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Interview no. 1688

Lucía Martínez

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Lucía Martínez

Interviewer: Yolanda Chávez Leyva

Project: Voices from the Border Project

Location: Café Mayapan in El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: July 29, 2016

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Transcript No.: 1688

Transcriber/Summary: /Ana Urías

Summary of Interview: Lucía was born in El Paso, Texas in 1960 and was raised in the Barrio Chamizal. She has two younger sisters, Rosalva and Angelica. Her mother is from Troncoso, Zacatecas, Mexico and her family had moved to Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico because of a drought. Her paternal grandmother, Carmen was born in El Paso in 1910 but when she was fifteen she went back to Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico. Her father was born there in 1932 and his family eventually came to Juárez to La Chaveña. Around the mid-fifties they came to El Paso. They bought a house by San Antonio Street and it was the house in which Lucía and her sisters were raised in. Her parents met in Juárez. She attended Beall Elementary School. She was a very shy child and did not like being around large groups of kids. Her parents would constantly have conferences because her teachers wanted to know why she was shy and not participating with the other students, even though academically she was doing well. It was a constant fight and her mother later told her that she felt like a lioness that had to protect her cubs. She felt that the teachers were very strict disciplinarians, some more than others. They required the students to speak more English than Spanish but were not reprimanded for speaking Spanish as badly as she heard from her aunts when they were in school. She does not recall much corporal punishment. After Beall School, she only had one year of middle school and skipped a year because she was very advanced academically. She then attended Bowie High School where she felt more relaxed. She was only challenged in her French classes. The number of students decreased as the years went by until it was a one-on-one instruction which she liked the best. She mentions that as a lesbian Chicana, growing up as a shy closeted teenager was not good. She remembers a particular teacher in high school that was the only teacher that talked about gay topics even though he was homophobic. She felt validated and it was one of the reasons she took French. When she was about twelve or thirteen years old, she watched the black and white Mexican movie from the forties called *Las Dos Huérfanas* which was about the French Revolution. She recalls there was a strong homoerotic meeting between the two actresses. She took French thinking that as a Mexican gay woman she might find herself reflected on the literature that she was reading. Once she was a senior in high school she read more existentialist literature in

particular Camus and she felt that she identified with the novel *The Stranger*. She was a bad P.E. student and would often be sent to sit on the stadium for not suiting out. From that vantage point she could see *La Migra*, or immigration agents on Paisano Street chasing people into the projects. She would be more fearful of them than of the police because they could snatch you up with no order. She would see agents much more frequently in her neighborhood than the police. When she graduated from Bowie High School in 1979 and in the summer she left to Los Angeles, California. Her aunts were working at the Social Security office so she took a test and started working as a clerk there. She would also interpret for them which was something that she loved. She returned from Los Angeles and went back to school at El Paso Community College. She eventually transferred to UTEP (University of Texas at El Paso) and graduated with a double major in Spanish and Art. In 2000 she applied to various graduate schools and ended up in the University of Arizona in Tucson for an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) program in Studio Arts. She felt that it was a spiritual experience but also a culture shock. It was very different from UTEP in that the university was very white. She mentions that in the art department there was only one Chicano faculty member and two Mexican American students that she was friends with. They all had different backgrounds. Lucía describes her art as figurative and abstract and used a black and white palette for many of her works. In Tucson she would read on Two Spirit and queer topics. She used art to express herself in regards to who she was a Chicana lesbian woman. She has exhibited her art in multiple places including San Francisco. She currently works in schools. She talks about the differences from her own experience in school. Her mother was a home keeper and her father worked in the Darbyshire Foundry that was near Paisano Street which later moved to Canutillo, Texas. Her father had a sixth grade education and her mother only went up to third grade. Her advice to young children that could be having issues is to find someone that they can confide in and that if things look bleak to not lose that dream and hope. She was in the University of Arizona during the September 11 attacks. That day she had the need to go to the art department and everywhere she would look she would see chaos, people crying and walking not knowing what to do. She felt a panic and fear. She did not know what was going on and why. She felt like a target. When she finally reached the art department, she saw how the students were pacing. It seemed that reality had been pulled out of them and she found it fascinating. She found out later when her mother called what had happened that day.

Length of interview 45 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a