

WSU COLLEGE OF NURSING AND HEALTH ORAL HISTORY
INTERVIEW of DR. NELDA MARTINEZ
INTERVIEWER: DONNA MILES CURRY

2012

DC: Present at the interview today is myself, I'm the interviewer, Dr. Donna Miles-Curry, and Nel would you like to introduce yourself so that the transcriptionist knows your voice.

NM: Sure, I'm Nel Martinez. I go by Nel but my full name is actually Nelda but believe me after I moved to Ohio, I learned to just go by Nel to make it easy and simple for all of us. I go by Nel.

DC: Very good and then Stacie, do you want to introduce yourself?

SH: I am Stacie Harris, and I am a graduate student here at Wright State.

NM: How are you?

DC: Good, how are you? Did I give you a set of the questions when we chatted the last time?

NM: Yes, I have taken a look at those, and I have them right here with me

DC: Very good. Why don't you start off and tell us a little bit about your personal background and how you came to Wright State because you did at least one of your degrees here, correct?

NM: Yes, I did both the Bachelors and the Masters of Science in Nursing at Wright State.

DC: Very good. So why don't you start off and tell us how you chose to come to Wright State.

NM: I have told this story many times. I do a lot of work with trying to keep support with minority, Hispanic students who are going on to college and certainly showcase careers in nursing and so forth. I always tell them about being born and reared in San Antonio, Texas and remember the day very distinctly; my mom getting us all together, brothers and sisters, to announce that my father was being promoted and we would be moving up north and we all sat there like "sure, what does that mean" and we found out that moving up north did not mean that we were moving to Dallas. My father was civil service and worked at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, as an engineer specialist working with engines and so forth and believe me I didn't come to realize what he did and still we moved to Dayton. He was promoted and working on a project at Wright Patt Air Force Base (WPAFB). We had 6 kids in the family and 3 got married and was going to stay there so there was me, my younger sister, and my younger brother. I was just entering my senior year in high school when the move was set to be made so I ended up staying with my brother and sister there to finish out my senior year. I always wanted to go to college. I was fortunate to take part in some honor classes during my high school and just always very supported by my parents. None of my other brothers or sisters had gone to college yet but I was very much into that; in fact, I took the basic ACT type of test or

whatever and put on the record that one day I wanted to get a PhD and wanted to be in health and medicine. I didn't know what it was, but I always aspired to that.

One day in San Antonio my dad came traveling back to San Antonio from Ohio and I knew that I was going to be moving up there, but to go to college where? He very much pushed the Ohio State University, and he gave me all the information and the application, whatever, and the more I read about Ohio State, the more I was petrified because it was just too big, too much and no one had ever gone to college in my family, so I just didn't complete the application at all and he was a little upset, but I think he understood. The thing that actually sounded the most interesting to me was the University of Dayton only because it was Catholic and private, and it felt so much more safe to me but I was really aiming towards a career in health and I thought of nursing and I did a lot of nursing kind of volunteer type work in a hospital in San Antonio and just really felt that that was what I would like to pursue. He told me that the University of Dayton did not have a nursing program but there was some place called Wright State University and I remember thinking Wright State, like right versus left, right versus wrong, what the heck is that and he reminded me about the Wright Brothers and all that history so that was the sole reason that when I was finishing up in high school that I said okay and I wrote off and applied to Wright State University and got a nice letter saying "yes, you can come and enroll" and that is what I did. The day I graduated from high school, my parents were there and the next day we were in the car, loading my stuff and hit to road to drive from San Antonio to Dayton, Ohio. That was the first experience of being out of San Antonio and it was like being in another world and it was really quiet an experience. I went to Wright State to register and the very first time I can remember the registrar and seeing my name and I gave her this letter and she looked at it and pronounced my last name "Martinez" and I had never heard that in my life. It was the real beginning of everything in many ways. I am Mexican American and all my family is and so forth so it was just really quite an experience and that is how I started at Wright State and I had selected nursing as a degree that I wished to pursue, but I started in with taking all of the pre-req type courses and all of the fun began with college and college life and all of that.

DC: Did you live on campus?

NM: No, no – my parents had moved to Dayton, actually to Fairborn. So, they only lived here for a year; they moved when I was starting my senior year in high school, and I stayed to finish my senior year living with brothers and sisters in San Antonio and just moved into the house in Fairborn. In fact, I remember the day I came to Fairborn, I moved very late at night and the next morning, my mother got me up and said let's go see downtown Fairborn. Oh my gosh that was downtown here in Fairborn, Ohio was a small town compared to having been born and raised in San Antonio and just knowing all the big Texas type of things. So that is where I lived, in Fairborn, Ohio. There was mom, dad, my brother and sister.

DC: Excellent. So, tell us about your early years at Wright State, any special memories when you were either in your beginning courses or in your nursing courses.

NM: You know going to college, as I mentioned, nobody in my family, nobody, nobody, not brothers, sisters, not cousins, not my parents, nobody had ever gone to college, and this was a

first in many ways. I certainly had all the enthusiasm, excitement, my parents but where was this and coming to Ohio and in Dayton I did not know a soul versus finding yourself on a campus where a lot of students came with people they had gone to high school with or others in their family and so forth and just perfect total stranger. Things that I found really different, many things, not just what do you mean go and pick a college class. I learned very quickly what does that mean. I mean nobody in the family could tell me what that was or what to expect or the experience to have. It was a first time learning in many ways but in any social kinds of things this was a whole different world. I've told the story many times that when you grown up and every Sunday you have your Mexican breakfast and run down to the store and get taco's or tortillas, whatever, nothing – there was nothing like that and to learn a different language in many ways – different food, different traditions. I had never been and had never heard of a Polish festival and things like that. I had never gone to a county fair, where you actually saw pigs and goats. I did not know what it was to see somebody literally cook a pie or a cake for a contest at a county fair. I mean this was really a foreign land and a foreign language to me, so I had not just the excitement but anxiety of not just starting college and learning what that was and what it meant but learning what was Ohio. You know, what was the Midwest.

DC: Right.

NM: A lot of excitement with it but a lot of stress at times and anxiety and so forth. But the way I am, I said let's do it and you know just learned a heck of a lot.

DC: Do you remember your first nursing class?

NM: I remember the time, you know, taking some of the science courses and I remember the time of applying with everybody around and then the comments and anxiety and wondering if I'd be accepted. What I remember so much is individual fellow students and hearing it for the first time in my life about I had nothing to worry about, I was going to be accepted because I was Hispanic. I had never heard that and had never experienced anything like that, and I had to talk to my dad about what is she talking about. I was very ignorant about many things along those lines. I got accepted and was admitted really into a sophomore year and one of the very first classes is a general kind of class and there was the time the new Dean had come on board and a lot of different things were happening about even having a uniform, wearing one or not. The nursing cap that people have when you graduated. All of those kinds of things so it was just a lot of things learning about being a nursing student, what nursing class, and what is a nursing school. All of those kinds of things were happening all at the same time. A lot of merits to that, but still a lot of like okay but sitting in the first class you are still petrified because I'm not here to fail and I can't and I felt the anxiety of being a nursing student, but you know you I started to really get involved in many more things in which what's culture and what's race and these were also elements that seemed to affect some people in certain ways and others and so you know trying to feel that and know that they are always looking at me because I'm Hispanic or something so I think that added to a little bit of that as well.

DC: Do you remember any of your clinical?

NM: Oh yes!!! Laugh. The first clinical we were going out to do just a general assessment and do blood pressures and whatever and we had – like a big van.

DC: Mobile health unit.

NM: Yes, and I was going to be out in the Xenia area and all of us came together to say well we will trade times driving all together and I said okay. I was going to be the first one to drive a group of us out to that community site and so I went and got everybody and there was a heck of a car that my parents were able to provide, and it broke down and we never made it to that first clinical.

DC: Oh, no!

NM: Oh boy having to explain that one that we didn't do that on purpose. That was a good way to start off everything there in nursing. But you know, after that, it was just really exciting. I was anxious to learn so the fun began.

DC: So, any particular changes that you faced while you were at Wright State?

NM: Well, you know the whole, I don't know, I got very involved with student government when the nursing school was officially formed. I had the first opportunity to be a rep for student government there. I ran for that and got elected and I got very much involved in many of those kinds of activities. I joined a sorority; I did all of those things. I really enjoyed very very much and then really learning how to learn and study and what have you. I came to learn the things that I liked doing that I would enjoy doing in nursing and things that I didn't like doing. I got more anxious and more nervous like when test-taking and topics and things like that so, you know, but my parents were very critical in that they said if you wouldn't do all these other things you wouldn't have such a hard time with the classes you are taking or this or that, but I don't know I'm just that kind of person and really worked to- I enjoy putting a lot of those pieces together.

DC: I know that you have talked primarily about your undergraduate. Tell us about how you chose to come back to Wright State for your master's degree.

NM: You know there was a faculty person that I really – she had given me a message to come in and see her and I thought “what did I do” or what have you so we sat down and she talked about some things that I really needed to work on some more and this and that and I started telling her that Oh my gosh I just hoped that I was not really falling by the wayside and I want to, I really want to move on and someday I did want to get a PhD, things that were exciting and interesting and learning more and so forth. She really played – had an impact on me in talking about a what do you do and how do you go about – you know, supporting yourself and identifying things that you need to focus on more and how to you know and those kinds of things. I have been in touch with her to this day in all of the steps that I have taken along the

way. That is how – you know when I talked with other people, other students or colleagues about what I say is true mentorship – she is one that I put on one hand as having been a true mentor in that it was really important to help me really understand and talk about graduate school. You know, what is that? What role it plays in supporting your goals and your objectives, what do you want to do and how do you go about doing it, why go on to a PhD, this is what is needed and she was the one who really helped me to open up my insight to many elements involved in pursuing and establishing the pieces to, you know, have a career and that is where the fun began so it was a Master's of Science degree in nursing and I had to be practical. I was newly married after I graduated and working and starting my own family. I waited a year and started there at Wright State for the master's degree.

DC: Would you mind telling us who your mentor was.

NM: Marie Lobo.

DC: Marie, excellent – Marie Lobo. I know her very well. Excellent, very good. Any other interactions you had with faculty or administrators that you remember?

NM: no. When I started the master's program and really that is being in graduate school I think that is really an opportunity to really learn what it is to master knowledge now. You know, you are not here to fail or anything like that, but you really work on helping you to learn and grow and really develop your own knowledge skill and competency and confidence and so-forth. At the time, you know, that was when Gert Torres was here and Marge Stanton was around as well and I can remember Donna Dean. In fact, the first article that I wrote here and got published that I worked on with Donna Dean as well so those were ones that really and also Joanne Ashley, you know, Peggy Chen, Marge Stanton – all of them. I remember Marge Stanton because one of the classes that I took I mean when I turned in one of my first papers that I wrote for the graduate program and it was one of those please see me, no grade – just please see me and I thought Oh my gosh what have I done. You know, I took about a week and I made the appointment she was the one who basically told me my writing stank. I can remember working so hard on that paper and she was the one that I can remember to this day, thinking about how important writing is and the role that it is going to play when going on to graduate school and to level of education and I am so conscientious of my writing to this day and that is where a lot of that really emanated from there. So, they were dynamic faculty. They were there in the time of turmoil and the school was going to close. They were the ones there when I first entered the first half of my master's program.

DC: So, what did you do for a thesis?

NM: Actually, it was actually a – working with a fellow student and worked on a project that was associated with doing like an education, a program to support a nursing program and so forth, something along those lines.

DC: Who was your faculty advisor for that?

NM: Oh, you are asking me to – oh I'm bad, I'm sorry, I can't get the name – you are asking me too fast. Marie had left about that time, so I didn't work with her. I caught up with her at Ohio State when I started into the Ph.D. program as she was at Ohio State at that time.

DC: Great, good. Not a problem. So how do you feel that your experiences at Wright State have affected your career since then. You kind of talked about it influencing your writing, any other ways that you feel like your experience at Wright State has affected your life?

NM: you know, I was very dependent upon everyone around me and really learning what I felt competent and able and not able to do because I couldn't learn from the experiences of anybody in the family and here, I am in a whole different world where none of my buddies from high school were at all. You know, I didn't keep in touch with them or see them and I really felt like a loner though family was around. Really moving ahead, treading water that was totally new to everybody and so times when I didn't know what I was doing, I wasn't sure and didn't feel good about it or whatever. I relied on my mom and my dad so much. It's not that they could talk about the times that they had gone to college or experiences with my other brothers and sisters may have had in college, but they were really just encouraging. We prayed many times, as our religion was important to us and just a lot of help in fostering confidence in itself and so forth. It just really meant a heck of a lot. It was very, very important even throughout my bachelor's program and even when I went through my doctoral program, my parents played a key role in all of that for me.

DC: Very good. Did you have any special friends that you made while either in your undergraduate or your master's program.

NM: Yes, you know. I was really so involved in many things, the student government, serving even on the budget board and all of the student kinds of activities. I remember going and sitting on university committees. Oh, my goodness, it was like that kind of world of Phi Mu, the sorority that I joined so that all the Phi Mu sisters that I had and all the activities that we did. We did that arena and then I could go to another arena which was the nursing school and everybody involved in taking the classes and the clinical and all of that so I just felt really fortunate to enjoy many different elements while I was there at Wright State in my undergraduate program. I had many friends in many different areas and I enjoyed that.

DC: Very good. Any other particular recollections or anything that you would like to share with us.

NM: About anything in particular?

DC: Anything about your experiences with Wright State or your, you know the impact of having done your master's here or your undergrad degree – anything you would like to just say.

NM: Well, you know from high school wanting to someday get a PhD, I guess going to Wright State and doing the master's program I really came to understand what are degree tract programs, what does it involve, what does it entail and so forth. I mean that was really critically important foundation for me. If it hadn't been really supportive of all of my learning and confidence and competency or what have you - I wouldn't have moved on. I mean I moved on to the day of not just my Ph.D. at Ohio State it was funded by the university. I got the pre-doctoral award from NIH and that and all the way on to a post doctorate in clinical genetics and that was funded by NIH and on to many things now. It couldn't have involved into that without you know establishing so much from a lot of folks and a lot of experiences I had there at Wright State. That was very important to me.

DC: Very good. Stacie, do you have any questions that you would like to ask Dr. Martinez?

SH: My one question is that I know you did your PhD at Ohio State and your father had tried to get you to go to Ohio State for your undergrad and graduate, would you think you would have had the same experiences if you had gone to Ohio State for the whole thing or do you think having the smaller community of Wright State atmosphere helped you be able to do Ohio State.

NM: I don't think that I could really have come through it as it did had I gone to Ohio State. For one I know about the academic world now, professionally I don't think so. I was nervous enough to just walk on that campus. Come to find out that even what I wore and what I ate was foreign compared to what was the norm in the Midwest and so forth. I couldn't image why people would dress the way they did. I had never worn a sweater, I never had a coat, or gloves, or scarf, none of that in my whole life and here was that whole thing where they had something called the fall season and I thought wow – really. The winter I thought you are kidding, right and different things like that. I mean it was just so much new experience and new life, so different than what I had ever known. I don't know, that coupled with the stress and anxiety of going to college and learning what does that mean, what is that all about, coupled with just being in a whole new world. I think that I can very much understand, I hear students today tell me about why they would not ever want to leave home and go away to college and here I'm trying to encourage them to go off to college and see the world and come to experience it and I can very much understand what their anxiety and trepidation would be. I don't know that that would have come through at Ohio State because it was so big and so much and I think I would have been overwhelmed by that so I felt Wright State was challenging enough as it was, I think Ohio State would have blown me away. By the time I got to the PhD, I thought why would you not go to Ohio State because I valued what a doctoral education was all about. I will say that before I went to Ohio State, I didn't apply to the nursing program. I still felt like I don't know if I couldn't get in, you know, it's so competitive and this is and that and what have you. So, I started out in the PhD program in health education and promotion or something along that line and I found out that Marie Lobo was on faculty at Ohio State, so I ambled over to see her and boy did she read me the riot act about not being in the PhD in Nursing program. So, I ultimately applied to transfer to that program and was accepted into it and that is how I ultimately really, I think felt much more into appreciating professional nursing and all of the elements of research and service and so forth by having an opportunity for the PhD in Nursing at Ohio State.

DC: Very good – Well

NM: I mean I get asked a lot because people will what to know. I still find it amazing when I hear so many, particularly down here in the valley area, that they still have nobody in their family that went to college and I thought, my gosh, I did this – I graduated in 1978 with my Bachelor of Science in Nursing and here being the first and only Hispanic there at Wright State in the Nursing program, I don't know how many there were in the university but here being the first in my family to go to college and I still hear that to this day. I think wow, where have we been, what are we doing all this time – we still have a lot to move on and move forward with in encouraging students to moving them along from high school on but you know with all the elements of not just college but going to college and being successful in the degree tract program but you know your own cultural and own personal kinds of elements are really what define you and how you go about it. I felt like I had to redefine and restructure so many things in life to live in a world with something called the Ohio Valley but I loved it and I couldn't imagine not having that opportunity and that is why I encourage students to this day that hey there is a world out there that has much to offer as well so.

DC: Very good – thank you so very much.

NM: You are welcome, hopefully this was helpful to you. If you have any other questions don't hesitate to give me a call.

DC: Okay – thank you

NM: Alright, take it easy.

DC: You too.