

DISSERTATION

FROM THE MIGRANT FIELDS TO THE ACADEMIC FIELDS

“A RESILIENT CHICANA”

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

FROM THE MIGRANT FIELDS TO THE ACADEMIC FIELDS

“A RESILIENT CHICANA”

The research for this paper is intended to explore how resiliency has contributed to increasing the quality of life for this Chicana, who was able to bounce back “against all odds.” I must admit to a pertinacious quest in obtaining my educational objective. An additional goal is to share my life story with individuals that have similar experiences and my hope is that through my story they will be able to accomplish and or complete their educational endeavors. I will share how my experiences impacted my passion for learning and how harmful and damaging these early school year experiences have been throughout my life. Those negative marginalizing comments made by teachers who were in power positions, made in the place where I spent more day time then at home, still haunt my inner being, my image of who I am and what I am able to accomplish. I continue to remind myself using Eleanor Roosevelt’s quote: “Nobody can make you feel inferior unless you grant them permission.” However, the small child in me did not have the coping tools I hold today and use on a daily basis.

My initial goal for sharing my story was to engage others to learn more about resiliency and help others to be aware of gathering tools they too may use in order to overcome and obtain their designated goals. Every experience and tragedy that one

confronts in life is unique; however, we can make a difference in the lives of children and adults if we continue to support and encourage resiliency.

Nash (2004) inspired me; right from the beginning of having read his message I knew that I would be writing a Scholarly Personal Narrative that would help me “understand my history” and “shape my destiny” (p.2). As Nash wrote,

I am convinced that all kinds of writing—personal narrative writing in particular can reach, and even surpass, a professional school’s highest scholarly standards (p.3) . I want them to believe that, in principle, it can be as “rigorous” (not “rigid,” a as in rigor mortis), and as scholarly as any other type of research. (p.3)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This has been both a successful and challenging journey. Making the decision to share several of the most difficult tragedies of my life was hard and I shed many tears. I have been blessed with two of the greatest champions in my life, my parents. Daniel and Reyes Salazar, who gave me beautiful gifts (regales) as North Americans of Mexican ancestry. As I write, listening to a song from Rene & Rene titled “A Mis Padres,” I am crying because my parents are deceased and I miss them both tremendously. I never thought or believed that this would be so painful. I cannot stop listening to this song. My parents are my heroes and I thank them dearly for giving birth to this resilient Chicana.

I give thanks to my Lord for providing me with the resiliency to bounce back and to continue to work toward my dream of being the best mother, grandmother, partner, sister, aunt, mentor, and friend that I can possibly be.

The JOY of the Lord is your strength. Joy, Jesus over You! Joy produces strength, and strength is needed to fight (Nehemiah 8:10)! For as long as I remember I have been fighting for fairness and I forgot that it has always been innate in me because I have the gift of strength from my GOD.

New Beginnings....A Sound Mind: For God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, and of love and of sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). God guided me throughout this process and has provided me with love and humbleness. I prayed and I prayed to complete this degree and to give others a voice that they can accomplish their dreams

because we have the power within us to do so. Although I believe strongly in faith, I doubted myself many times during this educational journey. We need to have faith in ourselves and believe anything is possible. Dr. Geraldine Jasper, my mentor for over 20 years, provided me with the love and encouragement throughout this process. She has been an credible and intelligent Chicana in my life.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9). I have been strong and courageous and I have my God, Jesus Christ our Lord, grandparents, parents, siblings, partner, children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, cousins, staff, faculty, friends, advisors, and my mentors to give thanks to.

Thank you (Gracias) for being with me during this incredible journey!

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Daniel and Reyes Salazar, to my brother Jose Salazar, and to my Baby Angel. I miss all of you with all my heart and I know you have been with me throughout this process. I hope to see you one day!

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my research is to bring together my story and concept of resiliency by using the methodological framework of the Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash, 2004). I have decided to include a short preview of my personal life story and introduce you to two of my grandchildren, whom I have raised, and who are yet another excellent example of children and their resilient nature.

I will never forget the day my whole life changed: I thought I had done all the right things in raising my children. I never imagined I would be raising two grandchildren, Breanna and Marcus.

When I began thinking and dreaming about being a grandmother, I perceived myself as the type of grandmother who was fun, energetic, and exciting, and of course one who spoils her grandchildren. However, my dream took a different twist. Today, I am raising two of my grandchildren because their mother (who is my oldest daughter) decided she did not want to raise them. She is a drug addict and is unable and unwilling to care for her children, and for that matter, herself. I am raising two of my nine grandchildren, and this has changed my entire life.

I underwent a lengthy grieving process for my daughter and my grandchildren. Eventually, it was clear that I had to accept reality, albeit one that broke my heart. This situation, to take care of these children, involved a moral and ethical metamorphic decision. The responsibility of having to raise children again led me to decide that I had to return to school and receive my doctorate degree in order to continue to provide a

stable environment for them. I had to locate extra work opportunities to provide funds to pay for the abundant additional expenses of raising two very young children:

Reorganizing/ remodeling my home, special food and health care for the youngest who had severe allergies, babysitting, academic support, counseling, musical instruments, and sports. Nevertheless, I knew that this was another one of my responsibilities as a mother, as a grandmother, and as a Chicana. The concept of “La Familia” has been instilled in me since the beginning of my life, as evident through the love of my parents, siblings and extended familia. The only question I had at this point was, “How can I instill these same values in these two precious children?”

When they were younger, I tried to tell my grandchildren that their mother was very ill and that maybe someday she would get better. By this time she had managed to lose her legal rights to the children, but I still had faith. Often I have wondered how a person can just abandon their little ones. Although I know this happens too often, it is still very difficult to accept. It is hard to imagine how my own daughter could just abandon her children. Marcus was almost one year old and Breanna came to me when she was six. As I reflect on the situation my grandchildren lived in, I cannot stop the tears. It is painful to know and accept the fact that this parent is my own daughter.

When Breanna was younger, she would often cry for her parents during the night. She was abandoned by both of her biological parents. I believe this type of abandonment destroys one’s heart, spirit, and soul.

Breanna is 17-years-old and a wonderful granddaughter. She laughs and enjoys life and she makes me very happy. I have been blessed with this little girl who has bounced back as her grandmother, against all odds.

Marcus is 13-years-old and full of love. There is not a day that passes without him telling me how much he loves me. He tells me that I am the greatest grandmother. He is a very smart and loving little boy. He did not cry as much as Breanna, because he has lived with me since he was 12 months old. He often thinks of his mother and wonders why she has not called. Both wonder why their mother cannot take care of them. Often they tell me that I cannot die, because then who would take care of them. Children should be thinking about having fun and not be thinking of death or who will take care of them.

Taking care of my grandchildren is a very difficult task; however, God has blessed me with a wonderful life. These children are survivors and will do great things. I thank the Lord for my health and the opportunity to do the right thing for these two precious little lives.

A long time ago I wrote a letter to myself promising that someday I would return to receive another college degree (I have earned an associate's of science, two bachelors, and a master's of science degree). Reflecting back on my life, I know that my self-efficacy and resiliency has provided me with the courage and persistence to continue to accomplish my dreams and goals. Through this process I know that this dissertation will bring me the healing I need and will serve to reinforce my ability to overcome life's many obstacles. I know that I am capable and determined and will succeed in this endeavor. As I continue to reflect, my mind continues to wander off to the many exciting memories with my children and grandchildren, and I know that they appreciate and support my efforts to graduate with a doctorate degree.

## **Reflections**

As I review the alarmingly low numbers of Latinas/os entering our universities, I think about the difference I can make with the students attending Colorado State University. During recent years, there has been much concern over recruitment and retention of Latinos/as in higher education. In the fall of 1993, the total enrollment of Latinos/as at Colorado State University was 970. Only 473 Latino men and 497 Latinas attended the university. The 1990 U.S. Census reported a total Latino population of 22.4 million in the United States, with 12.9% living in the state of Colorado. These demographic facts support concerns that the university has not been devoting the necessary resources to recruiting or enrolling its share of the Latino population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).

As I reviewed the data ten years later, the enrollment of Latinos at Colorado State University had not increased significantly. During the fall of 2003, the university's Latino population was 1,419—644 Latino males and 775 Latinas. This is an increase of less than two percent. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that the nation's Latino population increased to about 35.3 million, with almost 17.1% residing in Colorado. Obviously, the university's enrollment of Latinos is still lagging behind the proportion of Latinos residing in Colorado and the nation (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Reflecting back to 1993 and 2003, I started thinking about what is happening to the education of our Latinos and, more specifically, what is happening to Latinas. My goal is to be able to share stories of resiliency and persistence that are needed to accomplish degrees in higher education. I want to share my story through my own lens of the many challenges I have experienced accomplishing my degrees. I am a woman who

has succeeded against all odds. In a dialogue with several Latinas, these Latinas discussed and mentioned that there is a strong relationship between resiliency and their personal individual factors that contribute to the success of Latinas in higher education.

The literature review examines education, first generation college students, migrants, resiliency, language, and Critical Race Theory. I attempt to provide pertinent information needed to enlighten the readers concerning background information about myself. The findings of this study will provide opportunities to develop and implement programs that will be instrumental in helping Latinas be successful in their educational journeys. Latinas represent the least educated cohort from the largest “minority” population group in the United States. Angela Finn (2005) wrote her dissertation titled “*Can I Be Something Someday?*” Her study observed the “literacy profiles of academically successful Mexican origin girls” while attending Georgia University. Finn states that “Hispanic girls have higher dropout rates and higher pregnancy rates than any other racial or ethnic group”. “In some parts of the country as many as one in two Latinas drop out of high school” (Finn, 2005, p. 1).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to share my experiences in the educational system and demonstrate to the readers that if you have the desire to further your education and you are resilient then you can complete your own educational journey. Resiliency is the concept that helped me overcome misfortunes in my life and bounce back from adversity. Another purpose is to reflect and explore how these experiences harmed me during my early school years and throughout graduate school. Today, much has been written on the plight or failure of Latinas; however, it is my intention to identify strategies that have

been successful in helping better integrate this population into the educational and economic system in order to improve their living conditions and contributions to our society. My goal is to focus on a successful model and not focus on a deficit model or deficit thinking. Valencia (1997) reveals that in a

sense what we call deficits are really organizations of the environment that biases the opportunity structure to increase the likelihood of certain groups to succeed at the expense of others; that is, the environment does not provide the “disadvantage” and the “at risk” with the same encouragements and opportunities provided the “advantage.” (pp. 134-135)

Although there are many issues and factors affecting the recruitment and retention of Latinas to higher education, I have decided to concentrate on providing a historical perspective that focuses on one factor—resiliency. This is a self-narrative concerning my life, a woman who accomplished her educational journey despite struggling through her education. The purpose of this research is to examine my story in light of the concept of resiliency through the framework of the Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash, 2004). The guiding question for this personal narrative is “What role did resiliency played in my journey”?

### **Resiliency**

Henderson and Milstein (2003) state that resiliency is when people can bounce back from negative life experiences, often becoming even stronger in the process of overcoming them. This definition of resiliency mirrors my life and I know I am a stronger person as a result of these various misfortunes. My strength is evident by my willingness to persevere in my journey through life and in the efforts I have made to make this the best possible life for me and my family.

The reality is that my life has had many challenges because of the decisions or choices I made at a very early age. It is reported that Latinas comprise the largest non-white group in the United States (National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations, 1999). Furthermore, the national report reveals that adolescent Latinas demonstrate higher rates of pregnancy, high school dropouts, suicide attempts, and substance abuse (p. 1). The above statements confirm for me that our reality is the perception or assumptions already made by both the dominant and/or minority groups.

My early life certainly validated that this is what my life and the life of other Latinas was meant to be. Did anyone tell me anything different? When I was contemplating dropping out of school, did anyone tell me of the consequences of my choices? No, of course, not! My life was in the hands of people who believed that Latinas focused on negative behavior and that success is not a trait for Latinas. I expect that the fact that I was not supported in school or welcomed by students or teachers was indeed the primary factor that contributed to my wanting to drop out of school. We all need to belong: This is a primary human need. Nevertheless, I continued to love school and love learning, even though the school environment was not welcoming and I wanted out. I dropped out of school and married at the age of 15. By the time I reached the age of 24 I was divorced and had four children. What was I going to do to raise these children? The only option I saw was my long-standing obsession with education; I needed to return to school. I have been focused and passionate about furthering my education, and have since I completed high school equivalency examination (GED), an associate's degree, a bachelor's of science in business administration, a bachelor's of arts in Spanish, a master's of science in Student Affairs in Higher Education, and I am currently working

on a doctorate of philosophy in Education Leadership, Renewal, and Change. Resilient people bounce back against all odds and I definitely bounced back. I accomplished this by taking control of my life and thus achieving my most cherished goal of earning a quality education!

### **Significance of Study**

The academic landscape of this country is rapidly changing with more than 40 million Latinos in the United States. If we are to make a difference recruiting and retaining Latinos and, more specifically, Latinas into education, we need to create successful and effective retention programs that will provide opportunities for these children (Miller, 2006). To accomplish this, we will need to understand the resiliency and mentoring factors that allowed me, and will allow other Latinas, to succeed in their educational endeavors.

### **Definition of Terms**

Current literature uses a variety of terms to address Latinas/Latinos in the United States. For the purpose of this narrative, the following definitions of terms are used:

Mexican-American	A citizen or resident of the United States of Mexican birth or descent
Hispanic	Refers to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish or South or Central American origin
Puerto Rican	A citizen or resident of the United States born in the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican descent
Latinos/Latinas	A term often used in reference to male/female persons of Hispanic descent and sometimes used for those born in South/Central America

Chicanos/Chicanas	A term often used in reference to Mexican American men or women, usually in the Southwest, this term for many Mexican Americans is considered derogatory
First-Generation College Student	Students who are the first in their families to attend an institution of higher education
Resiliency	The ability to recover from or adjust easily to a misfortune or change

This narrative will use Chicana/Latina and/or Chicanos/Latinos; however, articles and other sources may use one or more of the terms listed above.

### **Summary**

Someone said, “A rose only becomes beautiful and pleases others when it opens up and blooms. It’s greatest tragedy is to stay in a tight closed bud, never fulfilling its potential.”

As I reflect on my educational journey of learning, I am reminded of Robert K. Greenleaf (2004) describing how healing is learning how to heal yourself and others. Healing is one of most powerful forces for leaders because it does transform the individual. This is also an opportunity to integrate your strengths to heal yourself and those around you. We know that there are many individuals who have been “emotionally hurt and their spirits have been broken” (p. 11). Servant leaders recognize this and they provide opportunities to help those who are hurting. In my life, I have had people who have recognized my hurt and these individuals have provided the nurturing I needed to continue to feel good about myself. “Healing also provides the courage to integrate your thoughts and to allow others to provide the encouragement needed to continue with your journey” (Greenleaf, 2004, p.14).

Although Greenleaf (2004) does not mention passion within the ten characteristics of “critical importance and central to the development of servant-leaders are listening, empathy, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of the people, and building community” (p. 13-16). Passion is the one leadership characteristic that I have added for myself. I do know that all of the characteristics are already within me; however, passion in my life is what makes me enjoy being who I am. The passion I have for learning and for empowering students to reach their destinations in their lives motivate me to write my life story. This passion drives me to write my story in order to explore all of the opportunities I need to share with those who want to know how an individual can drop out of school at an early age and yet complete a doctoral degree 42 years later.

In the research, I have found my niche to write my story using Scholarly Personal Narrative, and I know that this is my passion in life. I dropped out of school in the seventh grade, married at 15, and divorced at 24 years of age. After many tears, I decided I would go out and try to receive my GED. I was able to accomplish the GED within ten months of studying. With my GED in hand, I decided to attend Aims Community College for my associate’s degree. While attending Aims, I made a decision to continue with my education after graduating from Aims. I had a passion for learning and wanted to be the best mother and educator for my children. I was also aware of the importance of providing economically for my family and the need to become self-sufficient. It was only through my education that I was able to sustain my family and become the first in my family to complete the GED and begin my educational journey. My personal experiences

are important and will provide insight for students who have been marginalized throughout their educational journey.

Despite the huge task ahead of me, I know we can make a difference in the lives of our Chicanas/Latinas in education. We need to become the system thinkers Orr (2004) mentions in his book, *Earth in Mind*, and work on creating a better environment for our children. We need to stop contributing to the poor academic performance of Chicanas/Latinas.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: THE LATINA/CHICANA EXPERIENCE**

### **Background**

For the purpose of Chapter 2, I will attempt to review the literature that is pertinent to my life in education, as a first generation student, Spanish was my first language, and resiliency; as a life sustaining and life improvement tool. In providing the literature review on Critical Race Theory, it is important for the readers to know that we express ourselves through storytelling. We also engage in leading our voices so that we may be heard above the concerns of the ill effects of racism, discrimination, and marginalization; they have indeed impacted my educational journey. The aforementioned will provide a conceptual framework for a greater understanding of the many issues affecting the experiences of the Latina/Chicana in higher education.

I have examined a multitude of perspectives leading to a variety of responses to my question. This has been accomplished through the lens of many articles written over the past 20 years by Chicanos/as, Latinos/as, and non-Latinos who have researched the literature concerning Chicanas and Latinas. The impact and the many lessons learned from the research have provided me with valuable information concerning my own research and dissertation.

The various articles, books, and dissertations I have reviewed have incorporated extensive interviews in order to understand the realities of Chicanas and/or Latinas not completing their educational endeavors. It is imperative to create an opportunity to learn

more about the successes of Chicanas and Latinas rather than to perpetuate the deficit thinking model that Chicanas/Latinas cannot achieve.

### **Demographics**

González (2006) examined, in an article written for the *Journal of Hispanic Education*, the research work of Harvey (2004), who states that according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2002) there were 37.4 million Latinas/os in the United States, making this ethnic group the largest in the country. Harvey further states that in 2002, Latinas/os,

...accounted for only about 11.5 percent of all high school graduates, 9.5 percent of all college students, and 6 percent of all students who attained bachelor's degrees; data for the 2000-2001 U.S. Latina/os population show that 0.26 percent enrolled in graduate school, 0.06 percent attained master's degrees, and 0.003 percent attained doctorates. (p.348)

According to González (2006), "these dismal numbers make the Latinas/os the least educated ethnic group in the United States, and the Latinas or Latinos educational pipeline needs further examination and reform" (p. 348) by the nation's educators. Finn (2005) mentions that

according to the 2001 report of the American Association of University Women on the status of Hispanic girls in school, Latinas now constitute the largest "minority" group of girls in the United States, not including those living in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Ginorio & Huston, 2001 p. viii).

The U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Educational Statistics, and the National Survey on Earned Doctorates in Higher Education have examined earned doctorate degrees and report that Latinas and Latinos have had low academic outcomes at every level or point along the educational pipeline (Latino Policy & Issues Brief, 2006, p. 1).

Orozco and Páez (2002) reveal that “it is estimated that in just two generations the United States will have the second largest population of Latinas/os in the world—next to Mexico” (p. 1). The author’s further state

the U.S. Census Bureau claims that by the year 2050, a full quarter of the U.S. population will be of Latina/o origin; that is, nearly 100 million people will be able to trace their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking, Latin American, and Caribbean worlds. (p. 2)

Cisneros and Rosales (2009) discuss that:

Today, American Latinos are the fastest growing and the youngest population segment, generating the fast-growing levels of economic attainment, moving into positions of leadership in all sectors of society, and making rich contributions to the cultural life of the nation. This phenomenon has been called the “Hispanization” of the United States. It is a mistaken concept assumed to mean that the United States will become a Hispanic nation. Instead, we believe that the Latino presence in the nation’s future will be so pervasive that it will be one of the defining differences between the nation as we know it today and as it will change over the next twenty-five years. (Cineros & Rosales, 2009, p. xiii)

Garrod, Kilkenny, and Gomez (2007) state Latinas/os are everywhere and their influence has become a staple of American culture. In addition, the authors mention that Latinas/os have made major contributions and have made their mark on huge cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

## **Summary**

As noted from the various author’s, the Latina/o population will continue to grow and the educational landscape of the United States needs to prepare for this major demographic shift in order to meet the needs of this population. Many educators have been preparing for this shift for many years by designing and addressing high priority needs in education. These concerned teachers and policymakers have developed and implemented effective programs that are specifically designed to retain and recruit

Latinas/os throughout the educational pipeline in the United States. Furthermore, we need experts in the field of assessment who are able to inform educators about whether or not these programs are working at all stages of the education pipeline. In addition, we need more and more Latinas/os to have the desire to enroll in the many colleges and universities and be able to graduate, and become the experts needed as policymakers.

### **Introduction to the Latina Experience in Education**

The alarming reality concerning the Latina/o population in the United States is that we are the largest ethnic group; however, as the largest ethnic group we still do not reflect the academic and leadership representation of other racial and ethnic groups, or that of the overall population (Orozco & Pérez, 2002, p. 1). This is a significant factor and important enough to merit an urgent education strategy for Latina/o citizens in the United States.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2002, p. 1) has noted that Latina/o enrollment in colleges has increased; however, Latina/o degree attainment still continues to be low. For Latina women, the degree completion rate has been slightly higher than for Latino men. Latinas/os received 9.1%, or 51,573, of the 564,933 associates degrees awarded in 1999-2000 (NCES, 2002, p. 39). Latino men obtained 3.7% of these degrees, while Latina women earned 5.4% (NCES, 2002, p. 39). Latinas/os obtained 6.1%, or 75,059, of the 1,237,875 bachelor's degrees conferred in 1999-2000 (NCES, 2002, p. 40). Hispanic men earned 2.4% of these degrees, while Hispanic women obtained 3.6% of the total bachelor's degrees awarded (NCES, 2002, p. 40).

The low levels of educational success among Hispanics have significant implications for the future of the U.S. workforce. An economist from the Department of

Labor predicts 42% of total job growth between the years 2000-2010 will call for an education beyond the high school level (Hecker, 2001, p. 57). This is a serious matter, and if this trend of low Latina/Latino educational attainment continues, the effects will be felt disproportionately throughout the nation as the majority of the Latina/Latino population resides in five states: New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, California, and Florida (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2000, p. 3). Educational levels need to increase in order for the Latina/Latino population to make a difference in higher education and/or in the job market. If this does not occur, this large segment of the population will be condemned to low paying job opportunities and service skill employment, and the states' economies and our nation will suffer as a whole.

Balibrera (2009), in her dissertation from Prescott College, states the following: "The Latina youth population is marginalized in mainstream U.S. society by several factors: age, gender, ethnicity, language, and the lack of access to quality healthcare and education due to disproportionate rates of poverty" (Nadeem & Romo, 2008).

Nadeem and Romo (2008) found that Latinas who left school earlier, especially in the ninth grade, were less likely to return. This is critical and the studies completed by three Latinas discussed the seriousness and the importance of educating Latinas. It was also noted in their studies that Latinas wanted to continue their education and wanted to become successful leaders in this country. Reading these articles helps Latinas to become empowered and aware of the issues affecting their lives, how these issues will impact their lives without an education, and how this impacts their future.

It is critical that individuals who continue to make policies or major decisions concerning the education of Latinas understand the issues facing these racial and ethnic

groups. For example, during the past several years there has been much concern over graduation rates in higher education, particularly that of Latinos. Rendon (2003, p. ix) in her book, *The Majority in the Minority*, states her concern with higher education and how Latinos are growing rapidly into the largest ethnic group in the United States. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 530,000 Latina/Latino 16 to 19-year-olds drop out of school each year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Rendon (2003) mentions how ethnic and racial groups have been categorized as “minorities” with the majority of the groups located in Texas, Hawaii, New York, Arizona, California, Florida, and New Mexico.

Villapando (1996), in her dissertation received from the University of California, expressed that “the low educational achievement of Chicanas and Latinas has consequences for American society in that education is perceived as a vehicle to success and upward mobility for poor, racial, and ethnic minority communities” (p. 16).

Villapando continues to state that it is ironic considering that the education system has been somewhat of a hostile environment for Chicanas/os (Villapando, 1996, p. 16).

For Latinas/os students in general, moral support from their families and from mentors has been a high predictor of academic success (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Ortega (2006) references Medina and Luna’s (2002) interviews of three Latina professors. Ortega examined these interviews concerning the support mothers provide for their daughters’ educational journey. This interview strongly states the importance of a mother’s influence in the educational development of her daughter’s ability. The following is an excerpt that reflects this support:

The person who influenced my entry into higher education has been my mother. She started to teach me.... My mother would tell me that I could be a fast learner...As I got older, she repeated[ly told me] ‘to teach beyond what you expect to reach from.... There was always a sharing of what you know. These

were the conversations that we had.... She would ask me things like, ‘Do you ever wonder where the moon goes when we can’t see it anymore? These were the things she wondered about. She developed a curiosity in me. (p. 56)

It was a high school teacher [a woman] who helped me believe that I could go to the local university. It was the first time that higher education was articulated to me as a real possibility. I couldn’t believe that she really believed that I would go. I didn’t want to disappoint her.... I knew my skills were not competitive, but it was during my senior year [in high school] that I also began to believe in her vision for me. I knew that I could get accepted at the university, that I would make it. I would be successful. I was scared – terrified. I mean terrified. (p. 57)

The inability to adjust or change from a misfortune or from a particularly difficult environment can be a hindrance to the success of many Latina students, especially when they were raised in poverty, had a family lacking in a formal educational background, and who experienced a lack of support from teachers or counselors.

No matter what else influences the educational lives of Latino children, class is almost always the determining factor. For poor or working-class or even lower middle-class Latinos who finish high school and go on to use their entire intellectual potential, they must overcome six barriers: money, history, psychology, prophecy, language, and the wall. Shorris explains all these concepts, but she places special emphasis on the “wall”. On the first day of the first grade, Latino children are presented with a wall. The wall is made up of culture, and it is very high and thick. The wall is as solid as a word and as enduring as the sting of a slap. To enter the society of school, they must get beyond the wall. If they do not overcome it at the beginning, the wall will grow higher and thicker with each succeeding day. It is not the making of a metaphor to say that there are no dropouts, only children who did not move beyond the wall and enter the society of school. (Shorris, 1992, p. 227)

## **Summary**

For the Latina/Chicana, the consequences of not completing or furthering their education is the reality of staying in low paying positions and continuing to live their lives in poverty. This is not the reality that educators and policymakers envision for this population; instead many are developing early interventions programs that will help with

the retention issues in K through 12 grades. Calderón and Slavin (2001) note that it is important to understand that Latinas/os tend to perform much worse than Anglo students on measures of academic achievement (p.2). Olivas (1986) reveals that many institutions still show assessment data with limited access for Latinas/Latinos to continue to further their education. The literature clearly reveals early intervention is highly recommended.

### **First Generation College Students**

First generation students are the first in their family or families to attend any four year institution of higher learning. These students many times do not have the support or knowledge of the expectations required in a university setting. Fallon (1997) reveals that many parents of first generation students, who do not understand the college environment, may impose unrealistic expectations on their son or daughter.

Hsiao (1992) wrote that many first generation college students are an increasingly significant force in higher education. These students entering universities and colleges are faced with many barriers that exist for students who are exposed to the university setting for the first time in their lives. They lack of knowledge of the expectations from professors. They also lack knowledge of tools such as time management, taking notes, attending class, and test taking. They are often entering an unwelcoming climate, which has been a difficult step in their lives and a factor that may hold them back from being successful.

Tym, McMillion, Barone, and Webster (2004) published a literature review concerning first generation college students and reveal that

Research indicates that students whose parents did not attend college are more likely than their non first-generation counterparts to be less academically prepared for college, to have less knowledge of how to apply for college and for financial assistance, and to have more difficulty in acclimating themselves to college once

they enroll. They are also more at risk for not completing a degree because they are more likely to delay enrollment after high school, to enroll in postsecondary education part-time, and to work full-time while enrolled. Targeted intervention efforts that reach out to first-generation students both before and during college can help mitigate the differences between first-generation and non first-generation students and can help colleges reach their goal of recruiting and retaining all students. (p. 1)

Vargas (2004) addresses the fact that many first generation students are more likely to not have the understanding or awareness of how to prepare for college. First generation students might not know how to apply for programs that will assist with funding sources such as financial aid, how to apply and submit an application for admissions, and how to connect with certain programs that provide information on what is required for students. Many do not know that the Career Center can assist with connecting majors with career options and help students be successful.

### **Summary**

The literature review informs us of how critical it is for the success of first generation students to have the knowledge and awareness of how to navigate the university environment. In order for first generation students to be retained these students must know how to apply for funding sources and what are the requirements needed for their educational success such as connecting with services and programs designed to assist with the development process of these students. Although it is not noted in the literature it is imperative that universities and colleges hire faculty and staff that are knowledgeable about these students. It is also noted that intervention programs before and after first generation students enroll will assist with the retention goals and efforts of institutions of higher learning.

## **Resilience**

Goldstein and Brooks (2005) reveal the history of the study of resiliency and its roots dating back approximately 50 years. In addition, both state the following, “early on, the field of study was not extensive and the number of researchers devoting their careers to the examination of this phenomenon was fairly small” (p. 3). More and more research has been completed in the past 20 years because of the increase in the number of youth facing an increasing number of adversities in their lives. Again, the researchers have not mentioned the adversity in the lives of Latinas/Chicanas in the past 50 years, or how adversity has impacted their academic endeavors.

Goldstein and Brooks (2005) express that the concept of resilience is somewhat “straightforward if one accepts the fact of increasing the understanding of the means by which children thrive emotionally, behaviorally, academically, and interpersonally, either in the face of risk and adversity or not” (p. 6). Both authors mentioned the importance of understanding this concept of resilience in order to provide opportunities to assist children who might be experiencing medical problems or family risk such as divorce or loss of family members. Furthermore, both mention “resilience studies were reserved for high-risk populations with a particular focus on those youth demonstrating resilience or the ability to overcome the emotional, developmental, economic, and environmental challenges they face growing up” (p. 6). However, no specific ethnic or racial groups are mentioned in the research, which is important to the literature review concerning Latinas/Chicanas.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) address “resiliency-building schools that promote the connection between school-wide and individual based learning, change, and

effectiveness” (p. 55). The school community is responsible for examining the surroundings and responding to the challenge, with creativity and in a positive manner. Members of the schools are provided with opportunities to develop their skills such as critical thinking and effective problem solving necessary to deal with the challenges (p. 55). School member’s offer and “encourage cooperative behaviors” (p. 55) such as reaching consensus, team development, and creating and sharing goals with each other. Learning these life skills that “transcend the classroom and the school” (p. 55) provide students and staff an opportunity to become positive mentors and role models. This type of cooperative behavior also gives the student a sense of belonging.

### **Summary**

The concept of resiliency dates back about 50 years and the concept is being researched in different fields of study such as education, social work, and in psychology. I have found this fascinating and exciting for the simple reason that more children and youth can be told that they are resilient and many can bounce back and have the opportunity to continue to excel in their lives. Educators have managed to create school environments that allow kids to learn the skills needed for success because everyone is involved in the process of learning and developing programs that are effective for young children and youth to become successful leaders and mentors.

### **Language**

Brice (2002) writes that “speech-language pathologists, teachers, and educational professionals may expect that their Latinas/os students display varying degrees of English-language proficiency, which will depend on the degree that English fluency is valued in the home” (p. 8). It is noted that first and second generation students may have

limited English skills because many are not being exposed to the English language at home.

Mora's (1996) dissertation expresses the importance of how language influences behavior, style, and values for Latina/o parents, and it is crucial to know that communication influences social interactions (p. 110). This is important to know and understand why many parents do not attend school functions or conferences because they are lacking the English skills and may feel embarrassed or feel uncomfortable in the school environment. Many times their children are asked to interpret and both might feel nervous about translating in front of their teachers or peers. It is critical to know that some parents might feel intimidated and might not have had the opportunity to know how schools operate and function. School administrators need to make every effort to help parents and children with limited English skills become successful.

When parents have little education, and especially when they do not speak English, they are unable to guide their children through the many steps that contribute to students succeeding in school and in society. It is also important to note that many major life decisions, such as attending college, are made with the approval of several family members who do not have the knowledge or the education to help their student (Quevedo-Garcia, 1987).

### **Summary**

Teachers, educators, and parents know how essential it is for children to learn the English language; however, parents who are limited themselves might need to know who can help their children be successful in the school systems. Teachers and counselors might be able to provide the necessary resources in the community to help parents and students enhance the English language so they can become successful students. Parents

might continue to feel intimidated by the environment they do not comprehend, but we can help with the process by knowing who these parents might be in our community or schools. It is important to have people in our schools that are able to guide parents and students with the appropriate information needed to inform parents of upcoming meetings or conferences. If teachers know which students are translating for their parents, teachers might provide a list of other teachers, counselors, or staff that might be able to help with this process.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory provides opportunities for people of colors' voices to be heard. The voices are heard through the storytelling of their knowledge and experiences with racism, oppression, and by being marginalized in a society that thinks racism is normal. It is normal to Whites because they "cannot understand the world they have made for themselves" (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 4). It is our hope that through our stories, with knowledge and experiences, the oppressor gains a better understanding of how the world can be more inclusive of everyone.

Latino Critical Thinking is defined by Valdes (1998, p. 3) as "the emerging field of legal scholarship that examines critically the social and legal positioning of Latinas/Latinos, especially Latinas/Latinos within the United States, to help rectify the shortcomings of existing social and legal conditions" (Fernandez, 2002, p. 47). Valdes continues to "incorporate the following four functions: production of knowledge, advancement of transformation, expansion and connection of struggle or struggles, and cultivation of community and coalition" (Fernandez, 2002, p. 47). As we continue to gain a better understanding concerning Race Critical Thinking and how the power of

storytelling has the potential of bringing forth change and a sense of renewal in education for Chicanas and Latinas in the United States, we must continue to embrace this power to create policies and effective programs so that Chicanas and Latinas become successful leaders for our youth. This is why I continue to share my story of struggles, challenges, and successes in a world that excluded me because of racism. It is for this simple reason I continues to share the importance of education so we can persist in becoming the mentors and the educators for others.

### **Chapter Summary**

The disparities among Chicanas and Latinas in higher education are detrimental to the future of this country (Garza, 1996). Garza states that Latinas' experiences, concerns, and challenges have been largely ignored; their voices too many times unheard and sometimes even silenced. The experiences have been similar throughout the research concerning Chicanas and Latinas. For several years I was a member of Concerned Citizens on Hispanic Achievement for the Poudre School District. Each year we discussed research data but never used it to better the achievement of Latinos during my involvement. It was very frustrating for many of the members to continue, with the same results repeated year after year.

As the readings continue to highlight the critical situation of our educational system in terms of our Chicanas/Latinas being the least educated, I am alarmed at the lack of Latinas in higher education. It is important to understand the literature on the critical role that Latinos, and especially Latinas, play in their children's academic success. It is clear that the current education system has not met the needs of Chicanas/Latinas, and I have come to the conclusion that we must continue to write our

stories so our voices are heard. To increase the representation of Latinas at our country's universities, we must intervene early in the educational development of our children and become their support and the support of others who might feel intimidated by the system.

Throughout the country many effective programs for Latinas/os are being designed and it is critical that educators continue to gain a better understanding and awareness of what is necessary to combat the issue of retention and recruitment of Chicanos/as and Latinos/as. More effective programs specifically designed to help Chicanos/as and Latinos/as stay in school are needed throughout the educational pipeline.

Several factors contribute to the lack of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education. It is evident that more research is needed in this area; however, for Chicanas/Latinas it is still a challenge to overcome many of these factors and have the opportunities needed to succeed in society.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Theoretical Background**

My goal is to utilize the theoretical lens of resiliency to provide knowledge on what makes Latinas, who are faced with many challenges, continue to be successful with their education. Researchers have been conducting interviews with individuals who have bounced back from many tragedies or adversities. Reivich and Shatte (2002) reveal the “role resilience plays in people’s lives, and we’ve found that it’s essential to success and happiness” (p. 11). Reivich and Shatte have developed skills to help parents, children, and college students be successful. I had no knowledge that there were actual resiliency skills to help people with certain obstacles in their lives. These authors have developed “skills as a means to achieve diverse ends—overcome childhood obstacles, steer through new adversities, bounce back from major setbacks, and reach out to broaden your worlds” (p. 11). I have experienced many challenges in life and I know I have bounced back every time. I have been persistent in getting things done ever since I was a little girl. How did I learn this? This question has come up many times in my mind.

### **Methodological Background**

The methodological background that guided my study can be presented on three levels. First, the general framework of the qualitative approach provided the overall methodological backdrop for my work. Second, within the qualitative approach the genre of “self-study” (Samaras & Freese, 2006) provided additional focus. Third, at a

more focused level, the scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004) guided the specific methods for the project.

### **Qualitative Research**

As a qualitative researcher, I have read and learned that as researcher there is a need to share the methods utilized to illustrate how we have come to the conclusions. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman discuss the methods needed in qualitative research. “We need methods that are credible, dependable, and replicable in qualitative terms” (p. 2). These authors continue to state the importance of sketching your own experiences and, of course, the experiences of others in order to use qualitative methods. It is for this purpose that I have decided to use a qualitative study in order to reveal my story. I am writing from my own experiences as a scholar and will be exploring how these experiences and knowledge from my own family have provided me with the determination and persistence to continue with my education. Qualitative research also provides an opportunity to examine how you have lived for a greater meaning and understanding of your life. I also want to understand and investigate the role resiliency has played in pursuit of my educational journey.

Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) quote the work of Jacob (1987) who sorts specific principles into five major qualitative research traditions:

(ecological psychology, holistic ethnography, ethnography of communication, cognitive anthropology, and symbolic interactionism) by using dimensions including “assumptions about human nature and society,” the “focus” (content examined, at what social system level), and “methodology” (research design, data collection, and qualitative/quantitative analysis). (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 5)

My intent was to construct a framework of understanding and awareness of my life and how certain factors affected my educational experiences from a drop out to a doctoral student in the United States.

### **Self-Study**

Within the general framework of qualitative research, self-study (Samaras & Freese, 2006) is a type of self-study where there is a serious assessment of the individual's participation in both the characteristics of the study and in the experience and knowledge of research. Citing Loughran and Northfield (1998), Samaras and Freese (1998) give a clear definition of the self-study as follows:

Self-study is based on personal experience. Systematically portraying that investigation works to validate self-study as research and promote the personal experience as a source of new knowledge. (p. 44)

Included in the self-study methods are autobiographies (Angrosino, 1989), auto ethnographies (Ellis, 2004), and as I will develop in more detail next, the scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004).

There are probably many reasons why a researcher selects qualitative research and the self-study; I have affirmed that this is the method for me because readers will learn from my experience. As the researcher and participant, I will have the opportunity to share my story. Today, much has been written concerning Latinas/os and why many have dropped out of school; however, my story has not been written from my own lens. From the writings of Creswell (1998) the following is acknowledged, "Not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on what is heard" (p. 26). It is ironic that I have the opportunity to listen to myself and reflect a greater understanding

of what I am hearing from the voices of the past. Regardless of the pain this may cause me, I know that this personal study will bring a greater awareness and understanding to me and my readers. Wolcott (2001) refers to locating different “ways to represent qualitative approaches” (p. 87) and my study will use Wolcott’s story approach:

Stories are the way humans make sense of their world. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography. Stories are the focus of Homeric literature, oral traditions, narrative analysis, and fairy tales. Given their importance, I argue that stories should be both a subject and method of social science. (p. 32)

### **Scholarly Personal Narrative**

As I was researching and discussing my ultimate goal for my dissertation, my colleagues from other institutions literally in unison said to me, “you must read Robert J. Nash’s book, *The Power of Personal Narrative*”. In this book, you will start with your healing process and tell your life story from your perspective and from your own lens. This was so powerful; I felt their intensity for the work of Robert Nash. His book is about liberation and writing your story in a scholarly manner. All four of us are from different institutions, and Robert Nash has definitely liberated us. These four colleagues were all of different ethnic backgrounds, and I, at that very moment, knew I had located my specific qualitative method, Scholarly Personal Narrative.

Nash (2004) reveals it is a matter of academic honesty to be able to write your personal narrative in a dissertation; this process is both exciting and challenging (Nash, 2004, p. 1). I also believe this is a healing process for me and others who have decided on this method. Nash (2004) mentions in his writings about the many times he has “thrive” to recall many of his student’s papers and the enjoyment he receives from reading their narratives (p.2). He also writes how students enjoyed writing in the “first-person voice,

and for this reason these papers stand out even more in their minds” (p. 2). From the beginning of my dissertation I have enjoyed writing in the first-person, and I remember how difficult it was for me because throughout the many courses I have taken, this was not an opportunity allowed by many professors. Nash continues to refer to the many students asking questions as he listens to the bigger question for meaning:

- Does my life have a special purpose?
- Why do innocent people have to suffer?
- Can I be a good person without religion?
- Where do my deepest passions lie?
- Why do I worry about the future so much?
- Why am I here in school when I could be doing something far more constructive in the world beyond my campus? (p. 17)

I mentioned these questions, written by students in Robert Nash’s class, because they are similar to questions I have struggled with as I continue to write my story. Nash wrote *A Personal Reflection on Educating for Meaning*, an article that mentions how throughout his teaching career he has taught many students who have suffered through their writings because of a “crisis of meaning” (p. 18).

Nash (2004) further states “educating for meaning entails a constructivist approach to education, which applies the belief that students construct meaning for themselves” (p. 18). However, I left school many years ago and this concept was not available. Today, many professors are utilizing the constructivist approach for teaching and advising. This provides students opportunities for exploring their self-worth and for creating purpose in life. “Most important, however, Dewey, and later, Jerome Bruner set the stage for a generation of educators to understand that students bring a wealth of prior

knowledge and experiences to their learning” (Nash, 2004, p. 18). Nash states that “education, therefore, is as much about helping students to make meaning of those prior experiences as it is about filling empty buckets or writing on blank slates” (p. 18).

I can only imagine how different my educational experience could have been if I had been allowed to incorporate my knowledge and experiences as a child of migrant field workers living in poverty, in a family that lacked formal education. If only I could have had the opportunity to express my passion for learning and or wanting to continue with my education. It was for other reasons that I left school and many educators would not have understood my reasons or have cared. As I continue to read Nash’s book, I embraced the following statement:

Many students who sign up for my SPN course have one objective in common. They are most interested in constructing stories that might heal the rifts that exist between their personal and professional lives. They want congruence. They seek wholeness. They are tired of compartmentalization. What they do as professionals is inseparable from who they are, and who they are striving to become. Whenever I read their narratives, I always find a common, central theme, and it can best be summed up in the following word: “Now I wish to become whole.” (p. 101)

This is another reason I am fascinated with Nash’s wisdom and knowledge; he admires his students wanting to become whole. He understands and appreciates students from their perspective, and he allows them to express themselves in their writing.

### **Research Question**

As I reflect on my educational journey, in what ways does my personal reflection on my journey contribute to the understanding of the Latina/Chicana and the concept of resiliency?

### **Data Collection**

The data for my research is the transcript of my story. In order to capture my experience in story form, I recorded my story as I told it to three interested persons. From my transcripts of my story telling, I brought together a composite story. A final reversion of my composite story was developed by having one of my advisors and one colleague of this dissertation, who is familiar with this type of research, read my story for clarity, enhancement, and relationship to resiliency. This final story served as the document for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative research discusses and analyzes materials from different perspectives in order to provide the researcher with several tools to utilize. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Ziber (1998) illustrate how Holistic-Content Reading expresses the whole story and concentrates on the subject matter of the story (p. 15).

Lieblich et al. (1998) depict the following:

Lieblich (1993) presented the life story of Natasha, a young Jewish woman who had emigrated from Russia to Israel. In several conversations with the author, Natasha narrated the story of her life and adjustments to life in Israel. The analysis concentrates on one major theme: change, as manifested in many areas of Natasha's life—her external appearance and dress code, her language, her manners, her attitudes toward her family members and relationship with her parents, her friendships with girls and boys of her age group, whether immigrants like herself or native Israelis, her occupational choices, and her views concerning gender and equality. (p. 15)

As demonstrated in the referenced paragraph, it is possible to understand and gain awareness that it is possible to write life stories for one single individual or you can decide to write about yourself. I used this holistic method to obtain an overview of my story. I tried to narrate my story from significant events that impacted my life. The

major theme in my story is resiliency and how I was able to overcome the adversities in my life.

Categorical-Content Reading (Lieblich, et al., 1998) “focuses on the content of narratives as manifested in separate parts of the story” (p. 16). With this concept, I demonstrated the content and details of the story. I examined my complete life story from this perspective with a particular focus on the content of my story as it informed the concept of resiliency.

Nash (2004) discusses three qualities which are faith, resilience, and passion. Moreover, he continues to address how his students who take his course and who are involved with Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) writing turn challenges into “opportunities and risk into a benefit” because his students “posses these three qualities” (p. 131).

Nash (2004) mentions the importance of passion especially if you are doing SPN and you have the enthusiasm and you display the desire for your particular assignment. Resiliency is when students return from difficult situations with a sense of renewal, energy, and courage. Faith is doing the work that you love, especially in SPN, and you feel that what you are accomplishing is important and it is a “good thing” (p. 131).

Nash (2004) presents a great understanding and awareness in his own story the concept of the scholarship within SPN. “You are a scholar if you are willing to play with ideas. You are a scholar if you can build on the ideas of others. You are a scholar to the extent that you can tell a good, instructive story. You are a scholar if you can capture the narrative quality of your human experience in language that inspires others. You are a scholar if you can present your story in such a way that, in some important

senses, it brings truth to human life” (p. 46). All of these points concerning scholarship resonate and also provides an inspiration for me to continue to write my life story utilizing SPN.

### **Trustworthiness**

My attitude toward the trustworthiness of my story is reflected in the work of Merriam (1998). She refers to the importance of how “all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 198). It is also noted how critical it is to “trust the research results” (p. 198) and how important this is in education. Merriam states that “no classroom teacher will want to experiment with a new way of doing things without some confidence in its potential for success” (p. 198).

Merriam (1998) continues by posing an important question to the researcher, “But how can consumers of research know when research results are trustworthy?” (p. 198). The consumer knows because there has been some description, provided in the research “for their validity and reliability” (p. 198). Eakin (2004) writes about trustworthiness that “Life writers are criticized not only for not telling the truth—personal and historical—but also for telling too much truth” (p. 3). I am not proposing that I am a Life writer; however, I have been writing my story for a long time, and I am telling the truth as I remember from my memory. Although I have maintained a journal for several years, I know I will not be sharing private and personal stories about my family without their permission. I will only share events that have impacted my life.

Merriam (1989) captures a quote from Firestone (in Merriam, 1987) who investigates validity and reliability from another point of view (p. 199). “Firestone states how the quantitative and qualitative paradigms employ different rhetoric to persuade

consumers of their trustworthiness.” The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’ (Firestone as cited in Merriam, 1987, p. 19).

In addition to the foregoing attitudinal stance, I also implemented the following strategies for trustworthiness recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In addition, I tried to tell my story in sufficient depth that the reader would sense the “thick descriptions” associated with the results of my story. Also, I kept track of my research journey in order to provide an audit trail of my activities. Finally, following the recommendations presented by Tenni, Smyth, and Boucher (2003) that it is important to expose autobiographical stories to others during analysis, I asked both a cultural outsider and cultural insider to read my story and to make comments. The results of these analyses are present in Appendices A and B.

### **Summary**

Nash (2004) states that “good teaching, good helping, and good leadership are, in one sense, all about storytelling and story-evoking” (p. 2). Reading this sentence empowers and encourages me to continue writing my life story and it is my hope to touch and inspire others. It is an honor and privilege to have located Robert Nash’s work, especially when you know that many professors or colleagues will not appreciate the creativity and authentic method of writing a dissertation. In addition, Nash (2004) mentions that narrative writing can take different structures and while it may be “self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from the readers” (p. 29). It is my hope that this will occur from the readers and that many will reflect from their own past and examine their own stories and begin to write.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 presents my story in two formats. First, I present my story by recalling significant life events. This story emerged from my introspection of my journey and self-reflection. Second, I re-tell my story, but in a public forum of three students.

In this manner of re-telling my story, the story becomes a bit more structured around key events with a bit more interpretation. Next, I move from “telling” to my analysis of my story and I present the outcome of analysis within the framework of “lessons learned.” Finally, I reflect on the comments shared by my cultural insider and cultural outsider.

### **Significant Life Experiences: My Story**

As a Chicana, I have had many positive and some extremely hurtful and negative life experiences that affected my passion for learning. The goal of this chapter is to share my story in chronologically ordered vignettes with the intent of gaining a greater understanding and awareness of what happened to this young child who loved to learn and attend school. As the author of this qualitative inquiry I will provide critical analysis from other writers who have completed research on the isolation and the lack of support for children of the same economic status and ethnicity that I was born into. Please be clear that my experience with racism is somewhat of a misnomer: I happen to be Caucasian of Latino derivation. The following vignettes are truncated examples to be more fully developed within the research process.

First Grade: Excited, “My beautiful dress, shoes, socks and my tiny purse.” My father takes me to my class. I hold my brother’s hand, not knowing what to do or expect. We do not speak English, and our teacher is moving her mouth. My brother stares at me. The teacher is yelling something, walks toward us and pulls us to our desk. I stare at her with this look of, “How dare you pull my brother.” At that particular moment, I knew we did not belong.

Teacher: Class, this is Manuel and Loopie.

Me: Lupe.

Teacher: That is what I said, Loopie.

My excitement was gone, gone right out the door. Although I did not speak English, I understood a few words. We lived the lives of migrant workers and we played with the farmer’s children.

Second Grade: I can hardly wait to go to school. My brothers are not as excited, and it is a struggle for my mother; she nearly pushes them into the bus. My brothers say to me: “Lupe, why are you so excited! You know that we are not welcome in the school. First, we have to share what we did this summer vacation. We do not even know what vacation means. What are you going to say? That we had to work in the fields? Then all those kids will laugh at us.” I stop and think about what I am being asked by my brothers. Now, I feel frightened about what I will share with the rest of the class. Since we are in a very small school, I am in the same class room as my brothers. The teacher asks Manuel, my brother, to share his summer experience, and he tells the class that we went to visit our grandparents. My brother looks at me, and I know that I must say the same thing. I always wondered why my brother was so ashamed about the work our parents did;

however, I was not. I thought everyone lived the same way we did. I was so naïve. I was intimidated by our teachers.

As I reflect on my early school experiences, I remember that we always started school in Colorado in September and returned to the same class in May. In between these months, we were enrolled in school in Lubbock or San Marcos, Texas. As a child, I did not realize that my parents were migrant workers. I did not have the awareness that as children of migrant workers, we were behind in our classes and that many times most of us in the family were not allowed to attend to school; we had to work in the fields. According to an article, *Voices from the Fields*, about the children of migrant farm workers and the school curriculum, it is difficult for children who move and attend different schools because they receive a variation of content and delivery of curriculum, which contributes to the students' poor academic performance and low self-esteem (Whittaker & Salend, 1997, pp. 482-483).

In reading this article, I agree about the low self-esteem; however, I did well in my academics. I did not know how to read but I memorized all the books we had to learn in first and second grade. I did my homework and wrote down words that I had to learn so the teacher would not embarrass me. The teacher would say, "Loopie, stand up and read the following chapter." Okay, I read as I knew how to read. I do not think these teachers in first and second grade knew that I did not know how to read, and I wonder, "Did they really care?" As I continue with my recollection of the past in first and second grade, I remember how much I enjoyed learning in spite of being asked not to speak in Spanish and to sit in the back of the classroom. I always wanted to sit in the front row, because I had trouble seeing from the back.

Third Grade: I will never forget Ms. Harold; she was mean. My parents had bought me the most beautiful red dress and shoes. My father walked with me to the office and to my class. He left and told me that I needed to ride the bus with the rest of my brothers. I was so excited and eager to start school. I had missed it all summer. I walked into the third grade class, and Ms. Harold announced, “We have a new student from Texas, and her name is Loopie.” This was a school in Colorado. I looked at her and said, “My name is Lupe, not Loopie.” I stood tall and I did not move my eyes from hers, and I knew she did not like me. She told the whole class, “I just do not understand why Mexicans name their children such ridiculous names that we cannot pronounce.” In the first place, I had no idea that she was referring to me—since I was not a Mexican. I told her, “I am not a Mexican, and my name was given to me by my grandfather.” The teacher replied, “Oh, you are so disrespectful, and you must go to the office.”

This was the first time I told myself that this teacher hates people like me. My brothers talked about teachers like her; however, I could not believe that teachers were actually capable of hating kids. I immediately wanted to go home, and I knew that I was not going to like Ms. Harold. This was the first time that I hated school. I was a smart student. I would finish my work first. I would be the first to raise my hand in order to answer questions. However, I was never called upon and I really began to believe I was so stupid. I had refused to accept the fact that Ms. Harold really hated me because she was a racist. Of course, I did not know what a racist was. Thinking back on my third grade year, I know she was. That same year we returned to Texas where I had similar experiences. I continued to learn and not ask too many questions, and I stopped raising

my hand. I was not interactive or engaged with any students or activities. I kept to myself and told myself that I would endure anything in school as long as I was learning.

Fourth Grade: Reflecting from previous courses, I remember both the challenges and the good times at school. Although by now I knew about how we were treated, I made a promise that I was going to attend school and learn. I was going to work harder to turn in all homework on time and complete tests first so teachers would notice me and the effort I kept making for learning. Needless to say, this never happened, but I decided to continue to do my very best.

Colorado and Texas were not any different. Teachers from these two states were Mexican haters in my eyes. I did not understand why until I went to college and enrolled in Chicano Studies. My eyes were opened to a greater understanding and awareness of hatred. I continued to experience racism until the seventh grade.

Fifth Grade: I had the opportunity to stay in Colorado with my grandparents. I stayed in one class the whole year. What a wonderful experience! I did not have to go with my parents to Texas. I was attending a school in Greeley. This was different because I was called so many derogatory names that I started to hate school even more. I kept to myself. And although I wanted to fight all of the kids calling me names, I did not because I did not want to disappoint my grandparents with this type of behavior. Furthermore, I did not want to go with my parents who at this time were already in Texas. The year was bearable because I lived with my wonderful grandparents. I lived a different life with them.

Living with my grandparents I could arrive at home and complete homework immediately. I did not have to help with the cooking or the cleaning. My grandmother did

all of this in order for me to complete my studies. With my parents, I had to go home immediately and help with my younger brothers and sister. I could not study right away; I had to find time to read.

Sixth Grade: I remember this class very well. Mr. Stanford was a wonderful teacher and cared about all of his students. He called on me constantly, and I did not have to keep my hand up for very long. He would tell the class how proud he was of me to have completed assignments and turned in homework on time. Of course, many of my peers would tell me that I was his favorite. For the first time, I had a teacher who looked like the other hateful teachers but cared for students who looked like me. I enjoyed studying and learning. My confidence level was improving, and I knew this was because I finally I had a teacher who cared. Mr. Stanford knew that I had lots of responsibilities, because in one particular class he asked me a question and I started crying. He later asked if I could stay during recess, and I did. He asked me about my crying, and I told him that I had so many tasks at home that interfered with my homework and I knew that I had disappointed him. I told him that I had no one at home to help me with homework and that sometimes this was very difficult for me. I told him that sometimes I was not allowed to read because we had to turn off the lights. He looked at me and said, "If you are willing to give up recess, I will help you with homework." He opened this opportunity for others as well.

I had the best year ever with learning and with track. This was the year I started running, and I won many ribbons during track meets. As wonderful as the year was, I was reminded by others that I was going to drop out of school because that was exactly what kids from the other side of the tracks did. I had a place in society. I was poor. We were

migrant workers. My parents and older siblings did not attend junior or senior high school. My destiny was very bleak. I felt isolated and miserable. I was also 13, and by the end of the year I was going to be 14 and still in the sixth grade. I was embarrassed and sad about my situation. How can I continue with my schooling at my age? I had not told anyone how old I was. I felt much older and more mature than the other kids and so ashamed about my age. I shared this with Mr. Stanford, and he told me about a few characteristics of children from migrant families and how children have to repeat courses for two or three years. I was angry and I blamed my parents for our situation. Mr. Stanford had a great influence in my life and on my love for learning. He was compassionate; he saw my potential and continued to encourage me to stay in school and learn.

It was during the summer after sixth grade that I had an opportunity to attend a migrant school in Timnath, Colorado. My family allowed me to attend and did not require me to go out to the fields that particular summer. I was so happy and learned so much about migrant workers. I felt empowered when I learned about migrant children, their parents, and the injustices that occurred against these families. I knew I would go to college someday. This was also the year my father decided to leave us in Colorado in order for us to continue with our education. He traveled to Texas with my older brothers to work and left us in Colorado with our mother. Since my mother was ill with asthma, this was also a better climate for her. I was excited about not repeating the sixth grade or the seventh grade. I knew if I had to repeat any grades I would eventually drop out of school, and that thought terrified me.

While at the University of Northern Colorado, in the early 80s, I ran into Mr. Stanford in the Mall. He asked what I was doing these days, and I told him that I was a student at the UNC. He looked at me and said, "I knew it. You were always motivated to learn and you also wanted to go to college." We talked for a very long time, and I knew that his contributions as a caring teacher had a tremendous impact on my education. He was definitely one of my mentors.

Seventh Grade: Excited and thrilled about going into the seventh grade. I knew I was going to do well. I was determined to receive the best grades. This was also the first time I had several teachers. My favorite teacher was Mrs. Payne, and she was wonderful. She was great with all of her students, and we liked her very much. She told us we were smart and capable of doing great things if we set our minds to it. I believed her and I tried to always complete my work for her. The other teachers were different; they were more controlling and they wanted you to know who was in charge. I remember walking into class just as the bell rang, and I was asked to do ten pushups. I refused, so I had to go to the office for a pass. I remember exactly what she told me after class. She said, "Next time you will do the pushups," and I told her you will never make me do pushups for you.

I knew better than to be late to her class again. I guess I learned to be on time for each class so I would not be in trouble. I was doing so well; however, something happened, and I was suspended from school for about three days. That particular year several of the Latino students were being called derogatory names. We mentioned this to many of our teachers, and nothing was being done about it. I remember telling Mrs. Payne that Michelle, another seventh grader, kept calling me names and I was tired of her. Mrs. Payne asked that I speak with the principal. I did and I remember him telling

me that names did not harm anyone, and he refused to do anything about it. There were many problems among Whites and Latinos with name-calling; however, no one wanted to intervene and stop the name-calling. I finally took things into my hands. One morning Michelle called me a “dirty Mexican” and I turned around and I punched her and pushed her into a locker. She was screaming, but I would not let her out. I remember that several people tried to pull me away; however, I would not let go. I yelled and told her to stop, but Michelle would not listen. I was referred to the principal, and he told me that names did not hurt. Well, names do hurt! I am not a dirty Mexican! We are clean people and I am sick of all of you thinking that Whites are the only clean people around here. I stared at Mrs. Payne, and I said, “I am sorry to disappoint you but I am exhausted and drained with all of this bad things many students say about the students who are different from them.” I did let go of Michelle, and she was crying and threatened me with her parents and with the principal. She said, “You will pay for this and they will suspend you.”

The next day Michelle’s parents were demanding an apology from me, and I told them that their daughter had to apologize to me. They demanded to talk to my parents, and I told them to call them. They did and my mother did not answer. Well, I knew she would not answer because she did not speak any English and hated the phone. I was suspended for three days, and Michelle laughed. Of course, nothing happened to her. This changed my whole attitude about school, and I knew I would not return. The climate was not welcoming and most kids from my side of the tracks were dropping out of school as soon as they turned 16. Despite the fact that I did not want to be in school, I did very well. I was on the Dean’s list and almost made the honor’s list in the seventh grade. This was the last grade I completed.

In the seventh grade, I started dating a student in the tenth grade and he wanted to get married. I thought we were too young; however, when my parents made the decision to move to Fort Lupton in the summer to work in the fields, I decided that I would rather be married than to move. I was in love and this was my way out of the Migrant Camp and working in the fields. As I reflect on my marriage, I think about how crazy I was. I had shared with my boyfriend how I wanted to continue with my education and knew if I married, I was not going to return. My husband promised me that if I married him and did not move to Fort Lupton, I could return to school in the fall. I believed him, but he never allowed me to return. I missed school and I wanted to receive my GED; however, life was hard and I did not have time to study or attend classes. I realized that I was never going to return to school or receive my GED.

I started having babies, and by the time I was 23, I had four children and my husband asked for a divorce. At 24 years of age, I was a single parent trying to survive with four children and working at Monfort Meat Packing (Swift Company) in Greeley. I remember thinking about our future and how I was going to support four children with a minimum wage and no benefits. I cried myself to sleep, and the next day I decided to seek help. First, I needed to go to the welfare office and ask for assistance because my husband refused to pay child support. Second, we needed insurance. I had a sick child and could not pay for his medicine and visits to the doctor. The welfare office is not the friendliest place. After my meeting with a case worker, I felt worthless and ashamed for going there in the first place.

That evening I thought about returning to school and utilizing the funds from the welfare office as a loan. My perspective was if I receive money from them, I will go back

to school and do well. Eventually, I will not need welfare. I will obtain a good job that pays me enough money to raise my kids. I will receive my GED and attend Aims Community College. The next day I went to Aims Community College to ask about the GED program. My life was becoming harder, and I had to be positive for my kids.

For several years after dropping out of school, I would dream about returning and graduating with a cap and gown. It was as if I was obsessed with the regalia. The regalia were a symbol of accomplishment, determination, and persistence. A photo was necessary to prove that I had accomplished my GED and I had been accepted to Aims Community College. A photo was needed for my extended family, my parents and, most of all, for my own children. I was the sixth child of ten children and the first to receive a GED and the first to enter a community college. This was my dream, and I knew that I would complete this journey in my life. I was the only person without family members to attend my GED ceremony; the cap and gown were not required. Aims Community College had the same policy. This is the only reason why I needed to continue with my education, silly, but true.

As you continue to read, I will provide experiences starting with my GED, Aims Community College, University of Northern Colorado, and Colorado State University. It is important to understand that my journey has been difficult; however, I did not ever think about giving up even when the going got tough. I wanted to prove to the world that a child from a low-socio economic, first generation, and migrant background was smart and that with the proper encouragement, children can and will succeed.

My GED experience was not easy and I was horrified by everything I had to learn. I had to learn English, Writing, Science, History, and Math in order to pass the

exam. My instructor was Sharon McMorrow, an English instructor at the University of Northern Colorado and a wonderful teacher. She told me that I had the capability of learning and passing the exam. She encouraged and reinforced my courage and the desire to learn. She promised to be with me along this journey that would make a huge difference in my life. She kept her promise, and I studied daily and went to all tutoring sessions. Within ten weeks I was ready and so was everyone else. I was scared and did not know what to expect; however, I had studied hard for this exam.

The exam was hard and I walked out of the building with a tremendous headache. I really believed I had failed. I cried for days and was embarrassed to discuss this with anyone. I was a failure and the rejection was overwhelming. I lacked the self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence, and I did not know how to handle this. What was I going to do and how was I going to face my children?

I started to think positive about the exam and realized that as difficult as things were, I would accept the failure. I had the ability to challenge myself and the children would admire me for this. I had to learn how to accept failure in my life in order to continue to face success. Failure was part of life and success was what you accomplished after overcoming those difficult times. The significance was the motivation and determination to want to continue with my education.

I had a vision to see how things could be in our lives. In this vision, education was the only way to a better life for my family. Throughout my life, I experienced poverty and I wanted my children to have a life that provided some stability. I had no guarantees but I knew in my heart that I needed an education. I do not believe I ever lost sight of my

vision because I knew I had the ability to move forward regardless of not passing my GED.

I have told this story so many times of how hard I was on myself concerning the GED exam. Needless to say, I passed. It took me two weeks to open the letter concerning my exam because I was afraid. Finally, I had the power to open the letter, which stated the following: “Congratulations! You have completed your GED exam.” My highest score was math. I could not believe this and I cried and cried. I knew this was the beginning of a wonderful journey to accomplish my dream of entering a community college and later a four year institution.

After my GED, I enrolled at Aims Community College in Greeley, Colorado. The first day I was provided with an advisor who advised me to take several courses as a secretary. I asked if a secretary made enough money to raise four kids, and she said yes; however, a legal secretary would earn more. I decided to pursue a judicial/legal secretary degree. I worked hard on this degree and took as many courses as possible to learn and re-learn everything I had lost dropping out in the seventh grade.

During my first year at Aims, I was introduced to Maxine Marquez, a Latina instructor, and she was assigned as my mentor. I was relieved and excited that I had someone to help me become successful. Maxine offered me a work study position and she was supportive. With her assistance, I completed my degree with a high GPA, and she encouraged me to continue to the University of Northern Colorado. She told me that I was capable of furthering my education and that she would help with the process. Maxine did help and she introduced me to other women who would mentor me along the way. As I mentioned before, Aims did not graduate students with a cap and gown, and I had to

apply to the University of Northern Colorado in hope of someday graduating with the proper regalia.

My experience at Aims was good, and I developed skills to become a legal secretary or work for a judge. This was amazing to me because I had gained the experience to learn how to become a successful student in a world that was unfamiliar to me and to my family. This adventure provided me with the confidence to continue to pursue a degree at a four year institution and continue to improve and enhance my learning. This was going to be a great challenge; however, I was on my way to a better life for my children, and I knew this was only the beginning of my dream come true. It was such an incredible feeling graduating with my Associates even without the regalia. I knew I was only a few years away from having my four year degree and a photo with my cap and gown. The desire to achieve this accomplishment, and to take this photo, stayed in my mind throughout the following years at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC).

My experience at UNC was not positive and I had many challenges. During orientation, I was assigned an advisor to help me decide what courses I needed to take my freshmen year. I had no idea what I wanted to study, and I needed guidance in this area. The first thing she told me was that many students of my “kind” studied social work or they wanted to be teachers. She also shared with me that I would do very well in these majors because I had a high GPA as a transfer student. Needless to say, I had no idea what my “kind” was and all I wanted to know was will I make enough money to pay for insurance for my babies with these majors. Of course, her facial expression was not a positive one; she had no idea what I was talking about. She knew nothing about me and

she had failed to read my file concerning my life as a first generation student and that I was an adult learner. I had a feeling I was in trouble the very first day during orientation.

My response to my advisor was “What do students study who are not my ‘kind’? Whatever they study is what I want to study.” She stared at me and told me to take the following courses in business. I was going to study business and I had no idea what this meant for me and for my family. I was enrolled with 16 credits, worked two jobs, and I had four little ones at home to take care of. How in the world was I going to accomplish this?

My first semester was very difficult. I was enrolled in three business courses, one English course, and one physics course. The English course was for students who major in Humanities, and I had no idea what Humanities were. Dr. Meyers, my English professor, taught an English course in mythology comparing the first book of the Bible with mythology. I was so angry because how can you compare truth with myth; and how can someone teach this! I had no idea what to do. How can someone just place a student who has no knowledge of these subjects in these courses? How can this happen in a university setting? I was determined to find out and to find someone to help me get through these difficult courses.

I spent hours studying and feeling like I did not belong in the School of Business. Only a few Latinos entered, and many left. My advisor had told me that many Latinas did not enroll and many had mentioned leaving because of the lack of mentors or role models in business. I remember calling my mentor from Aims Community College and sharing my experiences with my courses and work. My mentor was on leave of absence for a semester and was traveling in Europe. By mid-semester, I was failing most of my

courses, and I knew I was not going to make it at UNC and I would probably be dismissed. I was heartbroken and ashamed for not succeeding. I blamed myself for wanting to take harder courses knowing that I still had so much to learn. I believed my advisor about how Latinos only studied social work and teacher education. These are wonderful disciplines; however, this is not what I wanted to study. I needed to earn money to support my four children, and I really believed that these two majors would not lead to high earnings for students.

As I reflect, I laugh because I wanted to earn money and I applied for a position at Colorado State University earning \$14,000 a year. I was eligible for food stamps. I wanted a master's degree and needed to sacrifice for a few more years. I realized that someday I was going to earn more.

### **Sharing My Story: Public Forum**

Good afternoon, thank you for agreeing to meet with me as I share my life experiences with you. The purpose today is to complete this section of my dissertation. This will be accomplished by sharing significant pieces of my life. I have captured these times by way of serious and arduous introspection. Lupe's life story: I am enthusiastic and excited to complete this section of my dissertation. Again, your participation is greatly appreciated! Please introduce yourself and mention your major and your year at CSU.

*I'm Phil, I'm a freshman here at CSU, and I'm biology major.*

*I'm Tanya, I'm a junior here at CSU, and I'm a Human Development and Family Studies major.*

*I'm Nancy, I'm a Residence Director, and this is my first year here at Colorado State.*

### **Discovering Motivation in Our Own Resiliency**

It is clear to me, given my life experience and being from an underrepresented group, that we must find motivation in our own resiliency in order to complete our educational goals. We must believe that anything is possible if you set your mind to do it. And, of course, you must find those resources that can help you accomplish your dream. It may be studying abroad, helping people living in poverty, or going out and doing research, whatever it is, you must believe that you will accomplish your individual mission.

My intention is to capture the most important of those experiences during this process. I will stop in 30 minutes and then ask for some feedback or clarification from you. Your comments will assist me significantly in this process. I have shed many tears during this Ph.D. venture and I may be crying again; please be patient. If somebody would tell me when the 30 minutes are up, I'd appreciate it.

I'm trying to recall from the memories of my life experience certain events that have scarred and caused deep pain in the core of my being, versus life events that have encouraged me to persist. It's those things that happened to me and motivated me to continue and persevere, to want to go even further in my life, which I will attempt to extract for you. Because I know that's where the resiliency comes in; it's that quality that helps you bounce back against all adversity or odds.

As I was thinking about how to tell you my story, I expect to maintain a sequence in the storytelling, but there are several events that have impacted my life and it is not an

easy task to return to these painful and fearful times in my life. My goal is when this narration is typed that we will record these events in a manner that communicates the full value and impact of these life experiences.

### **My Life Experience as a Child of a Migrant Farm Worker Family**

As I reflect through the years of traveling to and through several states, I remember how difficult it was for me to start a new school wherever we happened to find work; I should say when my parents and older brothers and sisters found work. The challenges I had to endure were frightening and sad. From Texas to Colorado to Nebraska, back to Texas and then, many times, from Texas to Florida, we traveled from state to state as a migrant family for many years.

In Fort Collins, near Waverly in the Wellington area, which is located north from Fort Collins, there were two migrant camps. One migrant camp had several families who worked in the fields: They picked sugar beets, pickles, onions, and cherries. However, cherries were mostly for people from the Fort Collins area, not people that were migrant workers coming from other states. The other camp was for the Braceros coming to Fort Collins from Mexico on work permits issued from the United States. My father was the Braceros employer and we lived in a big house surrounded with several small houses for the workers. There were two camps; however, I cannot find any photos, not even in the Fort Collins Library; somebody has to have the archives somewhere.

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s the government would allow people, mostly men, to come to the United States and work in the fields. My father was the buffer between the employer and the employees. He's the one that had to pay the workers; he's the one that had to take them shopping and to work. I grew up observing my father's

responsibilities during the Bracero Program. My father was amazing with a third grade education and was the most intelligent man I had ever seen and I was proud.

As I reflect back on my life as a four or five year old little girl, I knew I wanted to be like my father; working hard and helping people who wanted a better life for their families. I also wanted to be a good Christian, as was my family. As a Chicana or Latina, we attended church and I always prayed to learn and anxiously waited to start school. I remember wanting to become a nun or a teacher at a very early age, because it was also learning and teaching others to learn. So I was trying to figure out what I really wanted to learn, and I wanted to learn everything. I would dream about certain things such as, “Why does the sun come out at a certain time? Why is the moon so bright? And why do I love dirt so much?” I used to eat dirt; and probably stopped at the age of 12. I used to wonder why dirt was good; I mean it tasted very good to me. But I wondered; I had that curiosity to want to learn about everything. And I wondered if my brothers and sisters ever had that same curiosity, and they did. But the fact that curiosity led to all this learning and all this knowledge, we just didn’t see it that way at that time. Again, it’s because my family didn’t have that formal education; their education was informal and was based on their knowledge gained from their own personal life experiences.

### **School as a Haven: Exciting Moments**

I was excited to go to school, and I think out of all the 10 kids, I was the only one in my family that actually wanted to attend. Sometimes, I have wondered why I was so keyed up to learn and be in school. There's probably a variety of reasons. I was the only girl left at home. I was the sixth child, and at the time I was growing up, my two older sisters were already married and out of the house. The reality was that there were four

male children in the house and I was responsible to care for them, because my mother used to work out in the fields. For most of my childhood, my mother was very ill with asthma, yet she would go out to work and do all those things that some people don't do even when they're not sick. But, I wanted to go to school and I was thrilled to go to school and learn. The thought of learning English and learning how to read was intriguing to me.

### **Public Schools and Children of Migrant Field Workers**

As migrant field workers, many times you have to repeat the grade two or three times a year because you're taken out of school in Colorado, and then you're taken out of school in Texas. If you don't complete so many months out of the academic year you have to repeat it. But I was excited, even though there weren't very many people that looked like us in some of the schools we attended. In school many times we were the only Spanish speaking kids in class. I didn't know English until I was in the first grade and started picking up some words. It was easier for me because I guess I just paid more attention than did my brothers. I think it's also because when they called on me, I wanted to be able and ready to answer questions correctly. I didn't know how to read; I didn't know how to read until I was in the third grade. So in order to appear no different from the other students, I memorized the various books utilized up and through the third grade.

I remember my father would always buy us new clothes; we always had new clothes for the first two days of school—new shoes, new underwear, and new socks. I remember walking in with my little red dress, and I remember that I went in, sat in the front of the class, and was told I had to sit in the back. I could never sit in the front, and I remember not liking this at all and wondering why I was not allowed to sit in the front

row. This happened all the way to the fifth grade. The schools in Fort Collins and Greeley area are not any different from the schools in Texas that I attended, or any other schools in Colorado. Although I resented having to sit in back I did not have the social awareness until much later in life of the reasons why certain kids were made to sit in the back.

### **Third Grade Teacher: Miss Harold**

In the third grade I had a teacher, Miss Harold, who used to call me “Loopie.” I used to say, “My name is Lupe,” and they would say, “No, your name is Loopie.” My name was L-O-O-P-I-E, so that’s how they would write it on the board. Sometimes I would answer and sometimes I didn’t answer to that name, so of course, I started getting in trouble because I was being disrespectful. And, if I think back, it wasn’t that I was being disrespectful, it was because that wasn’t my name. I would tell my parents, and they would say that I was being disrespectful because teachers know best and that probably was my name in English. Well, no, I didn’t know how to explain that to my parents. So, for the longest time, I just went ahead and accepted the name or I would correct them and sometimes I would just keep my mouth shut.

I have never forgotten Miss Harold. I’m over 55 years of age, and I wonder why it is that Miss Harold still haunts me to this day. I wrote a poem about Miss Harold, when I was doing my master’s. It’s because of what she said, “Mexican families, you know, they put these long names to their kids, these long Mexican names, Guadalupe.....it’s a long name.” And at that time, I thought she was saying these things to a name that my grandfather had given to me. I was named after my aunt. His daughter had passed away; her name was Guadalupe, and so that name was given to me. It was a sacred name, coming from your grandfather. Miss Harold was significant in my life and she made me suffer

during my time in her classroom. I wondered for years why she hated Mexicans so much. She was an example of one teacher who legally held “in loco parentis” responsibility, and openly degraded one of her students!

### **Spanish Language: A Barrier in the Public Schools**

It wasn't until the fourth grade that I realized that I already knew English in school, but I spoke Spanish at home. I could not speak Spanish at recess; you weren't allowed. Of course, today, kids want to learn, and teachers are probably more sensitive to that; but at that time they weren't.

I had younger brothers and a sister that didn't know English, so I had to translate many times, and I would get in trouble for that. But still I wondered, “Why is it that I still like school?” Why was it that I wanted to get up and go to school? Well, I think that it was because I had a lot of work to do at home. It was easier for me to attend school, just do what I needed to do, and then go home—that for me was fun. As I've researched other writings such as Latino Critical Theory or Race Critical Thinking, I have a greater understanding today; these things happened to many, many other children. Today more and more people of color are writing about certain experiences or barriers they had to overcome, and they do empower and strengthen us. Their stories have empowered me; they gave me the motivation to say, “No, I can do this. I can really go on and finish my bachelor's degree, I can finish my master's degree, and I will finish this last piece of my educational journey, my dissertation.” What a wonderful journey I have experienced in my life? How have I accomplished this with only a seventh grade education? I am my father's daughter. A daughter who wanted to work hard and help others!

It is devastating to a child—I know it was painful for me—growing up and not understanding why you’re not welcome, why you’re not accepted, why you’re not appreciated for who you are. I hope that today there are, and I want to believe there are, and I know teachers do appreciate differences no matter how you look like, what language you speak, what race or sex you are, you are in fact embraced. As a child, I wanted to learn and I was the first one ready for school and I wanted to finish school, and because I was not encouraged to stay in school I dropped out in the seventh grade. This is why in my story. I have emphasized the significant events that have contributed to overcoming various obstacles and barriers during this challenging educational journey.

### **Not Accepted or Valued: Fighting Back**

As I continue to tell my story, I remember how my first years in elementary school were difficult and frightening but I still wanted to attend and learn. When I reached the seventh grade at Leshner Jr. High in Fort Collins, Colorado, I was on the President’s and Dean’s list for the whole year. I decided I really did not want to be in school anymore because I was constantly fighting. I was fighting because I was being called a “Spic”; I was fighting because I was called a “dirty Mexican.” By this time, I was already 15 years old, and to be in the seventh grade with younger kids did not feel good to me. But most people would not ask me about my age. Living on the North side and growing up in poverty was not an easy life or a good life—I was angry about how I had grown up.

I do not know if you remember the seventh grade but I do. I had already told my teachers about the comments that this little girl was saying to me and I had told the principal. It seemed like no one cared about my feelings. Finally, one morning when she

called me a “dirty Mexican,” I grabbed her. She was this skinny little white girl that fit in the locker, so I threw her in and would not let go of that handle. They had to pull me away to get me to open it. She wasn’t going to die, because there were vents there to get some air, but it was still bad. I didn’t want her to die; I just wanted her to stop calling me a “dirty Mexican.” In the first place, we were not dirty, and we weren’t born in Mexico. So, I was suspended for three days.

Someone from the school did call my mom, but I knew that when you called my mom, she’d hang up because she didn’t know English; she’d hang up the phone, and I knew that. I also knew that when she had to sign the paper that I was the only child that was able to translate and I was not going to tell her about the incident. This is not something that I’m proud of, but I never told the whole truth when she had to sign the paper. I was not about to tell her I was suspended for fighting, because I would have been in real trouble with my parents. So, I was just telling everybody I was going on a field trip, which literally I was on a field trip for three days. I was hanging out with friends. And I wouldn’t apologize; I did not apologize. As a matter of fact, what I said is, “She owes me an apology for calling me those names.” And that’s when I was taught by one of my teachers that derogatory names do not hurt and sometimes people do not mean anything by them. She said, “Sticks and stones might break your bones but names will never hurt you.” I remember clearly telling her; but, “names do hurt and hurt more when no one does anything about it.” Just the same, I was expelled and there were no consequences for her and the name calling continued until school was out at the end of the academic year.

I had passed to the eighth grade with excellent grades, however I never returned. I think that I was excited to continue with my education but I also was having problems at home. I was in track and field, and I used to stay after school for sports, but my parents needed me at home and did not understand or believed in these types of activities. The girls from our neighborhood usually were out doing something else and were not doing sports or anything like that; they were out getting in trouble, so that's what my parents thought I was doing. Finally, one summer day, my father informed me that we were moving to Fort Lupton to work in the fields and we had to live in the migrant camp. I knew I was going to do something different and I was definitely not moving to Fort Lupton.

#### **Decision to Marry: Lost Run Away Teen**

I ran away from home that summer, and I was placed in a foster home because I was not going to live in a migrant camp. The migrant camp in Fort Lupton was a huge migrant camp, and there were just two little rooms, real tiny rooms, in this little house. I was a teenager, I needed privacy and this was not a priority for my parents. My father said that I had to go, and I said, "No." I wasn't going to go to a migrant camp, and I was going to get married. So I ran away and got married, and really, when you're that young, you think you're going to have the freedom to accomplish your dreams. You think that you're going to have more freedom than you were allowed from your parents, but actually what I did is, I jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.

#### **Decision to Leave an Abusive Marriage: Divorced**

I didn't have the freedom. I really thought I was going to be given permission from my husband to attend school, but he didn't. I wasn't allowed to go to school, so it

was a difficult time for me. But you make it work because marriage is sacred. I was married by a justice of the peace first, and then, later on, before my son was born I was married in the Catholic Church. When you're married in the Catholic Church, you make a commitment for life. It is not easy to leave the Catholic Church and I struggled with my commitment; however, I made the decision that I was not going to live in an abusive relationship. I divorced my husband after nine years of marriage. We had four children and I had no idea what I was going to do.

It was a difficult time trying to support my children without an education or work experience. I worked in a laundromat; I worked cleaning; I worked helping the cooks clean and cook. I worked at Monfort; I worked in a cafeteria, cleaning, cooking, and accepting any job I was asked to do, because I needed to work. I was 24 years of age, I had four kids, and that's when I decided that I really needed to get a better job. I figured I needed my GED and needed to find other resources available to attend a community college. I had no other choice but to return to the one thing that I had always loved to do and this time it was going to be different. I was not a little girl anymore. I had the responsibility to teach my children the value of an education and in order for me to accomplish this I had to return to school and thus my educational journey began.

### **Earned General Education Equivalency (GED) and Associate of Sciences Degree (A.S.)**

I returned to school and I earned my General Education Equivalency Degree (GED) in 10 weeks, and it was really hard. Algebra was hard; Geometry was hard; and the only thing that I enjoyed was the section dedicated to math. I had a tutor during my GED classes at Aims Community College that helped me study efficiently and

effectively. I studied for 10 weeks, I took the test and I passed; my highest score was in math. This provided me with desire and the opportunity to continue with my education, so I enrolled at Aims Community College for a two year associate of arts degree.

Along the way, I reflect back on the times that were really hard for me, the times when I believed that I wasn't intelligent enough to learn. I was stupid, because I was made to feel that way. As a child, you just don't know when older people or your parents tell you, "You're stupid, why did you do that?" and "You're stupid," and pretty soon you begin to believe it, and I did. I had such a low self-esteem; I had no confidence or feeling of self-worth about myself. But I think it was my four kids that really made it possible for me to say, "I've got to go. I have to do something different." And so, when I went to Aims, I remember telling my advisor that I had just earned my GED, and I do not know what I want to study, but I have to make money. I can't live on welfare, on \$300 a month while trying to raise four kids. My rent is \$100 and some, my insurance is so much, and I receive food stamps for food, but I only have maybe less than \$50.00 for the whole month, so I have to earn money. She said to me, "Well, you can be a secretary," and I said, "Well, do you know what type of secretary makes money?" That's when she said, "A legal secretary." And I graduated two years later with my associates in judicial/legal secretary studies.

I did well at Aims. I drove my kids to daycare, and I was studying, raising my children, and I earned my second degree. Remember I had also earned my GED. When I graduated from Aims, my family did not attend my graduation. The only person that attended was my friend, Paul Cordova, and my kids. But Aims didn't have a cap and gown ceremony. For me the cap and gown is a symbol of your accomplishments. So,

since Aims didn't have a cap and gown ceremony, I said I have to go somewhere where they do.

I remember thinking about transferring to UNC and wondered if I was to be successful. I went to Sharon McMorrow, one of my mentors at Aims, and she told me, "Lupe, you can do this, you did well at Aims. I'll help you through that process." And I thought about money, and that's when they told me that I was eligible for financial aid. So I said, "Okay." I went to see an advisor, and she looked at my file and the first thing that they see many times is your transcripts. Well, at Aims I did really well, and so again we talked about a major and about money.

**University of Northern Colorado (UNC): Bachelors of Science Degree and Bachelor of Arts Degree (Double Major)**

I lived in Greeley, and the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) was close by, so I decided to enroll at UNC. I didn't know what I was majoring in; I just knew I had to continue with my education. I had graduated from Aims with a 3.8 GPA, and my highest score has always been math. As I think back, if somebody would have seen that talent, maybe I would have been doing something else, maybe I would have been a scientist. But at that time, women in general weren't even advised to go into those areas.

My UNC advisor said, "What would like to study?" and before I could answer or think of a response she said, "Your kind." "Your kind enrolls in teaching"; "your kind becomes a social worker." I definitely knew I was not going to become a social worker because I was on Welfare and most of my case workers had studied social work and they were not very friendly. It took me a while to say, "My kind?" And then I knew, at that time she was referring to my ethnicity. I asked my advisor, "Can I make money in these

fields, because I have four kids to raise?” I think that was my driving force; I needed to make money so I could have insurance for my kids. I needed to be able to afford housing; I needed to be able to afford food. I needed to have a car, and I needed to have insurance for the car—all of life’s basic essentials. I said, “Well, what do people who are not my kind, what do they study?” She said, “Oh, they go into science or business or nursing” because Greeley had a good nursing school. But I knew that I was not going to become a nurse, I do not like being poked in my finger for blood, much less poking somebody else, so I knew that was out. I said, “Okay.” But science scared me, so I said, “I’m going to have to study a lot, and would I have the time with the four kids?” I had a little one; my youngest was a baby two years old and so I decided to study business. I went to business classes, taking 16 hours each semester. I was taking a Humanities class, and I didn’t even know what Humanities was. I also had a management class and a physics class, and I had no idea what physics was at that time. This is what she advised me to take. It was a horrible experience, and I knew I was going to fail.

I learned later that the physics course had a prerequisite, and the woman still advised me to take it. I don’t know how they let me in that physics class, but I got a C in physics. The course was learning about electricity and I wondered what I was going to do with an electricity course. But I passed it, just barely. The Humanities class was an English writing class; I wasn’t very good at writing. It was about comparing mythology with the first book of the Bible. I grew up a Catholic; I grew up believing that everything in the Bible is the truth. These people didn’t lie about the Bible; that’s what I had been taught while growing up. What is mythology? I didn’t even know what mythology was. I didn’t know what Greek Mythology was. I didn’t know any of this stuff. So it was really

hard, and I got a D in that class. The other two, I think I got an F in one of my business classes. And I think I only got a B in the other. So, I was failing and I was angry with the whole college process. I was failing, and I really thought it was my fault. I had failed, never thinking or knowing I had agreed with my advisor and enrolled in all the classes and I knew nothing about these courses. I believed everything she told me because I did not understand the system or the environment I was in.

I believe that most of us grow up thinking that when there are people with power, people that are supposed to help you; you're supposed to respect and believe them. They're telling you to take these classes, because they believe that you're capable of doing this. I realized the 16 hours was a heavy load for me. I also had work study, and I had four kids and was working another part time job. This advisor never took any of my life circumstances into consideration. At this point I was seriously considering withdrawing from University of Northern Colorado.

### **My Anonymous Angel**

Needless to say I was devastated! I was in the student center; it is called the Union, at UNC. I was sitting there sobbing and feeling sorry for myself. It was that cry where you can't stop, and your chest hurts and everything hurts. I knew I was failing, and I felt like a complete failure. A woman stopped by and asked if I was okay (to this day I don't even know who she was). I just know that she was this white woman. Anyway, she looked white, she stopped, she put her hand on my shoulder, and she said, "Is everything okay?" I just told her I failed. I'm not going to make it here. I need to make it; I want to be here; I want to graduate from here; and I don't know what else I said. She probably couldn't even understand what I was saying. She told me "The Center for Human Enrichment has a support program, just what you need. It's located in this building on the

third floor. Just go up there and ask for Sharon Mc Morrow and they will provide all the support you need to succeed”. I knew about Sharon and how she had helped me at Aims, but had forgotten about her.

The Director of the support program or center, Ray Romero, really made things possible for me. When I was crying there, too, he said, “You’re going to be on probation; you’re going to be placed on financial probation, you need to utilize our resources and we will help with this process. Work for us, transfer over here from the College of Business, and you’re going to have an advisor; you’re going to have a tutor. Our mission is to assist you through graduation.

Had it not been for the mediation of the woman in the UNC Student Union, my life may have taken a completely different course. One can never know. I thank that woman; she was my angel; she was my protector. She took the time to make a difference in my life I was able to continue my journey. Following that semester, I did very well; I was never placed on probation again. The second year, I decided that I would not only take business courses, but in addition I would enroll in another major, which was Spanish. In order to learn more about my culture, I choose to take Chicano Studies as well. I saw this as a means to empowerment via knowledge about my complex, vital, and intriguing heritage and culture.

### **Empowerment via Knowledge Gleaned from Chicano Studies**

I believed this would help me dissect if not understand various questions: In the College of Business, too often, they would make comments like, “you were hired because they needed quotas,” and “you were hired because they needed minorities in their corporations.” Chicano Studies provided not only knowledge about my viable and

constructive heritage, but the opportunity to delve into conversations that enlightened each of us as to the social status of Chicanos in the United States. We learned that in the state of Colorado, quotas were illegal. We were hired, and people were getting these jobs because they were qualified; I was being empowered by facts. I enjoyed my Spanish classes, which were hard; you had homework every night and books to read, too many books. But Chicano Studies was a good experience for me and I learned about society as a whole; how in this country we've learned or been taught to marginalize people or to exclude certain people from certain jobs and to be restricted to purchasing real estate only in certain neighborhoods. This is when I started connecting the dots with Miss Harold.

### **Professional Employment**

After graduation from UNC, I went and worked cleaning homes. I said, "Okay, what am I going to do next?" I had applied for jobs, but I still wanted to be in education, so this position at CSU opened up as an Office Coordinator. I applied for this position, and I thought, "Great, my parents live in Fort Collins; I want to live in Fort Collins. I can work here and stop by and see them every day if I get this job. If I am hired, I can continue with my education and enroll in a Master's Program." So, I applied. I don't think I would have been hired for the position if Dr. Geraldine Aragon hadn't been on that committee, because the Director made a comment that was not appropriate for a Director to make—such as you have too many kids and I am concerned that you might not be able to do the job. I was a single parent, and he had asked me about my kids. I told him I had one that was fairly ill, in and out of the hospital, but I had been able to complete two majors; I had worked, and I had really good references. It wasn't an easy journey, but I wanted to be in a University environment. I was hired with a salary of

\$14,000 for 11 months; I had reached the salary level I needed to raise four children. I loved my position and I was able to take my own experiences and helped other students who were enrolling with similar struggles as me.

As you may recall, I mentioned working on two majors because I wanted to earn money? Well, \$14,000 at that time, for me, back in 1985, was a lot of money, because I was getting approximately \$5,000 being on social welfare. I started at CSU, and that same year, I was accepted to the College Student Personnel Administration (CSPA) master's program. I was working full time and I was enrolled with three credits the first year; after ten years I received my master's degree.

### **An Academic/Scholarly Investigation into Resiliency**

Throughout my educational journey, I did not know what resiliency was or meant. It has been more recently that I started reading about resiliency. I have learned that no matter how many hard times we go through in our lives, some of us bounce back against the different tragedies we encounter. This is because you're in an environment that supports resiliency; you're in an environment that encourages; and then you find mentors, people that can help you. And I can tell you that I have had many mentors, Geraldine Aragon is still my mentor. She's in New Mexico, and she's been my friend since 1985. She has consistently encouraged me to persist and complete the doctorate degree. Jim Banning is my advisor and his encouragement has helped me tremendously. He's a white male; a white male, who has a great understanding about privilege, power, and racism, and his support is strong as he encourages me, no matter what, to do whatever you want to do—and he is there to help me. He is a wonderful advocate. Carol Miller was married to a Latino, and for me, she's a Latina at heart, because she's always helped our

Chicano/a students in this community. She's made a difference in my life and continues to impact me in the most positive ways, because I know I can call her and she will be there for me. I've always had people that have encouraged me to go on, despite life's challenges.

You probably have guessed that my story is about resiliency; it's about overcoming obstacles. If you really want an education, there are possibilities for you. It's not going to be easy, and in some places, you'll wonder, "What the hell am I doing here? Is it worth it? Do I really want this?" You decide to continue to complete your dreams, and you will find people that are going to embrace you and say, "Yes you can!" Again, you will learn to choose your battles very carefully, because there's only so much you can do. You will learn to challenge systems or people, and this will be very uncomfortable. However, you have faith that you can make a difference and impact many people. This I know is true, because I have learned this through my own journey.

### **My Favorite Quote**

A quote by Zapata reminds me of my life, and it is hanging right on my wall, in my office, where I can see it and be reminded that "It is better to live on your two feet than continue to live on your knees"; I would rather experience life on my two feet. This quote has provided me with the encouragement and determination to fight for my rights as a human being. Zapata has empowered me to walk in this life with dignity; I want to be able to give that back. I'm close to finishing the doctorate, which is often referred to as the "terminal degree." This is my last step in my formal educational journey. It's exciting, but it hasn't been easy. It's been a worthwhile journey, and I would like to encourage you to work toward accomplishing your goal or dream!

## **Story Analysis**

My last step of this chapter is to share with you the analysis of my educational journey using the holistic-content framework (Lieblich et al., 1998). This framework is one of the methodological approaches used in the qualitative research analysis process. This will allow me to represent my story in broad holistic thematic categories. In each of these thematic categories, I convey both personal obstacles and various academic, personal, and spiritual supports. The categories will be summarized within the concept of “lessons learned” (Creswell, 1998, p. 36). I have asked an “insider” to my culture and an “outsider” to my culture to review and comment on my thematic categories. This will add additional perspective and depth (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2002) to my story.

Three major holistic categories emerge from the analysis of my story: culture (Latino/migrant), school experience, and finally, where I found support. The summarization of these categories and lessons learned are made explicit in the following sections.

### **My Culture: Latina/Migrant—Lessons Learned**

**Resourcefulness, Adaptability, and Coping.** My earliest memories include being in the bed of the truck as we traveled from place to place. We children slept and played games. There were eight children but only six of us were in the truck bed. We entertained ourselves in a variety of ways but we had fun. Our lives included a daily weaving of resourcefulness, adaptability, and coping skills.

Upon arrival at the designated migrant camp, my father’s first duty was to find the best available house. Usually, this was quite a challenge. Due to the fact that the houses were small, approximately 15 by 30 feet, we as a family of 10 had to be extremely

resourceful to make it livable. We used a two-burner propane gas stove and washed dishes in stainless steel bowls. We also had our own dishware. For sleeping, my mother made sure we had cots, with mattress and blankets. There was no inside plumbing or electricity. We had outside toilets and well water. The only positive I remember was the family unity and safety resulting from that unity.

**Summary.** The nature of living a migrant farm experience necessitates the ability to incorporate survival skills such as adaptability, coping skills, and creative resourcefulness. As a child these skills gave rise to my resiliency.

### **My School Experience—Lessons Learned**

**Capability, Excitement, Intelligence, and Persistence.** What do I remember from my school experience? The wonderful excitement preparing for the first grade: My new red dress, new shoes, new books, new Indian Head paper tablet and pencils. I especially remember my father registering each of us and walking us to our individual classrooms. This was especially important because I knew how very busy he was. He worked from sunrise to sunset; many times he worked while it was dark. He worked 12 to 14-hour days, every day of the week.

When I entered the classroom, I was introduced to my classmates. I told the teacher my name was Guadalupe Salazar. She was not willing to attempt to pronounce it correctly. Instead she made fun of the name by telling the class that “Mexicans always give their children long names that no one can pronounce.” So she decided that my name would be “Loopie.” (Now as a professional I think she in fact was a bit Loopy.)

Next, I was told to go the back of the room and sit in the back row. I wanted to sit in the front row but this was never allowed. I knew that I was capable of being a star

student because I knew I was intelligent. I always learned things my mother and father and older siblings taught me. And I learned these things faster than any of my siblings. Persistence was a skill essential to daily survival and was modeled by my parents.

**Summary.** You might expect that the various negative experiences have damaged my spirit, identity, and aspirations to learn and become a successful student. It did not! My innate intelligence allowed me daily to incorporate capability, excitability, and persistence.

### **My Supports—Lessons Learned**

**Role Models, Mentors, and Resources.** I realized that my fundamental support came from my parents and grandparents. They taught me by modeling the core values of spiritually, hard work, and the importance of family.

The next level of support came from the mentors I encountered during the first step of my educational journey. While investigating my options to support my four children, it became clear to me that education was the only option available. This might appear to be a dichotomy; however, education was in my soul and I had a passion for it. This is why regardless of how I was treated or perceived, I continued to persevere. At the time, I was living in Greeley, Colorado, and had access to a Aims Community College. I went to Aims' front office and asked to be directed to the individual responsible for the GED program. I completed my GED within a ten month period and proceeded to enroll in an associate of science degree, where I studied to be a judicial/legal secretary. This success was partly due to my mentor Sharon McMorro, who encouraged me and guided me through the registration and financial aid process. I completed my degree and, due to the fact that I had still not experienced a ceremony that included a cap and gown, I

immediately transferred to the University of Northern Colorado. It was important to me to provide a semblance of modeling that my parents provided and that I perceived as a symbol of accomplishment. I completed my baccalaureate degree and my immediate family and children were present to celebrate this major achievement. I was the first in my family to accomplish this monumental feat.

I was ecstatic, proud, and I knew I was capable of completing a master's degree. My personal goal was to be in a position where I would be able to generate enough money to care for my children in a responsible manner. I needed a job and a level of education that would allow me to accomplish this goal. At UNC, the people who contributed to my success by way of their mentorship and friendship included Ray Romero, Director of the Center for Human Enrichment Program (TRIO), Carlos Leal, professor of Chicano Studies, and, I must not omit, my anonymous Angel.

I was ready to enter the professional workforce and Ray Romero informed me of a position available at El Centro, a program that provides guidance, mentoring, and academic support to Latino/a students. This felt like a perfect fit, taking into consideration that I am bilingual and multicultural. More importantly, my training and education qualified me at the highest level.

### **My Outside Reviewers**

Appendices A and B contain the comments shared by my two outside reviewers. The first reviewer is a Latina who is working on her doctoral degree at Colorado State University. Her life experience brings a unique perspective in that she grew up in Argentina and came to the United States as an adult. The second reviewer is a white male of western European ancestry and is a citizen of the United States. His life experience and

perspective is valuable in that he did not have the various challenges our current society bestows on women, and to be more exact, on women of color/Chicanas and or Latinas.

An observation on society's current view of "Mexicans." is that they are blamed for taking jobs away from United States citizens (who realistically do not and will not work in these menial positions). Another observation is that the white majority society prefers to continue to blame the victim instead of placing the blame on those who are the power brokers.

I believe the above applies to my story in that the conditions for current school children of migrant workers may in fact be as bad if not worse today than during the time I was in school, especially in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. I expect the schools in Colorado and New Mexico are just as alienating to these students.

I share the summary here to emphasize my analysis and lessons learned. The observations made by my cultural insider about role modeling, mentoring, and resources mirror the modeling I received from my father and how critical it is for me to continue to model, mentor, and know the resources available for other students as the Director of El Centro.

I see you as modeling yourself after your father. You mention him more often than you mention your mother. I gather from that that you saw him as a strong figure in your family and your early life. I think that the work you do these days as Director of El Centro is a projection of your father's role with the Braceros program. Like him, you help people who need help. In the same way your father understood the Bracero men's conditions, you understand the conditions of the students that walk into your program. You identify yourself as "your father's daughter." (Liliana Castro, Cultural Insider, April 2011)

Orozco and Páez (2002) provide information about the Bracero Program that is needed in order to have a frame of reference of my father's work with

The Bracero Program, the institutionalized contract labor program that authorized the granting of five million contracts to Mexican agricultural workers, most of them men, remained in place from 1942 to 1964. This program, like earlier contract labor programs that recruited Mexican, Filipino, and Chinese men to work in the western and southwestern regions of the United States, incorporated men as pure workers, not as human beings enmeshed in family relationships. (p. 270)

Liliana Castro captures the importance of my father and his teachings in my early life. In addition, she is able to make connections with the work my father was responsible for during the Bracero Program and my responsibilities as the Director of El Centro at Colorado State University. Liliana also makes a strong statement that I identify myself as my father's daughter and she is correct because I have made every attempt to follow in my father's footsteps and that is to continue to learn and never forget where I come from.

My cultural outsider's comments can best be summarized by the following quotes:

I read an individual and cultural group member who found it in herself and her community to stand up against this system by learning the codes and eventually changing the game a little bit for others who walk a similar path of cultural alienation in predominately white institutions in the United States. I hear a cry for other people within the system to intervene and the support the access and opportunities of historically marginalized groups of people to make a little more right the terrible wrongs of the past. We cannot and will not move forward as a country if we do not face the past in order to honestly reconcile the present and the future. (Ed Brantmeier, personal communication, April, 2011)

In addition, the following was shared:

I read a story of hope and suffering—suffering due to the external pressures and internalized oppression of prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism and classism and patriarchy. Hope comes in the form of the angels, the cultural mediators, who aid the marginalized in navigating a system that alienates potentially. (Ed Brantmeier, personal communication, April 2011)

These observations or analysis from my cultural outsider provide me with a greater understanding of the pressures a child or older student must endure in order to continue to fight against all odds in order to accomplish educational goals. These analytical examinations are powerful and confer the realities many students continue to face in our schools, universities, and colleges environments.

### **El Centro's Position**

I applied for the position and was selected out of 156 applicants; only three of us were selected to be interviewed. I was hired. Within a short period of time I realized that I wanted and needed the challenge of completing the master's degree. The next logical step was for me to enroll in a program that would complement, enhance, and provide the knowledge and skills to perform my duties at the highest level possible. It is my every task and goal at the highest level possible.

I earned the master's degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) and the mentors, role models, and resources I engaged included Colorado State University's benefit of six credits per academic year. Colleagues who had completed the SAHE program served as role models and mentors. Grant Sherwood was the director of SAHE and he guided and supported me through the entire process as my Advisor. During this time my mentor at my side, Dr. Geraldine Jasper (Aragon), provided support, role modeling, and mentoring.

I became Interim Director and within the year I was promoted to Director of El Centro. My mentor, Geraldine Jasper, was in the process of completing her dissertation and encouraged me to follow in her footsteps.

### **Summary**

This educational journey has had a profound impact on me, my family, and my friends. The challenges, obstacles, and hurdles have contributed to the resiliency factor. I am not sure what the next step will be professionally and personally in terms of growth and development. I do know that once I make the decision to pursue a goal, it will be completed. I also know that this educational experience has provided a baseline for an advance propensity for identifying the known factors of resources, role models, and mentoring.

“Si Se Puede”

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Discussions**

In this chapter, I will discuss lessons learned in relation to the concept of resilience. As has been mentioned in various parts of this paper, resilience is the ability to overcome challenges and hardships while continuing to thrive and grow in all facets of the human condition. A scholarly definition is also presented in this section. It is this discussion that will fulfill the purpose of the study and the goal of the Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash, 2004). In addition, I will draw from this discussion the harmful aspects of my journey as well as identify successful strategies. Recommendations to Latinas, to schools and institutions, and further research will also be presented.

#### **Concept of Resilience: Relation to My Lessons Learned**

First, I present the following definition of resilience:

The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific COPING STRATEGIES. (VandenBos, 2007, p. 792)

The first aspect: My lessons learned in my school experiences directly relate to ways in which I was viewed and engaged with the world: capability, excitement, intelligence, and persistence. Although at the time, I had no idea I was adapting to

challenging life experiences. I knew was that I had a passion for learning and I wanted to go to school.

The second aspect of the definition by VandenBos (2007) focuses on the availability of quality social resources, and relates directly to lessons learned from my supports: role models, mentors, and resources. I was fortunate enough to have had role models who taught me how to model social behaviors. I find it interesting in retrospect to have observed that the majority of my role models were other Chicanos/Chicanas who had learned to navigate the system successfully; these role models provided the stimulus by modeling success. Their modeling and support contributed to my mental, emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

The third aspect and the most important part of my journey is how to develop successful strategies consisting of recommendations for institutions of higher education, for research relative to Latinas/Chicanas, and for community dialogue. I believe that being able to incorporate this triad of experience and lessons learned into a creative plan for potential success is the greatest outcome from lessons learned.

### **My Journey and Successful Strategies**

Given my lessons learned and their relationship to resiliency, my intention is to develop strategies and recommendations that may guide Latinas and/or Chicanas through their individual educational journey and completion of their academic goals. It has been mentioned in previous sections that mentors, academic advisors, and the numerous academic support resources available have contributed to academic success through graduation, this is definitely true for the author of this dissertation.

In thinking about the discussions in which I have engaged with colleagues and mentors throughout my educational journey, and with whom I have shared the harmful and joyful aspects of my educational experiences, it is clear that having a sense of belonging and having professionals who believed in my abilities to succeed made a tremendous contribution to the attainment of the various academic degrees which I have earned to date.

It has been said by many that one must first examine the past in order to create a meaningful future. I have and will continue to share how teachers imposed multiple, painful, and many times agonizing treatments and/or behaviors that were intended to marginalized, devalue, embarrass, and most importantly to dehumanize, the six year old excited, joyful child who wanted nothing more than to learn to read, write, and excel in mathematics like her father.

I have spent countless hours discussing our country's policies to maintain a working class and a poverty class system. These conversations with Latinas/Chicanas and other colleagues were generated to attempt to understand the systemic efforts employed by the educational system in the United States. We have deduced that this system in fact appears to be designed to systemically marginalize Latinas/Chicanas. This system reaps complex and varied consequences for the United States economically and imposes extreme duress on the individual, in this case the Latina\Chicana. One of the basic economic consequences includes loss of tax resources, resulting from a large percentage of our population being non-educated or under-educated. Additional economic losses result in Latinas/Chicanas having internalized the oppressor's message that they are inferior and intellectually deficient. This of course prevents the vast majority of

Latinas/Chicanas that live a life of poverty and deprivation from considering or ever dreaming or aspiring to enter higher education.

During my life was told and was repeatedly psychologically and physically abused into believing that she was incapable of doing anything productive. She lived in an environment that was counterproductive to learning and this for many years prevented her from accessing the opportunity to reach her maximum academic and human potential.

The abuse sustained by the author during her early adult years is but another facet and consequence of institutionalized racism. The Latino/Chicano who perpetuated the abuse felt as marginalized and oppressed as the victim. Institutional racism contributes to an internal oppressive mentality that infiltrates all aspects of the life of the oppressed existence.

What do I mean by this statement? Some social and personal consequences include high dropout rates, smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, and juvenile judicial incarceration. As a result, the Latina/Chicana frequently finds herself in the juvenile judicial system. Once this occurs, it is next to impossible for the young woman to exit that system due to the fact that her family generally is low income and does not have the resources to bond her out or to pay for the requisite legal or psychological counseling that a judge might consider in making the decision to grant probation instead of incarceration. The literature reveals that the majority of juveniles are not able to complete the legal requisites prior to reaching the age of 21. Now they are highly likely to end up in prison!

Not being accepted as a viable part of society via institutional racism may also set-up the Latina/Chicana for social failure in other social arenas. One of the most

frequent social failures may manifest in the Latina/Chicana becoming pregnant and needing to access support resources such as Aid for Dependent Children. The consequences of dropping out of school for the Latina/Chicana and for society continues to grow as she is now responsible for taking care of the child or children and many times the only option is to apply for Aide for Dependent Children or welfare, as it was once referred to. Society places the blame on the victim! So here we have a condition that is likely to become cyclical. The mother has had a negative experience within the school system, she has a child or children and what are her options? She lacks the educational experience, financial resources, work experience, and communication skills; consequently, she feels marginalized. Her family cannot assist financially due to the fact they also subsist on a meager income. They do not own property and many times can barely afford automobiles; if they do own an automobile, it is highly likely to be over ten years old and not insured.

The above mirrors my early adult life. I dropped out of school, married at a young age, divorced at a young age, and was forced to receive Aid for Dependent Children in order to survive. I had no education and no academic skills and a family that was not economically able to assist me and my children. I felt that I had failed; however, it was society that had failed me as a child who yearned to learn and to excel.

A summary that links my experience to important social science concepts is that my story is a counter narrative (Stanley, 2007). It is a story of resiliency in finding academic success, not a typical master story (Stanley, 2007) where the Latina is viewed from deficient lens, stuck in an achievement gap and most likely an academic failure. My story is also a story that takes a different journey than those suggested by the female

gender script (Simon & Gagnon, 1987). It is a story of personal power, resiliency, persistence and achievement. My story is a reality for me and can be for others as well. Typical societal stories and scripts must be rewritten to target and emphasize the personal and societal gains reflecting where the individual started from and where that sane individual ended. My story contributes to the events and efforts described in my life.

### **Recommendations to Institutions and Latinas/Chicanas in Higher Education**

#### **Recommendation for Institutions of Higher Education**

My first recommendation is that institutions of higher education consider contracting outside consultants with experience in higher education administration, have an academic field of study in which they have earned the doctorate, have direct student services knowledge and service, have taught at the university level, have both quantitative and qualitative skills, and have program evaluation experience.

As professionals in higher education we take pride in the various support systems and resources available to students. These support systems and resources have been implemented with the goal of increasing retention and graduation rates for all students. But what institutions of higher education have not prioritized is research on the various offices, departments, and professors that impact retention of specific populations.

As Director for El Centro, my primary responsibility is administrative. Nevertheless, I have chosen to counsel and advise students as I have acquired extensive knowledge about each of the direct student offices and the individual professors who provide academic and personal environments that in turn lead to productive academic outcomes.

I personally, as a professional at CSU, have had sessions with young Latinas/Chicanas who have shared their story of how isolated they feel at school claiming that no one cares about them. Immediately, I return to my past, recognizing exactly how they feel. At this point of my professional career, I am able to emphasize, and, more importantly, recommend the resources that Latinas/Chicanas may choose to access in order to succeed. My longevity at CSU has proven to be a tremendous asset to the students I counsel and I know professors that are sensitive, knowledgeable, and want students to succeed. This level of counseling may not always be available at other institutions. At CSU we have the Student Diversity Programs and Services. These services are intended to academically and personally support students who come from diverse backgrounds.

I believe mentoring opportunities for students who are searching for guidance in education is one effective strategy. We have a major problem with the Latino/a dropout rate and the achievement gap. For these reasons, there is a need to develop programs that will help combat this problem. From my experience, I know that mentoring has helped me. The impact mentoring programs will make in the future will help with sustainability in education. I am ready to connect the dots from the problem to the solution. As a person who values and has a passion for learning, the readings concerning mentoring make connections on how we can sustain programs that will help students to achieve in our schools.

All of my mentors have always made me feel good and people need to feel good about who they are. Johnson and Ridley (2008) address affirmation as the key to a feeling of well-being (p. 11). Furthermore, they both state that if you could do only one thing as a

mentor; affirm your mentee (p. 11). Throughout my education, I have had many mentors, especially in higher education, which believed in me and encouraged me to succeed.

### **Recommendation for Research Relative to Latinas/Chicanas**

A recommendation for research relative to Latinas/Chicanas who are currently enrolled in institutions of higher education involves the implementation of a qualitative interview. This interview is conducted upon admittance to the university and is repeated at the end of each semester. This tool is designed to gather information, which may lead to modification of the student's major, instructors, and access to services, programs, and activities that improve the student's potential for graduation. The admissions office would conduct the first interview. The Office of the Dean of Students (ODS) would take responsibility for each of the succeeding interviews. This Office would also be responsible for communicating issues and problems that the student might be experiencing. The ODS would contact the specific offices and professors that are currently Latina/Chicana. An action plan would be developed with the input of the student. The Latina/Chicana must have an internal awareness and knowledge in order for her to be successful.

The goal is for the Latina/Chicana to graduate. In order to accomplish this, she must know in her mind and heart that she alone holds the key to her academic and personal success. Now that she knows this, she must apply this knowledge by accessing any and all resources available at the institution in which she is enrolled. The first resource she may want to identify is a mentor, which is a process that includes both the intellect and the heart. The ideal mentor might be a Latina/Chicana who has completed

the doctorate and has several years of experience in higher education. She will guide the student through her academic journey to graduation.

### **Recommendation for Community Dialogue**

This recommendation includes a collaborative and interactive dialogue between all entities with whom a student has interaction: family, home, school, church, social service agencies, community centers, civic organizations, business foundations, community colleges, and universities.

In today's society, we have many young Latinas/Chicanas who are extremely intelligent and find themselves lacking the self-worth or the self-esteem to stay in school. Instead they may opt to engage in smoking, drinking, or drugs.

Frequently, mothers do not know how to help their daughters. Many times young Latinas/Chicanas are not able to seek help from their teachers or family members. This is due to their self-esteem and self-worth issues. Many times during discussions I have shared that if my teachers and parents would have recognized my passion for learning the question I have asked is: "What or where would I be now?" I have thought of this many times throughout my life, especially when I knew that I was capable of learning and achieving. I was not stupid; tears surround my eyes. If only I would have been guided in the right direction. If only I would have been supported and encouraged to follow my dream and graduate from high school and been advised to apply for college. During these dialogues with Latina/Chicana students at the university we share our common experiences and cry at the result of the marginalization that occurred during our time in the public schools.

What did I need from my teachers and parents? I needed to have experienced care and support. I needed to be in environments that provided a welcoming climate, support, and encouragement to want to stay in school. I needed to feel safe and valued from the teachers who are supposed to care for all kids. I did not understand why I was treated differently until entering the university and I was empowered by my Chicano/a professors. This is when I was able to connect the dots with the past and present of my experiences in the school system. What pain for someone so young to experience!

If my parents, teachers, priest, and other members would have been aware of the pain and trauma being inflicted on this child, my life may have taken a different turn and more productive.

### **Summary: My Final Reflections**

As I reflect on my life story and what I have learned from my teachers and professor, I return to the books, articles, and dissertations I have read that have inspired me such as the writers I present in my final reflections.

bell hook (1994) writes of her fears of becoming a teacher; however, what she always wanted was to be a writer. She became a teacher and a writer and her dream was accomplished. Bill Timpson, professor in the College of Education at Colorado State University, provided several books for us to read during his classes and the books I related to the most were bell hook's books. She empowered me with her writings about her life of learning and she mentions how all of the teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women and committed to teaching and nurturing so all the students would have the opportunity to become thinkers and scholars. She learned how, in a fundamental way, to resist every strategy of white racist colonization (hook, 1994, p. 2). I connected

with this woman immediately because I learned this as well during my Chicano Studies with Chicano/a professors. In these classes, I was embraced and told that Chicanos were smart and able to accomplish anything if you set your mind to do so. I was learning how to love myself and that I was smart. Needless to say, I was empowered. I did not hear this word “empowerment” during my early educational years until I was working on my master’s degree and I immediately adopted the word.

San Miguel (2001) states that some teachers cared; others, however, had low expectations of children with learning abilities and he further mentions that Mexican children were at times unwittingly, discouraged from achieving (p. 31). This is one reason why Miss Harold was mean and had low expectations of me as a Mexican American child. Yet she was allowed to teach and treat us as if we were less than anything. How many children who were identified as Mexican American wanted to stay home because of the abuse from our teachers? I did not! I wanted to learn to read in order to help my parents. Why I have allowed this woman to haunt me? I believe because she affected my identity and she did not take away my spirit and she did not take away my passion for learning.

bell hooks (1994) reports the following in her book, *Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom*,

Paulo Freire and the Vietnamese Buddhist *monk* Thich Nhat Hanh are two of the “teachers” who have touched me deeply with their work. When I first began college, Freire’s thoughts gave me the support I needed to challenge the “banking system” of education; that approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it. Early on, it was Freire’s insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called “conscientization” in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classroom with the same conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a

passive consumer. Education as the practice of freedom was continually undermined by professors who were actively hostile to the notion of student participation. Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor. That notion of mutual labor was affirmed by Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of engaged Buddhism, the focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation. His philosophy was similar to Freire's emphasis on "praxis"—action and reflection upon the world in order to change it. (1994, p. 14)

It is difficult to comprehend how teachers and professors who have been educators have failed to take seriously what it is to be meant to teach. The phrase in the above statement mentions, "When everyone claims the knowledge as a field in which we all labor." The interpretation for me is that teachers have not expressed the importance of working together for an end result.

Thich Nhat Hanh reveals and speaks of the teacher as a healer (p. 14). Both Freire and Hanh are educators who care about learning and about their students. They are passionate about learning and about teaching others to be successful. I embrace their method of teaching and will continue to do so in my life.

## **Epilogue**

Finally I am near completion of the doctorate degree – yet one more of my goals on this life journey. I am proud of my accomplishments at this time in my life. I will concede that this has been one of the most challenging. I was forced to open many hurtful wounds still embedded in my heart and mind. I cried many tears through this process and as before, having started work on the doctorate, I am once more working through the healing path.

I am drained emotionally and psychologically and I know that throughout my life painful memories will never leave me; however, these memories will help me know that I must continue to fight against the injustices that continue to impact our children. Children require a learning environment that is accepting, filled with love and with scholarly opportunities for problem solving.

I am resilient, I am my father's daughter, I am a migrant; I am scholar and mostly for the purpose of this dissertation, I am a woman passionate about having the opportunity to learn and to teach others. So, now I have the requisite tools for helping to widen the road of academic opportunity. The journey continues.

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## **APPENDIXES**

## APPENDIX A

### Letter from Liliana

Lupe,

I am a student in Educational Leadership Doctorate program. I am also an instructor at Front Range Community College. I teach Spanish and English as a Second Language. I was born in Mendoza, Argentina and have been living in the United States since 1990. This was an inspiring story –it brought tears to my eyes at times. I read this story and took notes of what the story told me. I don't know if this is what you need.

I see you as modeling yourself after your father. You mention him more often than you mention your mother. I gather from that that you saw him as a strong figure in your family and your early life. I think that the work you do these days as Director of El Centro is a projection of your father's role with the Braceros program. Like him, you help people who need help. In the same way your father understood the Bracero men's conditions, you understand the conditions of the students that walk into your program. You identify yourself as "your father's daughter".

I see you choosing education as an escape from unfavorable living conditions. You loved school because it allowed you to escape from the life your mom and probably the other women in your family had. You chose education over maintaining the status quo of an abusive environment. You chose to continue graduate studies to prove you are as deserving as the other students in your 7<sup>th</sup> grade class.

Culture is intrinsic to your identity. This is why you remember Mrs. Harold until this day; she did not recognize you, she renamed you. This is why you got that little girl in the locker. You are proud of your culture as a Chicana/Latina, but it has proved testing for others to appreciate you and respect you. Your story reveals the marginalization that runs through our social system.

I see the theme of resilience in this story. It is inscribed in the elections you made. I saw resilience in your capacity to learn from the back seat –away from the teacher. I see resilience in the strategies you used to navigate your way out of oppression –oppression at school, oppression at home, oppression in society.

Although resilience is a recurring theme in your story, I saw "dignity" as a main thread. I had written this down on several sections of the story before I read your recommendation at the end "walk in this life with dignity." I think this is what I see embedded in your account. The resilience aspect is the strategy you used to cope with adversity. But "dignity" is what guided you throughout this process.

Let me know if you need something different. I truly enjoyed reading this story. Thank you for sharing!

liliana

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Letter from Ed**

April 11, 2011

Dear Lupe,

I have read your story and am touched by it. I want to first share my positionality here as a cultural outsider, then share my stream of consciousness notes while reading your story, and then provide a few closing remarks on umbrella themes that I read into your story.

I am a white, male, first generation college student who has benefited from an institutionalized system of white dominance and racism, sustained by what Howard (2006) calls the three pillars that sustain white dominance: the assumption of rightness, the luxury of ignorance, and the legacy of privilege. With that said, I grew up poor in a divorced family of five children, where my mother worked as a beautician and never made more than 25,000 dollars per year. I share this to not claim that I understand your experience, because I don't completely, but I do understand the feelings of alienation alluded to in your story—alienation sent through negative messages about identity and agency within a schooling system long been dominated by the power elite in white male circles in this country called the United States.

I write my notes and codes below from the perspective of a critical social theorist. I am an organic intellectual (Gramsci) frustrated with the hegemonic modes of a system that squelches individual and group agency in the social and material world. I examine power dynamics for the purpose of transformative emancipation that keeps down individuals and groups from actualizing their hopes and dreams—a system that keeps people on their knees instead of inviting them to stand up and walk in dignity.

With that said, my lens of analysis is shaded from my background and experience, and here are my notes as a cultural outsider looking at your story:

#### **Stream of consciousness notes and codes**

- Individual mission connect to societal betterment—other centeredness and giving back
- Tears of schooling and keeping on...
- Father was cultural mediator, are you as well Lupe?
- Christianity and faith...
- Dirt and part of the earth—iron deficiency? And rootedness as a child of farmers
- Delayed literacy development because of migration—resiliency as a response

- Oppositional defiance to “Loopie”—coping mechanism... yet acceptance out of fear of “teacher knows best” out of respect for parents...
- Mean gatekeepers in the system—Miss Harold
- Strength from other counter-narratives of resistance
- Identifies not as individual, but as “daughter”—family orientation rather than individualistic orientation
- Fighting back against prejudice, discrimination, and racism—three day suspension and violence
- Physical violence against the white girl was a manifestation of the structural violence manifested in your oppression—being called a “dirty Mexican” in that schooling context—it was too much and you fought back.
- Parental rebellion via marriage...--influence of patriarchy—father wanted to move, and you moved to a man for freedom....
- Defying the Catholic Church for the right reasons—again, this is a counter-normative move. I begin to wonder if you feel like an outsider looking on—in the white dominated academy and when looking back on your own community.... I have labeled this as dual alienation—feeling alienated in both the cultural of one’s birth community and feeling alienated in the new world of the academy one has entered—I too experience this feeling of dual alienation—though I know it is different to a great degree for you and for me Lupe.
- “I was stupid” theme conveys internalized oppression from a system, structural and institutionalized racism---it wasn’t you or the group with which you identify—it was the system and individual gatekeepers and propagators (Mrs. Harold) of the system who consciously or unconsciously reinforced the rules, regulations, codes of the system within a white dominant society. There are gatekeepers of who belongs or do not belongs.... They accept certain body text and forms of cultural capital, and they reject others...
- Economic barriers, and not knowing about how the system of financial aid worked....
- Math as a strength, yet was that rewarded?
- Class consciousness—the need to make money to support kiddos
- Labeling theory—“your kind”—again, a gatekeeper within the system pigeon-holed you into being a teacher---your kind does this. Again, this person functioned to maintain the status quo of a racist, classist, and sexist system that oppresses according to those variables...
- Sharon and the Angel—a cultural mediator that helped you navigate the system in an intelligent, informed way....
- I get chills reading about the Angel who helped you.... I too have felt that angel intervention at pivotal points in my life...
- Chicano studies as a mode of empowerment to obstruct the negative messages and institutional barriers encountered in the College of Business—it was the counter-narrative to contextualize, legitimize, validate your experience in an alienating, white middle class environment—right....
- Work, family, education—the navigation terrain...

- Mentors as mediators of cultural terrain—foreign, strange, unfamiliar, unsettling cultural terrain of higher education....
- Walking in dignity, with resilience and positive self identity amid a system that oppresses....

### **Thematic Reflections:**

As a cultural outsider to your story, I read a story of a system that oppresses people of color for being brown or black and for speaking in a language or dialect that is different from mainstream, white America. I see a system of racism, classism, and sexism that oppresses along those diversity variables. In this story is the power of learning to be a cultural mediator, a person who can effectively navigate the contested cultural terrain of k-20 schooling environment. This is my systems insight. I read an individual and cultural group member who found it in herself and her community to stand up against this system by learning the codes and eventually changing the game a little bit for others who walk a similar path of cultural alienation in predominately white institutions in the United States. I hear a cry for other people within the system to intervene and the support the access and opportunities of historically marginalized groups of people to make a little more right the terrible wrongs of the past. We cannot and will not move forward as a country if we do not face the past in order to honesty reconcile the present and the future.

I read a story of hope and suffering—suffering due to the external pressures and internalized oppression of prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism and classism and patriarchy. Hope comes in the form of the angels, the cultural mediators, who aid the marginalized in navigating a system that alienates potentially. Change will come when that system is transformed and inclusive, to reflect the diversity of people and thought and ways of being in the world that lie outside the dominant paradigms codified and mortared into the very brick walls of the ivory white tower of the academy.

Your critical friend and former co-advisor,

Ed