



**Zhenia Martinez**  
**Las Delicias Bakery**  
**Charlotte, North Carolina**

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Interviewer: Tom Hanchett

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**Tom Hanchett:** I'm Tom Hanchett, and we are here with Zhenia Martinez on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017. We're on Central Avenue near Las Delicias Bakery. We're in my office at the old Midwood School, the Midwood International Cultural Center. Drako Hernandez is our engineer and will ask some questions, I hope. I'll have to slide him the microphone when he does that. And we'll talk some in English but also some in Spanish. So, Drako, when you ask questions, if you want to speak in Spanish, that would make my heart happy. And we're doing an interview for the Southern Foodways Alliance. So Señora Martinez, thank you so much for being here.

[00:00:44]

**Zhenia Martinez:** You're welcome. Thank you for inviting me.

[00:00:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** Tell me when you were born and where you were born.

[00:00:52]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I was born on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1976, and I was born in Mexico.

[00:00:58]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow.

[00:00:59]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It was actually a little-known fact I was born in Mexico City, but I was registered in Chihuahua, Mexico, because back then you could do that. You just have to take the child to the registrar's office and say it was born, and it didn't necessarily have to be in the same state where they were born.

[00:01:22]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. And tell us about your parents and where they grew up there.

[00:01:25]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My parents, my mom was born and grew up in Chihuahua—Las Delicias, Chihuahua, and my father is from Orizaba, Veracruz, and they met through mutual acquaintance. It was actually my mother's best friend and a—I don't know if it was his best friend as well, but a very close friend of my dad's, that actually they kind of needed a—I forget who was it, but one of them had a “third wheel,” so the other one had to bring somebody else, and that's how my parents met.

[00:02:07]

**Tom Hanchett:** When you say a “third wheel?”

[00:02:09]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes, it's—I forget if it was his friend that my dad was bringing along and told his girlfriend, “You need to bring somebody for him.”

[00:02:21]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[00:02:22]

**Zhenia Martinez:** And they did and—

[00:02:25]

**Tom Hanchett:** What attracted them to each other, do you know? I'm asking all these questions, Mr. Tape Machine, because this is a story that Zhenia's parents are very much a part of.

[00:02:35]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think it's a—I don't know if it's that the southern guys like the northern ladies or it was just their minds. I really don't know. I don't think I've ever asked them that. Unfortunately, Dad's no longer alive, but maybe I can ask my mom.

[00:02:54]

**Tom Hanchett:** What type of work did your dad and mom do?

[00:02:59]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My mom studied to be a teacher, but once she started teaching, she really didn't seem to like it very much, so she started working as a secretary for various

government organizations, and she was actually studying, trying to finish her degree as well. And my dad studied economics.

[00:03:25]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. Was he from a fairly wealthy, educated family?

[00:03:31]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No, not at all. I think it's more or less he was from a family that liked knowledge and sought knowledge. He always had books around. I think it's in all the houses that we lived when we lived in Mexico, we had at least one wall that was completely covered from floor to ceiling with books. So I think it was just that that.

[*Laughs*] And my dad, also, he didn't have your typical life, if you will. His father passed away when he was very young, so he started to work at the age of sixteen, and he went through these various labor-intensive jobs, including working at a brewery in the town that he's from in his later years. In his later years, I mean like in his twenties, when he eventually put himself through college, and I think he was in his late twenties when he graduated.

[00:04:44]

**Tom Hanchett:** And what kind of job did he find then?

[00:04:46]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think he started working for human—I don't know what it would be in English, but [Spanish spoken] in Mexico, which is basically a government job.

[00:05:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Cool.

[00:05:05]

**Zhenia Martinez:** And he held various jobs, working in the government while we lived in Mexico.

[00:05:14]

**Tom Hanchett:** So he knew both ends of the labor spectrum, the hard physical work and the working with your brain part, yeah.

[00:05:26]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes, yes.

[00:05:27]

**Tom Hanchett:** And working politically, because you don't work for government, I think especially in Mexico, unless you know how to get along with people and figure out how things really work.

[00:05:35]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Exactly. And that he loved. He actually loved politics as well.

When we lived in southern Mexico, he was actually at that time, one of the presidential candidates of Mexico, my dad actually worked in the same area with him. Well, back then, he was a nobody, and nobody knew him, so.

[00:06:06]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. So tell me more about your dad. What do you remember of him as a dad, growing up?

[00:06:15]

**Zhenia Martinez:** As a dad, I think he was always very understanding. We never had the typical, “You’re grounded.” I don’t know [Spanish spoken]. It was never that. We always—he will always seem to talk with us about what we wanted or why we thought what we had done was wrong and how to make it better. I remember that even from when I was very little. I think there was a friend. We must have been in fourth or fifth grade. There was a very tall girl, and I think all the kids, we came up with—I don’t even remember what the name, but it was a bad name for her. And when my dad heard me call her that, he had a talk with me. But it wasn’t like, “You can’t be doing that.” It was more or less like, “Does she like that? Do you think that’s a nice thing to say to somebody? Did she seem happy when you said it?” So it’s kind of questions to make you think—

[00:07:25]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow.

[00:07:26]

**Zhenia Martinez:** —and make you process kind of your own thoughts to come up with what do you think was morally best versus what I say is right.

[00:07:36]

**Tom Hanchett:** And to put you in somebody's else's shoes—

[00:07:40]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Exactly.

[00:07:41]

**Tom Hanchett:** —which is what the best teacher does.

[00:07:42]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:07:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** I'm very impressed with that. That's great. So you say "us." You had brothers and sisters?

[00:07:50]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I have one older brother.

[00:07:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** Tell me about him.

[00:07:55]

**Zhenia Martinez:** He's two years older than me, and I think we, as most brothers and sisters, we fought all the time. We did have times that we get along, but I think we stopped fighting, it feels like, the minute that one of us turned eighteen, that it was just kind of this magically, you know, we realized that there was no reason to be fighting. And just since then we've gotten along. *[Laughs]*

[00:08:26]

**Tom Hanchett:** What's his name?

[00:08:27]

**Zhenia Martinez:** His name is Nezahualcoyotl.

[00:08:32]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. And can you spell that, if you would, please?

[00:08:35]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes, I can. It's N-e-z-a-h-u-a-l-c-o-y-o-t-l.

[00:08:52]

**Tom Hanchett:** And let me get you to spell it on my piece of paper here. And also your mom's name and your dad's name, because the family is so important in this, and I want to get all these things right. And so that's your brother.

[00:09:08]

**Zhenia Martinez:** That's my brother.

[00:09:09]

**Tom Hanchett:** Good.

[00:09:10]

**Zhenia Martinez:** That's actually not the name that he was born with, but he started studying Latin American history and a lot more depth into Mexican history, so he decided to change his name to Nezahualcoyotl Xiuntecutli.

[00:09:33]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's what I was thinking.

[00:09:35]

**Zhenia Martinez:** So that's why he has a completely different last name.

[00:09:38]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Very cool. So your mom is Margarita and your dad is Aquiles Martinez.

[00:09:58]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Aquiles, correct.

[00:10:00]

**Tom Hanchett:** Very good. And how did you get to be Zhenia, do you know?

[00:10:03]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes. My parents, they met in Mexico City, and that's where their relationship kind of took place, and I don't know how my dad got acquainted with her, but he knew a Russian professor at the University of Mexico. I don't know if she gifted them or they saw a book that it's, I want to say, the Russian Cinderella story, and the main character in it, is named Zhenia. It's actually supposed to be pronounced Chenia, and it's about a little girl that has a flower with seven petals, and each petal is a wish. And from what I remember, I think she wishes most of the petals away on frivolous stuff, and then she meets a boy that has a limp. So once she gets to know him, she decides at the end that she wants to use the last petal to heal him.

[00:11:12]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's beautiful. I don't think I know that story.

[00:11:17]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think I've only heard one person that as soon as I said it they're like, "Yeah, I know which one you're talking about." But then again I haven't met a whole lot of Russian people, so.

[00:11:27]

**Tom Hanchett:** Well, my dad taught Russian history, so every once in a while I will actually know something about Russian culture, but not this time. So that's really cool. So a very thoughtful, very caring family is what I'm hearing.

[00:11:40]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:11:40]

**Tom Hanchett:** And very rooted in Mexico, because getting a government job is not an easy thing to do and becoming a secretary in a business is not an easy thing to do.

[00:11:50]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Correct.

[00:11:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** And still they left Mexico. Talk about all of that decision. How old were you then?

[00:11:57]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I was not quite twelve. I had my first birthday was my twelfth birthday here in Columbia, South Carolina. We were living in Puebla, Mexico, at the time. I think it took me years to realize that, and somebody else saying it, but it felt like my dad was a nomad. He just liked going to different places, because we had lived in Mexico City and from there we moved to [unclear], which is in southern Mexico, and then to Puebla. And I think on one of the parades that we had for some celebration in Mexico—and my mom tell me the story, I don't actually remember seeing it or her saying it, but she said she saw so many kids that she thought, "My god, how are my kids going to find a job here?" So that's when they decided. We had an aunt living in the U.S., my mother's sister, and that's when they decided that they wanted to move us to the U.S.

[00:13:13]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. And how did you physically come here?

[00:13:20]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My parents had already been here for I want to say about a year or so, and so they went back and got us passports and visas. My brother and I had been staying with my grandmother's house, my maternal grandmother in northern Mexico.

[00:13:39]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. And what year is it that they come?

[00:13:41]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They came in '85 [1985].

[00:13:47]

**Tom Hanchett:** Ah, before things really tightened down.

[00:13:47]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:13:49]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Interesting. So they were probably able to get papers here because they already had family members here.

[00:14:03]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Actually, no. They came here—well, they came here with visas, but they overstayed their visas. But, luckily, with President Reagan’s amnesty program, they got papers, and that’s when they brought us.

[00:14:20]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. And what did you think of all of that back then?

[00:14:27]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I don’t think I thought much of it. When I was younger, I had seen my aunt, and, to me, I think because she was one of the younger aunts, she was one of the coolest aunts. She would send us postcards in Mexico and things like that, so I was actually excited about coming to visit her and be near her.

[00:14:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** So when you think you didn’t think much of it, it wasn’t a big deal for you?

[00:15:00]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It wasn’t a big deal for me. I think the hardest part at that time was because I felt like I had just started making friends in Mexico, and I left all of my friends. To this day, somebody ask me if I kept in touch with any of them, it’s to think back then there wasn’t email, there wasn’t Facebook, there wasn’t any sort of chat. There was only

letters. So I've only kept in contact with them maybe the first couple of years, but I think after that, letters from Mexico to here take so long that we eventually lost touch because they moved or just didn't have much time. Being a teenager, didn't have much time for writing letters.

[00:15:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** So what was the first grade that you started in here?

[00:15:52]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I started seventh grade.

[00:15:55]

**Tom Hanchett:** That must have been a shock.

[00:15:57]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Uh-huh.

[00:15:58]

**Tom Hanchett:** Did you have any English at that point?

[00:15:59]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No. I had very few words, and I could say maybe, "My name is," but that's as far as it went. And I think one of the—it was in Columbia, South Carolina, and

the school that we went to didn't even have an English program or ESL program. The ESL program, once they started it, and it was maybe about a month after we had been in, because my brother and I were the only—other than the Spanish teacher, we were the other two Spanish speakers in the whole school. So we ended up in ESL class that took place in the conference room of the office, so they didn't even have a classroom for it, and it included two Vietnamese kids, one Chinese, and my brother and myself.

[00:16:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. José Hernández-Paris here at the Latin American Coalition now talks about that same sort of thing in the seventies in Charlotte, and I think the main group here, besides Vietnamese, were Greeks, because of the Greek restaurants here, and he was the only Spanish speaker here coming from Colombia. So people who are listening to this tape or reading this interview, it is such a different South than the South today.

[00:17:23]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes. Yes, I think by now it's—by the time I graduated high school, which was a class of approximately 480 students, maybe 5 percent were Spanish speakers. But from what I've heard now, they do have ESL programs.

[00:17:42]

**Tom Hanchett:** Which high school in Columbia?

[00:17:45]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's Irmo High School.

[00:17:47]

**Tom Hanchett:** So that's the main one, right?

[00:17:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes. Well, there's a couple of them.

[00:17:52]

**Tom Hanchett:** Yeah, the main older one.

[00:17:54]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:17:55]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Very good. Talk about what your dad did when he came to—  
your dad and mom when they came to Columbia, South Carolina.

[00:18:04]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Well, when they first came, they were working for my aunt at a  
restaurant.

[00:18:10]

**Tom Hanchett:** May I ask which restaurant?

[00:18:15]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes. It was called Little Mexico. It has now been sold. I think it may have not even been quite as long, but maybe about ten years that it was sold, and they changed the name to something else. And then again, it was one of the fewer non-chain restaurants. I think Monterrey Mexican Restaurant was another one, but that was a chain and more Tex-Mex. This one, it had more of authentic Mexican food.

[00:18:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** Describe.

[00:18:54]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They had *cabrito* for example, which is goat, which I don't think you can find in too many restaurants. They had the really hot authentic salsa. Just I'm trying to think of other dishes, but I'm drawing blank. They had a chicken dish which I can't remember what it was, but I just know that it was more of the authentic dishes that you can't find at chain restaurants or Tex-Mex restaurants.

[00:19:32]

**Tom Hanchett:** Do they have any of the Pueblo dishes like *mole*?

[00:19:34]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They had *mole*, yes.

[00:00:00]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[00:19:39]

**Zhenia Martinez:** But it's maybe [Spanish spoken]. That's the first [unclear] which is from southern Mexico and it's banana leaves and [Spanish spoken].

[00:19:52]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Explain all of that in Spanish, if you would.

[00:19:59]

**Zhenia Martínez:** Ah, el pollo al pibil es, eh, un pollo que lo hacen, este, en el área de Yucatán. Lo marinan con naranja agria, achiote y especias. Y luego va cocido en vuelto en una hoja de plátano. Y es muy típico de esa área.

[00:20:23]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. I can follow some of that. I've got a little bit of food Spanish. So were many of the people who came there from southern Mexico, or it didn't matter at that point because there were so few Spanish-speaking people?

[00:20:38]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It didn't matter, and, believe it or not, her clientele was mostly American. I don't remember seeing—actually, because there weren't that many of us, but there were—I don't remember seeing any Hispanic clientele.

[00:20:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** Did the restaurant function—I have noticed that restaurants and groceries and Las Delicias Bakery, which we're going to get to eventually, are almost little embassies, where if you're new to the community and if you're from that part of the world, you come and you have a meal and you find people to talk to and you find people to give advice. Did the restaurant work that way then?

[00:21:20]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Uh-huh. I think to some degree, yes, because it seemed from there we met quite a few, even after my parents stopped working there, but then everyone that would come there, like if they needed something, my aunt would help them. Or if she didn't know, she would send them to my mom or—because we were going to a church that was helping us and would kind of referral upon referral to say so. If she didn't know how to help them, she would tell my mom, and then my mom would say, “Well, I don't know, but go to this place.”

[00:22:02]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. And what was your aunt's name?

[00:22:04]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Alicia. We called her Licha [Alicia “Licha” Carrillo].

[00:22:08]

**Tom Hanchett:** I’m going to ask you to write that down there as well. The wonderful thing about the digital world is that when this is transcribed and put online, if somebody in Columbia is trying to find that history, they may be able to turn up this, and it may be useful in that way to them. So that’s cool.

I was going to ask another question at the same time. Let’s see. What was the other question? Ah. Okay. What was the church, the church in Columbia that was [inaudible]?

[00:22:41]

**Zhenia Martinez:** The church was the First Presbyterian Church, and they had a Spanish congregation.

[00:22:46]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. So is your religious background Catholic, Presbyterian?

[00:22:50]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No, it is Catholic. But it was the only Spanish-speaking church that they had.

[00:22:54]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. So the Catholic church did not have a Spanish mass?

[00:22:58]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Not at the time. Now they do.

[00:23:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. That's cool. So it must have been really something for your dad and mom to have come from these desk jobs to be working in the restaurant. What did they do in the restaurant?

[00:23:14]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They worked as cooks. They did the prep work and line work and even, when necessary, dishwashing.

[00:23:23]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[00:23:25]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I don't think they ever saw it as bad. I think because it was a way to feed—an honest way to make a living and feed your family.

[00:23:35]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's beautiful. Say, if you would, say in Spanish what they did in the restaurant, and you can say more than you said to me just now if you would.

[00:23:43]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Trabajan de cocineros, preparando la comida, cocinándola, hasta lavando platos—y creo no, nunca les molestó, ni nunca lo vieron como algo malo porque era una manera honesta de ganarse la vida y una manera de darle de comer a la familia.

[00:24:11]

**Tom Hanchett:** Did they have special dishes that they liked to cook or that they brought into the restaurant or did they just cook what was already on the menu?

[00:24:17]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No, they cooked what was already on the menu.

[00:24:19]

**Tom Hanchett:** Uh-huh. Do you remember getting food at home that was different, cooked by them? I'm saying this the wrong way. When they cooked for you, did they cook differently than at the restaurant?

[00:24:31]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No. Well, my mom does her typical dishes, *enchiladas*, which, creo que en—si le preguntan a mi mama cualquier día de la semana, “¿Qué es lo que quieres comer?” ella dice *enchiladas*.

[00:24:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** And explain what *enchilada* means in your part of the world, because everybody has a different *enchilada*, I’ve realized.

[00:24:55]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yeah. It’s her favorite food. So to us an *enchilada* is you have to make a salsa separately, and then you take a corn tortilla and you deep-fry it, and then you pass it in the salsa, and then you can either make—you can fill it with either cheese, chicken, beef, beans. My mom loves cheese, so most of the time they were cheese. And then you fold it over, you put more salsa over it, and then you have your choice of toppings, which can be onions or it can be more cheese, just a little something to give it a nice look.

[00:25:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** So it’s a crispy fried thing rather than a rolled thing.

[00:25:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:25:52]

**Tom Hanchett:** Good. Okay. Talk in Spanish, if you would, a little bit. There was a restaurant here on Central Avenue called Enchiladas, which I didn't get because I didn't know that every part of Latin America has a different *enchilada*. And if you wish, in Spanish, talk a little bit about all these different *enchiladas*.

[00:26:10]

**Zhenia Martínez:** Creo que sea la cuestion de servirlos pero lo que pienso es, no sé si, estoy tratando de acordarme, but pienso que cuando van enrolladas, es más americanizado. Y que en México cuando hacen las tor—cuando hacen las enchiladas, siempre van solamente dobladas. Y las ponen, como dijera, staggered, que van uno al lado de otro. Y que hace que se vean más, como con más volumen en el plato.

[00:26:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** Very cool. Very cool. So there you are, working in the restaurant in Columbia, and you decided that the—the family decides to leave Columbia and come to Charlotte. No?

[00:26:59]

**Zhenia Martínez:** No.

[00:27:00]

**Tom Hanchett:** How did you end up in Charlotte?

[00:27:02]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My parents went through from—they left working for my aunt to find something to have. I don't know if it was less hours and not so much working on weekends, because we were teenagers at that point. So they started working at a boat factory, and from there my dad got laid off. Later on, my mom would get laid off as well. And my dad found work in construction, my mom went on to work to another factory, and while my dad was working in construction, he fell, I think from a second floor, maybe a little bit more. He said it was over six feet. And because of that, he couldn't keep working construction, so he basically had to find—or, I think, even labor-intensive jobs—so he had to find a way to make a living.

So he decided to start selling Mexican products out of a van. So he started going, I think because while working on constructions, he had already been through these smaller towns throughout North Carolina and South Carolina, he had seen that there was a bigger population in other areas. So he bought Mexican products, put them in a van, and he started going to small farming towns in South Carolina to sell his products. And one of the things that he bought was *pan dulce*, and that's when he started to see how people were really looking forward to that, and I think that's when he got the idea that he wanted to open up a bakery. He started kind of looking for a town that would have the population, and I think somebody suggested Charlotte, North Carolina. So he came up here a couple of times, and that's when they decided to move here and open up a bakery.

[00:29:30]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. That's a big thing to leave a place where you are getting to know people and where you know the surroundings and come to a new place and start a new business.

[00:29:41]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It is. I think my dad, his life experience made that transition easy. He had lived from town to town without really knowing a whole lot of people, so I don't think it was that foreign to him. And I think, to me, the starting the business would have been what's the scariest, because you don't know if it's going to work. And at that time, they put all their life savings. The house that we had lived in Mexico, they had sold that quite a few years back, but they had that in a savings account, so they took part of that money and part of the money that my dad had gotten from the accident, and that's how they started the bakery.

[00:30:34]

**Tom Hanchett:** What year?

[00:30:36]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It was '97 [1997].

[00:30:38]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. And so by this time, you are how old?

[00:30:43]

**Zhenia Martinez:** By this time, I'm twenty-one.

[00:30:45]

**Tom Hanchett:** Okay. So you—yeah, wow. So what did you think of all of this?

[00:30:50]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think at the time I was on my own, and I was working and going part-time to school, so—

[00:31:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** Where?

[00:31:02]

**Zhenia Martinez:** In South Carolina.

[00:31:03]

**Tom Hanchett:** What kind of work?

[00:31:05]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I was working as a waitress.

[00:31:07]

**Tom Hanchett:** At a Spanish restaurant or American restaurant?

[00:31:11]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No, by that time I think I was working at Cracker Barrel. *[Laughs]*

Of all the places, I know.

[00:31:18]

**Tom Hanchett:** Yeah, now you say “of all the places.”

[00:31:20]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes.

[00:31:21]

**Tom Hanchett:** And you and I both have ideas in our heads when we say that, but what do you mean by “of all the places?”

[00:31:25]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Just because it’s an old southern cooking restaurant, and to have a Mexican waitress at an old southern cuisine restaurant.

[00:31:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** Did people give you a hard time?

[00:31:48]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Some did.

[00:31:50]

**Tom Hanchett:** Talk about that, if you would.

[00:31:52]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's kind of—I think I didn't quite grasp all of that was going on back then, so it just seemed kind of odd and out of place for me. But there were a few times that people came in there, in all honesty, said, "I don't want her to be my waitress," for the exact same reasons that you would think, "because she's colored."

We actually had people, and they were regular customers, that didn't accept me as a waitress, but they accepted an African American, because that's—you know. I asked somebody else, I said, "You know, why is it that she can wait on them, but I can't?" I mean, not that I minded, because if I was going to be mistreated, then I'd rather not do it.

But they said, "Well, it's because it's what they're used to."

But, yeah, it's just little things like that, and it happened more than once where we would get customers that were set in their ways, to put it nicely.

[00:33:08]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. That's powerful. Had you gone off—what were you studying in school?

[00:33:16]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I started out as a psychology major, and I think I took a couple of classes. At that time, I was taking only—I should go back a little bit. I wasn't able to get my papers until I was past nineteen, so I didn't go straight from—that's the reason why I didn't go straight from high school into college. I had to wait until my papers came, and once I did, I started going to a community college in South Carolina. And I think at that time I was doing my main courses, all that you're required. By then psychology was my major, but I was also doing theatre and astrology just as the—

[00:34:14]

**Tom Hanchett:** Astrology or astronomy?

[00:34:16]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Astronomy; I'm sorry. It's kind of all the electives that you can take, because I didn't feel like I wanted to take the regular stuff. I think somebody even asked me once, they saw my schedule, they said, "What are you majoring in, miscellaneous?"

[*Laughs*] But once I took a psychology course or a couple of them, I decided that's not what I wanted to study, and I think at that time I stopped for a little bit and started working full-time because I got a job working at an office as an administrative assistant, and I had bought a house. So it was just kind of a lot of stuff happening at the moment.

[00:34:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** And did you eventually finish your college career?

[00:35:03]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I did. I went back and forth, but I moved to D.C., and when I was in D.C. and I started going to school, again part-time because I was working. I took an Italian class, just because it seemed like a fun thing to do, and I ended up liking it, and that's when I decided that's what I wanted my major to be. But then when I moved to Charlotte, I couldn't find an Italian major, so that's when I had to tailor my degree to what credits I had, and I ended up with international studies with a focus on European studies because I already had the Italian.

[00:35:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. That sounds great. So this bakery gets started. Talk about starting the bakery, Las Delicias. How did they choose the name?

[00:35:58]

**Zhenia Martinez:** That's where my mother is from, and I think it's a—

[00:36:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** Oh, it's a place? It doesn't mean "delicious"?

[00:36:07]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It is.

[00:36:08]

**Tom Hanchett:** It's a place named Delicious?

[00:36:10]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's a place named Delicious.

[00:36:12]

**Tom Hanchett:** This was fate. You could not avoid having a bakery.

[00:36:15]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I know. Exactly. I think it's a law that any immigrant that comes to the U.S. and opens up a business, they have to name it the place where they're from. So I think it was inevitable that it would be named Las Delicias. I remember I would come for vacation and things like that, so I would get to see the progress that they made, even before they found the place, trying to get all the permits. I would often from either when I was—I think at the time I was in South Carolina, I would sometimes call inspectors or things like that, because English was not their first language. So it was a little bit harder trying to get around and asking questions. But for the most part, they did a good job, and they started baking. I remember their first spring that they opened. I think my aunt was here, my father's sister. We literally sat at the door waiting on customers, because there was nobody that would come in. I mean, it was just they didn't know the place and it was very small.

[00:37:49]

**Tom Hanchett:** And this is the same spot on Central Avenue where you are now?

[00:37:51]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's the same, exact same spot. As a matter of fact, that shopping center where it sits was completely empty. So I think that was even kind of another reason why people wouldn't know that it was there, because unless you're going to one of the other businesses, and you say, "Oh, look, a bakery opened." But, no, it was completely empty.

[00:38:17]

**Tom Hanchett:** So talk about Central Avenue in the nineties. When I was here, and I left in '87 [1987], came back in '99 when Central Avenue was starting to really be what it is now, which is a street of every different kind of international place, but when I left in the eighties, Central Avenue was almost a ghost town, because the shopping malls had pulled all of the businesses. They basically killed the mom-and-pop businesses down Central Avenue.

[00:38:47]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They did.

[00:38:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** What was it like in the nineties?

[00:38:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think it looks so different that I can't—I mean, it didn't look alive at all. It looked completely different. Pedestrian traffic, there was absolutely no pedestrian traffic, other than a couple of people that you would see here and there. I had come in the early nineties on Central Avenue. I think we came to a concert and we got lost, and I remember kind of pulling—I remember being on Central Avenue because of Eastland Mall, and it looks so different. I even remember there was a bike shop where there's now a laundromat, and we're talking like a Harley bike shop or one of those. And it seems, I think, if you were to look back maybe from '87 [1987] to '99 [1999], I could see how much it has changed just in ten years, but there didn't seem to be a lot of businesses. That was the first bakery in Charlotte, Latin American or Mexican bakery in Charlotte. So there weren't any Mexican stores. The Sav/Way that's there now didn't sell absolutely any Mexican products at all. So my parents were kind of like the only place that would provide that because they did stock, and the bakery was in—it was functioning because they were selling a little bit of bakery, but it wasn't enough to pay the rent. So obviously what they did is they brought in Mexican products to sell as well.

[00:40:29]

**Tom Hanchett:** What sort of things?

[00:40:30]

**Zhenia Martinez:** *Chiles, tortillas, condimentos* [condiments], *horchata* [rice-milk drink], *veladores* [votive candles], I think even *horchata, veladoras, pastas*, I think if you

look at the Mexican section at a Food Lion now, you can pretty see some of the items that my parents had.

[00:41:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's great. That's great. And your father was not a baker. How did he learn to bake?

[00:41:05]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They went to Mexico. When they decided that they would open up a bakery, they went to Chihuahua to a small bakery which still has the brick oven, and they basically said—and I don't know if the guy always does it or if they just got with him and said, "We want to learn. Would you teach us?" But they were there for about three to six months, and they learned everything that they could about *pan dulce*.

[00:41:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** And describe *pan dulce* and you can do it in English or in Spanish. Do it in both.

[00:41:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** In both.

[00:41:49]

**Tom Hanchett:** Do it in one and then the other, because there are so many different kinds of *pan dulce*.

[00:41:54]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Oh, yeah, the variety, especially from Mexico, it's crazy. I'm even trying to grasp on a number. Maybe about 100 different ones. But you have your different dough, and from those doughs you have this—you make different breads with it.

[00:42:14]

**Tom Hanchett:** How many different doughs?

[00:42:15]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Maybe about easily ten, maybe more. But the thing about *pan dulce* is that it's artisan made, so I don't think it's anything that you could ever make with a machine. It's so artfully, I think, I wish anybody that underrates the *pan dulce* that she go spend a day trying to make the stuff that they make and make it come out as beautiful as it does, because everything is shaped by hand and everything *has* to be shaped by hand. And there are so many things that we have things that—the *concha*, they have the [Spanish spoken], all these different things that—

[00:43:19]

**Tom Hanchett:** Describe each of those in Spanish.

[00:43:20]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Okay. So—we have things the concha. They have the caracol, novias, marranitos, panque, búhos, all these different things that—

[00:43:22]

**Tom Hanchett:** The *concha* is shell-shaped. That's about as far as I know, but keep going in Spanish.

[00:43:26]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Las conchas que son—les llaman conchas por la parte de arriba. Cuando los marcan, los marcan con un marcador que tiene las líneas como si fuera una concha. También están los búhos, que son pan hecho de una masa que se llama danés. So it's very similar to Danish dough. Y tiene los ojos como si fueran los ojos de búho. Por eso se llaman búhos. Ah, las novias son dos panes, o dos masas, y está un, la primera, que es un tipo de masa y luego una que va alrededor en forma circular, y luego se baña con azúcar que hace que se parezca como el, como el vestido de novia. Ah, y la parte de abajo como la crinolina. Como una falda de un vestido de novia, por eso se les llaman novias. También están los marranitos o puerquitos que tienen forma de, de lo obvio, y son hechos con piloncillo—qué—¿qué otro? Los churros que pueden hacer rellenos de muchas cosas. Y que también son, eh, se necesita mucha fuerza para poder hacerlos—y, y el caracol. Más bien dicho, en general, toda la canela. Porque todo el pan de canela tiene—se puede hacer diferentes formas que incluyen el maicito, uh, uno que parece un elote, o—otro que tiene una forma de un puro, y otro que parece una cuernita, cuernito, otro que es, le dicen

conchita porque es como una concha pero más chiquita, pero de canela. Y en sí, esos son de los pocos que me puede acordar porque hay muchísimos.

[00:45:41]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. Wow. Hay muchos más. [*much more*].

[00:45:44]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Muchos, muchos más.

[00:45:44]

**Tom Hanchett:** Talk about the pig-shaped ones in English for a little bit, if you would. I love pigs and these big thick pillowy kind of—are they made with brown sugar or molasses or something?

[00:45:59]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They are made with molasses. They're actually made with—you have to make a syrup with the [Spanish spoken]. And we specifically use [Spanish spoken], which is—I'll maybe have to send you a video because I just think even I underappreciated the way that [Spanish spoken] is made. But they burn the cane juice after filtering in, they burn it, and then they have to while it's—do all this cleaning, and then filtering, and then they have to—when it has gained the consistency that they need, they pour it into brick-shaped forms and they fill it with the syrup, and then they set it to cool and then just flip it over. And you have this cylinder-shaped molasses cube. So we

make a syrup from that, and that is a shortbread cookie, basically, and then it's—the form, it's a pig, a little pig.

[00:47:07]

**Tom Hanchett:** Is there a cookie cutter that makes the pig?

[00:47:10]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's like a cookie cutter.

[00:47:11]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[00:47:12]

**Zhenia Martinez:** And I think it must be made in Mexico, because I haven't seen any other country that has used that.

[00:47:18]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. Cool. Drako, you look like somebody who eats. I eat. You don't look like you eat nearly as much as I do, but ask Zhenia some questions about the bakery. Could be about food, could be about more general, and in Spanish if you feel comfortable or whatever.

[00:47:42]

**Drako Hernandez:** ¿Cuándo decidiste tú, como hija de familia, iniciar, iniciar el negocio de Las Delicias [inaudible] ¿Cuándo dijiste “Esto es lo que tengo que hacer”?

[00:47:57]

**Zhenia Martínez:** Esto es lo que tengo—Bueno, nosotros nos mudamos aquí en el 2005, porque el área en la, en la que vivía no había trabajos. Entonces en 2005 me mudé aquí con Manuel Betancourt para, porque no había trabajo en el lugar donde vivíamos y pues, de alguna manera había que sacar la renta. Entonces, eh, mi papá nos ofreció venir a trabajar con él y ayudarlo. Yo ya había estado viniendo y entonces yo siento que estaba más al—sabía mucho más de la panadería, aun si no era del todo. Y pues, empezamos a trabajar allí, en el 2010, bueno en el dos mil—sí en el 2010. Mi papá decidió, que él—digamos que ya se quería jubilar. Entonces me preguntó a mí, que si estaba interesada en, en comprarle a Las Delicias. Y después, pues de pensarlo y hablarlo, decidí que sí. Que, que le compraría a Las Delicias, o que le compraríamos a Las Delicias y de allí en ese momento vi—pues, siento que yo ya lo entendía, yo sabía lo difícil que es y lo duro que es ser dueño de un negocios. Ser dueña de negocios y estar allí pero aun así, creo que aun si en ese momento si él hubiera decidido vendérselo a alguien, no creo que yo hubiera sido capaz de ver—

[00:50:06]

**Drako Hernandez:** ¿No le hubieras dejado?

[00:50:07]

**Zhenia Martínez:** No le hubiera dejado.

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[00:50:19]

**Drako Hernandez:** That's how Mexican we are so—how do you say—like we embrace everything we do or the family do because sometimes you can [unclear] or you can let your family doing things that you don't like to let it go, like, for example, the [unclear]. If they sell to somebody else, I mean, even if you see them work there, she will [unclear] to do it. That's how we Mexican or Latin Americans do, and our family and our business or most of anything.

[00:50:52]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Because by that time, they had already had it fourteen years, and even from coming for vacations, I would already see the regulars, that they would come and sit and talk with my dad. There was a woman that I recently met the other day, my guess is I had probably met her before, but that she told me that she would come and exchange magazines so [Spanish spoken], which is a Mexican political magazine, that that was the thing that she loved. But she had moved to Mexico so she didn't know my dad had passed away, and when she came back and came to look for him, that's when she found out. So it's kind of nice to know they were already kind of—they had strong ties with the community already at that time after fourteen years.

[00:51:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** And so what year did your dad pass away?

[00:51:54]

**Zhenia Martinez:** In 2013.

[00:51:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** Mm-hmm. And your mom is still with us?

[00:52:00]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My mom's still with us.

[00:52:01]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's good. That's good. And by that time, you were taking over the bakery with your husband at the time, Manolo Betancur.

[00:52:11]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Correct.

[00:52:12]

**Tom Hanchett:** And what kind of decision was it for you to come back and take over the bakery? Because you had escaped—I'm using terminology that would work for me.

You wanted to be the little bird that flies out of the nest, and you had flown out of the nest, and you came back.

[00:52:28]

**Zhenia Martinez:** And I came back. I think it was a hard decision, more or less, because I know I had seen the toll that it took on my parents. But at the same time, as I was telling him, I couldn't see the bakery going to anybody else. And to this day, I can't. So it's one of those because, like I said, it had been in my—my dad had been with it, he saw it from when it was nothing to be in a business that got them the house that they now live in, and I think it's the ability for them to feel in a community as well, because I think given all the years that we lived in South Carolina, and while we were going to church and everything, the community wasn't as big. So now when they moved here and opened up the bakery, I think it felt like the community grew, and it grew around them, because, as we said, that there wasn't any Hispanic or any Spanish or even a lot Spanish-speaking businesses in the area. So I think I almost want to say it's kind of like a family, that kind of like when you start seeing your family grow and get bigger, I think it's kind of like the same sentiment, that when they started it was kind of like everything looked empty, and when they still owed it, and to this day, it just feels it's a community.

[00:54:16]

**Tom Hanchett:** That's beautiful. That's what I've observed from the outside. I live down Central Avenue and go by the bakery three, four times a week, sometimes three, four times a day. And talk about how Central Avenue has changed.

[00:54:32]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Oh, gosh. *[Laughs]* I think it's gone from looking almost like a ghost town to looking like a town. There is a lot of businesses and movement. The food, it's when they first moved here, there wasn't. There also weren't any Hispanic restaurants on Central Avenue.

[00:55:11]

**Tom Hanchett:** Why did they pick Central Avenue?

[00:55:15]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They actually, when they moved, they moved to the apartments that are on corner right behind Eastland Mall, is the easiest way to describe it, so the corner of Central and **S**. And they just saw that there was a lot of Mexicans and Spanish speakers in the area, so they realized that that was the area that they needed to open up the bakery. And then I think it helped a lot that it was—there were a lot of businesses that were—as far as places to rent, there was a lot of availability. My dad said he called quite a few places, but no one ever responded, so that this was the first place that they saw, and the owner got back with them, and that they went *[inaudible]*.

[00:56:20]

**Tom Hanchett:** Can I ask who the owner is?

[00:56:21]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes. It's Marshall Woodward.

[00:56:25]

**Tom Hanchett:** And a small, local businessperson in Charlotte?

[00:56:28]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's actually he's not the only owner. It's owned by his family, but it's they have strong ties in the Charlotte community as well.

[00:56:40]

**Tom Hanchett:** Did they have a small business there themselves at one point?

[00:56:43]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I don't know if they had a small business there, but they opened up the Berry Brook Farms on—

[00:56:50]

**Tom Hanchett:** Which is?

[00:56:52]

**Zhenia Martinez:** It's a natural or organic food place. My dad was in love with those places as well, so I think it was kind of a nice combination or when they met the owners,

then they would know. I also feel that they emphasized a lot with my parents because they had once been there, they had as a couple started a business on their own, and that's what my parents were doing.

[00:57:27]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. So around your store in that one little shopping center now, there is a fish market that's run, I think, by Latino folks. There are a couple of music and stereo places. There's the nail salon, which I assume is Vietnamese. There's the beauty salon, which I think is affiliated with your family. There was an insurance agent, who's closed, and that's now probably being taken over by Las Delicias. But then you go around to the next little shopping center, and there's a Vietnamese grocery and the Landmark, which is old-line Greek American southern restaurant. And what has it been like with all those different groups coming in there?

[00:58:09]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I loved it, I think, because overall it's the exchange of food and culture that keeps happening. For once, first, Landmark was kind of like the only place that we could go eat because it was right there and it was quick for my parents to get away from the business to eat, but now it's we go to get stuff from the Vietnamese grocer, other than always eating at Landmark, the nail salon, we're friends with the owners of that place.

[00:58:52]

**Tom Hanchett:** Are they indeed Vietnamese?

[00:58:53]

**Zhenia Martinez:** They are Vietnamese. It started the influx of other immigrant communities just to the Central area brought in customers that I think it's because the Mexican [**Spanish spoken**] has roots in French pastries, that it also correlates with other French colonies. So we've had people from Africa that tell us when they see the [**Spanish spoken**], which is bread that we use for a sandwich or treat, our meals, like our rolls basically, and—

[00:59:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** Mm-hmm, and I would say the [**Spanish spoken**]—

[00:59:44]

**Zhenia Martinez:** [**Spanish spoken**]

[00:59:47]

**Tom Hanchett:** —is like a submarine sandwich roll, except it's—

[00:59:50]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yes, it's like a hoagie, yeah.

[00:59:51]

**Tom Hanchett:** —softer and a little stubbier and—

[00:59:53]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yeah. I once heard it described as—this is going to sound bad, but as a bastardized version of a baguette. [*Laughs*] And in some parts of Mexico, it's still called French bread. So I think with that, we have Vietnamese and African that come in there and they tell us, "This is exactly like the bread. We have this bread in my country." And at the beginning, I thought, "That's weird." But once I started to—when it was first Africans, and I was like, "Oh, that's odd, but okay." But the more people that started coming in and saying that, I started to put two and two together and I realized, oh, so it's probably because they were colonized, and obviously it's the similarities. I guess it's not the exact same bread, but it's probably very, very similar.

[01:00:48]

**Tom Hanchett:** So your customers would be, I would imagine, mostly people from Mexico, also a lot of people from Colombia, because Manelo is Colombian, and then a bunch of people from all over the other place. Talk about that. Who comes to eat at Las Delicias? Who comes to buy at Las Delicias?

[01:01:06]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Well, we have Eastern European as well, and the [Spanish spoken] say the same thing. They say that they have bread. That one I haven't figured it out yet, how it happened, but so we have [inaudible].

[01:01:18]

**Tom Hanchett:** But start with your biggest group and then smaller groups.

[01:01:21]

**Zhenia Martinez:** So I think Mexican is the biggest. I think Colombian. From there I would say Central American, because they also eat [Spanish spoken]. Latin American for the desserts mostly, I think, and South American the [Spanish spoken] is not quite as strong, so they mostly come for desserts.

[01:01:46]

**Tom Hanchett:** And when you say desserts, what do you mean?

[01:01:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** The [Spanish spoken], our cakes, the desserts. What else? I don't like all the stuff that we have. [Laughs] The passion fruit mousse. The flan, it's another big one.

[01:02:07]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[01:02:08]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yeah, for the flan we also have a lot of Cuban and basically Caribbean cultures.

[01:02:15]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool.

[01:02:18]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Puerto Rican as well, because they have the very similar dessert taste. And I think from there it would be African, Asian, and Caucasian, about the same.

[01:02:38]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. So how many of your customers are like me and don't speak any Spanish? They could be African, they could be—how many are Spanish speakers versus non-Spanish speakers, would you imagine?

[01:02:49]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Gosh, I'd say maybe about 30 percent.

[01:02:59]

**Tom Hanchett:** Thirty percent non-Spanish speakers.

[01:03:01]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Thirty percent non-Spanish.

[01:03:03]

**Tom Hanchett:** Cool. That's larger than I would have imagined.

[01:03:05]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Maybe English speakers only—no, that's not fair to say. Yeah, I don't know, because I think there is a lot of—because we have a lot of other non-Spanish speakers, like the Asian community and the African community. So I would say maybe about 50 percent is Spanish speakers, maybe 50 to 60, and then the rest—

[01:03:34]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. Wow. It's much higher than I would have thought. That's great. Talk a little bit—we're kind of getting towards the end here, so things that need to get talked about, both of you please chime in. But one is a little bit more about how you think the future will unwind as—t's my observation that more and more Latinos are growing up here and English is their first language and I think there are a lot of people now who are truly bicultural as you are, very different from your parents' generation where it was much harder to be bicultural.

[01:04:18]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Correct.

[01:04:19]

**Tom Hanchett:** They did as well as they could, but it was much harder. But your kids will grow up in a different world than you grew up in. Just talk about what that means for Las Delicias.

[01:04:30]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think it's fascinating, because as we are growing in this global economy, and I think not just my kids, but kids everywhere, they're getting the sense of it's not just my culture but other cultures. So it's not only the ability for any kid that's growing up bicultural, but that other kids that are maybe not necessarily growing up biculturally are seeking out learning another culture or learning about other cultures, and that just helps create this idea of, I don't know, maybe this safe space or this environment in which businesses like Las Delicias can really grow in and keep growing. Because it's even we started out as a Mexican bakery, but over the years because we had bakers from other Latin American cultures would come and leave a recipe that we would get new products. So what started out as a Mexican bakery, we're now a Latin American bakery, and we offer all these products. And I think it's the same in the environment in the community we're growing, that it's no longer just this centralized as you would have in other areas, I think, where you have your pockets of Asian culture or your pockets of Hispanic culture or your pockets of Eastern Europe. I think what's happening in

Charlotte is that as we're growing, we're growing so intertwined that it's just we're seeing just a lot more influx of other cultures and sharing with them that we're growing kind of even within us as a global culture and as a global business, not tailoring to just one customer but to everyone.

[01:06:42]

**Tom Hanchett:** Drako, a question you might have or several?

[01:06:50]

**Drako Hernandez:** How do you see Las Delicias and how do you see yourself in ten years?

[01:07:00]

**Zhenia Martinez:** That's a really hard question. I think I was asked this at an interview, but I do see Las Delicias in the same place. I don't necessarily see a chain, because I think the heart of Las Delicias, it's in Central Avenue, and I think it's something that I would like to keep it that way, because once you start to growing a chain, it's you can't necessarily translate that feeling to another location. Where do I see myself? I think I see myself in the—I think it's not what you're supposed to say, but I see myself in the same place. I see myself being a part of the community. I see myself and maybe hoping that my kids are learning about other cultures, not just the one that their mom and dad share and the one they're growing up in, but other cultures as well.

[01:08:18]

**Drako Hernandez:** That's why my next question that was about your children. I mean, how you feel if your children decide to do the same step that you follow in after your family?

[01:08:34]

**Tom Hanchett:** Say your children's names and [*inaudible*].

[01:08:35]

**Zhenia Martinez:** My children, it's, Emanuel Gael Betancourt Martínez and he is seven years old. He's about a month shy of eight years. And, Julia Sofia, and she's five years old.

[01:08:51]

**Drako Hernandez:** And then they're going to be seventeen and fifteen, I mean, how you feel if they decide to follow the same steps as you, like after your father and mother?

[01:09:01]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think I have a long time for that, because I think even at seventeen had I been offered this opportunity, I wouldn't have taken it. I think you quite haven't found your place in this world at that age. If they have, then I'll be ecstatic and delighted, but I don't foresee that they will. And I think it's not necessarily a bad thing if they don't, because—and it's one of the things that my dad taught me. It's do what

makes you happy. So I would be happier to see them seeking out something that makes them happy rather than to try and make me happy and stay here.

[01:09:53]

**Tom Hanchett:** You're a good mom, I can tell that. You reminded me that you are not—even though you are so rooted on Central Avenue, Las Delicias Bakery supplies dozens, maybe 100 little grocery stores and [Spanish spoken] all throughout North Carolina into Virginia.

[01:10:18]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Correct.

[01:10:20]

**Tom Hanchett:** I hope I'm not betraying a confidence here, but Zhenia drives a red Prius of what year?

[01:10:28]

**Zhenia Martinez:** 2005.

[01:10:30]

**Tom Hanchett:** 2005. I have a 2004. I'm very proud on mine to have 230,000 miles, and you have how many on yours?

[01:10:36]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Close to 700,000.

[01:10:38]

**Tom Hanchett:** And that's because that was the delivery vehicle for so long.

[01:10:41]

**Zhenia Martinez:** That was the wholesale.

[01:10:43]

**Tom Hanchett:** Talk about building that. You are the center of a regional Mexican culture, and I say Mexican. I mean Latino culture.

[01:10:51]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Correct.

[01:10:53]

**Tom Hanchett:** What is this thing? So cool.

[01:10:56]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Yeah. Well, Manolo Bettencourt, my ex-husband, used to work for a farmworker organization in western Virginia, and so he knew about the little farming towns. That is actually how we met, because I used to work for a farm worker or a

nonprofit that helped farmworker organizations. I started as a farmworker advocate organization and then moved on to the association that does advocacy for these organizations. Within what I was doing, I was in a training program that would help educate farm workers on the dangers of pesticide, and that's where Manolo was working, and that's how we met. So he knew all these little town in Western Virginia because of that. So as a way of trying—he was looking to, I think, in his third degree in karate or tai kwon do, I can't remember which, but he needed to go train to western Virginia. So as a way to subsidize the cost of going there, he started to take bread from the bakery and sell it to these small stores, Mexican stores that were en route and around that area. And I think my dad knew that it would work because that's exactly how he had started. He had started selling Mexican products in farming towns in South Carolina, and it just grew bigger now in more stores, and I think more stores got to know about us.

[01:12:56]

**Tom Hanchett:** Do you have any idea how many there are now?

[01:12:57]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I don't have the exact number. I want to say it's between fifty and—around fifty.

[01:13:07]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. Wow. Do you interchange with them in other ways? Do they see you as a useful person in their cultural world, or do you just sell them bakery and that's about it?

[01:13:21]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think, in all honesty, we only sell them bakery stuff, but we do talk about, I think, as with anything, the political environment and how it can and has affected us all.

[01:13:38]

**Tom Hanchett:** Wow. And talk about that a little bit, if you would.

[01:13:40]

**Zhenia Martinez:** I think just the fact that they just—at first you think you're the only one, but then you start seeing more stuff. But basically there's a lot more because of everything that happens in November that it is now okay to be a little bit more racist, or not necessarily to be but to come out and say it, and I don't know if they see it as being politically correct now or what it is, but you get a lot more shrugs and comments and discrimination than I think a few years back. People would have held on to or not said.

[01:14:24]

**Tom Hanchett:** Is it hurting your customer base?

[01:14:27]

**Zhenia Martinez:** No, I think in the first few days because of the ICE raids that happened around our area, it did, but overall I think the community's strong and I think it frightened them for the first couple of days, but it's back to normal, thank goodness.

[01:14:53]

**Tom Hanchett:** A last thing you can think to say?

[01:14:56]

**Drako Hernandez:** *[Inaudible]*.

[01:14:59]

**Tom Hanchett:** Yeah. This is just wonderful. A last thing you want to say, anything, but especially something in Spanish? Talk about what this all means.

[01:15:09]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Más que nada quiero decir me fascina esta idea de—el intercambio de culturas y de ver cómo Charlotte y Carolina del Norte en sí se ha desarrollado. Creo que cuando mis papás se mudaron aquí hace más de veinte años, nunca en mi vida me imaginé que esto fuera a suceder. O que Charlotte se vería tan diferente como se ve ahora. Especialmente porque parece entonces ya había vivido diez años en Carolina del Sur y básicamente no había visto muchos cambios allí. Y entonces, yo creo que no sé si fuera parte cómo dicen la construcción, todo lo que, que trajo una población mexicana tan

enorme a Charlotte y que ayudó a que esto se sucediera pero es fascinante y es divino, ver como, como una comunidad ha crecido y ha evolucionado.

[01:16:26]

**Tom Hanchett:** Gracias.

[01:16:27]

**Zhenia Martinez:** Gracias.

*[End of interview]*