

# Oral History Interview with Mary Luevanos

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At Mexican Town Mercado  
Transcripts

**Amanda Hoover, Interviewer**

**11/22/2014**

Oral History Interview with Mary Luevanos

Interviewer: When and where were you born?

Mary: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, 1941.

Interviewer: So you've been here your whole life.

Mary: My entire life and we're right down this street. Bagley's over there and my grandparents lived on Bagley. My father owned a Latin American cleaners and he also worked at Ford Motor Company. Yes, so my family came here in the 20's so I'm born here in the United States.

Interviewer: Well, what was your childhood like being raised in this area?

Mary: It was terribly cool. We moved when I was five or six down the road on Vernor, not that far from here. But this area on Bagley was very much a village. My aunt lived over there, my other aunt lived over here. My mom's family lived over there. All of the family lived right here. I'm not sure if anybody had a car. I know my dad had a car but I always think of the train station as our Ellis Island because everybody came to the train station and actually located right near the train station.

Interviewer: How many siblings did you have, older, younger?

Mary: I'm the oldest and I have four younger brothers.

Interviewer: So, a lot of chaos in your house.

Mary: Oh, Man. Still, they haven't changed, only they're older.

Interviewer: Who did you look up to growing up in your community here?

Mary: In the community?

Interviewer: MMHMM

Mary: I'm not sure if I looked up to anyone. However, my grandparents played such a role, especially my abuelitas, and my dad was so cool. My one grandmother didn't like to cook at all but she loved poetry and writing. My other grandmother loved to cook and I often tell kids at workshops that my grandmother was like Jesus Christ and everybody goes like "what is she saying?" I said, "well, you remember when he had the loaf of bread that fed thousands." I would go over my grandmother's house with ten kids. She always had a pot that never seemed to go down, fresh made tortillas, a little bit of butter, and she lived on the corner, over here, where the tortilla factory is. Well she made tortillas arina, which are flour tortillas, but the tortilla factory is there and the smell for tortillas is right there. Well, the houses aren't there anymore, but it's right there where her house used to be. Yeah, it was like my cousins, it was great, just great. You didn't lock your doors. You didn't start locking the doors till my mother got up one night, this is on Cahalla, this is like farther down the road in a house tht I had grew up after I was five or six years old, and she saw some pants and she thought it was a mouse and she AAAAAAHHHH! And then she saw that it was my dad's pants and somebody had gone in the house. Those were the days you threw your bike down on the lawn. Or at three o'clock three thirty, "It's Howdy Doody Time!"

Interviewer: So it was an actual community still.

Mary: It was down at the other end of Vernor, it was a very diverse neighborhood, Armenian, Lithuanian, Polish. When I went to school I went to Bennett, and I believe I was the only Latina

in that school. Not just the only Mexican, the only Latina, and it wasn't until I went to Wilson Junior High school that in the eighth grade another Latina came in the eighth grade.

Interviewer: Was that normal for the other schools from those that you talked to since then? Or, was it just because you lived on the outskirts of the town that you were in a different school district?

Mary: Probably. My husband went to St. Anne's over here so there were a lot of, I think over here there was more concentration of Latinas then down the road which is only five or ten minutes away but...

Interviewer: But it was enough to put you in a different school district. Was that difficult being the only Latina in the school?

Mary: No, on the contrary, I had been the only one who had been out of the country and for the most part I was the only one who spoke another language. There were possibly some folks that spoke Lithuanian but, I just remember that they'd always look at me like if *las chanpanecas*.<sup>1</sup> One of those songs they have or they look at me like what was this like, that kind of thing. So, it was kind of a highlight. However, the opposite was true over here. I know my husband is very quiet and doesn't say much at all, let alone against a priest, but he said they were very prejudice. Now, that is where a lot more Latinos. Like when my father came, my father was eight years old when he came from Mexico. My mom was born in Saginaw. But he was put in Houghton School special ed and my father happened to be... in those days, if you didn't speak English they put you in special ed It wasn't until the desegregation act, and that was one of the battles of the deseg act, bilingual education. My dad happened to be a very intelligent person and became one

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<sup>1</sup> Some person who is odd.

of the very first foremen at the Ford Motor Company. So, my dad was a pretty smart fellow and played saxophone and played drums.

Interviewer: Music was his created outlet?

Mary: Oh, yeah. In those days you were dumb if you had an accent. So beat the accent out of them because it wasn't good. So my parents always spoke English when I was growing up. If it weren't for my grandparents, I wouldn't be speaking Spanish today. It's really such a familial thing to be able to speak both languages because I was really so enamored with my grandparents. I was always... My one grandmother behaved as if she couldn't speak English and she would pretend she couldn't... that's why I speak Spanish today. I find there's a period of time after they passed away... my other grandmother would say, "it's not polite to speak Spanish in front of people who don't understand you" so we always lived in a community where most of my friends were not Spanish speaking. So there's a long period which I didn't use it. However, I find that valuable because I'd done so many parenting workshops at Holy Trinity, with the parents I'd done family art. So if I'm telling a story or a scene, "you know my family is not a fishermen so how do you say scales, ¿ Como se dice? ¿ Como se dice? Oh, escamas. Oh, ok, escamas, you know the rainbow fish. Or, how do you say stapler? My family didn't work in offices so... "Es una engravadora!" How, interesting you know. So it turned out they also participated even though, you know, I'm doing this parenting, it was really great fun. It's a cool way, instead of going in knowing everything, they were all really, they would say, "oh, your one of us." I still see a lot of them. One of my big things is my Community Work for Community People. I think it's vitally important and actually one of the reasons I still do this kind of stuff is that my real goal is to have some of the women in the community come in and take over. Take over doing this kind of thing because it's so important for these youngsters to see people from their own

community. Connect with people. I want you to come see Michigan. I was roster artist for Young Audiences of Michigan and Tecumseh was my daycare so when I went there I used to do with parks and rec and go all over, Ypsilanti all over doing... like I said as a roster artist for Young Goddesses of Michigan and Matrix Theater Company. So when I went to Tecumseh, it was like being back home. I'm the oldest, my oldest brother is seven years younger than I am. So, that's a span. They were always much younger than me so when I went to Tecumseh it was like being home. I do Exploring the Arts, so I do a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of this and it was just amazing, amazingly good time. These kids, migrant day care, they put them in a room and they watched television I think I'm gonna have some kids coming in. (INTERUPTED INTERVIEW) So when I went to Tecumseh, Michigan it was like being back home and that's when I decided I wasn't going to be running all over anymore. That I was going to stay right here in my own backyard. It's really cool, I mean and the kids get to see what people in their own neighborhood do.

Interviewer: People like them, that they can grow up to be like. How did you get involved in art?

Mary: Probably since I was five years old, maybe less. I've been doing this all my life. My grandmother used to paint, she used to write poetry. I do some poetry, also, and some open mic and so it's always been there. My dad was very supportive. He bought me the works of Shakespeare. I actually wanted to be an actress and not hard, really, but I also took commercial art. I went to Cass Tech and took commercial art. But my real intention was to be a thespian, which I was. I've done some, a little bit of play writing and acting, actually quite a bit of acting. It's what I like to do. Probably my one grandmother, who didn't like to cook, (laughs) probably from her... I don't know. It's something I've always loved.

Interviewer: Was there ever any pressure on you growing up that you should do something else, at least for a living, a regular job, like the nine to five?

Mary: Well, I've done nine to five. I was at New Detroit for five years. In fact we met yesterday with the people I used to work with. I hadn't seen them in over twenty years. It was with Latino Affairs. Then I've done some work with LA SED. I've done a lot of freelancing since I've left the nine to fivers. I was a cashier at Great Scott many years ago. Probably ten years of that. Then I worked through Michigan Employment Security for a little bit, then New Detroit and actually freelancing. I've really been freelancing all these years; I still am, this is freelance right now.

Interviewer: Was there something that happened when you were growing up or as you were starting to become involved that made you say this needs to change, I need to be more active?

Mary: You are talking in terms of activism.

Interviewer: mmmhmmm

Mary: Actually, I have probably always been that way, because I remember when I went to New Detroit they said that they really wanted, well this was Latino Affairs. So I went and I even took a cut in my pay and it was a contractual job. There's a lot of things. I have a son who's developmentally disabled. I know his speech therapist told him, he didn't have to come any more. That he is gone as far as he'll ever go. That was "wait a minute. You didn't discuss this with the parent, you discussed it with the developmentally disabled person." So, I went to the head of the board. Then, again, they were going to put him in a, not a regular school, but he was temperamentally impaired, they used a couple loops and said he was falling right in here. Now he's twenty three by now, and (special ed is over twenty six). I said "wait a minute. I could

understand if you came up with this test when he was eleven, now you're gonna to do this to him." And they tried to make you feel like it was holding him back. I had gone to this and some of the schools that they were recommending. The police had just left. The walls were busted out. They were doing motor vehicle stuff without any ventilation. Over here they were doing...No Way! So again I went to the head of Special Ed and I didn't even think about the aspect that if he would have been put in that school that he was also an age where he didn't have to go anymore and he would have been the oldest one because everybody was dropping out. And this is from the head. I didn't even...he stayed in till he was twenty-six years old. He's now forty-seven or forty-five. Yeah, so I had to do that most of my life. When I was in Michigan Employment Security Commission, people would come in and were treated so badly and you know, wait a minute. "Well, you're just a receptionist." I said, "it's obvious that there's something wrong with this man." And the way they were treating him was just ridiculous. When I left that job to go to New Detroit, the manager there came to visit me and wanted my recommendations as to how the place would run better. But I'm just a receptionist. But I said, "for one thing, you have a lunch room and people should not be having lunch at their desk. Why, we have a line-up of people waiting for work and they're gritting their teeth to look for work and people are eating lunch at their desk. They should be in the lunch room." Well, it wasn't too long after I left that someone came in and took a couple shots in there. I'm like "People, for real the way you treat people" and (sigh) so crazy. And they had, I thought they were senior citizen volunteers, I mean I should talk right, but then they had all these files that were lost. They're not lost, they're on somebody's desk. It was just incredible. So, I've been like that. I guess I've been like that most of my life, but it's probably gotten worse because (laughs) if you get older, your passions...

Interviewer: So you like to fix things?

Mary: I guess so. I like to build things and fix them. I don't know. He's coming in.

(INTERUPTION)

Interviewer: What was the first major community event that you started really becoming active here?

Mary: Oh, God, I don't know, it goes back, there's so many. Cause I was involved in LA SED. Probably at Patton Park, its issues, public safety issues. You know, it's also taken a while to get it. I remember way back it was like watching the parade go by and how come none of us are in that parade? But then when people would say, "oh well, maybe tomorrow," that really really was really started getting to me. It's taken me a while to get it. That's why some of the young people that I'm friends, that I surround myself with, shall we say, you know

Interviewer: Mentor?

Mary: Nah, they're not. They're my friends, you know. They got it a lot sooner than I did because it's ....I just never felt that money really.....but you know money does talk and it talks loud and clear. I'm beginning to see it so evidently in this community. You know, we have a lot of issues about people coming in grabbing, and people coming out of the walls... and it is true. I always refused to believe that. I can really see what's going on. And I have an issue called... I'm very strong against cultural poaching. This friend in Texas coined that phrase. When an organization that has nothing to do, it's not run by Latinos, want to do Latino culture, like la sadas, which is actually religious, the Run of the Dead, that is an opportunity to raise money but has nothing to do with Day of the Dead. And we say why not have a zombie run on Halloween, now they're fine tuning it to say that this is to remember the people that run. Please, it's not in

the Latino culture. You might have a few people that were marathon runners, unless you consider the Aztecs and that you know five hundred years ago. You know, it's an opportunity for you to raise money. So there's a lot of that that goes on. Like this one organization wanted to do... the year of the Latino, this organization, well sort of. They're run by non-Latinos, but the director was a Latino, but he's gone now. They wanted to do the Mariachi Band to recruit non-Latinos. I'm like, "What the heck is that?" And the answer was "oh, well, the foundation made a mistake when they did the press release, they didn't mean that." I said, "well, you know should have them retract that." And I wrote to the president. In fact, I saw the president of that foundation. I said, "you know, would it make sense for me to have the Kwanzaa corral, and seek non-Africans." So to me, that's cultural poaching. And money begets money. You have money, so "oh, wow, this organization is so wonderful." I'm going to say this, Southwest Solutions, you have Gilbertville now and now you have Southwest Solutions. Well, Southwest Solutions has been in business much longer than Gilbertville. I would say that Gilbert's not as old as Southwest Solutions. But they own over four hundred rentals in this area. At one time they had no Latinos. Now they've taken a lot of Latinos from this street Las Vistas Nuevas. Now they have them over there. They were a mental health facility. They were Southwest Mental Health, then they came into Southwest Solutions, they found their niche, which is getting money from Title something or other of housing now. I think really, the whole thing with Lafayette Clinic came down, that's when this whole market was opening up. So now they're getting into early childhood. You name it, they're all over.

Interviewer: Did that change how the community views itself, or did it change anything in the neighborhoods?

Mary: It's changed a lot, the neighborhood and the people lived next to any... I know that Hubbard-Richard just had a hearing with them about their rental properties. It's not so much that the rental properties are....but.... NS we've been accused of being racist. We had hearings on Southwest Solutions, the fact that so many rapes have occurred in their buildings. You know, when the mental health facilities closed, Southwest Solutions, they created residential residence. I tell people I have a disabled son. They have to have somewhere to live. However, when you warehouse them and have units that have 30, 40, 50 units and you have three of them on West Grand Boulevard, it's a disaster. And this is throughout this neighborhood and they are buying and buying. we have an issue right now with Springwells United Neighborhood Initiative who wants to call the neighborhood farther down Springwells Village. and a group of us are with Enclave and this is...we're trying to stand up. And you asked me, you know, about getting involved, how can you let that happen? I don't understand how people can sit back. I don't understand how people can say "Oh, well, it'll always be Southwest Detroit to me." How can you let somebody come in and say "Oh, you know we have some money and we're gonna market and we're gonna change your name." I just don't get it. I don't know how you can think that way. They argue that we don't wanna see change but "oh, this used to be called Springwells Village" It was called Springwells Village by Rouge Factory by Ford Motor who wanted his people to get to work on time. But who doesn't want the change? If it was called Springwells Village and the people in our community are calling this Southwest Detroit then who is it that doesn't want the change? And like I say, it isn't me, it's the young people in our community. I mean, where do you see Springwells Village? You know, the way I say get your hot iron out of here. For me, I say back off. I mean, some of my other members, you have not included us in the process. We have petitions ongoing. But for me it's like back off. This happened maybe a

few years ago, we worked with Community Public Arts, there was banners all over the street, they're gone now. They wanted to call this, in fact we met right here in this room, they wanted to call this neighborhood the Vernor Neighborhood. I went nose to nose with one of the Vice-Presidents and I said this is not the Vernor Neighborhood and this other person from Center for Creative Studies said, "but oh, they have the purse strings." I said, "Wait a minute, because you have money, because you hold the purse strings, you're not changing my name ." So I went to the President and she's pretty nice but I went through a lot of...You know, people don't get it. They don't get it. And I had to go ta couple different places, organizations, Congress of (unclear) committees, self appointed congress from a non-profit. Who the hell...I was a part of that group and then I said who the hell are they gonna be congressing. I said we have the city council, we have the state rep, we have this, we have...Who the hell are they gonna be the congress of? So that's another creation of give away gifts to engage people to tell them what to do?

Interviewer: You said a lot of the young people just don't get it. You said it took you a while to get it. Did you have an Aha! Moment as in this is how this needs to be done?

Mary: Oh, I wasn't saying that the young people don't get it. In fact, it's a lot of us older people that don't get it. They don't see the importance of retaining your identity. They don't see the importance of you naming yourself and not letting somebody else because they have money come in and get it. It wasn't an Aha! Moment. I think that when you're raising six kids, and actually, I used to take care of my brothers' quite a bit, and I also used to work, and I went to school and worked. So, I don't think it's so much and Aha! moment, but when you have to stop and breathe, I was....I don't know what I was. I was with Southwest Detroit Environmental Visions for a while and then I got...I've always felt if I'd ever moved from my block, what

would happen to it? I hate to say I, I.. we cleared with the help of the Boy Scout Troop, it was the first time that the city, working with the city has been a disaster. It's the first time it's like yeah, it looks like you can do it. The wires aren't... So we cleared out five vacant lots that were all....This is way before anybody else was doing this stuff and all the neighbors, all the kids from eight to twelve years old were phenomenal. Once they get beyond twelve years old they get to like to sleep late. They do. You can't get them, and you've got to get that work early. We cleared up the neighborhood with Relief of Michigan we created some fences and split rail fences and with Greening of Detroit we planted trees. This was when they were in their infancy.

Interviewer: Do you remember about when that was?

Mary: Maybe about 2000. I have paper at home about that but...

Interviewer: I can look them up.

Mary: Yeah, I have that at home. I think Greening of Detroit might have been one or two years old back then.<sup>2</sup>

Interviewer: Do you see a difference in, you said a lot of the old people, they don't stand up, they're just like it will be...Did you grow up with a lot of them? Are they still from the area? Is there something different about how they were raised and they were raised?

Mary: No, I think they're getting old. And they're looking for their retirement home. Seriously, I have a good friend and they... and well, everybody has their own opinions and I just don't see how you can let people come in and tell you "oh, we want to remarket you. Oh, this is a wonderful community. We need to draw in new business." Well, what about the ones that are

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<sup>2</sup> The Greening of Detroit was established in 1989. It is unclear when the project Ms. Luevanos discusses took place.

here? What about retaining what we've got. What can we do to make them stay? What can we do to make people stay in our community? The way you're telling me "Oh, we need new businesses." You're telling me there are too many Mexican businesses now or too many Mexican restaurants. What's wrong with that? "Oh, it would be so nice to come in and get spaghetti." Well, what the heck man! Go over to the spaghetti restaurant Tuesday in another part of town, then come over here for enchiladas on Wednesday. What's wrong with that? But that's what they're saying and then when they say, "Oh, the neighborhood is so colorful, let's change it." And then, they're putting in flower pots. Who the hell thinks of this stuff? It's gonna look pretty, there's no doubt about it, but there's some square ones. Those are nice, but there are some very long ones in concrete all to the curbside that you have to maneuver and manipulate if you're gonna try to get into your car and if you open the door of your car, you're gonna hit, cause they're up about like about this far (signals with hands to about waist height) right on the curb. Who the hell thinks of this stuff? I mean, isn't walking traffic...you want to pull up and you wanna get out of your car and you can't do it with those things. They keep hiring people from who knows where that don't get out of their cars. You know, what happened the other day, somebody came in there with some church and there's gonna be all these people coming in June or July. Thousands of people and young people, so what do you need. How can they help you? Wait a minute. I remember way back, people would come to me and say, "Hey, can you take people around and show them, looking for a wall to do some murals." And they were from a church in Ohio and I said... and that happened the first time, ever since then I said, you know what, people come in here and our kids are watching them and they want to do wall painting too and I said not unless you're there to do what this group wants. But this is our

neighborhood and our kids need to be doing this work. One time, showed some kids around. They didn't want to get off the bus.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier that they can go somewhere else to get their pasta and then come here to get their enchiladas. Was that how it was when you were growing up, the ethnic neighborhoods that there was variety and you'd just go to different part...

Mary: Actually, yeah cause over in Oakwood was well, Gonellas is still there, Italian, well I don't know if there's any Italians left over there but they still go to Gonellas. Everybody goes, well I haven't gone to Gonellas lately, but, yeah, I mean, if you go over to Dearborn, there's like a lot of Italian. What's wrong with that? That's New York, that's Chicago, what's wrong with savoring what we've got. What's wrong with savoring the people who have used sweat equity, people who have not gone to Land Banks, who have not gotten loans, who have gotten their family's sweat equity to build what they've got? What is wrong with that? That makes me irate, you know. I don't have a business either, so I'm not talking for myself. That's one thing that I do. I do have issues with, too, because I have lost jobs, I won't take jobs if I'm advocating. If I'm advocating for Community Work for Community People, I won't take that job because I'm not gonna be self serving. So, that's something that's on the one hand hurt me but on the other hand, I don't care.

Interviewer: Has that changed with the years? Has there been less ethnic enclaves for the neighborhoods or is more people moving out or more people moving in?

Mary: Yeah, I think people are moving out. I love Southwest and I won't leave, but I would be putting my head in sand if I didn't realize that there's crime issues, and there's housing issues, and there's a lot of vacant property. The block behind me is almost totally gone, and it's a funny

thing because they had all their homes put up and in the last couple of years and they've gone. I really believe if you have one advocate activist on every block, because I think we've kept the house, our block together. Actually, we've kept half of our block together because the other half, now we have these townhouses. Townhouses you don't get to know the, I mean I do talk to everybody but, the townhouse people you don't really get to know them and those are bridging communities and I think they're related to Southwest Solutions. They're not promoting homeownership. But the other half of my, our block is all Mexican. All Mexican. And again I would be putting my head in the sand if I said all Mexicans take such good care of their kids. But on my block they do. They're all young. We are now the oldest, we were the youngest and now we're the oldest on the block. My mother wanted to give me her house. She just moved into a retirement...and she has a house in Allen Park and she says, "you want the house?" and I said, "ma I don't want the house." I said there's not enough Mexicans there. How do you feel, I know I'm the interviewee, but how do you feel when I say stuff like that?

Interviewer: This is your neighborhood. This is where you were born and raised and you should be proud of the work you're doing.

Mary: Well, I'm proud of the people who are here and the young people who are here, the youth. Although like I said I do have some issues with the protests the other day.<sup>3</sup>

Interviewer: So do you think homeownership is one of the keys to keeping the community together?

Mary: Oh, yeah.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Ms. Luevanos, during the week leading up to the interview, she and other protested at an intersection about the Mexican students killed just over the border. Some of the younger protesters stopped traffic taking attention away from the cause.

Interviewer: How have you seen the differences in homeownership versus rentals, how have you seen that effect the community?

Mary: A great deal. Again, I'll bring up my block. My block they're all homeowners. They've all bought these homes. And they've all fixed up those homes. I call my block the Archie Bunker neighborhood. We're all working people, you know. These folks...I would never imagine some of the things they've done to their homes, they bricked them, they've put arches all over. The guy down the street, he has horses, he doesn't have them here though, so he put in, what do you call them, rancho fence, you know, and he does cement work so he's got all this designer cement out front. The young man across the street, I think he's going to Mexico for a month, but he bought this house and fixed that up and moved across the street and fixed that house up and he sold this house to somebody he works with and this guys a landscaper and he's out there putting up all these trees. That's my block. Can't say that around the block, but my block, in fact I was talking to the guy across the street, his kids come over and use my computer. I have to clean my house up, but my kids bought me, probably our first computer years ago. And I have a, in fact in my ENCLAVE meeting, I said one of the first machines that I bought was a Xerox machine. I used to have a ditto machine many, many years ago. But those were tools, organizing tools. Because if you have to run to Kinkos, or you have to run to the library, if you have your own copier you, you know, it's faster, quicker. So I used to have a ditto machine that...one of the things that I did to organize the neighborhood, well not actually organizing them to do any thing, but to come together to talk about issues, is I had block sales, you know yard sales, block sales, and I would always put out coffee. I would always spend about a hundred dollars every time I did it, but I'd have pots of coffee and muffins, I'd go to buy those big muffin boxes. So everyone was talking to each other and the people around the block would come by

and they'd talk and "Oh, this is going on over here, this is going on over there." Same with when we cleared out the field, the people around the block with flyers and my copier (makes copying sound) and they said, "Can't come out today but here's some pop." Or "here's a couple packs of hotdogs for you guys to grill." This one kid, who's now dead, but when he was little I remember him saying, what's his name, I can't remember his name now but I can see his face, but I remember him saying, "Oh, man, we could even camp out here." And he's, I guess he had wisdom teeth extracted and he had some medication, he was drinking and died.

Interviewer: What are some of the projects you have going on now?

Mary: Well, this is funny, like I have no qualms about being seventy-three; it's just that I'm not moving as quickly. This has probably been busier than when I had the six kids, well I raised my grandson, too. We just finished Dia de los Muertos, we did ofrenda at the DIA,<sup>4</sup> before that we did workshops on, cultural arts workshops on Dia de los Muertos and before that it was Hispanic Heritage Month. Before that, I don't even remember. We have a small grant that we have't even used it up yet, so we were doing open mic. And this place, this is one of the things that bugs me. We used to do Fiesta de Mercadito, which is an opportunity for everybody to come out and share their wares and they wouldn't let us use this place even though the whole community, blah, blah, blah because we are not part of their partners even though we put in. Although we can do it, it's just that it makes me so angry because Southwest Solutions is here but they have big money. I don't think they're partners so... There's a lot of things going on. I don't know with the DIA we were thinking about recreating Bagley in photographs because the Frida and Diago exhibit is coming next year. But I told them I just couldn't get to it because we worked on the ofrendas, it was very time consuming. Then there was all the educational workshops, then yesterday was,

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<sup>4</sup> Detroit Institute of Arts.

for example, yesterday was, no the day before, was Mexican American National Women's Association and I did a little vendors table for the first time, and it was cool. Then after that I went to, I had two, oh Thursday, that was the demonstration day, then I have to deal with my husband you know, make sure he gets out of the house, make sure he eats, then Friday, I actually had the Hispanic, I haven't been to these meetings, Hispanic Girl Scouts advisory meeting, but I couldn't come because I had to drive my son to work and like I said get my husband out for a couple hours and then I went to, I had three things going on yesterday, oh, a twelve o'clock meeting the New Detroit people, and then there was open mic night. Open mic night is at Café con Leche and it's all the young people in the community and they're so cool. And then today is this and she called to tell me that the regular workshops were not gonna come, which I was really happy, but then she said, "oh, but the DSO's gonna be here."<sup>5</sup> So I was like, aeh.

Interviewer: Have you tried to get your husband involved?

Mary: He wants absolutely nothing to do with any of it. He's got Alzheimer's. All he really likes to do is go to the American Legion so I have to get him there. No, I thought when he retired, because I used to swim at Patton<sup>6</sup> all the time, I don't have the time, plus we were in a car accident and that's really pushed him over the edge. No, he wants nothing to do with that. He's happy going to the American Legion, he does have people he talks to. That's like all he wants to do, and watch television and watch football games. That's all he wants to do.

Interviewer: Has he been supportive of your activism?

Mary: Let me put it this way, he doesn't get in the way. (Laughs)

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<sup>5</sup> Detroit Symphony Orchestra video was playing.

<sup>6</sup> Patton Recreation Center.

Interviewer: (Laughs) That's supportive.

Mary: Yeah, I guess so. He did tell me once, which I was surprised, somebody had asked him something, I can't remember what it was, but he said he was very impressed because, well my daughter is now forty-five, but I was surprised that he said he was very surprised because my daughter wanted to go to Crockett Vo-tech<sup>7</sup> for photography. And Crockett you had to start out in tenth grade or the ninth grade, I don't remember, but I can't remember. It had just started so, she was probably in the first class, she would have been not starting when you were supposed to so I called up and she got in. He was totally impressed with that and I 'm like that's nothing. (laughs) All this other stuff was a lot...you know, that was no big deal, but yeah, he said once something was...But he doesn't do anything. He has to have every, well not everything done but it's like he won't remember to eat or he won't....that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Has that limited some of the activities that you would otherwise think about being involved in?

Mary: mmm not yet, but because, like I said I need to know so I can plan logistically so I need a little time. But neah, my son lives next door, and so, like yesterday he, I left the house, not yesterday, the day before, I left the house at 9:30 and I didn't get back home till six, so my son drove Johnny, drove Pete, went back for Johnny and picked up Pete, so my son took over. But I really don't like...but then yesterday when I went to the lunch, my daughter picked Pete up and brought him home, she's a freelance photographer, so she used to work at Ford. She put in twenty two years at Ford.

Interviewer: Are your kids active in the community, as well?

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<sup>77</sup> Crockett Vo-Tech High School.

Mary: My daughter Lisa is. And my daughter Laura works for...and she actually went to El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico on a peace junket. She's not as active. Lisa's a freelancer and she was in the corporate world. She likes this world much better. However, this world you have to like financially be on your toes more so than in the corporate world. I think she likes this world a lot better. In fact she teaches photography to young people here.

Interviewer: Do you think that freelancing, because you said you also freelance, do you think that gives you more freedom to be involved?

Mary: Yeah, possibly. If you can. But you can't...I think the difference is, well, she was with the Hispanic, the Ford Hispanic Network so they used to go out and do a lot of things. But as a freelancer, you can't, really your time into this time slot, you can't not do it because you've a lot of people depending on you. So, you know, you have to know how to juggle things around because you have to be there. When I worked at New Detroit, we'd go to meetings here and meetings there, you know when you are doing it on company time. Well, this is no longer company time, it's my time.

Interviewer: Well, you said one of the organizations you're involved in was the CLAVE, the

Mary: CLAVE Community of Latino Artists, Visionaries, and Educators

Interviewer: How did you get involved in that?

Mary: We put it, we all put it, not me, but all of us put it together because there was a gap. Casa de Unidad was the organization for Hispanic arts and culture, well that went under, they got out. Director who mowed it down, is really what happened. She wanted, was more interested in getting a higher rent place than doing, she had a ...something...its' kind of a difficult thing, you

have to know what you're doing. She didn't know... Maybe she didn't know what she was doing, but she didn't understand this community well enough to know that you don't do something at the Scarab Club because the people who... It's kind of, I hate to talk about marketing but its niche marketing, and if you're going to be nicheing in this neighborhood money's gotta be low. I was telling my friend, in an hour and a half time, that little vending thing that we did, we did pretty decent. But I was telling her, but it's niche marketing and she's like not understanding me and she said, "What do you mean by niche, you have to be Latino?" I said, "Julie, my products are..." or like my daughter Lisa's photographs of St. Annes, photographs of sarrate that the kids made. She's photographed some of my paintings, Madre de Mundo, Mother of the World is a woman and she's got all these children and Mother of the World, every child deserves to be embraced with love. These are all... I'm not saying that I'm targeting, because I'm not targeting, I don't work to target, I work to how I feel. But they're more conducive in this area and they have to be cheap. However, saying that, at the luncheon you had a lot of agency people who could afford to buy a lot of that stuff.

Interviewer: Right. How did they talk you into being the director?

Mary: Which one, of CLAVE?

Interviewer: Mmmhmm.

Mary: That was election. I don't know, I'm surprised. Well, not surprised. No, we were just... I ran for it, you know, and I was pleasantly surprised. The person who ran against me is a very well known fellow and I guess he.. I don't know, I guess he thought he was gonna do it, but from what I understand I got all the votes, so I guess that's it. But we're struggling, we're just a handful and for the most, I do so many. My daughter used to tell me "Ma you do too many

things, you're into too much different stuff." I said "well." You know the jack of all trade thing master of none and because I do build. I'm like, I started a puppet company because in this community reading is such an issue and I really haven't been out, I've been out with the puppet company a couple of times in the past two years. I sort of really went down with it because the car accident I was in and I just can't haul around so much stuff anymore. You know, you have to haul the stage and the puppets and all kinds of microphones and so I'm not..I want to do more of that, but it just, now my friends are getting too old. They don't have all the ambition that I have, but I can't do it all myself.

Interviewer: Right. How did you get started with the puppets?

Mary: I've always liked puppets. I used to go to Hudson's and look at the puppets I've always loved puppets. In fact, when you paint little things it's like it's like the character coming alive. I've made two, I really like the, I'm sorry I don't have my books with me, but I like to write little stories and illustrate. I don't have time to do all these things, but I have some at home. Magical realism. I have one story that I wrote that I haven't done anything with it, but it could be called The Magic of Art, I call it Quermos and the reason I call it Quermos is because all these things came from the sky. The sky was all dotted and orange. And they came down and they were neither men or women or boys or girls. And they kept going Quermos, Quermos, cacaca **a**nd there were so many of them that aaahhhh they were like little mesquitos all over and I didn't know what to do. So I went in the house and I went, hhhmmmm. If they came down in those little orange thingys maybe if I go in there I can get away from all of them. So I went into the refrigerator and grabbed all this food threw it in and got in and nothing happened and all the food went right back into the refrigerator...AAAhhh what am I gonna do? So I threw some books in

and (swooshing sound) and I got in and (swooshing sound) and went way, way up into the sky, beyond the clouds to nothing. There was nothing. There was no grass, there was nothing. What am I going to do? Oh, I've got this book and I was getting so hungry and here's some...so I started to draw, and I drew an apple and just when I put that final stroke in and it popped right off...(apple crunching sound) mmmmmm. It's the best juicy apple and then I drew chicken and then I drew all this so...I was getting so tired so...then I drew a bed and it goes on and on and on like that and then I drew some trees. Then I drew a lake and fish and a lake and little houses and then I got back into that orange thingy and it (SHHHSSHH) and there were those little things all over, oh, no they landed, I forget, they came in their little orange thingys, and they looked around and they said (indrawn breath), Quermos, curmudgeon's where I got that from. The word curmudgeons. You know what, I think Quermos means oh help us and thank you, at the same time. So they looked around they were so happy they had, you know, and I came back down and I landed right back. Sometimes I think it was all a dream. When I look out my back and I see that little orange thing underneath my steps, hhhmmm and that's my story about Quermos.

Interviewer: Have you thought about getting some of the younger people that you said are starting to be more active, getting them involved?

Mary: Yeah, I actually used to do that a lot. Not as much lately because all those young people now have babies. But I used to take a lot of kids on my block with me to Tecumseh and different places. Ummmm. I don't know. One of the women in the neighborhood was gonna get started on a story teller. That's the other thing I'd really would love to do is get a storyteller group together because a lot of the women in this neighborhood are so very talented and could do that. And its nice to make a little bit of money also, doing what you love to do. I don't know. People

are...I don't know. I don't know, that's what I think. I had gotten, I did get somebody involved but she's, she's bi-polar and sometimes it's like, I told one of my friends, I said, "If you want a real downer, give her a call."