

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: We are here at Reyes Media Group Offices in Kansas City, Kansas, Turner District and we're talking to Clara Reyes. And Clara, tell me a little bit about yourself. What is your full name? And where were you - where did your family originally?

Respondent: Mira, nosotros somos de Guadalajara y mi nombre es Clara Rodriguez Barreto [So, we are from Guadalajara and my name is Clara Rodriguez Barreto].

[0:00:30]

Respondent: Y yo aquí tenía un tío en Independence que empezó - hace mucho tiempo vino y entonces hicieron unas casas e hizo una calle que se llamaba el Barreto Lane porque todos lo - mi tío les ayudó a todos a build the houses. Lo que pasa es que uno venía y les ayudaba a hacer la casa a uno y luego iban a la otra casa y entre todos hacían la casa del otro. Entonces yo con - él era el hermano de mi mamá. [And I had an uncle here in Independence who started - he arrived here a long time ago and then they built some houses and he created a street called Barreto Lane. Because all - my uncle helped them all build their houses. What happened was that one would come over and he'd help one build their house and then they'd go to a different house and they'd all built another person's house. So me along with - he was my mother's brother.]

[0:00:59]

Respondent: Y ya después cuando yo tuve como 22 años - 21 vine. Él me dijo, "Ven para acá, ven para que conozcas Estados Unidos". Pero yo ni idea tenía, ¿okay? Yo estaba en México, yo estaba estudiando para ser dentista. Y estaba leyendo todos los libros porque me quería meter - tengo dos hermanas dentistas y yo quería también ser dentista. Entonces vine y en ese tiempo yo conocí a Manuel. [And then later when I turned around 22, 21 years old I came over here. He told me, "Come over here, come so that you know the United States." But I didn't even have any idea, okay? I was in Mexico, I was studying to become a dentist. And I was reading all the books because I wanted to enroll - I have two sisters who are dentists and I wanted to be a dentist too. So I came over here and during that time I met Manuel.]

[0:01:31]

Respondent: Y por una cosa o la otra anduvimos juntos, después él fue a México, se casó conmigo y yo regresé. Yo aquí estuve trabajando en una - en un laboratorio de dentistas porque como yo había estudiado un poco, sabía hacer las cosas y yo trabajé en un laboratorio de dentista que se llamaba [Hansen]. Y después ahí yo ya me empecé a enfadar porque estaba haciendo cosas

sentada y yo - mi mente siempre estaba pensando qué más hacer. [And we were together because of one thing or the other, then he went to Mexico, he married me and I came back. I worked here for a - a dentist laboratory because since I had studied a little, I knew how to do things and I worked at a dentist laboratory called [Hansen]. And then from there I started to get tired because I was doing things sitting down and I - my mind was always thinking about what else to do.]

[0:02:00]

Respondent: Y de ahí empezó, fui a vender real estate. Comencé, fui y tomé un curso en aquel entonces pues, era bien trabajoso pero pasé el curso y empecé a vender real estate. Y cuando yo vendía real estate, había mucha gente mexicana que quería las casas. [And it started from there, I went to sell real estate. I started, I went and I took a course back then. Well, it was difficult but I passed the course and I started selling real estate. And when I used to sell real estate, there were many Mexican people that wanted the houses.]

Interviewer: So you came to Kansas City and you're member of the Barreto family, that's your maiden name.

[0:02:30]

Interviewer: How was [Hector Barreto] related to you?

Respondent: He was a step-brother of my mother. My mother step-brother.

Interviewer: So he would be a tío [uncle].

Respondent: It was mi tío [my uncle].

Interviewer: Okay, so tell me a little bit about the Barreto family. They lived in Independence I understand, they eventually built houses over there and they named Barreto Street.

[0:03:01]

Respondent: Barreto Lane.

Interviewer: Lane.

Respondent: And Hector came and got married with [Maria Luisa]. And he got some kids, I don't remember, I think that they were three girls and one boy, Hector Barreto, Jr., and he was working in different places, in different things but he was also, you know, he got also his mind thinking about the bigger piece of the pie...

[0:03:31]

Respondent: ...for the Hispanic community and I the best where he started going and getting together with people that can kind of fulfill his dream. And they start the chamber but I was not involved in the chamber in the '70s because I - when I started the newspaper, it was 1981. And this when I came to Hector and he rented me the first floor of his building.

[0:04:00]

Respondent: So we can start the newspaper, I start the newspaper in my basement. But later on when I came, he says, "Why don't you come to the community?" And I thought it was a very good idea to start the newspaper in the community. And this is why got to start working little bit more with Hector in the chamber.

Interviewer: That was at the Southwest Boulevard.

Respondent: At the Southwest Boulevard. And Hector was having the - a Hispanic chamber of commerce offices in his building. And ahí [there]...

[0:04:30]

Respondent: Ahí conocí yo a todos los del [I met everyone at the] chamber when I was there, there was a lot of the people from the chamber but it was not the one from the '70, it was from the '80s. It was Barrera...

Interviewer: Was that Richard Barrera?

Respondent: Richard Barrera, Jesse...

Interviewer: Was Esther Wolf involved at that point?

Respondent: She was working for the Richard Cabot Clinic. So this is how she was involved.

[0:05:00]

Respondent: She did not have a business but she was very involved in all the - because of of the Richard Cabot Clinic and the community. And one of the things that I think that it was very important is that Hector start working with all the people from the city. He did not only liked to be working with the people. He liked to be working with the city manager and for that...

[0:05:30]

Respondent: ¿Cómo se llama esta Esther? [What is Esther's name?]

Interviewer: ¿Wolf?

Respondent: Que trabajaba [Who used to work] - no.

Interviewer: Esther Wolf.

Respondent: Who was working in the city? Was Estella Morales, perdóname [pardon me].

Interviewer: Estella Morales.

Respondent: Estella Morales era la secretaria del [was the secretary for the] city manager. And she was very involved in the chamber and she was bringing some money for the city.

Interviewer: This was Mayor Berkley's administration as I recall.

Respondent: I think so, yes.

[0:06:00]

Respondent: And Mayor Berkley was very fond to be helping us, he was really excited about all the ideas that Hector presented. Hector presented an idea that wanted to be of an international...

Interviewer: Office - is that the one that...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...[Jerry] and...

Respondent: [Jerry] and...

Interviewer: ...other people - he started it off as an international business or [unintelligible 0:06:31].

Respondent: Right.

[0:06:30]

Respondent: So they were very involved and like I said, he always go to the city, he always had friends with all the city manager, the mayor, all the people that worked for the city. And that's why he could move a lot of different things for the community and that's when the people really started seeing the - a community, a Hispanic community was really a vibrate young community that can do business.

[0:07:05]

Respondent: And you know that the Hispanic people, especially the Mexican people is very enterprise, they love enterprise, they love to start their own little business and that was how Hector helped a lot the community because he was - he believed in business.

Interviewer: After you started the newspaper in 1981...

[0:07:31]

Interviewer: Did you become more active in the Hispanic chamber as say, a board member or a someway active with the chamber?

Respondent: Yes, I started in not only Dos Mundos was a member of the chamber and I was in the board for many years, many years. And I was in all the meetings in the board and I met all the - all people that was in the board in I think they knew a lot of people that I knew that was working with us in the board.

[0:08:03]

Interviewer: Can you name a few of those people that were especially helpful or instrumental?

Respondent: Well, Richard Barrera was a real good friend, the guy from the...

Interviewer: He had a restaurant at one time, did he not? On the Boulevard?

Respondent: Richard Barrera, no.

Interviewer: No? Okay.

Respondent: It was Manny, the one who had that restaurant. And is Richard Herrera that had the Tenderloin Grill.

[0:08:30]

Respondent: And a lot of times Richard lent us her place so we can have meetings. And Richard Herrera was really close to Hector and he was really involved on the chamber. It was also Jesse Flores, it was Jesse Flores, well, Esther was in there...

Interviewer: Manny Lopez.

Respondent: And Manny Lopez of course. I liked to have a...

[0:09:00]

Respondent: Richard Barrera was working in the - in the Crown Center and he started saying, "Well, what do we have our meetings and our annual conventions in the small places? Why don't we come to Crown Center?" Because he and Hector always wanted to have big places, big functions, big staff and this one, you know, the chamber started making their conventions...

[0:09:34]

Interviewer: And banquets.

Respondent: ...and banquets in the Crown Center. And I can't - stop [unintelligible 0:09:44]. Was a - William Lopez and he was the president for some times and it was Robert Arredondo, Mike Chavez, Carlos and [Gerry] Cortez because [Gerry] Cortez was very involved and Carlos was his father.

[0:10:04]

Respondent: Jesse Flores, Manuel Flores, Robert Flores, Mike Mercado, Joe Perez. You know, Joe Perez was very involved. William Torres, Carlos [Cetian], Martin Salazar, Frank Romero. Paul Rodriguez, he's still involved in the chamber in the national level. There was also Henry Infante and John Kurtz.

[0:10:30]

Respondent: It was also an American guy that was really involved in the community. [Seneca Marquez] the one that used to held the savings and loans. Then well, like I said, you know, there was a lot of people that was involved, in different times we were part of the board. I was always in the board since I started joining the chamber.

[0:11:01]

Respondent: Especially because I have the Dos Mundos and I like to write stories about everything the chamber was doing. And I think that helped the chamber and Hector also be a little bit more vocal because he always come and talked to me and he always liked for me to be doing - making the stories or taking pictures of every event that they were having.

Interviewer: So his vision was to really make sure the Hispanic business is - we're recognized...

[0:11:34]

Interviewer: ...we're on the map so to speak. So people say, "Hey, they're not just restaurants or taquerías. They have construction companies, they have all kinds of businesses."

Respondent: Exactly. And the construction company was always a - very glad they can go to the city and bid for big business. Joe Perez was one of the ones that was bidden for every big business.

[0:12:01]

Respondent: And he was in the construction company.

Interviewer: At some point, the Hispanic chambers started doing scholarships to students as a way of giving back to the community.

Respondent: You're right.

Interviewer: What were the discussions about that? And how did that evolve?

Respondent: Well, we all decided that we can...

[0:12:29]

Respondent: Especially because we went to some of the colleges and they were saying, "We do have scholarship for minorities and the Hispanic side involved but they never apply." So the chamber says, "Well, we're going to make them apply if you give us - " I think that one of the colleges that started with us was the Rockhurst College is one of the ones that - also the Penn Valley Community College.

[0:13:00]

Respondent: They were always really close to the chamber. And they also match funds with Hector. And I think that one of the first persons that got the scholarship from the chamber was Ramon Murguia, the lawyer. He always says I - you know, I can always say that the chamber is the first one that gave an scholarship so I can go to college. And they were a lot of people. And we all believed in education.

[0:13:31]

Respondent: Hector believed in education. The young people for education. We got scholarships for Richard Barrera's son, for Hector Barreto's son, for my son, we have - you know, we want all the kids to know that education was the key. And yes, the business was good but you need education to start business. You need education to really make your business go up. And a lot of the people that was already doing business when we go to the national level there were all kind of business also starting.

[0:14:04]

Respondent: And when the chamber started coming, everybody was so glad to know that they can have an organization that can really help them go to the city, go here, go there and get a lot of business. Because sometimes they didn't believe in the Hispanics, they didn't believe that we can do things right and then they start giving a lot of chances to the Hispanic community.

[0:14:29]

Respondent: I remember McDonalds was one of the first ones that came to us, they helped the chamber, they took people to the places from McDonalds. I remember going to the school at McDonalds so they can show us how they can teach you to become an owner of the McDonalds. And I think in Texas and in other places is a lot of Hispanics that own McDonalds. And here I don't think it was

one person but I don't think that they really went really well like in other places of the United States.

[0:15:05]

Respondent: But it was because of the chamber, to start the...

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about Hector's involvement with the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Where did the idea come from to start a US Hispanic Chamber?

Respondent: He knew how he did - how good he did in here, in Kansas City.

Interviewer: Why don't you start again and say Hector Barreto knew?

[0:15:30]

Respondent: Okay, Hector Barreto knew how good he did the chamber helped the Hispanic communities in the Hispanic business in Kansas City. And people started calling him, "Hector, come over. Hector come here." And then, you know, Hector he went all the way to the president and he went with the president and sit down in his broken English like mine, he started talking to the president and saying, "You know? I wanted to be part of the..."

[0:16:01]

Respondent: ...we wanted to be part of all the community and we want you to be part of us."

Interviewer: President Ronald Reagan.

Respondent: Ronald Reagan. And I have, you know, some of the - and he was really close to Hector. I remember that Hector can have an extra phone for the president. Whenever he needs anything, he can call the president right away and they call him. And he can - I went to his office two or three times and he was talking to the president because he had an extra line just straight to the president.

[0:16:31]

Respondent: That was, wow. But this is how he did a lot of good to the community. Everybody believed that Hector can do it. He started the National in here in Kansas City. And he got Salvador Gomez and [Marcos Rincon], the king from Texas, I'm not really sure but they came and they started working with him and ask him, you know...

[0:16:59]



Respondent: ...and he - they started saying that they can do different chambers in different places. And they are the ones that start really going in another places and then later on I think that they decide that - why don't we go to Washington because in Washington we can really be visiting all the big people that can really help us on all the way. And this is why I think that the chamber moved to Washington. But Hector started going up and down from Washington.

[0:17:30]

Respondent: And he was still really involved in the business. I remember going to the conventions that they had, National Conventions. I always was there, we traveled a lot. Manuel and I traveled a lot with Hector. Hector always - we belong to a National Association of Hispanic Publications and then we go in an agreement that whenever they go to their conventions, they can all members come to theirs.

[0:18:00]

Respondent: And then if we do a convention - a National Convention, because we also have a National Organization, all the people goes to our convention and it was almost free. We didn't charge too much and they didn't charge us too much. So we can participate and have a bigger convention with more people and more people and that's how the conventions started being really big for everybody. And Hector was really good with the Hispanic Organization.

[0:18:30]

Respondent: For the publications. He came to our meetings and he gave us ideas and he went with us to talk to different people in Washington. And it was very helpful for our community, for our conventions too.

Interviewer: So as you reflect on the last 40 years since the Hispanic chamber started and then you started in '81...

[0:19:00]

Interviewer: ...so what do you think the biggest contribution of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has been to the Kansas City Community?

Respondent: I think that we as a...

Interviewer: Our biggest contribution, that chambers - our biggest contribution, sort of like that.

Respondent: The biggest contribution that I think that the chamber did for Kansas City is that business got bigger, the business got more...

[0:19:32]

Respondent: ...even money to start the business. Because a lot of people want to start their business but didn't have capital, the capital was very important. We work with Small Business Administration and Hector was very active on the Hispanic so that we all can be working on the banks. We went and visited a lot of banks and the banks started believing in our business.

[0:20:01]

Respondent: And they started opening up the way that we can do loans. And I think that this is how a lot of the people started getting their business bigger and bigger. Manny's restaurant was a real small place and I think that the small business lent him money and then they started being really big. They also - I think that Barrera had a little restaurant with his brother.

[0:20:31]

Respondent: He got a lot of brothers and they did have a restaurant in North Kansas City and then he also got some money for a restaurant en el [on the] Boulevard but he never did very good on there. But I think that was all the people, all the business, all the Hispanic people thought, "Well, I can do it."

Interviewer: Yeah. So he inspired and assisted immigrant...

Respondent: People to...

[0:21:00]

Interviewer: Entrepreneurs to start their businesses.

Respondent: It wasn't not only immigrants, it was all kind of people because Manny was not an immigrant, he - well, he was but I don't know if he was born in here. And Barrera, I don't know if he was also born in here and it was a lot of people, Jesse Flores and all those really good people that started with him.

Interviewer: Yeah, so the Mexican-American community.

Respondent: Right.

[0:21:30]

Respondent: I tell you why, because we all have to be having meetings with the president and meetings for different agendas that we have in the chamber but after that we usually go to Manny's restaurant and eat in there and talk about it and fight about things, fight about the issues that we want. I remember Hector and Manny used to have a lot of fights but at the end Manny always win.

[0:22:00]

Respondent: You know how Manny was and Hector says, "Okay, Manny. That's okay." I have a list of the presidency of the chamber since 1978, if you'd like to have that.

Interviewer: Yes, if you would.

Respondent: Hector Barreto was from the 1978 to 1981. And then Richard Barrera was from '82 to '84. [Deny] Lopez, then it was Frank Perez.

[0:22:30]

Respondent: There was Jerry Jaramillo también [also] was the president. Manny Lopez, Octavio Viveros, Estella Morales, Rafael Garcia, Regina [Fryes], Mike Barrera, Enrique Chavez, those are the ones until 2001. But then from - there's a lot more people that was in the...

Interviewer: [Unintelligible 0:22:54] the time CiCi Rojas.

Respondent: CiCi Rojas was also - yes.

Interviewer: After that and then Carlos...

[0:23:02]

Respondent: Carlos Gomez?

Interviewer: Gomez, yeah.

Respondent: Well, he's the pre- that...

Interviewer: The no, the presently...

Respondent: Yeah. And Carlos is doing a great job also and he's also working with a lot of the people from the city, he knows the mayor, he knows everybody so when you need - the reason that I talk about the mayor and the consul men and all these people because they are the ones that can make the difference.

[0:23:29]

Respondent: And when we go for permits or we go for paperwork, you know, when you're going to start a business, you have to go to the city and sometimes they don't put attention to you. Because you Hispanic, because people doesn't speak English real well but after Hector went there and after we all were sitting down and saying, "What is going on?" People start being a lot more friendly to all of us. I think.

Interviewer: Excellent.

[0:24:00]

Respondent: Leo Long.

Interviewer: He was very involved, yeah. So sorry again, Leo Long was very involved.

Respondent: We have a lot of people that was really involved in - they were not members - they were members of the chamber but not in the board because sometimes they didn't have so much time, they travel so much and I think that Leo Long was one of the persons that really helped on the chamber.

[0:24:30]

Respondent: And is a lot of people that didn't belong to the chamber board but were very involved in helping the chamber to grow.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great.

Respondent: [Unintelligible] ya que [let's have] Manuel hable de los [talk about the]...