

Southwest Detroit Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

(Jane C. Garcia)

Interviewed by

(Alyssa Liakos)

(December 12, 2014)

(Detroit MI)

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

Fall 2014

Brief Biography

Jane C. Garcia was born in Southwest Detroit and has been a lifelong activist for the Southwest Detroit community and for minority rights across the state of Michigan.

Interviewer

This interview was conducted by Alyssa Liakos; a graduate student of the Library and Information Science program at Wayne State.

Abstract

The narrator discusses her life growing up in Southwest Detroit, her career as an activist for the community and for minorities all across the state of Michigan and gives insight into the work that had been accomplished by LA SED and other Southwest Detroit community activist organizations.

Restrictions

None

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Transcript of interview conducted (December 14-15, 2014) with:

(Jane C. Garcia Detroit, MI)

By: (Alyssa Liakos)

Alyssa: My name is Alyssa Liakos and today is December 12th, 2014 I am interviewing Jane Garcia for Kin Schroeder's Oral History class; LIS 7770 Jane can you please say and then spell your first and last name.

Jane: Yes my name is Jane C. Garcia.

Alyssa: Okay, and then you just spell your first and last name please.

Jane: Jane, J-A-N-E and then the initial is C for Carolhas and the last name is Garcia, G-A-R-C-I-A.

Alyssa: Okay, thank you very much. So Jane can you give me some background of your early life, like where you grew up and where you went to school?

Jane: Okay, I was born in Detroit, Southwest Detroit to be exact. I was baptized at St. Anne's which is the largest and the oldest Catholic Church in the state and in the country in some places, I think it's over 300 years old. I was raised and went to school in Corktown which is the Holy Trinity area with Father Kern. I got married very young, let's see what else would you like to know? I went to Holy Trinity, I went to Franklin, I went to Western.

Alyssa: Oh okay, and how young were you when you got married?

Jane: I was 15.

Alyssa: 15?

Jane: Mmmhmm

Alyssa: Wow that is young.

Jane: Yea I was young; the year of '63 was a great year, not only for the country but also for myself. We walked in August of '63 before the Great March; I mean we did a lot of things because my father was a union person, so we got a lot of things done, I met my husband and we got married young.

Alyssa: Wow, so what types of union activities did you march in with your dad?

Jane: It was a march that they had before they had it in Washington, they had a big march down Woodward and Holy Trinity was involved because it was a union thing; you know that's where Martin Luther came and actually marched. I was very young I was only 15.

Alyssa: Mmmhmm

Jane: But it was great because we redid the march last year and it was really wonderful to relive it because when your 15 you're just marching for rights and things like that, you don't know the impact that it's going to take years later.

Alyssa: Mmmhmm

Jane: And I was young!

Alyssa: Yea, can you talk a little bit about your family life?

Jane: Well yea, let me see, my mother and my father, my father worked for Chrysler, he was a union steward, and my mother was somebody that worked at the restaurants and when we were older she worked in the bars because my father and mother separated. But she worked at all the bars in our community and she worked at the restaurants weather is was the Texas restaurant which was right across the street from Holy Trinity when we were kids and she walked across the street because we lived on 6th and Howard at that time.

Alyssa: Okay, then did you have any children or...

Jane: I had my brothers, all my 3 brothers lived with us, and yea, it was pretty nice you know we didn't think it was hard because we had people that were around us that had 12 or 14 children so we were small compared to them.

Alyssa: Oh wow yea.

Jane: The Solises, the Nevaros, the Solanos they had 14 children in their family, and all living at home.

Alyssa: Wow, these were families in the neighborhood that you grew up in?

Jane: Yea they were in the neighborhood, and Father Kern had a lot of community people that he would help out a lot because, you know there was no services in those years, you're talking

about '59-64' there wasn't a lot of services for people so they would mostly go to the church and mostly they would go to Holy Trinity to get services.

Alyssa: Can you tell me a little bit about living in Southwest Detroit prior to you becoming an activist there?

Jane: Well let me see, I was very young when I got married I had 3 children by the time I was 19 and I went to beauty school, I went to community college. But my husband was at Wayne State and he was very much an activist and working with the Latino en Marcha and the black union to get attorneys back into the law school, because they weren't accessing people, they weren't allowing a lot of that at Wayne State back in the late 60s and early 70s. So there was a lot of marches going on, so I would cook and were talking La Raza MEDA we're talking about the farm workers, you know Cesar Chavez came in to organize the farm workers there was a lot of students coming in from the University of Michigan who were organizing social workers and so they used to come and meet at different houses and then we would cook for them because they were all students and that's how we all got involved because there wasn't a lot of places where they could go and meet. So they would meet at homes and they met in my in-laws home they met at the farm workers union, they used Lackla? And they used to meet at Holy Trinity they met at redealers? So that's how that movement all got started.

Alyssa: Did you ever meet Cesar Chavez yourself?

Jane: Oh yes, I actually met him several times; I worked with him back in the late 60s and early 70s.

Alyssa: Oh great, can you tell me a little bit about working with him?

Jane: Well he was organizing the unions back in California for the farm workers and the issue was that the UAW had a big impact, the UAW helped with the organizing and there's a library in fact at the University of Michigan has one and so does the UAW, the UAW has a whole network of things that they helped with, because they were helping organize a different union, but they were helping organize these farm workers, so they came into Michigan quite a bit. In fact the young man, I call him young but he's not young anymore we're all older, who took over the farm workers Arturo Rodriguez I knew him when he was a student and he turned out being the son in law of Cesar Chaves so we had a long relationship, and his daughter right now is at the White House.

Alyssa: Oh wow. What's she doing there?

Jane: Yea, it's so funny when you think about all that stuff.

Alyssa: Small world.

Jane: Because we grew up in a world of activism, only because there were no other services, you understand, it was a need. It had a lot to do with that kind of need, I went to Wayne County Community College when it was all black, it was all African-American I was the only Hispanic in the club, in the whole room. Because I was, I was picked to be guess who's coming to dinner because I was the only one that was not black, it was a lot of fun. When you think about it, it was a lot of fun growing up in that era, grew up with Motown, we walked down Grand Boulevard, we actually got to see a lot of the singers, I mean you grew up in that era because it was there you know what I'm saying?

Alyssa: Yea. So what types of services were missing from Southwest Detroit at that time?

Jane: Services, there was all kinds of services that were missing, there wasn't bilingual services at all you learned English or you failed, it was that easy. I can remember probably up until '67 before the riots I can remember a lot of students going into LA SED because they were asked to join either the military or go to work at Great Lakes or Ford because they weren't gonna graduate, there was no hint that people were gonna graduate because of course they spoke a different language. So it was very hard for people, and the parents would go to places like LA SED and say they want to push my children out, we want them to graduate and people had to go and take a very strong view on how to advocate, LA SED, Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development actually filed a lawsuit against the Department of Education because of lack of bilingual services, and they won. And they filed a lawsuit against the Department of Social Services at the time because there was no bilingual services so nobody could get food stamps, nobody could get aid to children because they didn't have anybody that could speak the language, if you couldn't speak the language you couldn't apply for services. Very much like today, if you don't have a social security card you can't get a food stamp card, even though your children are born in the country. So to some extent we've come a long way and yet we've lost some things along the way, especially for immigrants.

Alyssa: Were there any particular groups or individuals that were causing problems in the community at that time?

Jane: Well I think the lack of services was the problem, the lack of sensitivity, the state felt that if you, the state meaning the state of Michigan, felt that if you were here you had to fend for yourself. If you couldn't fill out the application then you couldn't fill out the application, so by law since you made up so much percentage of the population they should have been hiring people and not discriminating against them because they knew two languages. So we always had that kind of a battle, unfortunately here we are 40 years later, 40/50 years later and all the people that we struggled so hard to get into the system are no longer there because they retired and no one filled the backlog, no one's doing that anymore, it's not their issue it's like fend for yourself.

Alyssa: Why do you think that is that no one sort of came up and...

Jane: I think it's the idea that immigrants are aliens from another world, not from another country. I think that deep down somewhere along the line that people are different and because they are different they're treated that way. I went to a meeting 5 years ago and I remember that someone mentioned, and this was a corporation, this was not a community agency this was a corporation, and they had asked community agencies to come in and they said well we really do wanna hire foreign immigrants like people from Puerto Rico. I had to remind them that Puerto Rico was not a foreign country, that Puerto Rico was part of the United States they're not immigrants, and this was 5 years ago. So the lack of that sensitivity or knowledge or culture is just amazing to me. You know in a country where half the country now are minorities the insensitivity that still continues, it stuns me.

Alyssa: Do you think that there is any immediate solutions for that?

Jane: I think dialogue is immediate solution. Dialogue, the continuation of uncomfortable dialogue will bring the change. People don't like to do uncomfortable things so they stay away from them.

Alyssa: Yes that's true.

Jane: But if you do not bring the discussion out then you never have a solution, even if you don't like the solution you've gotta discuss it. I grew up where in the community there was Maltese there were African-Americans there were Hispanics there were people from Ireland there were people from Scotland, I mean, and you communicated because you grew up in this community, there was a real community and people helped each other. I think that disconnect is what's happening so much across not only our community but across the country, and that reconnect through agencies helps. I've been involved with LA SED since I was 19 years old, I mean that's a long time. My mother in law and ? Hernandez and people like that in the community that we build on these people that have the knowledge. Father Kern said; you know what there isn't a lot of, there's not an agency that's filling the need of people that speak Spanish, it was Spanish speaking in those years it wasn't considered Hispanic, so we've gone from Spanish speaking to American to Hispanic to Latinos, they didn't know what to do with people that were another language so it was interesting to watch the growth. Like when I was a young girl I went to help at LA SED at 19 to make tamales and raise money and cook and gather toys for children that didn't have it, and here I am 50 years later almost and I'm still doing the same thing.

Alyssa: That's outstanding.

Jane: Pardon me?

Alyssa: That's outstanding.

Jane: Oh well I think it's because, I remember somebody said you love LA SED like you love a member of your family, well I grew up with LA SED so obviously Father Kern was very

instrumental in starting this agency. And it was real hard for the community because you had priests and nuns and the UAW and an organization called the United Fund, which ultimately spun off and became United Way. It was the United Fund back in the 60s, and the idea was to help people, not just get them food stamps and not just get their gas paid and not just to make sure, you know there wasn't a lot of talk about domestic violence though it did exist there wasn't a lot of talk. The family members didn't come to say that their husbands beat them up over the weekend because they drank too much; you know you didn't hear none of that, even though it existed. So the idea was to grow from that kind of an organization that was to help people get their food stamps, pay their bills, find out where they needed to go to services blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, right. But at the same time you were struggling because you had people on the board who didn't believe in divorce, and definitely didn't want to hear about domestic violence, and definitely didn't want to hear about incest, they had a lot of things that they didn't wanna talk about. So the organization back in the late 60s, it started in '65, you know it was just a group of people starting together and it was founded in '65. It took them 4 years to incorporate, 4 years to become a non-profit because some people didn't want the church not in there, some people didn't want the UAW out of there, some people didn't want this, some people didn't want that so, but you had to grow and you had to move away because ultimately you had to deal with all the real social issues, you couldn't tell a priest that the wife was beat up and she needed to leave for her own safety, their issue was to keep that marriage together so obviously you were going to be coming at odds, you see what I'm saying. So you had to grow, and out of LA SED came all the other agencies La SED was the founder of a lot of organizations based on the fact that the need was there, they couldn't do everything and they didn't wanna do everything and so today the Latino en Marcho, Chicano Burintas and you have the Latin Studies at Wayne State all started at LA SED, and that was to get people into the universities to get them into colleges to get them higher education to have a network so that you could groom them and hold their hands while they went through this process, because it was a different process for them. So that's what they did, I mean that's what we did as an organization.

Alyssa: Was that LA SED, or was that United Fund?

Jane: Yea that was LA SED.

Alyssa: Okay

Jane: I mean I was just a part of it, I mean there was other people that were really instrumental. I mean obviously Father Kern who had the vision, even though he was the priest, who had the vision that services were needed. And he's still spoken very highly of in the community and he's been gone a long time.

Alyssa: Was he kind of like the spearhead of creating...

Jane: Yea he was, he was the Monsignor at Holy Trinity, that everybody went to he was probably the first social services agent, and you know they still have a clinic there and they still have a

illegal services there that comes there to get services. So whatever he established there stayed, he just created LA SED based on a different issue. That the need was so well, and he wanted it separate from the church. Well he was one of the founders and you gotta give him credit for that, and the UAW the union people that thought it was real important.

Alyssa: Alrighty, so did the city of Detroit or the state of Michigan; were they doing anything to intervene on behalf of the community, at that time?

Jane: No, no they weren't at the time; you know you gotta remember that when you're thinking about the 60s' it was very different in that aspect. It was very white controlled; it was white police officers, white firemen, white administration. They couldn't justify the things they were doing with African Americans let alone someone that spoke a different language.

Alyssa: So then...

Jane: So what I'm saying; it didn't stop us from us becoming our own leadership, it didn't stop us from becoming activists they know their wrong. That's why I say I'm a great advocate for discussing things when they're uncomfortable because you can't get a solution if you don't discuss it.

Alyssa: So then what effects did the riots have on your community?

Jane: Well you know it was real interesting the day of the riots, and I can still remember we lived on 22nd Street and we lived under the bridge. You can imagine living under the bridge and having marshals all over, you know federal troops because it was a bridge so they had to protect that bridge at all costs. So as we left the house we had to be real careful because there were tanks right by our house, and that's amazing when you see that when you're at that age, at 19 years old and you're finding tanks and then we had to go to LA SED to make sure that nobody broke in. It didn't happen that much right on Vernor and all that area but I think it had a lot to do with the tanks, you gotta remember we were right next to the bridge. As you move further North which at Michigan Avenue and Livernois there really was no burning, but if you moved up to Grand River then you saw all the destruction, and there was a lot more destruction than people talked about.

Alyssa: oh really?

Jane: I wasn't that scared, but I'm just saying I remember the destruction afterwards. But it was very uncomfortable just having all the tanks around because you're young and you're thinking what the hell, you know you just don't realize the impact because you don't see it all you just see the aftermath. You gotta remember that my girls were like 3 and 4 and a baby so I was more concerned about keeping them safe because I thought what the heck are these people doing. But the riots changed things obviously, it changed communication, I think the city wanted to see what they could repair, I think that they had good intentions, I don't think it came about as fast as

it should have come and I don't think it came about as willingly as it should have come. You know we're talking the riots, we're talking 5 years later we had the first African American mayor, so change came but you know what I'm saying it just didn't come the way people thought it was gonna come and it was a very uncomfortable time.

Alyssa: Right, what were the expectations that people has that weren't met?

Jane: I think that, excuse me, I think that, I'm trying to think that, you gotta remember that you had a white police force in a city that was already probably 50% African American and maybe 5% Hispanic, maybe 3% Hispanic, you know you're not talking about you had representation, you're not talking about you had accessibility, and I don't know, I never wanna say that it was by design, I wanna say that it was business as usual and when the riots came the solution was to see what they could do about fixing the imbalances of it but nobody really likes change so it took many years until you saw African American police officers, Hispanic police officers, and you had to live in the city so the citizens were a lot easier to deal with because you had to live where you worked.

Alyssa: Yea that makes sense.

Jane: you don't have that anymore, so you have that disconnect, you don't have that anymore, you don't have to live in the city anymore, so that disconnect has happened not only for African Americans or Hispanics just for the citizens of Detroit you didn't have that many people, you had a lot of people leaving, not only whites and Hispanics and African Americans you had a lot of people leaving. You had the most people leaving from the year 1980 until the year 2000. And then 2010 the census will show you that we went from a million to 700,000 that wasn't just whites it was African Americans and Hispanics.

Alyssa: Yea so it was across the board that people were leaving.

Jane: It was happening across the board because people want what they want for their children and what they want is good education.

Alyssa: Right.

Jane: When you're single, and I can see that now, you can live anywhere, because you're single. But once you have a family you want then to have good access to good education and that happens no matter what economic base you come from, no matter whether your Hispanic or African American or white you want your children to have the best education that you can provide to them.

Alyssa: And that wasn't being provided at the time for...

Jane: It hasn't been provided for several decades. What we won in the late 60s early 70s with bilingual education it totally gone now they have it but you know bilingual education should be a

bridge for people that need it so they can learn the language it shouldn't go on for 12 years, you see what I'm saying. So you kind of lose a lot of that process, you know I'm an activist, I'm always gonna be an activist because I fight for the issues that I think impact our community.

Alyssa: Right, so in terms of your activism being that you had a young family at such a young age and you were involved in unions and you were active in the community, what was sort of your tipping point when you decided hey I really need to get up and do something about what's going on here?

Jane: I think it happened sometime in the early 70s only because my husband was very involved, and we were both very involved and by that time we had 4 children and he said you know honey we can't both be involved, and he said it real clearly I'll never forget it. He said we can't both be involved if this continues we're gonna miss something with the children, and I cracked up and I said to him, I said, so then okay you do it honey, and he said no you're more of a vocal person you do it and I'll be with the kids. I'll do everything with the children, the coaching, the schools the after school programs I'll do everything there and you do it. That was a real important time when that happened because it was a real turning point because I was always involved, you know we cooked we raised money we always did that superficial kind of doing things; cooking, raising money, marching we always did that. But this was a real strong view when my husband said to me, you need to do it because you are just more vocal than I am, and I said okay, alright honey, and so that's the decision we made and that's when I took the strong, I went on the board of directors, I was just cooking before that, but I went on the board of directors and we did a lot of the other strategy meetings making sure that New Detroit understood, because there was an organization that started after the riots. You know we always had to advocate that you know it wasn't a black issue only we had to have Hispanics at the table because we were part of the community so you know those were the roles that we had to take, and that I started taking along with the other people in my community moving forward that we needed to be part of the process.

Alyssa: Alright so can you talk about your early years as an activist?

Jane: I think the early years; basically it started off at Webster school. I was a teacher's aide at the school and the Latino parents came and they didn't speak English. So we started an organization there because they had a parents meeting and they were told that they had to leave because if they didn't understand English then they couldn't be in the meeting.

Alyssa: wow.

Jane: Oh yea it was real direct and we're talking '71, so I said to them that's totally unfair and I worked with the system for Mr. Laria I think I took out the rest of his hair, he just was so upset because I got up and I said so. Well he said well you work here and I said yea but I'm also a parent and I do not expect these people to be treated this way. So I said no problem we'll start our own organization, you won't let us be part of this then we'll start our own and we'll still make decisions on our impact on our children and it was the fathers, it was the parents and

educators that what it was called because the teachers were there that were Spanish could join so it was called parents and educators. What we did was we told the parents, in Spanish, their rights and their accessibility to school board members and things like that. We taught them that they had to stand up for themselves, and we were very proud of that because they became very strong in their views and they would get up and say their views and we would translate it and the school board actually listened to them, and it was a big change for the parents to come in and feel comfortable, they weren't thrown in a bathroom, I mean they actually came one time for a meeting and had to meet in the bathroom.

Alyssa: wow.

Jane: Yea so they actually experienced that real strong racism, there was no other way to say it, there was no other way to do it, and I remember Mr. Laria poor thing he was suffering a heart attack every time he saw us, you know you need to stop aggravating these parents. So I said I'm not doing anything they're coming and they're meeting and they have every right they have their children here they pay taxes here, so those were our first steps at getting the parents organized and then we kept going. Like I said it was always moving because of injustices to the town, that was our role there, and then I went on to the board of LA SED and I was involved there with them and their actions against the state of Michigan for not having bilingual services. So we were always involved in that role; and I say we because there was a lot of people involved, I just happened to be a lot more vocal than the rest of them.

Alyssa: So what other types of programs did you create for the community?

Jane: Well that was a real important one, I thought, because it impacted the children, and then after that we talked about social workers so we got workers to go into the social services because we met with them, LA SED as an agency which was the strongest agency at that time because we were an activist agency. Met with the state of Michigan and proved to them that if they could not provide services then we would file a claim and a lawsuit against them, and we did, and they settled and instead trained 50 across the state, and hired Spanish speaking people. They were qualified, it isn't like they were dropouts they were college degree people they were people that had graduated and were bilingual, could read and write in both languages, so they were very equipped people they were very knowledgeable and very qualified, and so that was a big break in when we did that, that was a big break because that was the Department of Social Services and then we were able to do the same thing with DTE and then we were able to do the same thing with MichCon, so basically we proved our point that these were people that were coming in and may have some problems and they didn't have anyone that could listen to their problems because they didn't have bilingual staff. It didn't mean that because they were bilingual they were less qualified so those were the issues that we took on as an agency and I just happened to be part of that roll out.

Alyssa: So what do you think throughout your career as an activist, what was the most impactful change that you helped implement in the community?

Jane: I think the most impactful was that we did something about 10 years ago when we met with, when the school was taken over by the state, and we met with David Atamatey who had just left Wayne State at the time and we talked to him about having qualified individuals that would become principles and during that time we turned up with 11 Hispanic bilingual principles that were promoted. That was a real big impact to me I never forgot that because you saw an outcome, you don't always see the outcome of everything else but you this as an outcome, we put them through school, Wayne State was helping they had to take so many courses in leadership, they don't even have to do that anymore but at that time they did, and we turned up with 11 administrators at one time, that was quite unique I think. It wasn't just Jane but we were part of that, LA SED was part of that and that was a big impact to me.

Alyssa: Yea it sends a powerful message.

Jane: Right, and so I think those were important, I mean you gotta remember I was always a little different than the rest of them, I was the first Hispanic elected as the Hispanic Vice-Chair of the Republican party. I mean when I did that my people had a heart attack, I was always a little different, so I did that also because I always was more conservative even though I was an activist, I had conservative views on financial and I wanted to make sure, I remember somebody asked me in Chicago why would you be a Republican, and I said why not? They said well because Republicans don't do for people, I do for people and I'm a Republican and so it was real different for them and I remember when I won being the Vice-Chair there were some people in the UAW that quit talking to me.

Alyssa: Oh no.

Jane: They actually quit talking to me, but you know what, it was okay because I did what I thought was important and when I was the Vice-Chair I went all the way to the White House fighting for Hispanics. So it didn't matter to me it's just access, it was always the access, I could win over Republicans it didn't bother me whatsoever, give me a room I'll fight my battles, as it was interesting.

Alyssa: That's fantastic though, it doesn't matter which political party you're involved with or where you fall in the spectrum you can still do good.

Jane: Oh yea and that's what somebody said, I remember somebody said that when they introduced me in Chicago they said Jane's the first Hispanic ever elected in the Republican party and somebody said like, ooh or something, and he said no, no, no I don't want you to say anything like that against Jane Garcia, Jane Garcia no matter where she goes she's always fighting for the people so it doesn't matter her political process or it wouldn't matter her religion, it's just who she is. And I thought that was very kind of him, in fact years later in 2003 at the

Hispanic Leadership Conference he presented me with the Cesar Chavez medalla for activism. And that was a great honor because I knew him and I had worked with him and to be even associated with someone that died for his causes was very moving, it was very moving. In fact that was the year that I met Obama he was at the head table with us.

Alyssa: That's pretty outstanding.

Jane: Yea he was running for senator, so it was a long time ago, a long time ago.

Alyssa: Well again, a small world you had really powerful connections to people.

Jane: Well I think it was real interesting because like I said there was a man in our city, a very, very powerful man and I got to be at the tables with him, it was Frank Stella, and it was always interesting when I watched him, he was a Catholic, I went to his funeral and he had three archbishops, I never have seen three archbishops at a funeral. I said my poor Frankie my love bought his way into the political party and to God and they all laughed and I said well because I loved him so, I just genuinely loved him And then I think because of the circles that I'm in I had access to a lot of people that could make decisions that impacted our lives. I started something in '89 with the help of other people, not just Jane Garcia but I always say that because you cannot be successful by yourself and I truly believe that in my heart, because yes I'm a voice and yes I'm an activist but I also have had a lot of support throughout the years. Not only from my family, who genuinely have always supported me and my husband who has always thought that I could do anything, but also from a lot of friends. In 1989 I saw something that other people hadn't seen that I was very angry about corporate America and what they were doing to people. In 1989 we had Bill Benetow who was the head of Michigan Bell, and I was on the advisory committee for Michigan Bell talking about bilingual services, and it was always services to the community and they were asking them to go, not be Michigan Bell anymore it was all the Bell systems in the Midwest and they had become American. At that time the 5 states had one board and not representation from Michigan, by the way, so I bought the stock and I asked my friends and said well we've done everything else why don't we have an impact on corporate America as activists, and they said Jane can you do that? I said yes, why not as long as you buy stock you're an owner so we started the Corporate Responsibilities Ythrough Advocacy True Ownership. That's what it's called, so what I did was bought the stock from each corporation that I thought didn't have representation. Well for Ameritech I was fighting for African American females because they let 4,000 female workers go , and you gotta remember these were employees, African American females who were never gonna be able to make that kind of money again because they had already been most of their careers with Michigan Bell, so I went to Chicago for the stockholders meeting and I had just started this corporation, called Corporate Responsibility Through Advocacy True Ownership, so I went and got up and spoke about rightsizing, because they looked it as rightsizing and I looked at it as downsizing, and you were gonna downsize but you were gonna impact mostly in Michigan and in Detroit was going to be African American females. Who were never gonna be able to get that kind of money again, what was their future

gonna look like and was there gonna be a chance for them to come back because they were so experienced with the company. They were very nice because they had to answer the question, of course they were gonna have 2 years' service pay and that's not an answer that's just, they were just trying to come up with something. I said okay that's not fair, so I came back and I talked to some of my African American community members, I said can you go with me, the next time I took an African American leader with me to Chicago and they got up and spoke about the impact, of how it was going to impact the minorities but specifically African American females. So I've been doing that since 1989 and I go to corporate America boards and ask if they have representation for African Americans, Hispanics, and make some real differences, I think it's been a great outcome, I don't get to choose who goes on their board but because of 5 or 6 years that I go they actually do have representation, that's an outcome. I don't have anything to do with who they pick I just keep saying we need representation, we need representation and you cannot get diversity, true diversity until you have someone from my community sitting on that board making decisions, so I went from one extreme to another, but it's been very successful man, we got a Hispanic at DTE, we got a Hispanic at Comerica, they have a Hispanic at General Motors, we've always had a Hispanic at Ford they were way ahead of the game. But yea, we've had Hispanics where there wasn't before and we're very pleased with that. Again now that's just an outcome.

Alyssa: When you first started in your activism was there any one person or group that was really resistant to the changes that you were trying to implement, specifically?

Jane: Oh no I never, well there was American G.I. Form or the LULAC organization or LA SED they were always happy to have me, because sometimes like you said people don't want to talk about uncomfortable issues, I never had a problem, and I think those organizations not in my community all those organizations were very supportive of what I was doing.

Alyssa: Well that's great.

Jane: No, I think that's wonderful you have great people that are no longer with us Lucy Ajax, Skip Barlarado worked at the American G.I. Form. You have all these people that were trailblazers, they were trailblazers I was just a voice, and because I didn't have a problem getting up and speaking they were very supportive, you gotta remember, I was chair of the board of the oldest Hispanic organization in the city of Detroit and that's LA SED, Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development, but people don't realize that I'm not a paid person I'm a total volunteer there's no salary attached to my involvement. I went to work for the federal government and I was blessed enough to work more than 27 years for them and I had a great boss who anytime I wanted to do something they were very supportive because I was a community activist, I also was a community worker for the Bureau of the Census to get people to file their forms and things like that, so they were always very supportive so in my life I've been extremely blessed.

Alyssa: That's fantastic.

Jane: I've been appointed by 3 mayors to several committees, I've had a very blessed life and it's not been a struggle to get up and say everything that you thought you had to say that was right whether you wanted to hear the truth or not it was very important, I think, that we needed to voice our opinions, I met up at a New Detroit meeting and challenged the African Americans saying hey we're part of this process, minorities doesn't mean African American only. A lot of our community people were uncomfortable saying that, I never was. Maybe it was because I was born and raised in Detroit, maybe the idea that I was a Hispanic chick born in Southwest Detroit made it very possible, I've paid my dues so I don't have any problems getting up and telling people that there's an injustice to certain people. I was interviewed not too long ago and the person in the interview called in and said that I was an American, I said absolutely and they said well don't you think that the people that are here illegally should be terminated and sent back to wherever they came from and I said no because this whole land, this whole country was built on the backs on immigrants, how do you wash that away? You don't wash it away, you can't wash it away, well you know all these aliens, I says first of all people are human beings they're not aliens. The aliens I was brought up to believe were from another world, another planet, these people are from the same continent, we just happen to have a border that was landed on them based on 200 years of whatever we did. So you have to educate people that what they say is not accurate, it like, I covered the census, I covered four censuses from '80 to 2010. In 1990 I had to go, and people still forget that the Upper Peninsula is really part of Michigan, but I went up to it quite a bit and I never forgot the fact that, and this was the 90s I mean you're not talking about 1960's or 70s or 80s this was '90. And I'll never forget it that I sat on a plane and the lady said to me, excuse me but can I ask you what you are? And I offended her when I told her that I was an American, I never forgot the look on her face, she said can I ask you what you are and I said sure I'm an American, it offended her you could see it in her face. And she said no I mean what are you really, and I said an American, okay what heritage are you from, and I said of my ethnic background I'm a Mexican American. But it offended her that I said American first; she said oh I'm so glad to hear that you're a Mexican American. I said oh really why, and she said I thought you were one of those people, and I said which people are them ma'am, she said you know these people that are fighting for their fishing rights. She was talking about the Native Americans, but because I was dark and I had long hair she wanted to ask me first if I was Indian, Native American and I said no ma'am, what's the problem with them? She said well first they want the land, and then they want this and then they want that and now they want the fish, and I just looked at her and I said oh my god isn't it amazing, I said we took their land, we took their language, we took their religion, and now we have the nerve that we wanna take their fish. The lady couldn't move anywhere, boy I forgot that, she couldn't move anywhere because it was a two seater plane, only 15 passengers so she had to sit there, and she said well I guess you could look at it that way, that's the only way I could look at it. You know and I was going up there to talk to the chiefs because I handled not only the Hispanics but also the Native American, the tribal reviews for the census bureau, and I was just amazed that in this day and age, the 90s we're

talking 20 some years ago that people still thought that of the native people, and I always wondered why they're, and I have brothers that are half native they were born on Montana reservations my step-mother was from the Navajo. And I always thought to myself isn't it amazing that in this day and age that people could still think like that. But that goes to show you those uncomfortable things that we need to speak about and that way we'll always be an activist because you have to fight for those issues, whatever is wrong is wrong.

Alyssa: So where do you see the Southwest Detroit community heading into the future?

Jane: Well I think we're very fortunate that LA SED fought 26 years for districts and it wasn't comfortable trust me because you had a lot of African brothers and sisters who said Jane as long as you're in the district your people should run like everybody else. I said no I think you need districts, we always fought for districts we went on record fighting for districts and we won that fight with a charter about two years ago, and now we have a Hispanic representation in city council so if you could look at some of that we've actually made some progress. It's not gonna happen overnight because they're gonna hit the same kind of problems that everybody else has the taxes, the bankruptcy, the lack of resources, but at least we can, it may have taken us some time but we have a representation in city council and we have access. Mike Duggen, you know I've worked with Mike for many, many years that I was on the board with him at DMC, he's very sensitive to Southwest Detroit based on the fact that his grandfather grew up there and I think that when you have that sensitivity you can have enough sense to at least come to the table and think about resources. Southwest Detroit became very important for the rest of the city of Detroit based on the population and the people are stable and that they're still living there. The neighborhood, if you look at the neighborhood they have diminished quite a bit Eastside you can't even find houses there. I got lost one day and I don't get lost usually but I went the wrong way to a meeting, the NAACP were having a meeting and I went the wrong way and by the time I hit the river I was crying because I couldn't believe the massive, vastness, empty space of that area. And so now I kind of realize why Southwest Detroit was so important because you have houses still there, you still have all these people living there. You know they move, a lot of the Hispanics have moved because of the education just like I said before, but they're moving right along the river, right along the 75 freeway so that they can come back into the community within ten minutes. Whether it's Allen Park, Lincoln Park, Allendale, they come back into Detroit because of all the restaurants and all the bakeries, but that's also what's helping keep Detroit stable was those businesses that haven't moved. The Eastern Market I'm real happy to see that's coming back, on the other side, but it still doesn't have the residential. See that's what I'm talking about we have a lot of residential and that's very important to the community, so again I think that Southwest is a very important part of the city and I think it's finally been recognized as a very important part of the city.

Alyssa: Alright, so one of the last questions that I have here, are there any changes that you still would like to see implemented in your community?

Jane: Oh I would still like to see, if they pass the Dream Act tomorrow, next Tuesday, and it looks like they're gonna pass it. It's gonna make it easier for people to get a driver's license, it's very, very difficult to have people that are immigrants and that are not here legally or they're not documented well, they can't get a driver's license, you really don't want people out there with no driver's license, and for whatever wisdom that was used across the country they decided to call that if you can't have a social security number it's almost like tracking people, if you can't have a social security number you can't get a driver's license and that's been a big issue you have people driving in Southwest Detroit that don't have a driver's license whether they're Hispanic or African Americans or any other nationality, they need to have a driver's license, so those are the big issues that I, but of course it didn't pass. The social services has been real big in the last several months because for whatever wisdom the state of Michigan has decided that they're gonna do less services, for the social services you know whether you get your My Card or whether you get the food stamp, or whether you get any kind of health services you have to go online to get these services. Well not everybody has a computer so we're dealing with people coming in at LA SED because they don't have access, not everybody has internet, not everybody has computers and then on top of that the person, the head of household has to have a social security card. Well a lot of the undocumented children, their parents are undocumented but the children are American citizens, so those are the issues we're fighting right now that are a real impact because you want children, you want them to have food, you want them to have medical services and because their parents aren't legally here, they are legally entitled to them but the parents don't know where to go. So we're getting bombarded with a lot of that stuff and we're hoping that the state will turn around and like the IRS takes a pin number their assigned a pin number so they can pay their taxes we're hoping that the Department of Social Services will also accept a pin number so children can have access to services. Those are our issues right now and those are bread and butter issues mija, they're not like okay we vote tomorrow, we're talking about bread and butter just to feed the children. So yea, here we are 40/50 years later and we're still pretty much in the same kind of boat in a lot of communities, I'm not saying all communities, in a lot of communities.

Alyssa: What do you think are some of the steps that need to be taken towards making those changes?

Jane: Well I think obviously sensitizing the state of Michigan and making sure that children have access, and we're meeting, we're already starting to meet with them and saying this is not acceptable, it doesn't matter how you feel about the parents, we don't know what the immigration issues are gonna become, we don't know whose gonna become legal and whose gonna be ... or something, we don't know that. The children still need to have services so we've already put it in writing to the governor and now we're meeting with the people at the state that's heading up the programs to see where they can make some changes. I mean really we could have bilingual services across the board so that people can explain to them what their rights are.

Alyssa: Yea that's important.

Jane: That's very important.

Alyssa: Alright my last question is; what was the impact of the Detroit bankruptcy on the community?

Jane: I don't think it impacted that much on our community; the businesses still pay their taxes. I don't think it impacted on us because, there was a whole lot of contracts that were owed to the Spanish contractors so it didn't impact the same you just had the repercussion of how it affected the city that was gonna affect us, you know what I'm saying? You know people still have to pay their taxes it doesn't matter whether we're in bankruptcy or not, I mean just because you're in bankruptcy doesn't mean you don't have to pay your taxes. And you still have to pay the parking tickets I mean so you, so bankruptcy affected large corporations that were owed money, you know what I'm saying? Vendors, the bankruptcy affected them more than it affected people that lived in certain areas, don't forget we were already not getting a lot of services, so it didn't impact us the same we're hoping that coming out of bankruptcy they'll find solutions to helping the businesses stay in Detroit, in the last 2 years I've seen a lot of businesses close down because they just couldn't pay their taxes anymore, they couldn't make enough money to pay their taxes. So I'm hoping that coming out of bankruptcy there's some leniency for the corporations, for the restaurants, and the businesses that are trying to stay, that no matter what they're still there. We have some businesses that are paying up to \$20,000 a year in taxes, and the man that closed his business right before the holidays, last Easter, no it was Cinco de Mayo because I was there working with the Cinco de Mayo. I remember he was closing he'd been in business 25 years; he just didn't make enough money to pay his taxes.

Alyssa: Yea and that's really unfortunate when institutions like that are forced to close.

Jane: Yea, and even in the community, right at Michigan Avenue and Central, 25 years they had to close and that's a business that's gone forever. So I'm hoping us coming out of bankruptcy the solution will be to help these people that want to stay in business whether we give them 5 years of a waiver for half their taxes, that would be great, that would really be great for these people because they struggle. I've heard a lot of them say, the restaurants they say our taxes are so high we may just close, and that would be devastating for our community in Southwest Detroit. And that's one of my biggest fears and I'm hoping that after bankruptcy we can sit down and talk about some waivers for these people, even if its 50% waiver just to keep 'em here because if you go down, have you been to Southwest Detroit?

Alyssa: No I haven't.

Jane: Oh you gotta go. Go down, we're on; LA SED is right on the corner of Vernor and Scottman, and across the street from a big park called Park Park which is very old and then you have Armando's Taco Halls and you have Mexicantown bakery, it's just, it's very viable. You go down Vernor all the way down to Springwells there's businesses, they're still there they're still vibrant and we're grateful for them. Right on Bagley its only 2 or 3 blocks of pure restaurants

and they do well, mostly because our Canadian brothers is what I notice, but you know what, by any means necessary that's what I say.

Alyssa: Yea a lot of my family immigrated into Canada.

Jane: But I invite you, you should really do that, go to the bakery, they're really great bakeries, really great. When I was growing up I had a lot of Polish bakeries on Michigan Avenue and they're all gone, see I don't want that to happen to our community. All the Polish bakeries that were down Michigan Avenue and Livernois they're all gone, there isn't one Polish bakery left and I grew up with all of them there, and I don't want that to happen to my community, I don't want that to happen in our community, basically the taxes outdo them and they just leave. Or they go downriver because I've seen a lot of restaurants, Mexican restaurants open down Lincoln Park, Melvindale, Allen Park, I've never seen so many but I think it was the taxes that's why they opened up over there and not in Detroit. That's what I've seen; I've seen those kinds of changes. Like every community we have our good and our bad so we still have to deal with the gangs that we didn't used to deal with years ago, and we have agencies that are dealing with them and trying to get 'em in school and keep 'em in school but like everybody else you have your problems with some of the gang stuff.

Alyssa: Alright well thank you so much Jane for taking the time to talk with me about this I really appreciate it.

Jane: Oh I hope you found it enjoyable, I mean you try to wrap up 50 years in something and I'm not sure, you know I've been married 51 years.

Alyssa: Oh congrats.

Jane: I know isn't it amazing? The only reason I know I've been married that long is because I see my children, but you know I've been very fortunate to have a great community that supported me for so many years, and I think that I've supported them has been a real joy, because if you bring about, even if it's just a little bit of change it's important.