

Interviewee: Black Navarro, Yolanda

Interview Date: November 15, 2010

MS: Today is the 15th of November, 2010 and this is the second interview with Yolanda Black Navarro. We have three black and white photos that range in date from 1954 to 1958. Could you describe a little bit about them and why they are here in the restaurant?

See Picture 1, 2

YBN: Well I'll probably start with 1958 because of the fact that that photo and those gentlemen, and the one lady, is where Villa Arcos exists today. At that time it was called Monica's, it was a bar and lounge and they're all there, and they were part of a softball team. So the adjacent pictures, from 1954 and 1956, some of the members that you see in the 1958 picture were members of the softball team and they were called Los Compadres. The lady that ran the lounge at that time, Monica, was their sponsor. So you'll see her in two out of the three pictures. So four members that are on those pictures are relatives of mine. There's three uncles in one and so that's the history behind why we have them here, besides that the history of our family and baseball players is very important.

MS: Further down we have a picture of Marie's Café. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

See Picture 3

YBN: Marie's Café. That building itself is ... on the next block here from Villa Arcos and for two reasons one, Pedro Infante is in the picture sitting on the very first step there. Second, my mother is there too and an aunt and even one of my dear friends and former state legislature Rick Noriega his dad is in the picture as well. So there's a lot of history to that one as well.

MS: Why ... what do you think ... I guess why have these in the restaurant? What is the message that it tells the customers when they come in and see these old photos?

YBN: Well I think the message says that the history of the building via the 1958 picture and my family, my uncles, that my mother's brothers and the other picture of the Marie's Café is - again it's history and my mother is in it and it's part of ... up here the Second Ward, and it's just one block from Villa Arcos.

MS: So you have a number of awards that decorate Villa Arcos. Could you tell me a little bit about them and what they meant to you?

See Picture 4, 5, 6, 7

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YBN: Well you'll see proclamations from two mayors. One is from Mayor Lee Brown when Villa Arcos celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2002. Then five years later for our 30th anniversary of Villa Arcos being in business, we also have a proclamation from Mayor Bill White for our 30th Villa Arcos celebration. The other ones that you see ... proclamations, is that I was awarded the Hispanic ... Mayor's Hispanic Heritage Award, and that was I think three years ago already and it was Yolanda Black Navarro Day and also a proclamation for receiving the Mayor's Hispanic Heritage Award. So the other one that you see is the Metro. It's the Appreciation Proclamation from Mayor Lee Brown for serving at Metro. I served on Metro for one year and you see that one (pointing) is also a proclamation from Mayor Lee Brown.

MS: So what did it mean to get a whole day named after you? How did you feel?

See Picture 8, 9

YBN: Well ... (laughter) it's really something because you know, you always hear of people having a day for themselves - acknowledgement of achievements, accomplishments and events... so it meant a lot because it's not something that we... that we get on a daily basis. It was very special to me as well. Of course I received the Willie Velasquez Award. That's not a proclamation but there's a picture you'll see here with all the recipients receiving the Tejano Center for Community Concerns Willie Velasquez Award. So I was very proud of that one too.

MS: There's a photo here of your mother and I believe of other relatives is that correct? Could you tell me a little bit about this photo?

See Picture 10

YBN: Yes. We put this photo and of course there's a lot of pictures of my mother, but I wanted to show the history of Villa Arcos - the brothers and sisters. So my mother was one of two sisters and then five brothers and so we took this picture. She is ...the lady third from the left and that's my mother Velia Arcos Rodriguez Duran and my aunt Frances. Going collectively from left to right is my uncle Arturo Rodriguez, Gus Rodriguez, my mother, my aunt, my uncle Alfonso Rodriguez then Lupe Rodriguez and then Jesse Rodriguez. Jesse was the eldest of all of them.

MS: Where was this photo taken?

YBN: This actually was taken at my mother's house probably about... I would have to say about 30 years ago, and it was taken right in front of the house we had. It was just a reunion and everybody was there so we took the opportunity, someone did, to take this picture.

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MS: We have another picture of Villa Arcos. Tell me a little bit about that one.

See Picture 11, 12

YBN: Well that one is historic in the sense that it shows ... that was probably taken like three months after we opened and the windows were in front of the building. One was where you ordered the food, the second one was where you picked up the food, and the middle one was just the sign that said we were open. So you'll see that now we have a patio and the picture itself shows the little park benches on the side, and even the street itself you'll notice the difference in how they widened the street. So there's also a gentleman, and there have been at least four or five people that say that they're the ones that's standing here to order the food (laughter). We really don't know who that was. So that was taken like in 1977.

MS: Tell me about this flag.

See Picture 13, 14, 15

YBN: Well this flag is very special to us because it was given by one of our customers ... and he's been coming here a long time, Rafael Melgoza. He had been sent to Afghanistan and I want to say probably this flag we've had for at least five years. But it was ... he thought about us to bring us the flag that was flown on one of the carriers while they were in Afghanistan. So we're proud of it because it's from one of our dear customers, and second because we're proud of the service that all of our servicemen have provided for us as soldiers. So we're proud of the fact that we can highlight our United States of America flag.

MS: Beautiful. I see you have a picture with you and Geraldo Rivera. Could you tell me a little bit about how he came to be in your restaurant?

See Picture 16

YBN: Well this picture is from June of 2009. Geraldo Rivera was here in Houston because he is certainly a strong advocate of immigration and the process. He came to Houston for a forum on that, and in the picture with Geraldo you'll see myself, and next to me is John Hernandez from Amegy Bank, and next to Geraldo is Jeff Mosby from the Greater Houston Partnership. So they brought him to Ripley House because he wanted to look at some of the social service agencies. John Hernandez is my banker at Amegy Bank and so he said "let's go and have some great tacos," and he brought Geraldo over here and he enjoyed them. He's a very nice person. He came to the kitchen and talked to all the ladies here, and so it was special because he came to see us.

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MS: I also see the photo of you and Hillary Clinton. Tell me a little bit about that.

YBN: Oh that one... well she was not here at Villa Arcos that would have been wonderful. She was running for president and she was at the University of Houston. And I certainly had the distinct advantage, and I guess the opportunity, to take a picture with her. So I thought that was very important and I brought it here to Villa Arcos because of course she is now Secretary of State and it's something that is pretty special.

MS: So you have one... two ... three... four... five photographs in your restroom. Tell me a little bit about each one and how they ended up here.

See Picture 17

YBN: Well let me just say that the fact that they are here doesn't signify that they are any lesser than any of the other ones, because they are important. The one that is I guess the most important because it's 460 years of Chicano history. This is a poster that is very popular, done by Gonzalo Placencia. It highlights the 460 years and so we have ... from the Aztec-built city, Mexico City on the right, to Carlos Santana, to Cesar Chavez, to the Low Riders, to Anthony Quinn, Cantinflas, Fernando Valenzuela, the Los Angeles Dodgers. It represents the history, 460 years of our history, and I think it's something that people like to see. It's very important for us to recognize our history.

MS: You have the 2007 Mayor's Hispanic Heritage Award.

YBN: That was the year that I mentioned previously, and I was very fortunate to receive the lifetime achievement by Mayor Bill White. So the event was held, and there was other categories, and I was pleased to have our mayor sign the poster for me. So that's why I have it here.

MS: The next one?

See Picture 18

YBN: The next one is a play by Luis Valdez that all of us know as "Zoot Suit," which then became a movie and it's at the Teatro Campesino from San Juan Bautista, California. I have it here because again it represents our culture, and also it's signed by the playwright himself - by Luis Valdez.

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MS: And the last one?

See Picture 19

YBN: The last one is important. I have it because to me it's a picture of a Latino man and his wife and ... so you'll see what it says is "todos juntos pueblo con pueblo." So I mean, I think for me it represents family. It represents friendship, township, the ability to advance and so it means a lot in terms of being united. I would say that it's ... if I had one word to say it would be that Latinos need to be united - or two or three (laughter).

MS: It seems that most of the photos in Villa Arcos have women in them. Is there any significance to that?

See Picture 20, 21, 22, 23

YBN: Well it is. There is a significance ... one of the pictures that you'll see is of course of the Virgin de Guadalupe, which for our culture is one of the most important that we have, not only the fact that she's the Virgin de Guadalupe but because in my neighborhood, Second Ward, we have Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. So it's a combination of many things, and it's a celebration of our history. To me it represents our religion, our faith, and the fact that our mothers in our particular culture are very important. So you'll see some other pictures, one it's only a print, but it's a print from Salvador Dali and it is ... a picture of a Spanish maiden, and so I thought that that was a very significant and a woman as well. I mentioned earlier that some of the other... we mentioned about having Hillary Clinton, and mentioned about the family and so because my mother was the one that opened this place and again ... the desire of Latina women to make a difference not only to be mothers but to be entrepreneurs is something that I think we should celebrate.