, and part of my coming of age was reclaiming my name, Zulayka. And it means "brilliant beauty." It's actually Persian. [laughs] Persian, Russian, Dominican – it's a global name.

LH: Wow, so, what was the process coming back like with the people who knew you as Mary? [pronounced *ma-rē*]

MZS: Yeah.

LH: Or Mary? [pronounced *mer-ē*]

MZS: Yeah. Most of those were grad school friends, and it took 'em a minute to adjust, but I think most people adjusted quite beautifully to it. And I have a name that's very odd, especially for, you know, the South, and so it's gotten butchered many times. I've been called Srilanka and Zukira and Zalama, so that just comes with having an odd name. [laughs]

LH: Where were you born?

MZS: Guayanilla, Puerto Rico. And I lived there 'til I was 6. But my – I was raised with my mother's side of the family, and they're from the Dominican Republic. So I consider myself Dominican more so than Puerto Rican, in terms of culture and ethnicity. I'll try to keep a level tone. [laughs]

LH: And what year were you born in?

MZS: 1975. It was a good year.

LH: Can you tell me a little bit about Guayanilla?

MZS: Well, I can tell you about what I remember, visiting again. It's a coastal town, or city, on the Southern coast of Puerto Rico. And what I remember were – it's my aunt's father's home, which is a very old house, and very, you know, modest. I remember meeting, like, some older brother of mine... It's an interesting story between my father and my mother, it was actually an arranged marriage for citizenship, since my mother was in the Dominican Republic with my older sister who's of a different father. So he was much older and had grown children, so I remember in Guayanilla meeting some of those paternal family members but not having a very close relationship to them. And then the last time I was in Guayanilla was when I was 12 years old, and we made a family trip back to the islands, which was rare. And one of the purposes of the family trip was for me to get to meet my father for the first time because my mother left him while she was pregnant with me. And I

remember walking up this little knoll, in this little shack, basically, it was a little one-bedroom house, tin roof, and my father was sitting in that house. And we met on a Saturday, my grandfather introduced us. He didn't know who I was, of course. And that was a Saturday and I sat next to him. The one picture I have of me and my father is that day, and he's double-fisting – he's got a cigar in one hand and a cigarette in the other hand. And Saturday I met him, Monday he died. Yeah. And he – I was 12, and he was close to 80. So he was much older than my mother, and not a very nice man from the stories she tells me, and that's my last real memory of Guayanilla.

LH: Have you been to the Dominican Republic much to visit family there?

MZS: A few times. The last time that I went was actually a beautiful trip. I got to be the one to take my grandmother back to her homeland, so it was a very quick trip. It was basically so she wouldn't travel alone. But my grandmother was suffering from early stages of dementia, and during that trip she was very, very present with me, and like leaned over a couple times and said, "*Ay, gracias, Zuli,*" like, "Thank you Zulayka, for taking me back," because she knew she wouldn't have been able to do it by herself. So that was the last time I touched the land and came back home. But in 2007, I got to do this amazing trip with my mother and my grandmother, the three of us traveled back to the Dominican Republic, and my grandmother got to see some of her family, her sisters, and of course my mom got to visit with some family. And for the first time we were able to see quite a bit of the island, because my mother grew up poor so she had never seen her own country. And so part of the purpose of the trip for me was to rent a little car and travel around, and she loved it, we had a really good time. My grandmother, unfortunately, couldn't go with us for a lot of it because of her

physical limitations, but... So in 2007 was the actual trip, and then I took my grandmother back in 2008.

LH: Do you still have a lot of family there?

MZS: In the Dominican Republic, I have... yeah. I have an aunt, my mom's only sister, and then you know, great-aunts and cousins galore, yeah. But I'm not all that close in terms of constant contact.

LH: And tell me about any siblings you have.

MZS: I have one sister, and she's three years older than me. And her name is Susana [laughs]. And she has a different father, so we're very different in so many ways. She's a beautiful person and she married when she was 19 and is still married to that same person. [chuckles] And they have two kids, a 9-year-old and a 7-year-old. And they live in Rockingham, North Carolina, and... yeah. I mean I love her and can count on her, and she's very different. And very, like, still in the church we grew up in, which is Seventh Day Adventist, and very conservative in her own ways, and so...

LH: Tell me about how you left Puerto Rico.

MZS: We left when I was 6 and a half. And at the time, my mother was raising my sister and I by herself, and we had some uncles who had moved to Louisiana to work in the refineries – Southern Louisiana – and chasing the American dream of better education, better jobs. We moved to Louisiana to be closer to my uncles and for my mom to get work, and... We moved in December – the shock of weather, from the Caribbean to – and Louisiana wasn't even all that cold, but it was much colder than what we were accustomed to, so there was a lot of tears in terms of adjusting, and I remember distinctly... We would, in Puerto Rico, at that time, everybody wore uniforms to school, even public schools, and when we

moved to Louisiana, we didn't have enough money to go shopping for school clothes and so my sister and I still wore our school uniforms. We were the only two little girls in uniforms [laughs] in this elementary school, and I remember my mother taking me to the bus stop with a belt because I so didn't want to go to that school, and it was horrible. You know, getting used to it. And then after that, it didn't take me much longer to acclimate, but it was a tough first adjustment from Puerto Rico to Louisiana.

LH: Do you remember other things, other than the weather, and the reactions of the kids at school, that were hard to get used to?

MZS: Yes, the language. [laughs] So they put me in a bilingual class, which I really appreciate. I remember my teacher clearly, Ms. Hoppy was her name. And I remember one time we had an assembly and the whole school in the cafeteria and there was something happening, and I was sitting, and I needed to go to the bathroom really badly, and I didn't know how to ask for permission. And my... Ms. Hoppy wasn't around, so it was all the English-speaking teachers, and so I peed on myself in this chair, 'cause I was too afraid to ask for permission, I didn't know how in English. I peed on myself [laughs]. I concocted this story to tell my mother because I was too embarrassed to tell her that I had, you know, and so I told her that I had gone to the bathroom and that the floor was wet and that I had slipped and that apparently there was pee on the floor and the pee got on my uniform, which is why I stunk. I don't know if she actually believed it, but she didn't say anything to me. She gave me a big hug and was very sweet about it, so...

LH: Wow.

MZS: Yeah.

LH: So you said you were in a bilingual class; were there many other Spanish speakers?

MZS: Yeah, there were several. In Louisiana, this was in Kenner, Louisiana, which is just outside of New Orleans, and in that area it's very rich ethnically and all sorts of different people, and... Most of the Latinos in that area at that time were from Central and South America, so my best friends, my best friends were Kesha Jeter, who was from Louisiana, a young Black girl, and then Rosa Irula, who was from Honduras, and then eventually Karen Garcia, who was from, like, Guatemala, so it was mostly from that part of the world. But I can't even imagine having made that transition without having the little base and safety of a bilingual classroom, and I think about the children now who have to make that transition into full immersion, and I really feel for them. Yeah.

LH: Can you tell me about some of the stories that your family has passed down to you?

MZS: About what? Just general stories?

LH: Or any that are your favorite or that really kinda stand out as, as more memorable, or more you know, surprising maybe, or...

MZS: Huh. I always say that my mom is like the queen of idioms, because she's forever pulling it some new idiom that I've never heard of, and that always conjures some like crazy images in my head. Stories that are passed down to me, so that I wasn't involved in?

LH: Mm hm.

MZS: I think I struggle with that, because part of I think what's difficult in terms of my lineage is that I know few ancestors first of all, like my maternal grandmother is as far

back as I can really go. And I think part of growing up poor, working-class is this “work, work, work”... that there isn’t so much like a celebration of oral history. The one that for some reason comes to mind ‘cause I always think about my mother’s hands. My mother’s hands, I actually wrote a story on this when I was younger, like in high school, and the first line of the story was, “My mother’s hands tell the history of my family.” And part of that history is that one of her hands is really emaciated – is that the word? And she used to tell my sister and I that she thought she had had a case of polio or something, and then she thought, or it could have been because she worked as a bartender for a while; my mother has all sorts of interesting career positions. And so she would say that from working in a hot bar, because they would do food, and sticking in her hand in the refrigerator, so from hot to cold, that it impacted her hands, but there are all sorts of calluses. She was an alternator mechanic for a while when we first moved to Louisiana. So yeah, that’s one thing.

One of the harder stories, one of the few stories that I have about my father is actually from my mother, talking about how incredibly abusive he was, physically abusive and emotionally abusive. And she tells this story, and this is kind of jumping ahead, but I’ve grappled with depression for a long time, and when the first signs of depression first started appearing for me was when I was a teenager. And she would sit next to me in the bed and tell me that she felt responsible in some way, and that she thought that the trauma that I had experienced while in her womb is why I had depression. And my mother’s a woman of no formal academic education, like she’s never been to school, so for her to make these sorts of evaluations... She says that when she was pregnant with me, she made the decision to leave my father. She didn’t want me to be born into that, into that violence. And so, he kicked her out of the house, literally with no clothes, nothing to her name, and said, “If you leave me,

you get nothing.” And of course this is connected to him being the path to the green card, and “I’ll make sure you don’t get your citizenship and your green card.” And so I get this image of my mother in the street, fully ripe pregnant with me and having nothing, and having to run to the neighbor’s house to find shelter, and they took her in and took care of her. So that’s one of the more heartbreaking stories that has been passed down to me. Yeah.

LH: Did she end up having any trouble with the immigration situation because of— were his threats real in that sense?

MZS: No, thank goodness for the wisdom and kind-heartedness of the judge that she was before, ‘cause he tried, he definitely followed through on his threats. When I was born, he tried to take me away from her at the hospital and he couldn’t, and then followed through in terms of trying to, you know, interrupt the immigration process. And they ended up before a judge, and my mother told her story to the judge, and the judge decided to side with my mother, fortunately, and my father didn’t get his way. And eventually she became a resident, and then yeeears later, became a citizenship. Citizenship! [laughs] Citizen. Yeah.

LH: Was your mother political in any way when you were growing up? Or your other family members around you?

MZS: No. No, not at all. I think of my mother, again as a, like a very kind and wise woman in her own way, but it has little to do with any formal academic education, and not in the politically savvy sort of way. Her way of giving back or taking care of community happen in, you know. usually either in one-on-one situations, or through her church, eventually, became the vehicle for a lot of that. But not the “let’s take it to the streets” kind of way.

LH: And how old were you when your family started getting involved in the church?

MZS: [laughs] When we lived in Puerto Rico, we didn't have that, uh... I was trying to find a word that's not so judgmental. We didn't have that parameter, we'll say. Because the Seventh Day Adventist religion is very restrictive in a lot of ways, and it was when we moved to Louisiana, probably when I was like 7, that my mom decided to join the church again, and has been there ever since. And I got baptized, because Seventh Day Adventists believe in baptizing, supposedly when you're an adult and can make the decision for yourself, but they let a lot of children make decisions for themselves in *that* situation, so I got baptized when I was like 10 and a half. Yeah.

LH: Do you know what led her to join the church?

MZS: You know, I've never asked her that in that way before. I imagine that it was partially due to wanting that sort of community and support that comes from being part of a church, and that was a wonderful part of our lives, was the community that we got from the church. I do also remember, actually, a little siiiide story... Another reason we moved to Louisiana was because my mother's lover at the time, who turns out was a married man, had promised her that he would move her to Louisiana and then that they could be together. And my mother, since she had my uncles and was, you know, she was willing and able to take that risk. And then when we moved to Louisiana, he never left his wife, things fell apart. So, I wonder if that was also you know, connected to her repentance. She had visited the Seventh Day Adventist church when was younger and left it, and so this was her, uh, what is it? Born again kinda thing. Yeah.

LH: I'm just gonna try moving the recorder on the chair, because when they go up the stairs I think it is, it vibrates the table, and I can hear it.

MZS: Oh wow.

[Luke moves the recorder]

LH: Okay.

MZS: Oh good. The email I was waiting for...[unintelligible]

LH: So you mentioned the – I think it's gonna be better up here. [Moves recorder again.]

MZS: [laughs]

LH: You mentioned that the church had a good sense of community. Did you feel engaged in the church otherwise, like religiously, when you were baptized, or were you just going because of your family?

MZS: No, I would say at the time I had – and for a long time – really bought into the whole “choose Jesus or choose Hell” kind of messaging that we get so strongly in a lot of Protestant Christian religions. And so I would say that most of that was born out of fear, more than devotion. [laughs] And especially the way the Seventh Day Adventists preach Revelations and the Apocalypse, that's just like, intense, especially for a little girl! So I think that's what drove most of my devotion for a long time, and it wasn't until I left for college that I could leave the church, and struggled with that for a long time, so...

LH: You mentioned a couple of the jobs that your mom had. What are some other ones?

MZS: So, my mother started working when she was 9 years old as a, like, housekeeper-babysitter thing. And she's been working ever since, which is why she has never been able to go to school. She taught herself how to read and write, and so some of the jobs... you know, the bartender was an interesting one. When we moved to Louisiana, she was the alternator mechanic for a little while, and then she was what they called then a

chambermaid, housekeeping at a hotel. And that really marked her career as housekeeper. She went from being a housekeeper at a hotel to being a housekeeper for this lovely family. Actually it was a lawyer and his wife who was terminally ill with cancer when my mom was brought into the family, and they had adopted five children. And three of the five children had some sort of issue that they were grappling with. And so my mom became housekeeper, but again, like caretaker of the children and transporter. And they treated her really, really well, and the wife died while my mom was there, and so the children really got attached to my mother. She was with that family for a while, and then we left Louisiana and she was working at a book-binding factory in Massachusetts, so placing pages in books, and... I actually worked there for a little while with her, for a couple summers. And then she became a housekeeper in a hospital, and spent many years doing housekeeping in a hospital. Two different hospitals. And eventually, not retired but was disabled. She couldn't keep working the way she was working, so... She has rheumatoid arthritis so her joints were not collaborating with her.

LH: And you mentioned that you don't know your ancestry past your grandmother?

MZS: Mm hm.

LH: Is that, like, your mother didn't know and your grandmother didn't know?

MZS: The only thing they talk about, and I tried many times to get my grandmother to talk about it... And she would talk about, like she had first names of, like, her mother and her father, and I think maybe her grandmother, but that would be the extent of it. And my mother knew her father, and they don't... Yeah, there's just not a lot there in terms of, you know, above grandparents. They both tell this story about, I think it's supposedly my great-great-grandfather who was Black, like from Africa somewhere. [laughs] "In Africa," they

say. And the great-great-grandmother who's light-skinned from Spain. And that that's how... But I don't know how much of that is the story that all kids get in the Caribbean [laughs], or if there's any truth to that.

LH: Do you think that there was a reason why they didn't want to talk about it, or it just wasn't as important to them in the same way?

MZS: I just don't think I come from that sort of "let's celebrate lineage" place. Again, it's like this real, "you do what you gotta do to survive" kind of thinking, so when my grandmother passed away last summer – was it last? Yeah it was last summer – I started my ancestor altar, which is something that I had been wanting to do, but felt like, I don't know my ancestors, how can I...? But I established my ancestor altar and have some pictures of my grandmother and a few pictures of family – my mother and a couple of uncles. And my mother has come over since then, and one, she doesn't believe in altars, and so she thinks that's, like, of the devil. And then [she] doesn't quite understand what the point is. This whole "but they're dead," you know... I think part of the Seventh Day Adventist thinking is like, when you're dead, you're dead, until the second coming of Christ. And then you can reconnect with your loved ones, but until then, this trying to have a connection doesn't make any sense. And my mother, since my grandmother's death, has had several dreams with her, and I will ask the question, "Did she say anything to you? Like, did she want to communicate?" And she's like, "Ay, Zulayka." [laughs] "Dead people don't co—" And I was like, "Ahh." So it's just different kind of thinking, it's like this real definitive beginning and end, and *se acabó* [it's over]. Like, you don't really talk about what came before in those ways, you know?

LH: Does your altar include ancestors that aren't genetically part of your family? Like, do you have other types of ancestors that you include in that?

MZS: Huh. Um, I have some symbols, there are two Taino [indigenous people of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico] symbols that I brought when I went to take my grandmother, and it's the male principal and the female principal. And I have a couple other things, like shells, mementos from nature that speak to me in some way, and I have sand from the Dominican Republic, and a feather, and so that kind of stuff. I feel like in many ways, my connection to nature is my connection to what came before and what comes after. So in that way, yes, I have other things, but... yeah. I don't know if you were asking about something... yeah.

LH: Why is it important to you to remember or celebrate your ancestors? Or how did that become important to you?

MZS: Mm hm. Well I think part of it is just honoring the continuity of life and the sort of circle of life. And I think I come from a place of, like, you struggle, you struggle, you struggle for what comes next, you know, for your children. Like my mother, the message of "I sacrific"—not in the sort of "you owe me" sort of way, but -- "I sacrificed a lot so that you and your sister can get ahead. So that you can have what I didn't have." And this sort of forward mentality is where I come from. And I think that that has, um, that part of my wanting to connect with my ancestry is recognizing that—I don't know if this is gonna make sense – is recognizing that that cycle goes forward and backward, and so that the work that I'm doing in my own life in terms of healing my connections to my father and healing different types of trauma, that obviously it will impact the generations that come after, my children, and their children. But I also feel like this work that I'm doing now impacts the

generations that came before me, in particular the women that came before me, because I know that a lot of what I've carried in terms of my collective trauma comes from the maternal lineage. And so, if I'm acknowledging that, that the work I'm doing is honoring in that direction, then I wanted to also be able to celebrate the beauty and the gifts that come from that direction as well. It felt like a way of balancing that.

LH: That's beautiful.

MZS: Thanks.

LH: Other than the parts about your ancestors, are there other things in your family history that you wanna know about but they won't talk about?

MZS: Oh, yes. Yeah. I mean, I do feel, like a void in some ways with that. Like, I do wish that I could have had the opportunity to like sit at my grandmother's lap and hear story after story after story, and we just didn't have that sort of connection, and my grandmother was a woman of few words, so getting just a first name was about as much as I could get. But I do, especially around spiritual tradition, the sort of stepping away from the Seventh Day Adventist religion, and organized religion overall, because in so many ways it feels more oppressive than anything else in my life. Yet wanting to celebrate spirit and be connected to spirit, and what does that look like, you know? I've gone through many different search processes. Moving to Sedona was incredibly illuminating and helpful in a lot of ways, in terms of connecting with the divine feminine, which was "whoa" you know, a totally new concept at age 28. Because coming from this very paternalistic, "God is man" sort of frame, to be able to honor the goddess was, like, it felt liberating in so many different ways. And then there was this rendezvous into Buddhism and meditation and silence. And I've been able to keep meditation and silence as part of my spiritual practice, but the, you know, the

piece about mantras and... it just didn't feel authentic to me. And that's really where I am right now. And I feel like I'm not alone in terms of many people of color yearning for that and suffering from that sort of disconnect from native spiritual traditions. And so I wish that in some way I could have that, or that I could have somebody in my family that I can explore that with, but I don't.

LH: So, you said that your family moved from Louisiana to Massachusetts?

MZS: Mm hm.

LH: What was that about?

MZS: [chuckles] Again, chasing the American dream, whatever that meant. To them, that meant better jobs, better education, more opportunities for my sister and I. And yeah, my—there was a stepfather at this point. My mother married a man when I was, like, 9, and so he moved up there first and got a job, and then moved us up, and my mom got that job at that book-binding factory, and education was supposedly better in Massachusetts than in Louisiana. And I think the housing projects that we were living in in Louisiana, up until that point had been really safe and family-oriented. And my sister and I would drive bikes around, and felt totally safe. And it started shifting. It definitely shifted after we left, we found out from friends there was a lot of violence and gang activity. And so Massachusetts, again, represented the ability to – we were still in housing projects, but they were newer and nicer and so there was that as well. And we had some family friends that had moved up there. So as it normally happens with immigrant families, there's like this trailblazer family [laughs] that goes ahead and then everybody else kind of magnetizes towards them.

LH: And how long were you there?

MZS: In Massachusetts? We were there, like, five years. [sigh] And it was hard. The culture shock that I experienced going from Louisiana to Massachusetts was 10 times worse than what I experienced from Puerto Rico to Louisiana, and there was no language barrier to contend with. So the whole New England, very sort of racist-as-the-norm way of thinking... and we moved to this predominantly Irish town. Most of my classmates were O'Laughlin and Bailey and McLaurin, you know like all these Irish last names, and many of them didn't know I wasn't Black. It was a very Black/white sort of paradigm, and yeah, I just struggled, and high school was... Every year, I would say, "I'm not going back to this high school, I'm not going," and I ended up doing all four years there.

LH: Did you find any ways to help you get through that?

MZS: I had... this was when church really comes into play again. My best friend at the time was from church and she eventually came to my high school, 'cause she moved nearby for a little bit. But [I] felt like most of my real connections were through the church, and there was a church youth group called Pathfinders, so we would go camping and do fun things like that together. And at age 16 I had my first boyfriend, and he was, you know, from the church, and that helped a lot [laughs] to deal. So... And I mean, I did well in high school. I was in the Student Council for a couple years, I played varsity volleyball, I was in the National Honor Society, so I thrived, and yet it wasn't the environment that I was happiest in. And it was particularly hard when my sister was still in high school with me -- she graduated two years before me -- because my sister was the butt of a lot of jokes, in terms of, she was nerdy and kind of a little odd. She struggled academically, and so she didn't fit the nerdy-smart category, and I always wanted to be in defense of my sister, and that was hard being

the little one. It was just rough. I always say that I wouldn't do that again if they paid me, you know. That's such an awkward age. So...

LH: You were saying that it was really racist there, and that it was a very Black/white dynamic. How were the relations between the Black folks and the Latino folks?

00:40:00

MZS: Well the few Black folks that were there, it was pretty good. I was one of a handful of Latinos who weren't in the ESL [English as a Second Language program]. There was a small ESL contingency, and I think people hung onto that even if they didn't need to because they didn't want to leave that little cohort. And so I remember in my graduating class, it was me; then there was my friend Sandra who was Afro-Latina, she was Black Dominican, and she was only there for a little bit. And then there was Jason, Jason Haw I think was his name, "the other Black guy" [laughs], and Kwon Kim was "the Asian guy." [laughs] And that was pretty much it. There were people who flowed in and flowed out, but then there was the ESL cohort and us little people of color among the ocean of a lot of white folks, so...

LH: So then how – what was, can you tell me about going to college?

MZS: Yes. I was eager to get out of Clinton, Massachusetts, and I applied to a few schools and got a full ride from UMass Amherst [The University of Massachusetts Amherst], which is where my best friend had gone, and I turned it down, which you know, hindsight... Decided to go to the big private school that was far, far away from home and went to Syracuse University. And even though they offered quite a nice [financial aid] package, it still meant a lot of student loans, which I will pay for a very long time. But it was a really amazing experience, oh my goodness. Syracuse does a really good job of taking care of its

students of color. Like, they do a pre-freshman year program, and so that's your opportunity to make your friends and get to get comfortable on campus before everybody else comes, and I think that's a wonderful, wonderful way of integrating, especially youth of color who don't come from families where they visited college campuses, and – you know? So it was a great experience. Two years I did there, and then transferred to Barnard College of Columbia. And I did that... the public story is that I did it because it was more academically challenging and it was a great opportunity to live in a big city. And I did it because my boyfriend moved. [laughs] And I wanted to be near him. And so... yeah.

LH: [laughs] So you were like your mom in that way?

MZS: Yes! Ooh, yeah. There's a whole other story. Part of the healing that I'm doing I think for the women in my family is about this role that we play in relationships, and in particular the role of "other woman" and what that has done for each of us. So, yeah, in so many ways, I'm working for my mother and my grandmother and my aunts, yeah.

LH: So what kinds of things were you involved in in college?

MZS: Mm, I wasn't all that like extracurricularly involved. I was pretty focused on doing well, which was a big adjustment, obviously, from high school. And I decided to accept an invitation to be part of the Honors Program [laughs], and of my cohort of all the youth of color that had come in with me, I was, like, one of two in the Honors Program, which upped the ante for me in terms of academic rigor. But it was good. And you know, I managed to go to a lot of parties, and... yeah. So, mostly it was academics, some sort of work-study always, and then, you know, a little partying on the weekend. And I say partying in the very innocent sense. I fortunately managed to click with a group of people, my closest

friends, we weren't into alcohol, we weren't into drugs, we weren't into having sex with a lot of people, so it was a really healthy cohort that I developed.

LH: You mentioned earlier that college was a time when you had a chance to step away from the church and think about your relationship with it?

MZS: Oh yeah. Yeah, I remember it clearly, it was in that pre-freshman year program, and there was a party on a Friday night, and Seventh Day Adventists honor the Jewish Sabbath, so it's Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. And I remember having this internal conflict as to whether I would go to this party. At the time I still wasn't wearing jewelry 'cause, you know, Seventh Day Adventists don't allow that. Going to a party, period, was a big step, just because you know, dancing and... and then on a Friday night. And I made the decision to go. And I remember walking outside the dorm with my little friends and there was one other girl in the group who was Seventh Day Adventist, and I remember she was sitting outside on a chair watching us leave to this party, and it was like [laughs], it was like the voice of guilt coming to haunt me. And she was like, "Mary! You're going to this party on Sabbath, huh?" [laughs] and I was like, "Ahhhh!" [laughs] And I ran away from that. And then I just, you know, one thing after another. And then for me, it was just gaining awareness and being exposed to different paths to God, and beginning to see that what I had been taught just didn't make sense to me.

LH: I saw in your bio that you majored in pan-African studies?

MZS: Mm hm.

LH: Can you tell me about that and how you decided to do that?

MZS: Mm hm. So for Latinos, this question of race is a tricky one and an interesting one. When we come to the United States, being forced to choose one of the two boxes [white

or Black] before being able to choose Latino or Hispanic. And for me, it's always been the case that I have felt more pulled towards the African side of my heritage, and my father was a Puerto Rican man, and he was a Black Puerto Rican man. You look at him and there's no denying that. So it's part of being able to honor and celebrate that as part of my lineage, and also knowing that I come from a very "Black is worse, lighter is better" kind of frame. My grandmother used to tell me, "You better not marry a Black man, because I don't wanna be brushing no bad hair for my grandkids," you know. So this whole "bad hair" is definitely part of the conditioning that I come from, and so getting to college and having this opportunity to really celebrate my African ancestry and the African diaspora was just amazing. And I knew in undergrad that a B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] was a B.A. and that I'd have to... I would eventually get a Master's. And so I was able to pick something that I was actually really interested in, and my mother never quite understood what the hell I was studying in college, or—"Pan- what does that mean, and what are you gonna do with that?" You know, because she comes from a very, like, teacher, doctor, lawyer – that's why you go to college [laughs]. So, yeah, it was wonderful.

LH: So... how are we doing on time? Good? Okay. Sorry, I'm just taking a minute to see...

MZS: No, take your time.

LH: Do you have any favorite family rituals that you would do, on holidays or certain gatherings or things like that?

MZS: Hm. I mean, eating was always a big part of our celebrations, especially as a child, I mean, I think it's changed a lot for my mother as she's gotten older and her ailments have gotten heavier for her. But I remember my mother always hosting some sort of dinner

or, they call it like, “after-church social,” or she’d always have some big pot of something, and our teeny – ‘cause we never lived in any big houses – teeny little living quarters would always be jam-packed with people, and that’s when she would be the happiest. So yeah, eating and cooking. And my mother in, in some weird ways, in some beautiful ways... the Seventh Day Adventist church teaches that you’re not supposed to dance, you know, in a... But at home, she’d always dance, and any little excuse, like any little music and she’s always moving, and I love that about my mother. She has a very bright and vivacious and engaging spirit. I totally think I inherited that. [laughs] And birthdays of course, and we learned to celebrate Thanksgiving in this country, and Christmas and New Year’s. It’s never, never quite been the same as the Christmases of my childhood, and in the Caribbean we used to always celebrate Three Kings’ Day, which we don’t, we stopped doing when we came to the United States, unfortunately. Which sort of extended the holiday celebration because that’s in the beginning of January. But other than that, yeah, there weren’t any other family traditions.

LH: Is that how you mean it hasn’t been the same? Because of the – it wasn’t extended?

MZS: I mean I think part of it is just growing up and losing some of what they call you know, the Christmas spirit or holiday spirit. But no, in the Caribbean also, part of the Christmas celebration or holiday celebration is what they call *parrandas*, which is like caroling on crack. [laughs] You would grab pots and pans and spoons and whatever you could make noise with, and of course they would have real instruments, like wheedles and *maracas* and *panderetas*, and then there are all these songs that you sing, along with clapping: [sings] “*Alegre vengo de la montaña...*” [Happy I come from the mountain], and [makes the sounds of the instruments]. It’s real dance-able, fast music, and you go door to

door – which is why I say it’s like caroling on crack – you go door to door and some of the songs that you sing is, “We’re here, and we’re not leaving until you feed us [laughs] and give us something to drink,” like, “We’re all up in your—“ And it was just fabulous. And it’s like the whole neighborhood is into it, and there’s a party at every other house. Then we moved to Louisiana, where it’s cold and you don’t go out. You just don’t celebrate in that way. So it’s just really different, you know, cultural adjustment. And eventually when we moved to Massachusetts, we connected with some friends who were from Puerto Rico, and they would do it, and we would like adapted version of *parranda* because it was cold as shit in Massachusetts, and there’s snow so you definitely couldn’t do the traditional ones, but we would gather in people’s houses, and have a good time. No alcohol, because those friends were Seventh Day Adventists too. But it was fun, so it was a way of reconnecting with that.

LH: You should start that tradition here.

MZS: [laughs] I totally- “*Parranda!*” on somebody’s door.

LH: [laughs] Oh man.

MZS: I have some friends in Raleigh--- that’s funny because this past Christmas, you know who I brought with me? Justin [Robinson] and Thaddaeus [Edwards]. ‘Cause Justin, turns out he grew up with a Puerto Rican family, he’s fluent in Spanish and knows all about our food and our music. Homeboy showed up and we were having the *parranda* in my friend Pati [last name?]'s little house, it’s in the living room, and he pulled out his violin, and people were like [laughs], so yeah.

LH: You just said a whole bunch of names.

MZS: Oh, Justin –

LH: I think I got it.

MZS: Okay.

LH: Okay. Man, you have like, a, Southern blend going, you know Puerto Rican Southern, have the fiddle and--

MZS: It was fun. And then Pati was like, “You know your friend with the violin? Can you invite him again?”

LH: [laughs] Did you have any particularly influential teachers when you were growing up, or when you went to college?

MZS: Yeah. So obviously there was Ms. Hoppy, which was my bilingual teacher when we first moved. And then in the fourth grade there was Ms. Holder, and the reason I remember her is because she did the whole “you’re special” thing, and I was part of a spelling bee, and then when I didn’t make it too far in the spelling bee, I was no longer special. That was crushing. And then in high school, I remember a couple of my teachers, but the one that sticks out is one who didn’t step up for me. I remember Mr. Balvin. He was our Civics—I think it’s just called Civics – class, and we were in that class one afternoon and it was not the first time that I had gotten into some argument with one of the white boys. And we were... And Mr. Balvin was in front of the class, and I was going at it with David Citro – it’s rare that I remember these names – and finally David just says to me, “Why don’t you just shut up and go back to wherever it is you came from?” [laughs] And I was just like, you know, and I was sooo crushed by that, and I look up at Mr. Balvin, waiting for him to be like, “David—“ Nothing. He just kind of moved behind his desk. And I got up, no permission, and just walked out of the class and went to, I think it was the nurse’s or something. And he didn’t call me out on it or anything. So I remember him clearly. [laughs] And my guidance

counselor in high school was incredibly helpful to me and incredibly discouraging to my sister, so it was always hard for me to understand how... But I guess we all have our flaws.

LH: You mentioned having... your mom liked to have lots of people over with food and stuff. What was some of the food that she liked to cook?

MZS: The food of my childhood. I mean, I could go on and on, but... So, we eat a lot of rice and beans, of course, rice and beans and we call it *bacalao*, which is salted cod prepared in different ways. Plantains, green and yellow, fried or mashed or boiled, all sorts of different ways. My mother would also make these, like, brown spaghettis with chicken in it—oh, so good. [laughs] It's so good. *Pastelón de harina*, which is like a... I guess the closest thing would be a shepherd's pie but made with yellow cornmeal instead of potatoes. *Platanitos en escabeche*, which is green bananas with chicken gizzards and onions and bay leaf and lemon. Before we came back to the Seventh Day Adventist church, in Puerto Rico, my mom would make an amazing octopus salad, 'cause you know, being in the Caribbean, and we would eat crab, which after being Seventh Day Adventist you couldn't eat any of that. Bummer. *Majarete*, it's a Dominican sweet dish that you make with like, grinding corn. [Rubs hands together to demonstrate.] And *panadillas*, that was a special treat, it's like a, how do you call them? Oh gosh, the stuffed flour half-moon shaped...

LH: Like empanadas?

MZS: Empanadas. We call them *empanadillas*. Yeah, and all... I could go on and on with the food, so...

LH: I have a Dominican roommate now, I'll have to go... I'll bring this list and be like, "These are things you should make me." [laughs]

MZS: Does he, he or she, cook?

LH: Yeah, she made, the other day she made us, I don't know what she called it but it was mashed plantains with um, she put a fried egg on top.

MZS: *Mangú?*

LH: Yeah. And I never would have thought – I'm not a big egg person, and I never would have thought – but it was just so good.

MZS: Yeah, *mangú*. We ate a lot of that growing up.

LH: So now I'll know what else to ask her to make. [laughs]

MZS: "Can you...?"

LH: Yeah. Okay, let's see. So... then after college, what happened?

MZS: After college, which was 1997, I went from New York City to Rockingham, North Carolina [said with exaggerated Southern accent]. My only sister was living there, she decided to settle there. And I wanted to be near family, and we wanted to move my mom up from Florida and be closer. And I got a job with the state; I started working with abused, neglected, and dependent children in the juvenile court system. Which is so much like many other people in social justice and nonprofit -- as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I wanted to protect children and work for children, and it was extremely difficult and draining work. Re-stimulating, as you can imagine... the worst cases make it to the court system. But it was also, in terms of my career, a great opportunity, and I had really great supervisors and bosses who believed in me, and it was good. I did it for two years and I went to grad school at UNC-Chapel Hill [The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill].

LH: And what did you go to grad school for?

MZS: Master's in Public Administration, because I wanted to become an Executive Director of a nonprofit eventually. And I achieved that and then decided I didn't want to be an Executive Director of a nonprofit. [laughs] Yeah.

LH: How did you get interested in working in that area, in the nonprofit world?

MZS: You know, pretty early--- I guess the first concrete experience was while I was in Syracuse, I did some volunteer work with an after-school program for under-resourced kids, mostly kids of color in the city, and I loved it. And felt like that was my life's work, working in that sort of setting, and for "the cause," whatever "the cause" was at the time. So, yeah.

LH: So then you went and got your Master's. How did you feel about your time at UNC?

MZS: It was very good and practical. Basically they paid me to go to graduate school, and that's the only way that I could afford to go in a graduate school given all the debt that I had incurred from undergrad. So I had these great fellowships, and I got to live on campus for both years, which was really awesome. You know, good classmates and it's a very practical degree in terms of accounting and budgeting and grant-writing, and I had a Certificate in Nonprofit Management, and so it definitely gave me the skills that I needed to be able to become an Executive Director. And this, you know, I feel like graduate school happened obviously while I was an adult, and it happened before my coming of age, so I was still living under this name and this persona of Mary Santiago, and I was still very much in the closet, like, *very* much in the closet. Some – I think one of my classmates or one of my teachers, after they knew I had come out and was partnered with a woman, mentioned to me, "Do you remember making a comment in class one time about homosexuality and God, and

how you just didn't believe in it?" And I was like, "God, no," but it doesn't surprise me. I was still struggling to go back into the Seventh Day Adventist church. I had this car accident where I totaled my car and I thought it was Jesus talking to me to come back to the church. Intense. [chuckles]

And so, after graduate school, I got a job and it was a job doing abused, neglected, and dependency work, but at the project director level. I didn't want to do it but they recruited me and it was a good opportunity and good pay, blah blah blah. I was following that path and I was engaged to a man, who was a very nice man but I wasn't in love with him, and I was depressed and pretending not to be depressed, and just struggling with fulfilling "the role," you know? And then the moment came where it was the wake-up call, was like, "Whoa," like, "What am I doing, and why?" And then decided to pack up my little car and drive out West. [laughs] Called off the wedding, called off the engagement, called off the relationship, in a span of like, two months, I was in Arizona. Didn't have a job, didn't know a soul, didn't know where I was gonna live, it was just me and my little ol' dog, and my green Honda Civic. And we made it, we made it work, it was beautiful. Two weeks after my arrival, I had a job in my field, working with the Boys and Girls Club, which was working for youth but in a much more positive setting. It was healing in so many ways, and I realized that I had to go that far away from home and from family and from messages of what I was supposed to be doing to actually breathe and let myself question what is it that I really want and what do I believe in, and what moves me. I finally was able to come out, which was ridiculous [laughs] how long that had been suppressed, and made some amazing friends, connected to nature in just a whole new way.

I remember going on this hike, because I would go on these solo hikes, just me and my dog, get lost on those red rocks, and I remember one time calling my mom on the phone. ‘Cause one of the reasons I had gone to Arizona was to get closer to God, I thought. And I remember calling my mom from the top of this rock in the middle of nowhere, and saying, “Mommy, this is it! This is connected to God, is being out here in nature.” And I think at first my mom was like, “Good, baby!” And then she started freaking out thinking that it was New Agey, this “God is nature” thing started freaking her out, so... But that set me on a very clear path of nature as a connector to the Great Spirit for sure. Which is still very much alive.

LH: Wow. [laughter]

MZS: That’s what happened after grad school. [laughter]

LH: So, you said that there was the big moment that you woke up and then you drove out West. What—how did that moment happen?

MZS: Do—I have a good friend, Marisol Jimenez-McGee, we met in grad school, and I remember it so clearly. I was in a funk. Again, it was depression and I was trying to disguise it as something else, and she was house-sitting in Durham and I went to visit her, and I was sobbing yet again about something. And she says, “If you could do anything right now, what would you do?” And I was like, [in a voice that sounds like she’s crying] “I would pack up my car, and just drive out West,” you know, “fulfill this dream, and I’d drive out West.” And she was like, “And why can’t you do that?” And it was this moment of like, “Why can’t I do that?!” And I got a little loan from the State Employees’ Credit Union, supposedly to buy a laptop, so it was like two grand they gave me, and that’s what I took. That’s all the money I had [laughs] when I moved out West. And I literally, from that exchange with Marisol, it triggered obviously some discussions with my fiancé, and then I

literally opened up a map and was like, “Oh, this is ‘out West.’ Where ‘out West’ do I want to go?” And I found this little town named Durango, Colorado, and I was like, “That looks really pretty because it’s in the middle of some mountains.” That’s as much as I knew. “That’s where I’ll go.” And I remember talking to an older friend of mine – older like she was a few years older than me – Milka. And I tell her, “So...” You know, one of those calls, [said really quickly] “Called off the wedding [unintelligible] and I’m driving out West.” And she was like, “Whaat? You don’t know any-“ She was panicking for me, and all these concerns for me, and then she said, “Why don’t you at least go to a place that I have been to, that I could personally vouch for: Sedona, Arizona.” And I was like, “Sedona? Isn’t that really touristy and how am I ever gonna find a job there? And, I don’t know.” And so I settled on Flagstaff, which is 45 minutes north of Sedona, because it’s a university town and it’s bigger. I thought I could find a job there. And so, that’s where I drove to: Flagstaff, Arizona. The next morning, my dog is on Eastern Standard Time, he gets up at like, 5:30, and so I decide, well we’ll daytrip down to Sedona. And the drive from Flagstaff to Sedona is this winding creek, it’s breathtakingly beautiful. You go from Aspen country down into the high desert, and that first turn that you make where the creek emerges into the red rocks, and you catch a glimpse of the red rocks and the green shrubbery and that blue sky, and I was like, “This is where I’m supposed to be.” And I picked up a little newspaper and looked in the classifieds, found a roommate. [laughs] And two weeks later found a job.

LH: So where did this dream come from of going out West?

MZS: I don’t know. I really don’t know. I had done some international traveling. While in grad school I had been to England and Ireland, and then after grad school did a solo backpacking trip through Europe – five countries in three weeks. So there was this adventure

kind of spirit in me. And it was just a part of the United States I had heard a lot of but never explored, so out West sounded wild, wonderful.

LH: And were you, I mean, was there... the way you describe sounds very kind of like, exciting and, this is where you knew you were supposed to be. Was there also part of you that was freaking out, or...?

MZS: I think the freak out came... So Sedona is a, they call it "the New Age mecca" for a lot of different reasons. And some people believe that Sedona is also on a vortex where there's vortex energy, something about the magnetic line, I couldn't explain it to you. But what it did for me was, I went with all of this yearning and hope and needing to heal so much, and explore and it, uh – how do you say? – expedites that process. And so, it was a few months after I had arrived and had developed some friends, and I had this moment where it hit me that everything that I had believed in up until that point – and this is talking like, religion and a lot of the cultural conditioning – everything that I had believed in up until that point was up for grabs. I was like, I don't know. And it was incredibly liberating, right? And freeing. And at the same time, super scary and it was in that moment that I was grieving the loss of all of that, and I felt like this little uprooted flower, where my little roots were just kind of flailing in the wind. And I think that was difficult, but the beauty and the gifts so greatly outweighed any fear or doubt that that's an experience in my life that I would never change. And since then, Sedona has become one of my spiritual homes. I feel like I can't go more than two years, and that's a stretch, without going back to those red rocks and expressing my deep gratitude and love, and going to get lost in, you know? It holds a lot of power, for me, that place, because of what it helped me work on personally, and just because of the beauty and majesty of the place itself.

LH: Had you had a connection to nature before that?

MZS: I mean, I had grew up in high school and such, camping. I think part of growing up in the Caribbean as well, having your early years be marked in a place that is so tropical and beautiful and the ocean, you in some ways get saturated with beauty at an early age, so there's always been a pull for that. But it really wasn't until Sedona that the connection to nature became sacred, you know?

LH: So you'd said you were working for the Boys and Girls Club there? So what made you leave Sedona?

MZS: I always knew that the journey was time-limited. The intention was to go out there for a year, and I was there for 15 months. And my niece and my nephew were growing up without me, and I knew I wanted to be near them. I didn't want to miss seeing them grow up and being a part of their lives, and my mother and I have a really deep connection and I didn't want to be that far away from her. And so when I left Sedona, I was like, I'll go and be there two years, and then come back – not necessarily Sedona, but out West. And I came back and fell in love with North Carolina all over again in a different way, and this had become home, and I love the South, I love the Southern aesthetic and the vibe and the people. So I don't wanna live in the town that my family is in, but near them is good.

LH: Where do they live now?

MZS: Rockingham, still.

LH: And where do you live?

MZS: Pittsboro, now, North Carolina.

LH: So how far is it between those?

MZS: An hour and a half. Perfect distance.

LH: So then what did you do when you came back?

MZS: I started working for El Pueblo, which is a Latino advocacy organization that I had admired for years, and they happened to have an opening as a youth program director, and I got the gig. And it was great, you know great work and really respectable people I was working with, and it was fun, and I was working with my best friend, Marisol, one of my best friends. It was good. It was a good fit.

LH: It says on here that you were a ESL instructor at one point?

MZS: Uh huh.

LH: Where did that come in?

MZS: That came in when I was living in Rockingham, and I started doing it part-time through the community college, and it was awesome. Most of my students were from Mexico, and so there were times where my Spanish was, there were words they didn't understand, and it was like, figures. Because they couldn't understand the English, they couldn't understand my Spanish. Most of them were farmworkers or working in one of the factories, so it took a lot for them to come to class, and I really appreciated that. And then I did it again later on, when I was living in Raleigh, through a community college system here in Raleigh.

LH: Alright, well, we have 10 minutes left, so I'm kind of hesitant to get started on a whole new topic. I don't know if there's anything about the stuff that we've covered today that you wanted to add, or...?

MZS: No. I talk a lot.

LH: [laughs] No, everybody says that when they get interviewed, but it's not like that, really.

MZS: Yeah?

LH: Yeah, you have great stories and we're glad to hear it, so...

MZS: Thank you, that's sweet.

LH: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW