

4-13-2011

Rosa Torres Caskey interview for a Wright State University History Course

Elise Kelly

Rosa Torres Caskey

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Kelly, E., & Caskey, R. T. (2011). Rosa Torres Caskey interview for a Wright State University History Course.

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Profile

Narrator Name: Rosa Torres Caskey

Interviewer: Elise Kelly

Author: Elise Kelly

Date of Interview: 04/13/11

Subject: Oral History Interview with the former president of Dayton's LULAC chapter. LULAC is the largest and oldest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. Rosa Caskey discusses her life and community service experiences.

Key Words:

Waco, Texas

Family

Head Start Program

Latino Communities

Presbyterian

Discrimination

Central State University

Dayton, Ohio

LULAC

Social Justice

Diversity

Immigration Reform

El Puente Learning Center

Migrants

Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities: An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey, HST 708: Oral History Seminar, Dr. Marjorie McLellan, Spring Quarter 2011

Rosa Torres Caskey was born in 1951 and was raised in Waco, Texas. She grew up surrounded by several extended family members who were all very protective and loving. Both of Rosa's grandparents were Mexican immigrants. Her grandmother on her mother's side was the matriarch of the family. Rosa was very close to her grandmother and learned life skills such as sewing and cooking. Bucking the Latino cultural trend, her parents only had three children and both of them were bread winners. This allowed the family to have more financial and economic opportunities. During Rosa's early years as a child, her parents enrolled her into the Head Start Program. Here, she developed her passion for learning. Since her parents valued and education they moved the family out of the "barrio section" of town and purchased a home in a more affluent area. Because of this, Rosa

attended Bells Hills Elementary School, which was predominantly an all white student population. Rosa did not like being away from her friends and family who were attending the all Latino schools. During Rosa's childhood, she became aware at a young age of the concepts of discrimination and inequality. When Rosa and her siblings wished to visit the local libraries or convenient stores in town, they were always advised to travel in a pack of three family members. This is because Latinos were not safe or welcomed in institutional places that were run by white owners.

A large part of Rosa's childhood was centered on religion. Living in the southern part of Texas, surrounded and influenced by several different Christian religions, Rosa's family considered themselves Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Pentecostal. She explains that "Growing up we were very faith based. We were allowed to do anything if it pertained to church or was part of church or another church."¹ Religion has played an important role throughout Rosa's life. Living near Baylor University, many of the university students would come into the Latino community that Rosa lived in and distributed religious literature. This had a profound effect on Rosa not only because she had the opportunity to read and learn about the Christian religion but she, at an early age, witnessed and experienced the work of community service.

When Rosa was fifteen years old she got pregnant and married the father of her child. Although she was ready to graduate from high school and was already taking community college courses, she found her self married with a young child. Unhappy in her marriage, she filed for divorce soon after the matrimony. While in community college she met her husband. Since David was from Ohio he wanted to get married and move back to Ohio to start a family. She was excited with the idea of living in a new place so the couple settled in Xenia, Ohio. However, Rosa had a hard time adjusting to the cultural differences in Ohio. She explains that,

"All the brown people were the leaders, were the commissioners, were the teachers, were the shop owners, the grocery clerks; they were the ones in charge of what I thought the whole world. Until I came to Ohio and I thought, where did all these white people come from (laughs)? I'm serious, I

¹ Rosa Torres Caskey, interviewed by Elise Kelly, Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities: An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey , University Library, Wright State University, April 13, 2011.

thought, what have they done to the brown people? Growing up in the South you have a very – more welcoming environment; happy, greeting, pleasant atmosphere. In Ohio everyone looks at you like their suspicious of something and because we came to Ohio, Ohio did not have a lot of Hispanics.”²

Rosa further explains that she grew up with such a sense of self worth and pride in her heritage and culture but she found herself struggling in Ohio where no one seemed to respect or understand her. She faced discrimination in local stores where employees would simply ignore her and would wait as long as they could to wait on her.

As the family began to settle in Xenia, Rosa got a job working as a Xenia City Schools library aid. During this time, since she was missing her family and the presence of her culture and people, her and her husband would take weekend drives out to the migrant camps. There she found solace and guidance from Latino migrant families. Since Rosa’s grandparents and her mother were migrant laborers, Rosa felt a special need to help them. She found that the local school systems did not recruit Hispanic migrant children and subsequently she then worked with the school systems to help reach out to these children in need. As an elder of her Presbyterian Church, she engineered and started a Hispanic Ministry organization. Getting on church boards, she developed connections and worked with the Buckeye Trails Girls Scout Council. Here, she was able to help train young girls in diversity and leadership skills. Seeing that the Latino population in Southwest Ohio needed a LULAC chapter, Rosa decided to start one in 2002. She became the leader to Dayton’s LULAC chapter and through LULAC she strives to “make sure that people know they do have rights: They have rights to an attorney, they have a right to an education. The majority of the people we're talking about are not the undocumented people. It might be someone who has language barriers and can't communicate well.”³ As the leader Rosa was able to administer grant money from LULAC and start a learning center with a computer lab for Latino children.

² Rosa Torres Caskey, interviewed by Elise Kelly, *Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities: An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey*, University Library, Wright State University, April 13, 2011.

³ Matthew Fiorentino, “Xenia woman to be honored with Access to Justice Award,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 19, 2007, Z4-1.

In 2009 Rosa served as the coordinator of this after school educational program. Although the program initially faltered because of location and lack of visitors the change in location has helped the program grow to become very successful. Children are getting better marks in school and their parents are becoming more involved in their children's education. Rosa sees that El Puente Learning Center is the most gratifying accomplishment that she has been involved with. She explains that she "wanted to develop an environment where it was a learning environment, yet it was a playful environment where the kids felt safe and that they felt like they could ask us any kinds of questions and at the same time be respectful."⁴ She hopes to serve as a Latino role-model for children from lower-income families who often don't see Latinos in powerful influential positions.

As a leader of many Latino organizations, Rosa is concerned with the current immigration system. She advocates for an immigration reform bill that would guarantee more rights and freedoms to Latinos. She is acutely aware of the growing population of Latinos and wonders why Latinos still cannot break into political and economic leadership roles. She hopes that her work will help generate commitment and awareness to future generations. Because of her hard work and dedication, Rosa was honored at the Access to Justice Awards on May 1, 2007 for her efforts on behalf of the Miami Valley's Hispanic community."⁵ She explained during the award ceremony that "I am really honored with this nomination, but I don't do this work for the awards or the recognition. I do it as a public service. It's important to me to make sure that the voices of the voiceless are heard. There are so many people who won't come forward...and all we have to do is speak up for them."⁶

After almost twenty years of employment at the National Museum of Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center as the volunteer coordinator, Rosa was let go due to budget constraints. Going back to school full time, Rosa graduated from Central State last December. With a bachelor's degree in education, Rosa began to look for employment. Early this year Rosa interviewed and accepted a position as a Head Start instructor. Going

⁴ Rosa Torres Caskey, interviewed by Elise Kelly, Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities: An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey , University Library, Wright State University, April 13, 2011.

⁵ "Community: Rosa Torres Caskey to Receive Award," Midwest Latino, accessed April 10, 2011, <http://www.midwestlatino.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1013>.

⁶ "Community: Rosa Torres Caskey to Receive Award," Midwest Latino, accessed April 10, 2011, <http://www.midwestlatino.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1013>.

back to her roots, Rosa will be the coordinator for the Migrant Head Start Program in Piqua, Ohio.

Rosa Torres Caskey is a woman committed to causes that work for justice and equality. As a leader, Rosa has built and created many organizational service programs throughout the community. She is an honest, dedicated, and fearless woman who selflessly gives her all to achieve the benefits for all. Rosa passionately explains that she is

“An advocate for other people because I think I can use words to make my point. I’m not derogatory, I’m not threatening, or I try not to be. I try to tell another person’s story from my mind’s eye as to how I see it. I try to have them understand it so that they can have a better understanding because a lot of it is fear; a lot of it is fear and what they don’t know, what they don’t understand. I find that I can roll up my sleeves and fight for somebody else. I don’t always fight for myself but if there’s a cause I will fight for it and if I see that it’s an injustice, a social issue that has an impact on a greater community.”⁷

As members of communities, we need to take into consideration and remind ourselves these words of wisdom.

⁷ Rosa Torres Caskey, interviewed by Elise Kelly, Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities: An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey , University Library, Wright State University, April 13, 2011.

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: ¡ Viva La Iguladad! Leading and Empowering Latino Communities:
An Oral History Interview with Rosa Torres Caskey

Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and
Geography, Wright State University

Archives or repository

Interviewee/narrator name: Rosa Torres Caskey

Interviewer name: Elise Kelly

Others present

Place: Wright State University, Millett Hall, Small Conference Room

Date: 4/13/11

Length of recording: 2:23:28

Original format: wav

Key words:

Waco, Texas

Family

Head Start Program

Latino Communities

Presbyterian

Discrimination

Central State University

Dayton, Ohio

LULAC

Social Justice

Diversity

Immigration Reform

Delores Huerta

Joan Southgate

El Puente Learning Center

Migrants

September 11, 2001 (9/11)

Indexed by: Elise Kelly

Index

0:00:00-0:00:37 Introduction to the recording.

Information listed above.

0:00:37 - 0:33:53 Childhood

Ms. Caskey explains in great detail about her childhood experiences. She discusses how she grew up in Waco, Texas in a Latino community. She explains how she was a Head Start student and how education was very important to her and her family. She discusses the close relationships that she

had and has with her family and the how religion played an important role in her early life. She also explains the discrimination that she and fellow Latinos faced while living in Texas.

Keywords:

Waco, Texas
Education
Head Start Program
Family
Mexico
Hispanic
Religion
Discrimination

[V: Family, Community, Education, Faith] [E: Joy, Excitement, Confusion, Bitterness] [R: Appreciation, Condemnation, Struggle, Critical]

0:33:53 – 51:45:18 Education Background and Early Married Life Experiences

Ms. Caskey discusses how she recently finished obtaining her degree in education at Central State University. She goes on to discuss her experiences of getting pregnant at an early age and re-marrying her second husband. Being on seventeen years old, she moved to Ohio with her husband. She explains the difficult experiences of adjusting to a new place and how it was a culture shock for her. She also discusses the discrimination that she faced when settling in Ohio.

Keywords:

Central State University
Pregnant at a Young Age
Married Life
Culture Shock
Dayton, Ohio
Discrimination

[V: Education, Culture, Family] [E: Joy, Sadness, Confusion, Excitement] [R: Struggle, Critical, Assessment]

51:45:18 – 1:13:17 Early Job Experiences and Early Married Life Experiences

Ms. Caskey talks about how difficult it was to find a job in Ohio since she was so young but goes on to explain how she found a job at the Xenia City Schools. She discusses how she took advantage of the development programs that her job offered. She then goes on to explain how she and her husband would visit the migrant camps in Ohio. Furthermore, she discusses how it was difficult to adjust to living in Ohio without having her Mexican culture present and she explains the difficulties of being around her husband's family who were at times not respectful of her ethnic background.

Keywords:

Employment
Xenia City Schools
Developmental Programs
Migrant Camps
Culture
Family
Ethnicity

[V: Employment, Culture, Faith, Family, Community] [E: Grief, Confusion] [R: Affirmation, Struggle]

1:13:17 – 2:09:22 Community Work

Ms. Caskey discusses her experiences in the many Latino community organizations that she has led and has been apart of. Some of these include starting a Hispanic Ministry at her Presbyterian Church, beginning a LULAC chapter in the Southwest Ohio Region, and developing a learning center of Latino children. She also discusses what needs to be done politically, economically, and educationally to help better the lives of young Latinos and the life lessons she has learned with doing community work.

Keywords:

Hispanic Ministry

Presbyterian Church

Latino Community

Advocacy

LULAC

Latino Connection

Migrant Workers

Delores Huerta

Civil Rights Liberty Union Award

Joan Southgate

El Puente Learning Center

Linden Avenue Baptist Church

Catholic Hispanic Ministry

Tony Ortiz

Maria Goeser

Immigration Reform

9/11

Hispanic Population

Organization

NAACP

Commitment

Faith

[V: Faith, Service, Justice, Equality, Community] [E: Excitement, Joy, Anger, Uncertainty, Frustration] [R: Critical, Condemnation, Assessment, Affirmation, Appreciation, Struggle]

2:09:22 – 2:23:28 Family and New Employment Opportunity

Ms. Caskey discusses the death of her husband and how that was a difficult time period in her life. She worked for almost twenty years at the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio but this year that had to lay her off because of budget cuts. She then goes on to discuss her experiences of obtaining a position in the Head Start Program. As of this summer, she will become the coordinator of the Migrant Head Start Program in Piqua, Ohio.

Keywords:

Family

Death

National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center

Wilberforce, Ohio

Unemployment

Budget Cuts

Migrant Head Start Program

Piqua, Ohio

[V: Family, Education, Service, Equality, Community] [E: Sorrow, Grief, Joy, Excitement] [R: Affirmation, Struggle]

Oral History Interview

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Transcribed by

Elise Kelly

Interview transcript

Kelly: First off, tell me about your childhood and adolescent experiences?

Caskey: Ok, childhood experiences. I grew up in Waco, Texas. My immediate family is a small family because my mother was the eldest of thirteen children and she had it in her mind that she was not going to have a lot of children because she played that role as a parent to her siblings. So there were three all together in my immediate family but I have an enormous extended family with 12 uncles and aunts who have five, six, eight, nine children. So that gave for a lot of cousins to play with. The family structure was very loving, very protective; we were always within a family member of some kind. Sort of like, I think of the mother hen and her little chicks. As she got busy and had to do other things she just passed them on to somebody else, a member of our family. We didn't have paid babysitters like we think of today or child care centers etc. But my grandparents had - lived out in the country and so we spent a lot of time out in the country. No restrictions, no restrictions, we got to play and do whatever we wanted to. We ate twice a day, light breakfast usually cereal or oatmeal or something like that, or eggs because she had chickens. Then sort of later in the day not really noon but later in the day three or four clock-ish that was our dinner hour. That was the good heavy meal that we had. I try to keep that practice because if we eat too late then we're stuffed and we want to go to bed and you're sitting on it.

Kelly: So you don't have lunch it's just breakfast and then a kind of an early dinner?

Caskey: Mmm-hmm. A lot of people call that desayuno and the desayuno is the morning - here it would be like a brunch. You don't eat early breakfast but you eat sort of a brunch and then you eat later. Growing up we were very faith based. We were allowed to do anything if it pertained to church or was part of church or another church. So we tried to do as many of those activities as we could so that we could have more social interaction with folks and do a lot of things. I went to school; I was a Head Start [Head Start program provides comprehensive education, health, and parent involvement services to low- income children and their families] student so I guess that would be pre-k. I grew up in the - I was born in '51; I'll be 60 this year so I'm one of those baby-boomers. Head start was very available to the Latino communities and a lot of families

didn't actively participate in that because they wanted to keep their children at home for the most part. Education was not one of those things that you were anxious to get into right away because they really felt like you still needed to be nurtured as a family so families had that responsibility to do that. My aunt was one of the teachers at a church pre-school and it was La Escuelita which means "The Little School" and she was one of the teachers there. She had encouraged my mother to put us into the Head Start program, put us into the Head Start program. We're really going to take advantage – we could have some advantages if we can get into this Head Start program. She was a teacher there so I'm sure we were given some priorities, so I went to the Head Start school and I was like a sponge. I just loved it and I got to play with kids and didn't have to fight with my brother and sister (laughs) and so this was fun because it made me feel special. I was a middle child; I wasn't the oldest, I wasn't the baby, so going to Head Start was really fun for me. I guess that was my first taste of education and my taste for learning. I made my aunt very proud because now I'm in the field of education and I was sending her daughter my graduation card or invitation to let her know that this graduation, this diploma to me, is attributed to her.

One of the things that is very important in our culture is that we honor our elders. You never argue with an elder or someone of authority and anyone who is older than you are is someone of authority (points to herself and laughs). So we honor that, you follow the rules. I think I grew up in a time where things were much more different than they are today. I remember when my mom started working and that meant that for a lot of Hispanic families they have one sole bread winner, the dad. The mom stays home and I can remember when my mom went to work. She sorted tomatoes at some tomato place and she put them into little baskets and then moved them on. When she went to work we kind of took care of our selves because we were a little older and it gave us more opportunities because now we had a family with two incomes. My dad purchased a house which was on the other side of town and they knew they were going to make payments etc. This was sort of a step-up and for a lot of our other families they were still single income. They didn't move out of the barrio sections or the lower end of town and so they went to the all Latino schools. I went to Bells Hill which was predominately white and I was very angry about that because I was not with my friends, not with my family.

Kelly: Did she want to do that to make more money to have the kids go to...?

Caskey: To a better school. Again, my family had a lot of opportunities that a lot of other families did not have. My dad went into the military and his experiences in the military opened his eyes to a lot of things; that there was communities and cities beyond ours, (laughs) neighborhoods beyond ours. So when he came back he married my mom. They started to talk about their dreams and aspirations and one day own a house and not have a lot of kids. So they – I see them as pioneers with what they were trying to do. It didn't make sense at the time, when you're a child, nothing makes sense other than they're destructing your life and you hate them (laughs). You're not going to do chores and that kind of stuff. So you try to rebel whenever you can.

But I remember my mom going to work and we had a television – we didn't lack for anything, we had basics. We had our shelter, we had food, we had clothes, and we had two pair of shoes that most families had then. You had your church shoes and you had your everyday shoes. Your everyday shoes were school shoes, were your play shoes and we because of extended family, you passed all of that down so if you didn't wear it out you got somebody else's hammy-downs. I used to tell my cousin if she got something new, oh take care of this because I want those (laughs). I remember there was a particular dress that I really liked and I would say, oh please, I'll grow [into] it because I want that dress (laughs). But when my mom

went to work this goes to following structure and respect to our families. They would give us the rules: you clean your room, you can read, you can go outside and play, you can go to the neighbors and play with Virgie and Jenny only for an hour and come home for lunch. Don't turn on the stove, don't turn on the T.V. and we're like, check, check, check, yes, yes, yes. We never turned on the T.V., we didn't turn on the stove and after I had my own kids, in retrospect, I had this discussion with my husband when I'd say; did you turn on the T.V. after you were told not to? "Oh, yes as soon as they left the door we were getting in anything we could, rootin' around, going through their bedrooms," and I was just appalled that they would even consider something like that because if we were told not to touch it we didn't touch it. We had a shot gun that stayed in the kitchen corner and you didn't touch it.

Kelly: Do you think that this is a Latino – because you respect your elders – do you think that was kind of a...?

Caskey: I'm sure it was very cultural. We have family reunions and we laugh to this day because we think we could have turned that T.V. on anytime! (laughs) How would they have known? But you're children and you think they're going to know, they're just going to know. They're going to turn on the T.V. and the newscaster is going to say "this T.V. was on during such and such a time," and we had no clue! (laughs) But I had a very loving childhood, I had – I was considered a free-spirit because I liked to do different things, a variety of things. I was always encouraged to try anything. To this day I say, my dad always said I was the princess, and I'm the princess and so I go first (laughs).

Kelly: Can you explain if your parents or grandparents were immigrants?

Caskey: My parents were not, my grandparents were. We don't consider ourselves as immigrants. We were already indigenous to this country of North America so we didn't travel anywhere to get anywhere (laughs). My grandfather worked for the railroad and he was in Mexico. As Texas was growing they were soliciting workers, America has that tradition. They promise you all kinds of things and with that he got hired for the railroad and of course he had to move migrate a little farther so that he could travel with the railroad. He brought his wife, my mom, and I think Uncle Sam who was the only two that were born at that time. They had promised him United States citizenship, he could have dual citizenship and they didn't have the borders then that they have. You could travel and commute like you're going to Beavercreek and Xenia or Fairborn and you went to work and you came back and you went to work and you came back. So the borders weren't there; you didn't have to check in and check out or anything. But they chose to move farther up the inland I guess or main part of - the central part of Texas so that he would be closer to his work again, closer to his wife and the kids. The core family again was together so he moved farther into Texas and so most of my – well all of my uncles and aunts were all born in the United States, in Texas. My grandfather and my grandmother were not.

They literally were born out in the rural areas and in the rural areas if you are not a farmer or a sheepherder or training horses or cows, that kind of field, you tried to migrate into the bigger cities where you can have paying jobs or you were an entrepreneur and you created some kind of source of income for your families, future family. On my dad's side of the family, they too were of Mexican descent – I mean they were indigenous people of Mexico. My grandfather was a horse-trainer and as he got traded from farm to farm, well we need you to come help us with our horses here or a rancher might say "well you know Pete's really good with horses we'll see if he will go up and work with you." Whatever they do to train the horses, when that gets done he can choose to go back or come back or whatever, and so my grandfather at the time chose to move into Texas to train horses. They would on the weekends kick up their heels

and go to the big city and party and shoot their pistols and drink beers, cervezas [beer]. He met a pretty farm girl in his route to the big city to go celebrate and he would see my grandmother all the time and she would sell flowers or whatever they had on the farm. She would sell them to the people that passed by and so they struck up conversation and decided to get married and so that's the Torres side of the family. They decided to move to another farm where he could have better work, better pay and so that's what they did. My grandfather always worked for some kind of farm whether it was working with the horses or working with sheep. I remember as a child sittin' on the fence, remember I said my parents didn't have babysitters, so they took us with them. My dad would help his dad on the weekends to shear sheep and so to give mom a break I guess. I don't even remember if he took all of us or some of us or whatever, but I was always a little tomboy and I was girly because mom always put dresses on me and bows in my hair and socks with my shoes and all this other stuff. I was girly but I liked the outdoors. When dad would go help grandpa shear the sheep, I can remember sittin' on top of the fence in this little dress watching them do that. To me it was just like getting a haircut, so that was sort of a weekend ritual that I loved to go because they would chase the animals around and take care of them and that was pretty interesting for me.

My grandmother, well my grandpa was the animal care giver; my grandmother was the matriarch of that side of the family. You didn't do anything unless it was sanctioned by her; she gave approval for a lot of things. She fixed lunch religiously everyday and everyday her boys would come and get a little burrito and say hello and catch up on whatever and they would go off to work. Or come in the mornings, have a cup of coffee and go to work. But everyday that was a daily thing. We got to see my grandmother quite often because we lived very close to each other so we would walk across the highway to where she lived and then we would visit with her. A lot of times we wouldn't come home until my dad got off work and he come pick us up. We spent a lot of quality time with grandparents on both sides of the family. My favorite is the grandmother that I'm talking about, the matriarch. She could cook anything and everything and just was pleasing to whatever she came up with. If we were hungry if it was, one of my favorites is peanut butter and syrup.

Kelly: Really?

Caskey: Yes, you just got peanut butter and you poured syrup over it and you got to eat it and it was just wonderful. She made tortillas everyday; everyday she made tortillas a couple times a day. She needle point embroidered and sewed. She did a lot of our clothes and as she got material or she found material or if someone gave her material, she was always measuring you to see how much you've grown and if she had to take out a hem or if she had enough material for a new skirt or shorts or a little blouse or something. She was the one that to me, that I remembered, that I want to sew, I want to cook, I want to do those kinds of things that my grandmother did. She was very instrumental in my growth and I still say she's my little angel to not only my values and my ethics about what's right and what's wrong. If we got into trouble a lot of her neighbors and her own children, my uncles and aunts, would drop the kids off and they would go to work and Mamito would take care of the kids. Of course she had to be the referee to everything that went on, we did have a swing set and we had a big tree that we climbed and we played on this big tree. But if you got into trouble, usually somebody would come up the steps. We had three little steps to the porch, if somebody tattled, or if somebody got hurt, or if somebody got into trouble, you went up those three little steps and she heard the story and then you both sat down. You both sat down and she would make you have some kind of interaction. She usually gave you something to sew, you were either darning socks or you were doing some

embroidery. If the infraction was very severe she would bring out the Bible and you would start memorizing verses. You couldn't slack off on that because she would take the Bible and she'd say, "did you read them?" "Oh yeah, we read them." "Ok, well tell me which ones you read." She then would open them up and she [inaudible] while you were reading it (laughs). So once we tried to get away with not reading the verses we found out later that you had to because she was checking on you and so we did, we had to read a lot of Bible verses. So she was the referee as far as (laughs) what happened with my family. It teaches you fairness, it teaches you justice even if they're cousins or the neighbors down the street. That's how it begins I think. So she was my favorite. One of the other things that I remember, not only the peanut butter and the syrup was the – we didn't do a lot of sweets and pastries. We had fresh fruits and vegetables almost everyday. Of course we had all kinds of meat because she had chickens and we always had meat of some kind, which isn't always the case for the families, so we knew we were blessed, we knew we were blessed. You said your prayers every time you sat down to eat and when you finished eating you had to say, "gracias a dios," which means thanks to god. If you dared to walk off the table without saying that she would remind you that, "you ate, you ate and you didn't give thanks?!" (laughs) So it was like oh, excuse me, gracias a dios, gracias a dios. That was your ritual and to this day I say gracias a dios every time we eat.

Kelly: So religion was important when you were a child?

Caskey: Very - on my mom's side of the family, religion was very important and we were avid goers of church. On my mom's side of the family they were Pentecostal so that was sort of the more physical kind of church especially revivals. On my dad's side of the family they were Catholic and Presbyterian. The Presbyterian Church was - they had a Mexican Presbyterian Church and so we were very much apart of that because they spoke Spanish. All of the leadership, the elders, and the laity were all Spanish speakers and in fact a lot of my family were members of the church and led the church worship. Again, if it had anything to do with church we could participate because it had church involved. I was raised Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Pentecostal. The Baptist comes in because we lived right in the center of Baylor College. Baylor is a Baptist college and a lot of the students would come into the neighborhoods passing out literature and they were always doing summer programs with the kids. They adopted our church and then there was a Presbyterian church that was also within that community. So the Presbyterian Church, the Anglo-American or the white church, would partner with the Mexican church and so they did a lot of things to ensure our success. They had all kinds of classes and all kinds of activities and programs and then when they needed college students on board they brought in Baylor and so Baylor also brought their Baptist literature and all this other stuff. We got to do a lot of things; we had a lot of opportunities and a lot of programs. So yes, religion was very much apart of our daily lives and rituals because we used to be apart of the fundraising for the church on Sunday evenings and Wednesdays. I'm an elder of my church and I'm still a Presbyterian and I've helped to grow Hispanic ministry. Somebody was teasing me because they said "is there anybody that doesn't know you?" I said, between Ohio and Michigan it would be close but outside those borders, yeah, yeah. It's the church really that - it's the ministry that happens where people get to know me.

Kelly: Tell me about your educational background.

Caskey: Well it started in head start! (laughs) I was a pretty good student. I ran track and that was during the period where women couldn't compete in sports. To participate, we could run, the women or girls could run but they weren't counted in the relays and the scores and all this other stuff. But the girls could do that and then eventually we ran with the boys, we didn't have a

girl's team. If they needed fillers they used the girls so we were always cheering that one of the guys would fall or something would happen or he wouldn't show up or something so we would get an opportunity to play. That was our introduction into getting into sports.

I liked school, my parents - my mom was uneducated because of the large family that she had and because they were cotton pickers and worked in the fields they didn't have the opportunities. Education really was not valued as much; getting a good paying job was the thing to get on my mom's side of the family. She went to the third grade and by the time she got to the third grade she was always being pulled out because another baby was being born and she had to take care of the baby and so she didn't go to school. My dad, he did go to school. He went through the eighth grade, he went to middle school. So by the time he got of age he was able to join the army and at that time you didn't have to have a lot of education you just had to be able to have the physical strength and pass that to get in. I think you had to be able to read and write some, I'm sure, I'm sure. My dad was the educated one and my mom really was not. My mom didn't get educated until after my dad passed away and we were educating my mom. We were translating for my mom; we were doing so many things for my mom because she just didn't have the where with all.

My dad used to read books to us. We had access to books through the church; we had access to books through Baylor because they always wanted to make sure that we had access to them and they'd give them to you, they were free. We were allowed, because the library was in our community, we were allowed to walk to the library. A lot of families were not allowed to walk to the library and did not go into institution kinds of buildings. But we were allowed to go because it was within our community and if we went as a group, safety in numbers, we were allowed to go. We were always trying to see if so and so wanted to go and so and so wanted to go because we had to have at least more than three to go.

Kelly: Can you explain that about how you said – were you not allowed to go to some places like the public library?

Caskey: Yes, any type of institution or any type of building that was white. We couldn't go to the big grocery store; we couldn't go to the 7-11. I'm trying to think of what else that couldn't have been available. We couldn't go to the gas station, we couldn't go to the library that was close and we knew that was a public building. My cousins and my aunts and uncles that were my age couldn't go to those places but we were allowed to walk up there and we had a library card. We would check out books and so my dad was the reader for us. Through the church we could get books, through the library we could get books, so we were always at least reading once a week. Now what was interesting was if we were bad or if we were grounded or whatever, we were not allowed to go to the library. We got our privileges taken away. I think of that today and I'm thinking that's the worst thing you want to do as a parent! (laughs) You don't want to take away those privileges like throw books at them and see if they want to read. I liked to read, my brother didn't like to read, but we always had to bribe him that we would buy him a candy bar or something if he would walk with us because we had to have the three in numbers. A lot of times if my little sister didn't want to walk that far then we would negotiate with my grandma that if she kept my sister, then we would take Belinda, or we would take Janie with us, or we would take Joey with us so that we could have our numbers to go and we would go. A lot of times we would just go for the walk and then come back. We had access to - I had access to books; we had access to higher learning. That made a big impression on me and still does to this day that parents that read to their children are influenced by that. I think of all my other cousins and I'll say, have you read such and such, and they're like, "no, I don't read." Unless it's the newspaper

or – plus you have – I kind of like the cell phones and the texting and the emails because now I’m thinking, oh, you have to read. You have to spell! (laughs) Well, they’re not spelling well because you can cheat on the spelling but they’re reading emails and they’re reading the cell phones. I think it’s funny. But we did read, we did read. My sister is an avid reader, my brother is not. I’m an avid reader. I haven’t read a lot in the last couple of years because everything that I have read has been textbooks pertaining to my school (laughs).

Kelly: So you’re trying to get your degree in education?

Caskey: I just got my degree in education.

Kelly: Here or...?

Caskey: Actually I got it at Central State, when I tried to transfer in they said, “well you’re a senior over there,” and it didn’t make sense and I thought ok, you choose your battles and that’s not one of them that you’re going to choose. I graduated from Central State and when there’s a difference in family culture in the Hispanic community because in some cases girls go through their quincinera which is their fifteenth birthday which means they make a commitment to the church and they also are promising to their families that they will abstain until they’re married. But at that time it’s sort of a coming of age, a coming out, so that you are allowed to have suitors and allowed to date and allowed to have a social life. I think of my cousins who grew up in that way and they didn’t get married until they were in their twenties. On the other hand, there are other families that got married at fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen and quit school to have families or they were pregnant. I got married when I was fifteen and I think that happened because I lost my dad when I was about ten. I didn’t have that double parenting and I didn’t have that father figure that could make sure that the boys didn’t come around. I got to be a little promiscuous and I wound up pregnant and then they said, “well, you have to get married.” I did not want to get married at fifteen because I was ready to graduate from high school and I was going to community college.

Kelly: That’s so young! Wow.

Caskey: Yes, and that was at fifteen and I was pretty excited about that and then reality hits. My aunt insisted that I get married and you can see, I look at those wedding pictures and I even show them to my grand daughters when they were growing up and I said, see this picture, this is not a happy person. This is not a happy person because look, she is pregnant and she doesn’t want to get married to this guy because he is a good friend and she loved him at the time, but knew that he was not ready to get married and be a father. But see all these other aunts and uncles (laughs), that’s the pressure that I had. It wasn’t the peer pressure; it was the family pressure that you had to do the right thing and you had to be married and blah, blah, blah. I did that; I got married and had my son so that he was not a son out of wedlock because again, what are people going to think and that was traditional for you to be married. While I was – right after I had my son, I went back because I was supposed to start in the Fall. But he was born in August so by January I was going back to the community college saying is there any way I can start school. I was a different bird, they had no clue what I was doing there because here I was a mother with a child trying to go back to school and you’re only fifteen?! So again, you have this institution that tells you what you’re supposed to do and how things are supposed to go. You’re thinking well, this is reality and this is my scenario. So my extended family; my mom, my aunt and my grandma helped to take care of my son while I tried to go back to school. About the time I was thinking, oh, I’m going to finish school, this is going to be great and I love what I’m doing. I worked in a library and I was getting an associates degree in library science and it was slash instructional

media where you get to play with all the AV equipment. You set up the equipment for people to have programs and just...

Kelly: Cool.

Caskey: Yes, you know like, we need this computer – I think of computers but this overhead isn't working and so you're running over there with your little light bulbs because you know that's what you do. About that time I met my husband and I had already gotten divorced and all that. My husband, he was just - he was love at first sight. He said, "how would you like to move to Ohio?" I thought, you are nuts! (laughs) I thought well, getting out of Texas would not be bad and if you've ever been to Texas it just goes forever and you're thinking if I ever get out of Texas because we used to visit our families and it would take hours. You could drive all day and not get there so you would have to drive the next day. So the idea of getting out of Texas, that was a good idea. So we got married and he was meeting my family and he was doing all the right things that he needed to do and of course this is the guy that I really wanted to marry. So I said you have to meet my grandmother because nothing will happen until you meet my grandmother. My mom, piece of cake, that's nothing and sure enough we had a little obstacle because he was an American, he was white, and she was not too crazy about that idea. It was funny because all my other relatives were saying, "you're not going to marry him!" "They're not going to let you get married to this white guy" (laughs). I thought well, we'll just see. We always said *primero dios*, *primero dios*; if it's in God's hands then it will happen and if it's not then we'll see. They met and they hit it off and we had lunch. He ate everything that she prepared which is important because it's an insult not to eat and not to clean your plate. He passed everything with flying colors and then he introduced the idea of my leaving Texas and of course she got very irate with that about that's not going to happen. She was like, tell him tell him, and I'm trying to translate and so I said, she wants us to take some time because it's too soon. We had met in November and he wanted to get married in December and she said no. Then he has said he wanted to leave the following year while he finished his term there in Texas and then we would leave the following year to leave for Ohio and she said no. So we left sort of disenchanted about our dream (laughs) and how are we going to get grandma on board with this.

We visited her often which I think is what she wanted. We visited her often and every time he came into town he visited with her and he already knew that he had gotten – my mom was yeah, ok, because the first marriage to our elders is the one that's important, the first marriage. A lot of them will say, "why do you want to get divorced, just stick it out." "It's a commitment, this is a decision you made – you've made your bed now lie in it, end of discussion." So we finally won over grandma, mamito and she – I talked to her constantly about, I can fly home. "Oh, you can't fly home you," you can't do this. There's a telephone, "oh, but you can't get hugs over the phone," and just all kinds of things and "what if I need help with dinner or something?" because I was always kitchen's little helper. In time she – we won her over. I was going to community college then and I don't know what I was thinking, I was a child because I really felt like I was going to finish school and still get married and still finish up school. It just didn't click. It didn't click and so we had met in November, we married in February, and then we left in March. In February, then I realized that after we had gotten married that I – if we're leaving in March, I'm not going to finish this semester. He said, "go ahead and withdrawal and you can go to school in Ohio and you'll finish." I told him how important this was for my dad for us to get an education because he really saw that if you had an education, you had more opportunities. I think he saw that in the military, when he was in the military, and he couldn't stress that enough to all of us. So I withdrew, came to Ohio, had my son, so I didn't go

to school right away. I was trying to learn the community; I was trying to learn the culture because it's so different. I was very homesick, cried a lot. Big, big changes for me, a lot of growth happened within that year. My husband was very nurturing and very compassionate with what I was going through with what needed to happen. He let me call (laughs) anytime of the day or night that I wanted to call home. If I said but I have to go home, he would save enough money so that I got a ticket and I got to go home and visit and that was probably the best thing for me. They didn't charge like they did for children at that time so you could get like a child ticket. So I flew home quite often, at least a couple times a year. I didn't go back to school for a while and then I started our own family.

After I think, once I started – my daughter was born a couple of years later and then I started to work. Most places where you work they offer some kind of educational self development package. So I took opportunities to go to school while I was employed at different locations. Then as I grew up I guess, my interests changed a little bit and life gives you detours and so you take these little detours. I took a lot of psychology and sociology to try and understand the culture, the people, my husband, and his family because they were totally different from my family.

Kelly: Can you explain what that culture was like when came to Ohio, how different it was?

Caskey: The shock for me was that, I said earlier even in the church, my family, my neighborhood were the leadership of that church. In our communities my aunt was a teacher; my uncle was not the gas attendant but the owner of Mobile gas station. All the brown people were the leaders, were the commissioners, were the teachers, were the shop owners, the grocery clerks; they were the ones in charge of what I thought the whole world. Until I came to Ohio and I thought, where did all these white people come from (laughs)? I'm serious, I thought, what have they done to the brown people? Growing up in the South you have a very – more welcoming environment; happy, greeting, pleasant atmosphere. In Ohio everyone looks at you like their suspicious of something and because we came to Ohio, Ohio did not have a lot of Hispanics. We had the base [Wright Patterson Air Force Base] but then the base was also recruiting Hispanics at the time too. But what I found was that you either fit into what society puts you into; you're either black or you're white and don't try to tell them that your neither because they will correct you (laughs). They'll tell you that well, "you're not white so you're black," and so that was a struggle because people always wanted to put me in this little pigeon hole of where I should be. Where they thought I belonged. I grew up with such a sense of self worth, such a sense of pride, that there's no way that they could tell me what I wasn't because I knew exactly what I was, where I came from, and what the possibilities were. So, I struggled with that a lot. I constantly would tell folks and correct them very graciously and gently as I could, with a very pastoral kind of attitude so that even if they got angry, I would just smile. This is the way it is people (laughs).

Kelly: Can you explain if you faced discrimination here?

Caskey: I faced it here, when we moved to Dayton we lived in an apartment and I can remember people saying rude remarks about, "what are you doing here?" We were just in this apartment for a while and my husband's from Beavercreek, so we wind up staying with my in-laws for a while. Again people were very curious about me as a person and my son because my son came back with just the most beautiful tan. He's already brown and he came back with his –good color. You could stand in line and people would ignore you [looks above interviewer's head] and may I help you and you wouldn't get served. If I went to buy something I could wait till the whole store was empty before they would take my money for me to get my groceries. Or if I went to K-mart, or

things like that, or if I had a question because I would go to the counter maybe, and ask questions and you were ignored. The discrimination I found was subtle sometimes and my husband helped to clue me on that. I would say, you know I felt funny about this incident that happened today or we would be talking and he'd say – I said say something like, I thought they were rude. He would say, “no they're racist, they were discriminating against you.” These were all new words for me. Again, when you grow up in a culture or your Latino society, they are very protective of you going outside of that realm because they don't want you to get hurt.

Kelly: Like the three, you had to have three to go to the...

Caskey: Yes, you had to have three to go to the store or to go to the library. Or go get ice cream, or go get a candy bar, or even if we went to the store for my grandma if she needed soap powder to do laundry or something, we went in groups. So they were very protective and I didn't see that until I became an adult and I moved to Ohio. I was able to kind of in retrospect see some of the things that happened. The impact that that had, but a lot of things – I remember because I thought I was smart, I'll get a job because back home you can start to work when your thirteen, twelve. You could drive the tractor and you really didn't need a license then. I remember telling my husband, I'm going to get a job and he goes, “you can't get a job, you're not old enough to get a job.” I wasn't eighteen so he's laughing because he's twenty-two and he's thinking, “ok, go ahead, you're not going to get a job.” So I surprised him and I got a job. We lived in Beavercreek for awhile but then we moved to Xenia and I got a job working for the Board of Education. They had a new hire there who was an African American, Aaron Page. He also told me I was too young to work and that I would need a permit (laughs). New concept for me, everybody works in Texas, how can you not work here in Ohio? But you needed a permit to work in Ohio, and again same time I'm taking classes at Sinclair because I am trying to learn sociology. [I was] going to the library and I'm reading books about human behavior and cultural differences, trying to teach myself. But, this gentleman, this African American gentleman, he came back and said, “I like that you worked at the library and education is important to you. And he said, “I'm going to go out on the limb.” I think it was about affirmative action, they had to hire, try to hire minorities, teachers as well as staff. Of course he was at the board of education and he was the only black there at the time. He said, “I'm going to go out on a limb. I am going to recommend you for this position; you'll be a library aide in the school district.” I was excited, I was very excited. He looks me straight in the eye and he said, “young lady, I'm going out on a limb for you, don't let me down.” But he said it with such stern, just very adamant about, you will do this or there will be a reckoning. I mean it was like hearing your dad or your grandfather saying, “I'm going to do this for you don't let me down.” I assured him that god as my witness; I will die before I let you down. I worked for Xenia City Schools for a number of years and I went to his funeral because I just felt like he gave me an opportunity to go to work. My husband could not believe that I got a job. But I went to work and it was part time because you worked the school year and you didn't work in the summer. You got all these little vacations and...

Kelly: Great! (laughs)

Caskey: And it kept me busy. Again they had development classes that you could take if you wanted to pursue school. So I pursued a class here and there, every now and then I would just sign up for classes before they had computers or doing anything online. Then my kids grew up and we went through a couple of tornados in Xenia. The cultural differences – my seeing a lot of brown faces in leadership and running the cities and then come here and I'm thinking, ok, where are the people? There is nobody that looks like me that is running the city and running the schools, or teaching, or shop owners and things like that. So I started to think about well, where

are the people? I knew about the migrants coming to Michigan, to the North, to work the fields because I had heard that from my own grandparents. So I started doing a little research about looking for them and I inquired within the church and the church said “we do have migrant camps.” So they told me about the migrant camps up north around Findlay or Toledo and my husband and I, on Sunday or Saturday drives, we would drive to those areas to see if we could find the migrant camps. A lot of times he would pull off the road because we’d see them working in the fields. He would pull off the road and my son would pee (laughs) on the side of the road and we would get something to drink. But it gave me the opportunities to walk up into the fields and say hola, cómo están?! [hello, how are you?] Or hey! They would just look at you like, where? I’m sure they looked at me like, “wow she’s got a car, who is this? Maybe she’s the plantation owner?” So it gave me a chance to talk and this just got to be a ritual with us. We just went out to see if we could find migrant camps and talk with migrant people and that’s what I just did. A lot of times I knocked on the doors at the farms where they worked and asked – and told them where I was from and why I was doing this and that I just wanted to talk with some of the mothers because I had questions about being a mom and I had questions about being a wife. So they gave me access, the gift of gab I guess. I had access. So that was a big change for me, the fact that we didn’t have- or his family didn’t have tortillas everyday. They didn’t eat rice and they didn’t eat beans and I thought you all are missing something! (laughs)

Kelly: Oh, yes culture shock.

Caskey: Yes and where are your spices and they had no spices. So I’m calling home and saying mail me chili powders, mail me this, mail me this kind of flour and mail me this. They would, they just sent me all kinds of stuff and so everybody kept saying “oh you should open up a restaurant or you should do this.” But I was more about- I was feeding myself, I was feeding my soul more than anything else. To have the things that I was accustomed to, I was bringing them here. There were a lot of things that I liked about American culture but there were a lot of things that I did not want to let go of.

Kelly: Oh, yes.

Caskey: There were a lot of things that I didn’t want to let go of, the traditional things that my grandmother had. So I sewed for my son, I sewed for my daughter, I made their clothes, I became the best cook, and I became the best seamstress (laughs). My daughter to this day will say “you’re an over achiever,” and I didn’t think of it that way, I really didn’t (laughs). But as I grew, my self, I started to see things a little bit differently. I did see discrimination within the schools just with kids on kids or teachers on teachers. I didn’t say things I was just an observer. I was the listener, the observer. Then within the church, of course when I went to church, I sat in my little pew and here at this little church some people talked to me and some people didn’t. Then I thought that was odd because if we’re all in the church as Christians why wouldn’t you speak to folks. I can remember sittin’ in there and praying about, I hope someone talks to me, dear God (clasps hands and closes eyes). I’m here to worship and hopefully you’ll open their hearts. But that was a challenge for me and my husband would say, “well, why go to church if they’re going to treat you like that, why are you going?” I just – it’s not about those people it’s about my relationship. So I continued to go and of course now I’m an elder and a leader of the church but you experience those subtleties and you witness some of those things that happened. Those are embedded in your mind and it makes you step back and think about things. The cultural things, I kept bringing a lot of stuff back and I love color. I love spices, I love - and people would say “wow isn’t that bright?” Yes, don’t you just love it! (laughs) I think I turned a lot of folks around because I have an infectious laugh and smile. I don’t know strangers, I don’t.

My husband would often say “you could ask Rose and she would probably do it. I won’t do it but she would do it.” I have a sense of humor and I found that a lot of people were attracted to that or they were attracted to my compassion I guess, but they liked to be around me. Hopefully I changed some folks on my husband’s side of the family because they would say – their idea of family time was to sit around the table and talk about different people. Or they would have racist jokes, even did you hear about the one about the Mexican and dah, dah, dah.

Kelly: They did it right in front of you?

Caskey: Yes, and I’m thinking this is uncomfortable and a lot of times I would walk away. I would tell my husband and I would say, why is Bob doing that? Does he not see that I am a Mexican or that my whole family behind me is Mexican, or that his niece and nephew are Mexican? And he says “I don’t think they get it. I don’t think they understand that it’s offensive to you.” So I remember saying, I don’t expect you to take up for me because I will when I’ve had enough I will just tell them. He even said “do you want me to tell them that I don’t want them to do that anymore?” I just always felt like I can stand up for myself but thank you. If I need back up, yeah (laughs). But I can remember having those conversations like at Christmas and usually the holidays was a time of – they thought they were adding to the conversation and trying to be social. I remember being direct with my mother-in-law and telling her that even when you don’t say anything, it’s giving them permission and it’s an acceptance of what happens. This was at her home when we went to these celebrations and I just wanted to let her know that I probably wouldn’t be coming because I was uncomfortable and I didn’t want my children to be uncomfortable. If they felt like if this is the way they wanted to treat people, I probably wouldn’t be coming. She was like “oh no, but were not - that’s not the way it is.” You get these “I used to have a friend who was a Mexican and dah, dah, dah, dah,” or “I used to have a black lady who used to work for me.” It just doesn’t make sense but that’s the excuses that they would use and it made for some interesting holiday gatherings. A lot of times I would go and take my children and sit in the car. We – my brother-in-law would have some really good ones and I read, whereas he did not (laughs). But I read and I was prepared for anything he had to throw at me and my husband said “you make a great lawyer,” because he didn’t want to be caught in the middle. Although he said “I’ll back up if you need me to,” or “I will tell them,” or “we don’t have to go.” But like I said to him, the importance of family would mean that we fail as parents and I want my kids to know their grandmother. Do you know he has a brother and sister and of their children, our children, are the only ones that got to know their grandparents and have the relationship the relationship that grandparents have. We would literally dump our kids at her door and say “we’re going up to the store, can you watch the kids? Of course my kids are just as outgoing and loving as I am and they made grandma do anything. They had her going to the bowling alley, they had her playing pool, and they had her taking walks out by the creek because she couldn’t leave them unattended. So, most of them have passed away of the grandparents and my husband and his brothers and sisters, but to this day, the cousins will talk about “well you at least got to know your grandparents.” But again, it was because my husband and I made a concerted effort to make sure that that happened; where the other ones is like “oh, were not going to go there,” or they didn’t want to be bothered. My husband would say “I can’t believe my family lives ten minutes away and I can go months without seeing them. Your family that lives ten hours - no twenty two hours away call you at least once a week and you visit with them probably more than I visit with my family.”

Kelly: I think it has to be at least cultural too, family is so important in Latino culture. But that’s excellent that you...

Caskey: (Laughs) I mean to this day, well, this is grandma Caskey's or this is grandpa Caskey's. I know my niece and my nephews don't have the antidotes or the little stories that they can share and neither do the other ones. When my brother-in-law passed away, we had a gathering at the funeral and we were talking about the legacy for the Caskey's and what's left. My nephews and nieces were saying "we never knew them. We knew the Godby's from West Virginia, we knew the Randalls from Kentucky but we don't know what their ancestry is and we don't know their genealogy." I've had people who call us and say "are you related to the Caskey's that...", I don't know think so because all we knew was that Harold Caskey was from Kentucky and they moved to Ohio. He worked at NCR and they had three children and they had no extended family. Every time we got to go, there were no other extended families. But at my family reunions you might have well, there were two hundred cousins when I took my husband back and my kids down. I don't know how many hundred of grand children and great grand children and great, great grand children that my grandparents had. He [Rosa's husband] was just amazed because when we went down to the first family reunion he said "what's going to happen because I'm the white guy?" I said forget that you're in Ohio because here you're going to fit in and no ones going to say anything to you, no ones going to look at you. I said it's going to be like the United Nations and I said, just hug everybody and smile because they are probably a cousin somewhere down the line. So when we pulled in he's like, "where's your family?" Of course it was a sea of people all over this park and he said "how are we going to find where your family is?" I said that is my family. He's looking at them and he's saying "well, they look sort of Asian, they look sort of this and they look sort of that." I said we are, we are, and so I gave him the history. I said the French came and they took our women. The Germans came and they took our women and the Polish, the Russians they came and so we intermarried. Then you who are Scottish and Irish, I said now we have to add that to our mix so it is a lot of multiculturalism that's going on in here.

When he came back to explain to his family about the family reunion because they wanted to know how he did and what happened and he said "there was so much food, they ate non stop, and we had physical games, we had relays and we had physical games that we did." He said "I just kept saying I'm Mr. Rosa, I'm Mr. Rosa," because people would say "and who are you related to?" "Well, I'm Mr. Rosa," because people wanted to know who's your parents and who their parents, parents are and that's how you relate to finding out which clan you belong to. He was describing to his family that no one treated him like a gringo; no one treated him like an outsider. He had people hugging and kissing on him and he thought that they were going to wear him out because he had never been hugged and kissed so much. That greeting is a greeting ritual when you see someone and it's also when you leave so he said - by the time that we got to meet everybody he said "I'm sure they're people that I don't know." But he said that it was every ethnic group whatsoever because he said "there's some white with green eyes and there's some that are light brown, and there's some that are dark, there's some that are black, there's some with slanted eyes, there's some with blue eyes." He said "blondes, browns, black hair, she had them all, she had them all." He had a ball but he did say - a couple of reunions were overwhelming for him. He said "there's so many people," and he said "I don't want you to take offense but it's overwhelming for me because I'm not used to that." I understand that. He really was very encouraging in anything that I wanted to do. He was very supporting in anything that I wanted to do. He knew that I was an advocate for women and children. He knew that I got very passionate about social justice.

Kelly: I wanted to ask you about – I know you were talking about when you first visited the migrant farms and stuff. How did you start getting into Latino community issues and start joining all these organizations that you were apart of?

Caskey: Well, I created some of the organizations. I helped to create the Hispanic Ministry within the Presbyterian Church and actually brought pastors to come to this area. Again, that's what I know, that's the world that I was in that's what was there. This is the different world. The leadership was when people would say something like "you're the first Hispanic that I met," or "you're different than what I expected," or "we could use people like you," or "how do we – are there others like you?" "How do we tap into the Hispanic community?" How do we tap into the Latino community?" Of course I would go back to my husband and we'd share a lot of these conversations and we would talk about them. My response then when I would come back was, if you want to tap into the Latino community you need to know about them. You need to learn and have an understanding about them. They wanted to know where the pockets of Latinos were and of course at that time there were no pockets because we were more middle class and upper class families. They either worked at the base and they might live in Centerville or Fairborn or Xenia; they didn't live in the urban city of Dayton. If they were migrant farm workers they lived in the rural areas and they were not visible. Then I got on church boards and then I worked for Buckeye Trails Girl Scout Council after I left Xenia City School system and they were very strong with diversity. I just loved it because they always put diverse teams together and you went out in diverse neighborhoods and you did these trainings for the leadership and for the girls. So that's where my passion for women and children came. But the Girl Scout office put me into key positions; committees for the United Way, committees for Red Cross, committees for the Dayton Foundation. We were as a Girl Scout office, we were invited to the community and we had an opportunity to show off our diversity and it helped to open doors because then they wanted – "well, what other Hispanics do you have," because you can't be on every committee. So I'm thinking, ok, where else did I see that Latino? Or where else did I see such and such? So you started to build this network of people. I'm a great organizer because of my library skills and I kept cards of everybody and I made lists. I had a little notebook of where I met them, what's the date, if I met them at a church, or if I met them at a picnic, or if I saw them at – oh, what was that grocery store - Zayer's Department store, or Lazarus, or any of those places where I would see people. Then I would document that when I would come home or get out a piece of paper and document it; so I kept a lot of those records.

As the community started to grow in this area, there were a couple of incidences that made news; Hispanics being arrested or they would do a story on the migrant workers – the vegetables and things like that. I usually tried to stay connected. A lot of Latinos don't do that, a lot of Hispanics don't do that. They want to stay invisible which is ok and that's what I observed. But that's also from all the reading that I had done trying to figure out why Hispanics act the way they do. Even my husband would say, I remember when I was younger, we would go to Kroger's and I would see a brown face or I hear somebody talking and it's like the antennas would go up. Where are you, where are you (looks around)? I would make my way down there and I'd Hola! Como estás, because that's just who I am and they would just kind of look at you like who is this trying to come up and talk to us. They would ignore you and they'd leave. I remember standing in line one time at the Kroger's and there was another family over there, in the next aisle over and Dave says "I know you heard that, are you going to go say hi?" I said, yes, I'm just trying to get enough courage. I turned around and I said hello and they turned around. Dave says "you want me to go shake them up?" And I went no, and he said "well that's odd. Why is it that

Latinos will snub another Latino?” Then he thought that was wrong and so he’s like “let’s go have a talk with them.” I’m like no and we’re standing there laughing in the line but it was another observation. Why are Latinos snubbing other Latinos? So we had that discussion and then I said, you know I think it’s again the not being – not understanding. I said they’re going through the same culture shock that I went through when I came here. They’re mistreated or they’re picked on or they’re treated differently and so you’re shield guard goes up and you don’t want to let anybody in, regardless of whether they can speak your language or they look like you. You are just going to put up that guard because you just know somebody’s going to screw with you and it just might be that brown lady that’s standing there at the check out counter. So I said well, we’ll meet them again and I’ll greet them again, and so life goes on. So you do get snubbed every now and then but it just depends on what kind of baggage they have, what kind of experiences they have. But I can relate to what they do because a lot of times you’ve had those same experiences too.

I am an advocate for other people because I think I can use words to make my point. I’m not derogatory, I’m not threatening, or I try not to be. I try to tell another person’s story from my mind’s eye as to how I see it. I try to have them understand it so that they can have a better understanding because a lot of it is fear; a lot of it is fear and what they don’t know, what they don’t understand. I find that I can roll up my sleeves and fight for somebody else. I don’t always fight for myself but if there’s a cause I will fight for it and if I see that it’s an injustice, a social issue that has an impact on a greater community.

Kelly: Why do you feel that you need to advocate for other people or is it..?

Caskey: I think it’s inbred and I think it’s in your DNA. I think my experiences growing up even when you look at and I’ve used this scenario several times, even when you’re out in the playground and someone is being treated unfair the older sister will go and defend your little sister. Or if a group of guys goes and tries to beat up your older brother, we go to that and we defend our older brother. Even though he’s the older brother but you’re not going to let him get beat up, up there and get a bloody nose unless you do something about it. I think we were always taught that if somebody needs help you help them. Again that goes back to our theology, goes back to our religion, about what we’re mandated to do. We’re here for a short time; we need to do the best we can while we’re here.

Kelly: I agree. You’re a leader and member of many Latino organizations in the area. Tell me about your experiences and involvement in these organizations.

Caskey: Well, some of the things that we try to do, like I said, there was – you can read in the newspaper and my husband would often say “here’s a Mexican name,” not that we were stereotyping but it was used to our advantage. “Here’s a Mexican name that got in trouble again,” and the newspapers got it in the paper and he’d always fold it over to make sure that I would get it so I wouldn’t lose it. But I would read these stories and it was concerning sometimes because I thought, no that’s – I can’t believe that’s the way that it happened or it just doesn’t feel right or sound right. A lot of times I would look at who wrote that article and I would call and say, I’m so and so and I’m with the Presbyterian Church, I’m also Hispanic and I’m concerned about the article that you wrote and I want a little bit of an explanation. Sometimes they would give it to me and sometimes they would say “who are you? “Get lost” (laughs). But that was a way of finding out about these things. Again because of where I worked I had other opportunities to be engaged and involved in a lot of things in the community. There was a couple of things that happened with women’s abuse and that was before they had shelters. Often times Latino women weren’t accepted because no one could communicate with them; police couldn’t get a report and

it was just so frustrating. What do you do with the kids? A lot of times they would come to my house, they would go to a friend's house and it just struck me, there's something wrong with this system because if in Texas we can take care of the women who get beat up by their husbands, or if they get thrown out of the house, or whatever, there's a system. I'm thinking there's got to be a system in Ohio, now why isn't it working here? So I started to ask questions and people were shocked that the questions asked, number one and so then they feel like someone's watching. Maybe we better take care of this because someone's watching, someone's asking questions. So I ask questions and I challenge people. I tell them that I want to see it and I'm nobody, I am nobody.

Kelly: Well, you were the director of LULAC.

Caskey: Yes, I started LULAC in Ohio again because we had LULAC in Texas and it was a thriving, growing organization – a national organization. That's where I got my scholarship to go to school and I remember – oh, wise words – I remember my husband and I had gone to a meeting about a women's group and it was about abuse and the church - I had gone to make a presentation for them to try to help this woman and her family. They were documented, this was not even undocumented. These were American citizens that had gotten abuse and the language barrier and blah, blah, blah. I tried to get the church involved and the church disappointed me by saying that they really didn't want to get involved.

Kelly: The Presbyterian or the...

Caskey: The Presbyterian Church. That was disturbing and I was very upset and I came home and I thought, I'm changing religions, I'm never going back to church (laughs). Why didn't they get it? They didn't have any compassion. I was so frustrated and I got in and my husband was already getting ready for bed and it was already after nine or something and he said "how'd your day go?" I went, oh, it went great, and it went great. He could tell there was something not so great and he kept digging a little bit – I don't know what he called it, unpeel the onion a little bit at a time. So he unpeeled the onion and finally he got to the source about – "so how did your meeting go?" Oh, well it wasn't what I expected and then here comes the truth. I say, it's so frustrating that this happened and after several of those stories he's starting to say, "well, what are you going to do about it?" I can't believe he walked away from something like that. There was another incident that happened where there was a Hispanic male that had gotten into trouble and he was – one of the females had charged him with sexual harassment. What are you going to do, no one would pursue it and the church wouldn't touch it. I would come home again frustrated with another story and I would journal, I journaled a lot of things. I just recently threw away a lot of my journals and I'm thinking why did I do that? Now, I could write a book (laughs). I would journal all these things, about my perception, what I saw and what happened. I was frustrated that night and I said I get so angry with the church because its hands are tied and they can't do certain things because it's not politically correct or it's not part of policy. I would say things like, back home things like this wouldn't happen and he turned that around to me and he'd say, "well where are all those whoody doody Latino organizations that would take anybody to court? Where are all those justice groups that you are always talking about?"

Kelly: And is that how you...?

Caskey: Like, Bingo! These organizations, we need to organize and we can do some collaboration. We can do – we can bring in some organizations and start organizations. Where if the church's hands are tied, then these organizations can take root and take hold and take on these issues. So that's pretty much how LULAC got started. A friend of mine; and it's funny how God intervenes in your life, but a friend of mine had gone to a conference in Chicago. She

worked for the Fair Housing Commission downtown and she came back all energized about how she went to one of the largest convention she's ever been to and you wouldn't believe the Hispanic people that were there. I said, well, where was it? And she said, "Chicago," well you haven't been out of Ohio because Chicago is pretty diverse. She says, "have you ever heard of LALAC?" I'm like, LALAC? A lot of people miss pronounce it and then it dawned on me, no I've never heard of it. Then it dawned on me, what she was trying to say. So I said, Yes, I know LULAC, I'm thinking of starting one! She said "I want to be a member, sign me up, I want to be a member; I want to start this with you." So I called national – I had already inquired because we have a lot of LULAC members who are related to me that were part of it in Texas. I called and I said how would you go about starting one? They said "there's chapters and there's state levels and all this other stuff." They said "just call national and say that you want to start and they'll send a resource person and they'll get you started." So by then I'm online and I'm getting all this information and sure enough they sent me a person and brought me the packet. They said "we need ten people to get started. Do you know ten Latinos?" Yes, I can do this; this is a piece of cake! So we started that and then right after that the Latino Connection was –what would you call that- it was a group of people that come together. Latino Connection was almost formed the same year that Hispanic Ministry started to grow because we started to make – we were working with the Catholic Church because they had a Hispanic Ministry. I was on a committee at the church and they would ask me "what kind of – do you want to be on this one committee?" I said no, I don't want to be on anymore committees because this is what I'm doing. Then they asked me "how are you doing all this? What is it that you are doing?" So I explained what I was doing; advocating for women and children and this is what we do. We've taken on some social justice issues and they're thinking, "through our church?!" I said oh no, with other churches that want to do this. With the Lutherans that help refugees, with the Catholic Church and I said I'm using my Spanish skills. I said for years, I cried when I moved here thinking God, why have you forsaken me? Why did you bring me to hell-hole Ohio where nobody likes me (laughs)?

Kelly: As you're wearing a Dayton shirt [Caskey was wearing a shirt that said, "Dayton, Ohio].

Caskey: Yes, Dayton [looks down at shirt]. It's such a struggle for me to fit in. Why did you take me out of my comfort zone? Why am I here on this journey? I then called my mom and the epiphany was I know why God has me in Ohio. He's using me as a vehicle to make awareness of Hispanic people here. She was so thrilled that I was helping migrant workers and my grandparents were so thrilled that I was helping migrant workers; that was a story they could relate to. I got over the fact that this is the reality here (laughs) and this is why I'm here. I'm here to translate for those – I've used this often times- the voice for the voiceless. The passion that I have for my folks, the passion that I have for social justice, and being fair to all people; if we talk about it let's do it. I don't want to be on a committee, I don't want to be on an ad-hoc committee, I don't want to be on a committee on the special advisory board that's just going to do a lot of talking. I want to the results. I want to see (laughs) the final of what happens with what you can do; don't give me just lip service.

Kelly: What have you been able to do to help the migrant workers?

Caskey: Well, a lot of that- the school systems did not do a lot of the recruiting of the Hispanic kids. So the school systems began to say "are numbers are down, we need to fill our numbers in order for us to get our funding. If you know of any Hispanic children that would benefit from this program, we would be happy to go talk with their parents. Ok, well you do you have in your organization that speaks Spanish?" If I bring you a family, then what are you going to do with this family? The schools started to branch out and recruit. As I got on an advisory board then

they would say “thank you for your good work. What else can we do? What are your words of wisdom?” My words of wisdoms or my life lessons are, if you are seriously and sincerely and intentionally want to engage into the Latino community then do it honestly. Put them on your board, hire them for your companies, and the person you employ, or the person you put on that committee, or the person you put on that board is going to be that other set of eyes and ears. And a resource that will give you a different perspective of what all you white, affluent males are trying to do in your organizations. In working with LULAC we would go to national conventions and you have all these companies that have to do diversity within their companies; P&G, AT&T, Time Warner, Banks. Bingo, why aren’t they working with our groups. So when we’re organizing within the Latino community, what I want the Latino community to understand is that they need us as much as we need them. We want to be inclusive and when you have an organization that says “well, it’s just for Latinos only,” well then we are guilty of doing the same things. We are not being inclusive, we are being exclusive. That’s what I found the church was doing, a lot of organizations were doing. They wanted to say they want diversity; they want to say they want to be inclusive but they were putting in barriers that made it exclusive to the Latino community. An example, if you want Latinos to be part of your committee here at Wright State, what time are your meetings, where are your meetings, when are your meetings? Oh, there at ten o’clock in the morning, there out here at Wright State, where the Latino community doesn’t have transportations. We are working all day so we can’t take off work to be here at a ten o’clock meeting or a one o’clock meeting. So are you being inclusive or are you being exclusive?

Kelly: No, that makes a good point. What are some of the most interesting programs or events that you have been involved with?

Caskey: Oh, wow. I have been blessed. I’ve met some really amazing people that work in social justice. I’ve met Delores Huerta, who was part of Cesar Chavez’s group that worked with farm workers. I was given the opportunity to be in the same room with Mirrors [leader of SCLC], the SCLC people. The Civil Rights Liberties Union, that award was probably the most significant award I’ve had. I was to be in a room – this was a group was founded to help and advocate for poor people to at least have the same access to justice in the courts where you can make a difference. This was major for me. I’ve met Bill Cosby and Ray Charles. I’ve met four different presidents and governors that I’ve shaken hands with and commissioners, representatives, senators, and Treasuries of State, just people that...

Kelly: Through your work of all these different organizations?

Caskey: Right, different opportunities, yes! I remember for college I was – my professor wanted a – we were doing computer technology and he said do a facebook. I thought, oh, that is so lame. That is so teenage; I have to ask my grandkids about this. So he said “well, just clip some pictures on there so it would give us a bird’s eye view of who you are.” So I went through my pictures and my grandkids helped me go through my pictures and they’re like, “well, you’ve met so and so and you met so and so.” They’re going through my pictures and they’re like “oh, is this who I think it is?” Yes, I mean I’m in awe when I meet them but then you forget about that because you’re still on this treadmill, on this day to day race for life about what needs to happen before the end of the day. That was just an experience, just an opportunity. I got to meet a lady and she quoted me in her book. When I worked in the museum in Wilberforce, she walked...

Kelly: Yes, Joan Southgate.

Caskey: Yes, she walked across Ohio to try to have the same experience that her fore fathers had. Of course I could relate to that because again, the family, having those same relationships

and real stories that happened to your ancestors and your family. Hopefully you're making a difference but you still want to know what they went through, or to have an understanding of what they went through.

Kelly: Were these – it was the Underground Railroad?

Caskey: Joan Southgate, yes, Joan Southgate traveled across and I followed her a couple of place because I feared she was not safe. I felt responsible for her so I wanted to make sure she was safe and I did. She was an amazing woman, we had a lot of heart to heart chats about families, what our past was like, what we can do, and what our legacy is going to be for our children and our grand-children. My kids and grand kids will talk and say “well grandma you've done everything. You've met everybody and everybody knows you!” I think no, there's probably still one more person out there that doesn't know me and that's my challenge.

Kelly: And it keeps you going.

Caskey: Yes, yes it does.

Kelly: I know you were the coordinator of El Puente last year. Can you tell me about your experiences with that?

Caskey: To me, that was such a passion. That was just another milestone that was reached. I have always tutored because I feel again, my dad read to me; reading is the key to your education. Your education is who you're going to be as an adult and how the world perceives you. Often times in my own neighborhood in Xenia or in Dayton or wherever I don't have to give my number to anybody, people find my number. People know where I am and I often tell Sister Maria, I don't know where they find me (laughs). But [they would say] do you know so and so because they have my number now. I would tutor kids, a lot of times I would tutor my own kids and grandkids at the kitchen table when we would go over homework and stuff. If I knew of another Hispanic family that was in the area I would invite them to come to the table. I could help them with homework or we could share a discussion about homework or we could make it fun which makes it easier and you're done. You don't have to worry about missing assignments or last the minute, at eleven o'clock, you haven't done your homework and now mom's yelling at you so that invitation was always there. I tutored kids that way and working with school system and the Girl Scout Office had after school tutoring programs too so that was sort of again, part of my experiences. We had talked about – well, let me back this up a bit.

LULAC got a grant to get a computer lab and part of the grant writing that we did was that we would have an after school program that kids could have access to education and access to computers in the technology world. So we got the grant and got the computers. Now this puts the program into place so we started out at the Linden Avenue Baptist Church because it was centrally located so we started there with the after school program. They had a women's program and we worked with the East End Community Center in trying to provide for this program. They lost staff and the program fizzled out. Well, that annoys me more than anything because you build something and you get there and then there's no one to take it over. I feel strongly that if you're developing leadership, you're developing it so you can pass it on, and it gets passed on, and it gets passed on. I remember something my dad said, “you have two hands, with one you reach for whatever you want and it's your future but with the other hand you bring along someone.” So you're always having this push and pull and Maria Goeser [Local Latino Community Activist] has another quote that I'm sure she's going to tell you because she uses it all the time, so I'll save that for Maria. I won't take away her thunder. Again, that you got to help one so that once you're out of the picture, if we do our jobs right our children to be successful. So if we're developing good leadership you're going to be able to step away and other leadership

is going to emerge. So part of that tutoring program was to put that program into place and I was checking in on the computer lab because I'm still promoting the computer lab not knowing they've shut it down because no one was interested.

It became all Anglo and then the Latinos didn't want to go because there no Spanish speakers were there and they just lost interest. They just said "it's ok we'll just close the doors," with computers all dusty, they weren't utilized. I investigated to found out what's up? What's wrong with the program? They tried to very graciously to say that it just wasn't working anymore and it was time to just let it go. I'm thinking those who have are great; those who have not are still suffering and that's a social injustice (laughs). So I'm thinking of all the times that Baylor [University] came and brought us opportunities and we didn't care how old these things were. They were new to us. So I'm thinking ok, how do we use those resources? So I call national and I say this is what's happen. How can I get those back and how can I...? They gave me the tools that I needed to close that one and open a new one, new board, everything. So we moved it with the Catholic Church. We closed our relationship, we had an understanding with the Linden Avenue Baptist Church because they – it also was supported through Dayton Christian. So I was disappointed because I thought it was going to be a win-win situation. But that's not the first time churches have disappointed me, as you have heard. So we got the tools together on how we can change. We talked with Sister Maria [Director of Catholic Hispanic Ministry] and she was on board and we were going to get it going again. So we started over at Holy Family [Catholic Church]. We moved the computers in, we start advertising that we're going to be open and that we're going to provide the tutorial program. I get off work and I come and I provide services and I recruit volunteers from the colleges. I am a volunteer coordinator from way back; the Girl Scout Office and now the museum and so recruiting volunteers is a natural. I'm recruiting volunteers and we're getting it going and its growing back. We're using our computers and we're using our volunteers and the kids are learning and they're getting better marks. The parents are proud of their kids and they're starting to think that they can have a piece of the American Dream. I say, it's not about your future; it's about your child's future. They have to learn English; they have to learn to read if they are going to excel in school. That goes over pretty good and we're now looking at expanding the tutorial program. By then the church is moving – no, we're still expanding the program and at that point I'm ready to change over leadership from the president of LULAC in the Dayton area to Tony Ortiz. A good leader always looks at ok, where's the leadership? Where's it going to emerge from and who has the resources that can help you or help the program benefit? LULAC is a not about self serving or personal gain; it's about overall community gain. What's going to be the best overall or for the people and not personally or for individuals.

I didn't know Tony Ortiz that well because he worked for Wright State and he was busy (laughs). He did not mix in with a lot of the Latino community; he just was not part of it. I remember talking to him and he was like "yeah, yeah I'll help, I'll help." Very few people say no to me too so he was engaged and he was excited. Then I asked him, would you be interesting in being president of LULAC? He says "well, I'm pretty busy right now. I got a couple of things that are maybe going off my plate and maybe I can do this." I told him, I will support you, I will hand hold you, I will do whatever it takes to get you up to speed. So he the following year said yes and he took on the challenge. He even said "where are the Latino pockets," because he's got grown children, he doesn't have little children. I still have grand children that I'm carrying around and I took them with me to everything. My granddaughter says – she wrote an essay on her march on MLK Day and the teacher thought it was a made up story and my granddaughter

said “no, I really did march with my grandma down Main Street in Dayton!” These are those experiences that I’m thrilled that they have that to share. But Tony took on the leadership role of the organization and I warned him saying, everybody’s going to want to pick your brain. Everybody’s going to want you to be a representative to this organization or that advisory board but remember what you have because it can be overwhelming (laughs). I said at some point you have to say no, I can’t this time.

Kelly: Yes, because that goes back to what I was going to ask you is that as the leader of LULAC, what were some of the obstacles and frustrations that you faced? I guess you probably told Tony what he would face, like what you said.

Caskey: You have to say no, because everybody’s going to ask you. Everybody’s going to pick your brain and they just think, they think that we get paid to do this and we’re all volunteers. I mean we have our real jobs that pay our bills but we have such a passion to do this that you make time to do the volunteer work.

Kelly: Yes. What are some of the most gratifying contributions?

Caskey: Well, the gratifying part is the El Puente piece. I was telling Tony that I wanted – I said I’ve got a lot of the students from the colleges and I said it’s a struggle sometimes because you would think college students could take initiative and really move on things. I said it’s like a six grader; you’re hand holding them constantly, constantly. He had this brain child that why don’t we get the College of Education students that are trying to be teachers to come into this tutoring program. He asked how I wrote the grant through AT&T and I said there are grants out there we just got to find them. You got to get a team together to help you write the grant and I said, I mean I have the ideas but I can’t always take the time that it takes to write the grant, proof read the grant, put the language in there that the reader wants for you to get that grant. He [Tony] did that. He put a team together, he wrote a grant, and he got it funded. We got great support from Wright State. He said “I want the first manager to be you, if that’s possible.” I said, oh, I would love it! It was a pilot to see if it would work and we have a great relationship. We’re like brother and sister or uncle and niece. I can tell him things and he can be honest and tell me right back or if he says something again [I say] this is how I see it or this is how I think. So he got it off the ground and we had the after-school program. The teachers, the supervisors, all the professors all wanted to see what’s going on just to make sure that, if they took a risk on this program. But we’re open, what you see is what you get, and come look.

Kelly: I mean I’ve visited and it’s great. I mean I volunteered one day and I can’t believe how many children come after school.

Caskey: Yes, we worked with Dayton Public Schools. They, Teresa Troyer, who is the advocate for ESL, helped us to coordinate the schedules of when they got out of school, who would participate in the program, how we would get the word out, and then getting the volunteers. They [the students] have to do their homework. I believe that because of the way I grew up I guess learning can be fun and you can be at play and it can be an educational learning experience. I just think that because I grew up in sports and in school that that has a connection. So with El Puente, what we wanted was that those kids should be able to have fun. We know that they lack in social skills because they’re having trouble acclimating to their surroundings, to the regiment of school that you do not talk, you stand in line, and everything is very structured. Parents have put pressure on them about that they you will behave and you will do on what’s going on. But that’s not our culture, that’s not how we operate. We are screamers, we are players, we are teasers, we are jokers, and just competitive and play.

So we wanted to develop an environment where it was a learning environment yet it was a playful environment where the kids felt safe and that they felt like they could ask us any kinds of questions and at the same time be respectful. They hate it when I come in because if I hear the language going on over there, I remind them that you have to be respectful. They're acclimating to a lot of the American culture and a lot of the pop culture that's going on. The kids all love the program and they did do better on their scores, the one's that are in the program. The parents all wanted to continue; I see it as a growing piece in our community and it's definitely something that was needed. We've had people on waiting lists that can't get in because we are limited by resources and we're limited by staff. I think Tony and I feel that that's something we're very proud of. It's happening and it's very successful the way it's working. I had to take a step back because I was doing student teaching and that was full-time so we hired Alyssa who is a Spanish speaker. Our initial focus was to hire someone who is Latino, again to be a role model of what happens there because I want kids to grow up knowing that that teacher is Mexican, or that teacher is from Venezuela, or that police officer is a Cuban so that they have role models that they can connect with. If we constantly have the Anglo, white teacher, male or female then kids are always seeing that, well, I can only go so far or that position belongs to a white male or a white female. When I come in they go, "here comes the teacher, Tony. Here comes the teacher," and hopefully this is an impact on those children that one of these days they're going to say – I've had some kids say "I want to be a teacher like you," or "I want to be a civil rights leader like you," or "I want to help women like I've seen you help my mom."

Kelly: That brings me to one of my last questions, is what do you think needs to be done either politically, educationally, or economically to help better the lives of young Latinos and Latinas.

Caskey: Just when we think we made some strides we can look at where we need to be. We're never there. When we feel that we have made it we should be dead (laughs). Because when you feel like you're finished, ok, we'll just throw some dirt on you because you're finished. It's never finished. I think there's always room for improvement. I think there's always something else to do and our politicians make it to a point where we have to continually work for others that are not having the same access and are not treated fairly. I think to have a society where you have those who have and those who have not, just to me isn't realistic. There needs to be a common ground, a middle ground where ok, yes, I worked hard to where I'm at and you should work that hard but give them the same access. Give them the same opportunities you had and then see if that doesn't happen. We have found that many of the people of color who have gone on to further education, owned their own businesses are leaders in the community, leaders in the state.

I don't know. I think a comprehensive immigration reform needs to happen. When 9/11 occurred I knew it was going to be a step back. President Bush is from Texas but I mean I could see that Texas mentality versus what needs to happen for the good will of the people. This was just the good will for some and some of the decisions that are made by some key people don't always take into account the reality, the impact that it has on everyday folks. Decisions are made, like the 9/11 Terrorist Act was passed and there were so many things put in and I looked at it and I thought, whoa, this is too much. But then you look at some of the pieces put in and they were actually pieces that were too exclude certain things. We're suffering those results of what happened from 9/11. We've got to change some laws, we got to get – my cousin was saying "when are you going to run for politics?" I said well, right after you do and in Texas they've got quite a few who are politicians of color and even in the South. They're always looking at Ohio because we're the swing state. I said Ohio is not the swing state anymore because they've now changed the restructure of how we vote and that whole process. It's going to shift some things

and we're probably not going to be looking at Ohio anymore as much as we're looking at some of the other states. But I think I like the President we have in there. I think he's been given a fair chance to do his job. Unfortunately, there always these groups that are obstacles to doing what you need to do well. You can have a good plan but then you have what we call the snipers that just want to shoot...

Kelly: The Tea-Party?

Caskey: Yes, different things and they're obstacles. It deters you from doing what your goal is and what the set plan is. Yes, they broke the votes. It was a great strategy because it worked. There still needs to be some changes, we still need to make some strides across the country. You would think that in some places where states are very – Georgia is now 1 and 6 Latino. Georgians are scared. In Texas, predominately Hispanic, why, and this is a question I have asked several people, why are they still running the place?

Kelly: Why are white males still running the place?

Caskey: Everybody there is Mexican, why are they still running the place? In Arizona, why are they still running the place? In California, why are they still running the place? I don't know. Again, when you are up here [points up high] and you're trying to make up and you don't see anybody up here then you think ok, that's where they're supposed to sit and that's where they're supposed to sit. I think the election physically and visually has an impact on what people see. I think some folks are scared and I think it's going to open some doors, eventually open some doors. I see that we still have more work to do. I think Latino groups can organize a little bit better, we can communicate better. Often times and I was in a meeting last night where someone had said "that person got all of this stuff together and now he's moved on and has left our group over here stranded." I thought why did you let that happen? Where were the checks and balances where you stayed as a group, three's, and marched him up the ladder so that he wasn't just marching up the ladder and then kicking the rest of you – or pitching the ladder so you couldn't climb up. I think those kinds of checks and balances need to happen so that we build alliances like groups. I think the NAACP, well LULAC is comparable to the NAACP; we work collectively and jointly and partner nationally and in other states very well. In Dayton some of us get along and others don't want to have anything to do with us because it's their agenda and they don't see the big picture that it's everyone's agenda. It's all of us; it's all of us on this globe trying to work together.

Kelly: I agree. My last question would be what lessons do you carry away from your involvement in community and community service.

Caskey: I learned a lot of lessons and I say that these are life lessons. Things you could have done differently, toes I've stepped on that I probably wouldn't have.

Kelly: So you've grown as a person more confidently?

Caskey: Yes, I think so. I met a gentleman last night and he said "I've heard of you but I don't think we've ever been formally introduced." I've heard of this person too and he had his hand out like this [like a handshake] strategically did not extend my hand to shake it because I think men have to be reckoned with sometimes. I just waited for him to make his comments and I said well ok, I am Rosa Caskey and believe everything you've ever heard. Normally I say, don't believe everything you've ever heard, because stories get embellished or they get enhanced but I wanted to make an impact with this person that I'm not going to be a quite person on this committee. So I've been asked to be on this committee for a purpose and if I take something on I take it on one-hundred percent. I'm not a person that wants to be on a committee so my name appears, I don't want it to give me prestige or free pass to something. I do it because I believe in

it, I want to make a commitment to it, and I will give it one-hundred percent. If not, then I will back off and let somebody else do it. I let him know that believe everything that you've ever heard with a smile because I'm there to make sure that our voice is heard and also to let you know that someone is watching.

Kelly: So what – could I ask what committee?

Caskey: It's a church committee and when my husband died I slowly started to let go of things and let other people take in charge. I felt overwhelmed and I'm going through this grieving process, I didn't know if I'm going to be thinking straight. From books that I've read you go through this grieving process and I didn't want to make decisions that would have impacted other people by things I said or did that would suffer from my actions or my words. So I started to let some things go and letting other people take charge so that wouldn't happen but at the same time life lessons that I has learned I think have been very good. One of my goals was to finish school. When my husband was ill, he had kidney failure and he said "you're the longest student to finish her degree but if something happens to me you go back to school and finish. I said you saying that just makes it sound like it's my dad speaking to me, you need to get an education, you need to- you're special, I'm the princess, you're special and God has a plan for you. I believe that and so when he passed I went back to school part time and then the state of Ohio had budget cuts and I got laid off. I thought – I got my little thing and I listened and they said "is there anything we can do, or say, or do you have any questions?" I said no, is that all? Thank you. I went downstairs to my office and I put myself in prayer and I got my lunch and went to lunch. I called my daughter and I said guess what, and she said "what?" and I said I just got laid off. She says "oh, mom, are you alright? I said call me and she called and she said "are you alright?" and I said yes. I said I really believe God wants me to go to school full-time and collect unemployment and she said "I love it, I just love it!" Again, you're faced with a dilemma and ok, I can choose to be miserable or I can choose to move on, be happy, and just continue. I thought this is not my plan, I thought I had eighteen years in the museum and I was going to go for two more and then I was going to go to school. God had a different plan. I'm going to lay you off (laughs) and you will go to school and you will finish. I have accepted a position as the Migrant Head Start at Piqua. So all of my experiences - I finished my last class in December, they didn't have a graduation in December so I have to wait until May, a six month interval of what do I do with myself. So I've gone back to the committees working when I can, helping – volunteering at El Puente doing some stuff there, and getting back into church committees getting back in there. I tried to get a substitute teaching certificate and they said "well, you can't because you don't have transcripts yet." I won't get them until May so again I can choose to be angry (laughs) or what do I do with this. Ok, if that's- if those are the options then what's my strategy to get me where I want to be. Ok, so that means I don't teach right away, maybe I do something else. So I was sending out my resume I thought, the migrant camp, that's perfect. I get to work with...

Kelly: Going back to your roots.

Caskey: Spanish speaking children, working families, working with kids, and I can oversee those teachers and see what they do with my kids.

Kelly: That's great because you're working for the Head Start Program that taught you. It's like a full circle.

Caskey: I said that in the interview and they said "do you have any other comments?" I said I want this experience, I know I can do the job. I think I would be the best for this job because I was a Head Start student and I know how important it is for those children and those families.

They said “another success story! Are you serious, you were a Head Start student?” I said yes and I started telling them about my Head Start experiences with my aunt and of course they were all grinning and I felt really good about this interview. I had a friend that said “how did the interview go?” I had everybody texting me, “well, how’s the interview?” I didn’t answer them and finally when I got into the parking lot I said interview’s over and I said I think I did real well and I feel really good about it. Someone said “don’t be disappointed if you don’t get it.” I said I won’t be disappointed; I got a chance to talk to people at the table about how important Head Start was and how important education is. I said that’ why I’m here, it’s to make that awareness about what needs to happen with our families and our kids, as well as your kids.

Kelly: That’s wonderful. It takes such a strong person and such a selfless person to do that. I can’t imagine how- I mean to see it that way. To see it like it was for you but you’re seeing as you’re giving back – you’re letting them know how wonderful this program is and how important it is.

Caskey: They didn’t call me and of course everybody’s like “well, have you heard?” I said no, I’m just glad for the experience; it helped me to hone my interview skills because I hadn’t applied for a job in eighteen years. So I said it gave me some pointers of what I need to do for my next interview. I was ready for my next interview and I’ve gone on a couple of interviews but I didn’t feel as good – I just felt like I was called to do that one. I was doing something and I went home and there were three messages from this gentleman and he said “I’m Alan Yingling and I’m with the Migrant Head Start and I wanted to talk with you more about your application.” Then he called back and he said “I don’t know if I left my phone number but my name is Alan and I liked to hear from you.” Like, I don’t know and fifteen minutes later was another one [saying] “you are going to think this is a crank call but this is Alan and I’ve left you a couple of calls and honestly I can’t even remember what I said on them so I’m just going to start fresh. We’re interested, please give me a call. I know it’s Saturday so I don’t even know if you’re in town and I probably haven’t given you a chance to respond to the messages. So when I got home I thought, whoa, three messages! So the first one is Alan, the second one is Alan, and the third one is Alan by then I was in stitches because I thought this is so funny because the second one said “I don’t know if I left my phone number,” and I thought I’ve done the same thing. So I called him back and he said “let me apologize,” and I said no, I’ve done the same thing. I had a little humor with that because I’ve done the same thing. I get through this whole message and I forget to leave my name or I forget to leave my phone number. I said I was just taken back with your message so its fine and he said “have you accepted another position. We are very interested. You were our first choice.” I said out of how many people and he was like what? I said I am just teasing, tell me that there was two hundred, two thousand, I will feel good about myself. So he’s just laughing and he said “well, have taken anything?” and I said no, I’ve been waiting for you to call. He said “well we’ve talked a little about salary,” and I said Alan the salary’s all negotiable. I know it’s going to be in Piqua and that’s going to be some travel time for me but this is something I want to do. I said it’s temporary but it’s something I want to do and I want this experience. So I said I want to add it to my portfolio and he was excited. He said “well, don’t take another job,” and I said you don’t know me well but if I give you my word you can count on it.

Kelly: Just like when you mentioned earlier, with the African American man [Aaron Page]

Caskey: Don’t let me down, don’t let me down.

Kelly: Well, I don’t have anymore questions. That was just a wonderful interview. I mean my goodness you’ve led such a – so many experiences. Your whole life has been...

Caskey: I often told my husband because he - I don't know if it's his background or because he's from Ohio but he feared for my life a couple of times. He would say "You're going to get yourself in trouble," or "you're going to put our family in jeopardy because they are going to hate you for some of the things that you say." I told him sometimes I go into these meetings and I go into prayer before I go into meetings because I think Lord, help me choose my words. He would say just remember you have a family, remember you have kids. You don't want to put them into jeopardy. So that was always at the back of my mind. When we opened the LULAC office and we had our telephone, we had phone calls. Hate phone calls, just profanity and just all kinds of stuff. It was hate groups and when we marched on the federal building for some kind of advocacy, I forget which one it was, we had - they called our line again. They just reamed us, reamed us with their vulgar accusations and it was hard to listen to. You're listening to a voice mail and it's again you want to listen to what they have to say but a lot of it was very little because of all the profanity that they used. It gives you a different perspective of how they see things opposed to the way you see things. I let the other officers listen to the phone messages saying we got a phone messages; we need to know that there are people out there like that. But my husband feared for my safety as well for my family. He would say don't tell people where you live, don't give your phone number." But my response to that was I feel I have lived a full life and if this should happen it's meant to be, it's going to happen. It's going to happen whether I walk out the front door, or if I'm in the center of Dayton, or if I'm at the Dayton Mall and that was before Fairfield Commons. I said if it's going to happen, it's going to happen. I said I think it's part of what God puts in this fearless factor that you're on a mission to do what I call God's work. Or it's a goal that you set and you do it.

Kelly: I totally agree. Do you have any questions about the release form?

Caskey: No, no I've done a couple of these.

Kelly: Well that was wonderful. I thank you so much. I'm going to turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW

Glossary (Any special terms, events, people referred to in the interview and/or transcript)

Waco, Texas

Family

Head Start Program

Latino Communities

Presbyterian

Discrimination

Central State University

Dayton, Ohio

LULAC

Social Justice

Diversity

Immigration Reform

Delores Huerta

Joan Southgate

El Puente Learning Center

Migrants
September 11, 2001