CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Women, Politics, and Activism Since Suffrage Oral History Project

An Oral History with THERESA SMITH

Interviewed

By

Analia Cabral

On October 1, 2015 and October 22, 2015

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Theresa Smith and Caesar Cruz, circa 2009.

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: THERESA SMITH

INTERVIEWER: Analia Cabral

DATE: October 1, 2015

LOCATION: Placentia, California

PROJECT: Women, Politics, and Activism Since Suffrage

AC: Okay, this is an interview with Theresa Smith on October 1, 2015 for the Women, Politics, and Activism Project at the home of Theresa in Placentia, California. The interview is being conducted by Analia Cabral. Okay, we're gonna start with when were you born?

TS: April 3, 1947.

AC: Where were you born?

TS: Upland, California.

AC: Where are your parents from?

TS: My mother was born here in Placentia, and my dad was from the Philippine Islands.

AC: What is your parent's educational background?

TS: My dad went to the third grade, and my mom went to the seventh.

AC: What did your parents do for a living?

TS: My mother was a homemaker. She took care of us. My dad worked in a nursery. He loved plants. He had a green thumb.

AC: Do you have any siblings?

TS: I have two brothers and two sisters.

AC: What are their names?

TS: After my dad died, my mother remarried, so my brother Tommy, my sister Rebecca, my sister Rachel, and my brother Ralphie.

AC: Who is the oldest?

TS: I am.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up?

TS: Well, like I said, I was born and raised in Upland, a very small town. I went to Upland Elementary, Upland Junior High, and Upland High School. But, all of our family was here in Orange County, so we were here in Orange County every weekend for a party or a baptism or holiday or something. There was always something going on. Anything else?

AC: Can you describe your neighborhood growing up?

TS: We were a very tightknit neighborhood. All the mothers watched out for each other's children. Back in the day, they said it took a village to raise a child, and it was a village. All the mothers raised everybody else's child. I had a very good childhood. I mean, I was a kid. I did a lot of stuff, you know, rode bikes, went roller skating. I used to always be at the Boys Club. I played football, and I was a tomboy kind of so I was always at the Boys Club. The guys there taught me how to play the piano, how to play pool. I loved the outdoors. I loved the beach, so we often went to the beach. Especially, as a family, we used to go to the beach every year, our whole family. And, I'm talking our *whole* family. We would stay about three days and camp out there. All the women and kids would sleep in the tents, and the men would sleep in the cars or just on the beach. I always remember waking up in the morning. My grandma would be making fresh coffee and tortillas and eggs and chorizo or whatever, but you know, we always woke up to her making us breakfast. We just had a wonderful time. And then, during the winter, the whole family would go up to Big Bear and go to the snow. So, I think I had a pretty good childhood. I had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun growing up. I enjoyed my childhood.

AC: How was it growing up with a big family?

TS: I loved it. I mean, I had a lot of friends, but where we lived, but you know, people say, Well, your mom was from Placentia, and you guys have been here for so long, you know. Do you know this—we didn't know a lot of people because we were such a big family. My mom had fifteen brothers and sisters. I had a lot of cousins, and we were always together. We had a very good time all the time. My family was very affectionate, very loving. So, like I said, my childhood was just, like, very family oriented, full of love and affection. I cherish that. It's very important to me. Family is very important to me because of that.

AC: What kind of challenges did you face in your childhood?

TS: I was short and skinny and I had three moles on my face and they used to tease me about that. They used to tell me that I had *mocos* coming out of my mouth, my nose, and just they used to tease me about that. And, because I was so tiny—I mean, I was really small and really, really skinny, so I got teased a lot about that, you know, about my appearance. But, I think that was the only challenge. I didn't let it get to me. I mean, that's who I was. That's how I was built. It wasn't my fault. I mean, in junior high they used to put me in the lockers and lock me in there because I was so small I fit in there.

AC: (laughs)

TS: I did. It was just crazy. I mean, like I said, I was so skinny, and then, you know, I was very late in blooming, so that was another issue. Especially, when you become a teenager and all the other girls are wearing bras, and I'm still not, you know. So, I remember getting my first bra. Oh, my god, all the boys teased me, and it was just crazy. (laughs) But, I took it all with a grain of salt and just accepted me for who I was. I guess I never let anything like that get to me. I got teased a lot, you know, growing up, so I think that was pretty much the only challenge I had was just my appearance, my thinness and because I was so short. I mean, I weighed, like, sixty pounds, and I was 4'5" in junior high. I was second to the shortest person in school because the other girl was a tall midget. So, yeah, I was kind of like the shortest person.

AC: How was it growing up with a mixed race family, like, having your mom being Latina and then your father—

TS: My dad?

AC: —well, yeah.

TS: You know, I don't recall having difficulties with it. I really didn't. I mean, my mom's family loved my dad. My dad loved to cook, and so he cooked for everybody. Everybody loved my dad because he was this great cook, so they were okay with that. My grandmother, who didn't believe in mixed marriages, surprisingly loved my dad. (laughs) I didn't have much of a challenge as far as my mom and my dad being mixed race.

AC: Did you identify more with your Latina side or more of your Filipino or both or—

TS: You know, I guess it's kind of crazy because it depended on who I was with. (laughs)

If I was with my Latino family, of course, I was more, but if I was with my Filipino—I guess the only difference was is that, although Filipinos and Latinos are very similar— you know, even some of their words are in Spanish. They're very close knit families, and they're very religious. They're Catholic, and so they have a lot of

the same customs and beliefs. They're even more superstitious than Latinos. So, it was—I don't know. It was just interesting. My dad told us quite a few stories about his background. Both his parents, his sister, and his brother were killed in World War II running from the Japanese, so I never got a chance to meet them. The only ones I knew were, like, distant cousins and uncles, but, just like the Latino family, everybody is your uncle, and everybody is your cousin. You're related to everybody. (laughs) So, I guess it just depended on which side of the family we were with.

AC: Can you recall a time when you were younger when you stood up for yourself or others?

TS: Yes, I'll tell you one incident that was (laughs) kind of crazy. There was a girl in our neighborhood who was very big, and like I said, I was very small. She must have been about—I want to say 5'9", weighed almost two hundred pounds, and she had several brothers. They were a huge family. There was about thirteen of them. She was big, and she was tough. She was very tough. She used to beat guys up. She was really, really tough, and I am not a fighter. I just am not. I don't like to fight. One day we were sitting down outside, and she got up and she kicked me. I said, "Beanie, don't kick me. I'm not a dog." And, she kicked me again, and she said, "What are you gonna do about it?" I said, "Beanie, please don't kick me. I'm not a dog. I'm telling you. Don't kick me." And, she said, "What are you gonna do?" Like I said, everybody was afraid of her, right? I was afraid, but I was, like, no, you're not gonna kick me. I'm sorry, I'm not a dog. I'm not an animal. So, I jumped up, and I socked her. And, of course, it didn't phase her. She socked me, and I went flying. I got up, and I hit her again. We did this for quite some time, and she kept telling me, "Just stay down." I said, "No, you're not gonna do this to me." She finally said, "I give. I'm not gonna fight with you anymore. You're crazy." (laughs) She honestly just said, "I'm not gonna fight with you," and everybody was, like, wow! But, after that day, she showed me nothing but respect because I'm actually the only person that stood up to her because even a lot of guys wouldn't stand up to her. But it's, like, you know—I don't back down very easy, especially if I think I'm right.

Even when I was younger, I mean, I used to argue with everybody, my point. My dad's side of the family, the Filipinos, they said if I went to college, they would pay for my way if I became an attorney because they knew I liked to argue. But, I don't argue. As I say, I wouldn't argue unless I thought I was right, you know, but I do stand up. I always did. I know at school one time, we got called Beaners, and this is way, you know, quite a while ago. That was the worst word they could have called us, and nobody stood up except for me. And, like I said, once again, I'm, like, 4'5", and I weigh, like, seventy pounds. I stood up against a whole, like, half the school, and I was furious. I almost started a riot because I was really upset. I mean, the teachers, the counselors, everybody—because this was in junior high—and I was furious. I mean, how dare this person call me that or us that, you know? Ultimately, that girl had to apologize. I made quite a big stink about it because I just thought it was wrong.

[00:11:45]

AC: What did you do to make her—

TS: Oh, I started (laughs) rallying everybody, and we started (laughs) telling them that we were not gonna let them call us this. We went to the teacher, and we told them that it wasn't right for them to be calling us Beaners. We were Mexican-Americans. We were born here. We were not gonna allow anybody to call us Beaners. I mean, it was wrong. It was being racial. And, I didn't realize how racial—I mean, I knew it was racial, but it wasn't called that back in the day. It was just wrong. And, for me, I took the initiative to stand up because, like I said, I don't appreciate things like that when it's at me or anybody else.

AC: How did you rally up your peers? How would you convince them or to, like, help you?

TS: I said, "Do you know what they just called us? They called us Beaners. Come on, man, we're not gonna let them do this." I just was talking and talking. I can't even remember everything I said to them, but I think I got them so pumped up and made them realize that this is wrong. Sometimes, people get so stigmatized that they're okay, and they become very complacent with what they're being told, what they're being called. Me personally, it's, like, no, I'm not gonna allow that. I just didn't, you know, and I'm glad you're bringing this up because this is my first recollection of being an activist, I guess, in junior high. (laughs)

AC: (laughs) And as a child, what did you aspire to do? What were your dreams?

TS: Honestly, I wanted to be a beautician. (laughs) I don't know why I wanted to be a beautician, and then as I got older, it's just like, yeah, I didn't want to stand on my feet all day long. (laughs) So, I kind of, like, no, I don't think that's what I really wanted to be. Then I got married and had kids. I was just—not *just* but I was a mother. I was a wife, and I was okay with that. But I've always worked even if they were just, like—you know, my first job was at the car wash, and I worked there for probably two-and-a-half years. But, I loved my job. I've worked in factories, and I've just done different things. Then, when I got divorced, I had four kids to raise, so I knew I couldn't just work in a factory. I had to have some sort of a career, so I went for testing for about a week with this organization to see where they could place me. I ended up, ultimately, working at the unemployment office. I worked there for a year in training, and then, I took the test. I passed it, and I got hired. I worked at the unemployment office for sixteen years, but then I got carpal tunnel. This is when it first came out, and people were not really aware of it. So, I had to medically retire at a very early age, but I went back to work. I don't know how to sit still, so I continued to work. Actually, I'm still looking for work again. (laughs)

AC: And, how was your experience at the unemployment office?

TS: I loved it. I loved my job. I worked in job service helping people get jobs for half the time. The other half of the time I worked in the unemployment. This was during the

big aerospace layoffs, so it was a lot of work. I had never worked overtime because I chose not to. At that time, I did. I had to because we had so many people from that industry that were laid off. I mean, a lot of the aerospace pretty much closed down. And, that's when the economy was not real good, either, so the unemployment rate got really high. But, I was trained to do quite a few things. I was one of the few people that was trained to work both sides. I did job service. I did unemployment. I did the switchboard. I did job search workshops. I was the training specialist, [recording paused] and I also became—um, what did they call it? I wasn't a supervisor. I was a step below it, and I didn't get any training or pay. I was crew leader. I also worked at out stations(??) with the youth, and the people who were getting laid off that could no longer go back whatever they were doing, I was able to allow them to go to school while they were collecting unemployment. (dog barks)

[recording paused]

AC: So, we were talking about your unemployment job.

TS: Yes, so like I said, I did quite a few jobs. I was also given a special title of irate client for customer service because, during this time, people were very frustrated, especially, people that had been working and had a career. A lot of people felt like unemployment was like a welfare kind of thing, especially people in—an engineer coming in and having to ask for money? You know, it was kind of degrading, I think, sometimes to them, and it was just the frustration of not—there wasn't a lot of work going on in that job market. I think it just scared some of the people, so we got quite a few people that were very irate, very pissed off. So, they gave me the special title of being that irate customer service person because I knew how to deal with that type of person, and, when somebody is irate, if you just let them yell and scream and vent, normally, they get that anger out of them. So, after they'd yell at me and tell me all kinds of stuff or whatever (laughs) they were mad about, I would very calmly tell them, "Okay, now what can I do for you?" And, I'd say 99 percent of the time I was able to resolve any issues that they had. So, whenever anybody was mad, I was always the first one that they called. I also did a lot of the translation, you know, because we had a lot of people who worked in the fields. So, yeah, I did quite a bit at the unemployment office, but, like I said, I loved my job. I really did. I hated that I had to retire so early.

AC: So, you would translate in Spanish?

TS: Yeah, um-hm.

AC: Okay, so going back to your childhood, as a child, um, what did you aspire to do? I think I already asked you that, right?

TS: Yeah.

AC: Okay. So, who have been your role models growing up?

TS: My cousin.

AC: Why?

TS: I was very close to her, but I always looked up to her because, in our family, nobody had—I mean, a lot of my cousins, you know, they quit school, or they got married young or got pregnant or something. She was one of the first to graduate from high school, and she went to college. She was one of the first to go to college, and she had this beautiful, white wedding, so she was always the person I looked up to. To me she just did everything right, you know, or the way I thought was right. So, she was definitely my role model.

AC: Would you two hang out a lot, um—

[00:19:50]

TS: Oh, yeah, um-hm. Yeah, we did. I spent every summer at my aunt's house, and every vacation that I could, I'd be over there. We were very close. We're still—I mean, she lives in Idaho, and I haven't seen her in years. She doesn't really (laughs) come back to California, but I still call her every once in a while. It's just like a friend, if you don't talk to them for a while, but you pick up that phone or you see them, and you just pick up where you left off. I still tell her—well, when I tell her she was my role model, she cries, and she says, "How sweet." But, I'm not doing it to be sweet; I honestly mean it. I guess because everybody in my family hadn't, to me, done the right thing and graduated, had a white wedding, because, back in the day, that was the way it was supposed to be. And, not that I love my other cousins less. You know, I loved them. I just had that respect for her because she did all those things, and like I said, going to college was huge in our family. So, that was my role model.

AC: What sort of options were available to you as a woman growing up in regards to education, school, work, things like that?

TS: I don't think there was a whole lot of options.

AC: Why would you say that?

TS: Well, I think in the era that I was at, most—like, I wanted to have an education, but, if you were married and had kids, you were a housewife and a mother. I probably could have had education, but, in our culture and just the way it was in my era, the mother stayed at home. And jobs, you weren't gonna get a job like a man, that's for sure. And, even if you did, you weren't gonna get paid close to what he did. It's similar to now, but I think it was even worse then. I mean, women really had to fight their way and prove themselves, that they could do the job. I think women today are more educated, more smart, and just they've got more energy, even than men. They have more ambition, I think. And, like I said, during my era, women just didn't have that

ambition because they were just expected to stay home and take care of their husband and their children.

AC: Okay. What message did you receive from your parents about gender roles?

TS: That's hard, and it's a hard question because we got more discipline from my mom than we did my dad. My dad was very passive. I don't know. That's hard because it was me, my sister, and my brother. I had to clean the yard the way he did, and he had to do dishes and clean house the way we did. So, there really wasn't a separation, like, oh, the boys do this, or the girls do this. It was, like, no, everybody in this house does everything.

AC: How do you think that has affected the way that you see men and women or affected your work as an activist?

TS: Well, being a female and the things that I do, I expect men to do the same thing I do. Like I said earlier, I think in this day and age, women are much stronger because then, on the activism, it's mostly women. The majority is women. I mean, there's a few men, but the majority is women. And, I think now that we are aware that we do have a voice and that we can do things, and we fought to be allowed to do certain things, we're very—I don't know, I think we're very confident now. We didn't have much confidence back in my era, and, like I said, today it's different. It's a whole different thing, and I think, like I said, that now it's—I mean, I've always stood up for myself. I don't care. This is me personally. I didn't care if it was a male or a female. I've always stood up for myself, and I've always realized that I could do whatever I wanted. Not everybody felt that way. Me personally, I've always felt like if I wanted to go to work I could have gone. If I wanted to further my education, I could have. But, like I said, the culture kept me in, being a housewife and a mother. I went back to college when I was fifty years old, and, when I went back, I was working at a federal transitional home. So, I went for, like, about a year-and-a-half, but our work load got really hectic and I was very involved with my church at the time. So, working all those hours, and I was going to church three times a week, I kind of put it on the back burner. I know I shouldn't have, but I did. But, I am going to go back. I'm going back next semester. You know, I've had people say, Well, you're old. You're never too old to learn. That's how I feel, and I was very good in school. When I went back to college and I took those couple of classes in regards to counseling and human services, because that's always been my interest is human services, I was really scared. I mean, you've got a lot of young kids. My god, I hadn't been to school for, like, thirty-some years, and here are these kids going, Oh my god, I haven't been to school for, like, three years. And, oh my god, that made me feel ancient, and I was just, like, oh my god, am I gonna be able to keep up? But, I am very proud of myself. I got all As and Bs. So, I was proud of myself that I could still keep up my grades. I was pretty much a straight A student all my life, so that kind of worried me, like, am I gonna keep those grades? I'm a high achiever. I expect a lot from myself, but I felt really good to continue to get those kind of grades even after all those years, so it was good for me.

AC: What are you gonna go back and study?

TS: I was studying criminal justice. I think I'm gonna probably just stay with it. I don't know kind of where at, probably criminal justice / human services. I have a passion to help other people out, and I think a lot of people who work in criminal justice don't have a passion or they don't have a passion for people. They take it as a job or it pays well or maybe all their family has been in it or it's something better for them to do. A police officer told us this the other day, that police officers are not social workers. I think it's true to an extent, but you are because you are engaging with people all the time and different kinds of people and especially now with different nationalities. So, you have to be some sort of a social worker. You have to know how to deal with people. I mean, I think that's why there's so much brutality right now because I don't know that they have the compassion or the understanding of other cultures. I don't know. I just like helping people, and that's where I want to stay. I want to stay helping people, and I want to be able to help other people out. So, I've always been told human services doesn't pay a lot, but I'm not looking at it for the money. I want to do it because I care.

AC: When you said that you felt like you could do whatever you wanted, where does that confidence come from, or where does that idea come from?

[00:29:16]

TS: Well, I guess growing up—because like I said, I was very good in school, a straight A student—I was always told that I could do whatever I wanted because I was educated. And a lot of it, I guess, comes from myself. I know whatever I've set my mind out to do I've been able to accomplish it, so I really never had any low self-esteem. (laughs) I've been a pretty confident person most of my life, so whatever I put my heart into doing, I can do it. And, I put that into my children and now my grandchildren because we are capable of doing anything we want. We just have to have—I don't want to say passion, but maybe it is passion. You just have to be confident and want it, and so I raise my kids that way. I don't know if it was a good thing sometimes because I told my kids they could do whatever they wanted, and they could be whatever they wanted, except they couldn't be good murderers and they couldn't be good thieves. They couldn't do that, but I told them they could be president. I don't care what you do. You could be President of the United States. You could be the best garbage pickup person in the world. I don't care, just be good at whatever you do because that's how I felt, and I wanted them to have that same confidence. In saying that, my son watching kung fu movies thought that he could climb walls and fly off of buildings, so I think I gave him sometimes too much confidence. But, yeah, I've never had a problem with my self confidence, I guess, and I think a lot of it comes from being teased, being younger and being okay with my body, especially now. These young ladies are not okay with their body. I've always been okay with my body, always. This is me. Like me for me or don't like me at all. I mean, this is who I am. This is what I look like, this is what I am, and what you see is what you

get, period. So, I've always felt that way, and I guess that's where my confidence comes from.

AC: Is there a history of activism in your family?

TS: Not in my family.

AC: What makes you say that?

TS: Because nobody in my family has ever done the things that I've done. I mean, when I worked at the unemployment office, I was an activist because I was a job steward there, and we were always fighting for better wages or for better healthcare or just benefits in general or whatever. So, I was constantly protesting and rallying and trying to get people to be a part of this, especially, if they wanted raises. It's hard to get people to get involved, but when I believe in something, I commit myself, and I take it all the way. But, nobody else in my family has done this. None of my family are activists.

AC: What values did you acquire from your family?

TS: Respect, love—respect and love.

AC: And, do you use those values in your activism?

TS: Yes, I do. It's a part of who I am. That's who I am. So, if I was not respectful or showing love and forgiveness, it wouldn't be me. It would definitely not be me, so the way I've lived my life is the way I do my activism, with love and respect.

AC: How long have you lived in Anaheim?

TS: I lived in Anaheim for a few years. I don't know exactly how many years I lived there. God, how long was it? I want to say, in Anaheim itself, I lived there maybe about nine or ten years.

AC: And, how long did you live in Upland?

TS: I lived in Upland—I've lived here in Orange County for forty-six years. God, it's been that long! Yeah, forty-six years, so I lived in Upland, I don't know, twenty-two years, twenty-three years?

AC: And, how was it growing up a Latina in Upland versus maybe Orange County? Maybe talk a little bit about both.

TS: Well, I don't know. Growing up a Latina, I mean, going to school you were either Latina or white. There was no other races. And, like I said, the only incident I had is when they called me a Beaner. I didn't have that many problems in Upland. I can

honestly say—I mean, like I said, except for that one incident or a couple of incidences—but Orange County is different. Orange County is very different, to me, than any other county period. It's very different.

AC: In which ways is it different for you?

TS: Well, when I first came here, especially, and just knowing what my mother and some of my family went through, I mean, if you were a person of color, you just didn't really matter. You did menial jobs. You didn't really have great jobs. You didn't live in affluent areas, that's for sure. I think it's gotten worse these last few years than when I first moved here. I don't know. Because when I first moved here, I was just a mother sending her kids to school, so I didn't have much interaction with a whole lot of things except in the kids' school. The kids had some problems because my kids used to stand up for the underdog all the time, *all the time*, so they were constantly getting in trouble. So, I was constantly at schools and defending my children because I believe in defending the underdog. I don't care who you are or what color you are, you don't mistreat somebody who can't defend themselves. So, I was (laughs) always at the schools arguing with a teacher or a principal about something. I don't know. I think my kids had more problems being Latinos than I did. Maybe because I'm older I didn't have as many issues than I know my kids have. So, I mean, there is a difference, but not much. I just know that being a person of color anywhere is gonna be somewhat difficult.

AC: Why do you think it's difficult?

TS: Well, because people of color have always been stigmatized by white people. You're either poor, ignorant, a thug, a drug addict. People just usually see people of color in that sense. I mean, look at what Donald Trump said, you know, all the rapists and the killers are coming here from Mexico, somewhere from Central America, South America. That tells you what a lot of society thinks. So, it's a difficult thing. It's a very difficult thing to go through. My ex-husband was black, and so *my* family stopped talking to me because he was a *colored person*. (laughs) When they used to tell me he was colored, I would say, "What color is he," and they couldn't answer that. But, I told them—and I say this because this is how racial inequality happens even within your own family— they never looked at him as a man. He was a colored man because my family is really old school, so they didn't say black. They said colored. It took them a long time to come around, but once they got to know him, they fell in love with him. I mean, he was just this great person. He was a wonderful person to me and to my children, and, like I said, once they got to know the person, they were okay.

And, I think that's what's wrong with society. We judge everybody, myself included. We judge before we even know a person. We judge them by the way they look, by the color of their skin, by the way they talk, dress, so this happens quite often. And, like I said, most people see the Latinos as being ignorant, just workers. I mean, they're just laborers. They shouldn't have an education, and if they do, they're still not smart. You'll outsmart them. So, it's sad that that's how they see the

Latinos, and I can only speak for Latinos. I can't speak for another race. So, when they do meet a person who is intelligent, it kind of scares them. They're intimidated because they don't expect anybody to be able to reach their standards. So, I think, to me, that's just an important part of it, is the way they see us, and they don't know us. We've invited, quite often, council people and the—I don't say the mayor because he has been to the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Anaheim, but we've invited every council person to come down and meet with the people or just come to see them. You know, come to an event, come to a party. Yeah, they won't show up. One of the council persons went to an event for the kids for soccer because she was gonna donate some soccer items. The kids came up to her to thank her, and she literally got scared. And, I'm talking kids. I'm talking seven, eight, nine year olds.

[00:41:27]

AC: Where do you think this fear comes from?

TS: (laughs) They're just scared. They're scared of Latinos. They're scared of them. They're scared of them, if they're smart. They're scared of them, if they stand up to them. They have this idea that they're just all gang members. Like, they're just out to hurt you. These are children, seven, eight, nine year olds, so that makes—that was very interesting. It made me laugh because you're scared of these little children who just want to thank you for giving them some soccer equipment, but once again it's a reality of this world. People forget that we're not different races. We're one race. We're the human race, and it's hard for people to look beyond that. It's the way they're raised, you know. It's the way they're raised. I'm sure they were raised, like, don't hang around with those people, man, because they're all drug addicts, and they'll beat you up. (laughs) I've heard people say that. I know for a fact, sometimes, that's what's being said. I mean, some kids could not hang around with my kids because they were Mexicans or they were told not to hang around with them. They didn't care. They still hung around with them.

AC: How did that make you feel when they would say that about your children?

TS: My first initial feeling was anger, and then I would then in turn think, You're ignorant because that is ignorance. It's just how I felt.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about your ex-husband, and how did it make you feel when your family wouldn't accept him?

TS: I don't know. I guess I had mixed feelings. I was kind of angry and kind of sad because he was such a great person, and it made me sad that they didn't even give him a chance, at the beginning, to know him before they made this judgment call on him because of the color of his skin. And, it made me mad because they did do it because I wasn't like that. I've never been like that. I think I expect everybody to be like me and not see color, and unfortunately, the world doesn't see things that way. Most people don't. And, it's funny because, like I said, we're Latino. I mean, we're

Mexicans, and I say Mexicans because I am raised to be a Mexican. I'm a Chicana. I'm a Chicana; that's what I am. And, all of my kids' friends, the majority, all their best friends were white. So, we would go to the beach. We would go out to eat. So, here would be me, my kids, a couple of white kids, and then my husband was black. And, these kids used to call us Mom and Dad. All my kids' friends called us Mom and Dad. They called him Pops; they called me Mom. People would always turn around and look at us really funny, and I would think to myself, They probably think we adopted these kids. But, these kids didn't see the color, either. You know, it was amazing that even though their parents said things to them, they never saw color in us I guess because we didn't treat them that way. So, sometimes, it's a way in which you treat a person. They were treated the same way my kids were. If my kids got yelled at, they got yelled at. If my kids cleaned, they had to clean. If my kids got something to eat, they got something to eat. But, all their friends got treated the same way my kids did because I was not gonna ever give more to another person than I did my children. So, they all got equal. If I had two ice creams and there was five kids, nobody got ice cream, period. I just always believed that everybody should be treated fairly, even within my own family.

AC: And then, before your ex-husband, the father of your children, could you talk a little bit about him?

TS: Ah, he was a macho, macho Chicano. Like I said, back in my era, I was just there to take care of him and the kids. I wasn't allowed to wear makeup. I wasn't allowed to wear dresses. I wasn't allowed to have friends. I couldn't go anywhere without him. It was more like having a parole officer or something instead of a husband. You know, dinner had to be ready when he got home. He never really ate dinner when he got home, but it had to be ready. He never washed a dish or changed a diaper. I cleaned the house. I took care of the kids. I took care of the dogs. I took care of the cars. I paid all the bills. I bought all the groceries. I did everything. He just went to work and back. But, like I said, in my era, that's kind of the way it was. The woman did everything, and the man just went to work. Fortunately, I saw the light, and yeah, that doesn't work for me anymore. (laughs) We're both equal. I feel, in a relationship, you do things together, and I'm kind of glad that I raised my kids that way because Caesar was, when he was married to his wife—well, while he was still alive—he helped his wife clean the house. He worked, but he helped clean the house. He helped wash the clothes. He helped do dishes. He loved to cook, so either she cooked or he cooked. He changed diapers, took care of the kids. They did everything together. They were a family. I remember one time their dad told him, "You know, you're a much better man than me. I've never done anything that you do." And, he was absolutely right. He never did. But I feel like I had a lot to do with that because I raised my son different. I raised him to have respect for his wife, and just because you're male doesn't mean that you're higher than your wife or your wife shouldn't be higher than you. I'm proud that I raised my boy—and my oldest son is exactly the same way, and my girls are the same way. They will not allow a man to tell them what to do. My kids, okay, my kids in general, they just feel everything is fair, you know. Nobody is above the other. It's a partnership, especially in a marriage, so, to

me, one shouldn't do more than the other. A marriage is supporting and sharing your life, and people have lost sight of what a marriage is. And, that's important to me.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about your children, your names, what they do?

TS: Okay, my oldest son Joseph is—oh, let's see, 1966. Okay, he was born in '66. He just turned forty-nine. My daughter Candace will be forty-six. Caesar would have been forty-one, and my baby, Esther, is forty years old. And, Joseph was very smart, too, in school. He was very smart, straight A student, too. He graduated and went to the Marines, and he's been in customer service ever since then. Candy, Candy, Candy's always been my middle—her and Caesar have been my problem children. They didn't graduate. They didn't finish school, went their own ways, kind of did their own thing. They just always did something different than what I expected of them, I guess. But, they had the most kids! Candy has five kids, and Joseph has one daughter. He's got one child; he's got a daughter. Candy has five kids, four girls and one boy. Caesar had five boys. And then, my youngest daughter, Esther, has been in the medical field for the last eighteen years, and she's got three kids. Her son just graduated and went into the Marines.

[00:50:59]

AC: What was the community of Anaheim like for raising a family?

TS: It was a community. I mean, you know, you're neighbors. You watched out for each other. You help each other. It's a family. I think that's the best way to describe a community, and the communities that I lived in, they were families. Everybody knew everybody, and everybody took care of it, the way it should be. My daughter has lived in more affluent areas, and she never knew none of her neighbors because they don't talk to each other. (laughs) And, that's sad to me because here where I live, I talk to all my neighbors. (laughs) I talk to everybody, but I talk to all my neighbors. And, wherever I've lived, I've always talked to my neighbors because I think it's important to know your neighbor. You know, they might need something; you might need something. And, when I say need something, you might need a cup of sugar, you know. You might need a ride to the hospital for an emergency, or you might need somebody to watch out while you're not there. So, it's important. It's important, and people have lost sight of how important it is to interact with your neighbors. They stay locked up in their houses, and they don't talk to anybody anymore. So, in the neighborhoods that I've lived in Anaheim, it was pretty much family. That's how it's always been wherever I've lived.

AC: So, now we're gonna transition into where were you when you found out your son had been shot by the police, when you got that call?

TS: I was home. It was raining. I had worked, like, seven days in a row, so I hadn't had a day off. That was my first day off, so I was still in my pajamas and my slippers because I was just relaxing. I was living with my daughter at the time, and I

remember my son was there. He got a phone call from one of my nieces that she heard Caesar was shot, and then my son got on the computer right away to see if he could find anything out. My daughter started calling the police departments, and they said, No, no, they didn't know nothing. We called Fullerton. We called Placentia. We called Anaheim because what happened is he called us and said, "I'm on my way to pick up the boys," because he was gonna take them to practice football because two of his boys were on the football team. So, he was leaving my niece's house to come up here, in Anaheim to come up to Fullerton. We kept calling the police department, nothing, nothing. So, we weren't really getting any information, and then my sister called and said that she had seen on the news—I don't know the exact thing because nobody wanted to say anything to me, but I think she had said something to the effect that she heard Caesar had been shot at the Walmart in Anaheim. Everybody is trying to calm me down, and I'm freaking out. I mean, people aren't gonna call you unless this is, like, happening. And, we hadn't heard from him. We were trying to call him, and he wasn't answering his phone. We were pretty panicked, so I immediately jumped in the car. And, my daughter and my son-in-law said, "No, you're not driving." It's Friday, and it was, like, 4:30, almost 5:00 because we found out about it, like—I don't know—4:00 or so. Anyway, it's in the afternoon, it's Friday, and it's raining. We have to go from Fullerton to Anaheim, and there's traffic. And, I'm thinking, We're never gonna get there. It's taking forever. When you have to get somewhere in an emergency, it takes forever. That day it was taking us forever. I wanted to just press on the gas when my son-in-law was driving. He was trying to be careful, though. Like I said, it was raining.

So, we get to Walmart, and it's got all the yellow tape around it. I jump off the car, and I run to see what's going on. The police immediately stop me, and they're telling me, You can't pass. You can't pass. And, I'm, like, "I just heard my son got shot!" They said, What's your son's name? And, I said, "Caesar." Oh, he's at the hospital. They took him to UCI. So, I jump back in the car, and we start to take off. And then, I see his truck. He had a Suburban. I see it, so I stop again. I go to go see, and there they stopped me again. They tell me, He's at the hospital. So, my first thought is, He's strong. He's a fighter. He'll be fine, you know. And, I'm praying all the way to UCI. You know, he's gonna be fine. He's gonna be fine. I get to UCI, and we get to the emergency room. I told the nurse that I want to see him, and she says, "I'm sorry. We can't let you see him. It's under investigation." And, I'm, like, "What? I am his mother." And, she says, "I'm sorry, but we can't let you back there." So, as family came, they kept asking, and they kept saying the same thing. I just remember I stayed in the bathroom by myself for quite a while. I was just praying because I kept thinking, He's strong. And, all I kept saying to God is, "You know, he's strong, and if it's your will, you know, he'll be fine. He'll be fine." And, of course, in my heart I want to believe he's gonna be fine, you know?

I think it must have been maybe two-and-a-half, three hours later that they finally said they wanted to talk to me. I mean, I'm devastated by this time. I've been crying, so they put me in a wheelchair is all I remember. They want to take me to the back to talk to me, so my daughter went with me to make sure everything was okay. I don't remember a lot. Everything was really blurry. She told me later that the hospital was full of police, like, all up and down where they were taking us down the

hall. She said there was police all up on top of the hospital, all over the place. I have a lot of family. I know a lot of people. Caesar knew just as many people as I did because he was just as outgoing as I was. I don't remember because, like I said, everything was very, very, very clouded for me, but evidently, the entire hospital, the emergency room outside was full of people. I think they were afraid something might happen. My daughter said there was SWAT. There was undercover. I thought there was only, like, maybe five cops. She said, "Mom, the whole hallway, *the whole entire hallway* was police." And, I said, "There was?" Like I said, I don't remember. I just remember them taking me into a room, and the first thing they wanted to do was ask me questions. My daughter said, "Mom?" And, I said, "No, I'm not gonna answer your questions." I said, "I want to know where my son is," and I continued to ask them. One of the officers—and it was a female—I remember she told me, "We're asking you our question. You need to answer." And, I said, "No, I'm not gonna answer your questions. I want to know where my son is. I want to know where he's at." There was somebody from the district attorney's office in there, and he finally said, "You need to tell this woman about her son." I don't even remember the exact words. I just know that they told me that he was dead. And then, my daughter said I asked to see him, and I remember I did ask. I remember asking to see him, and they said, Well, he's not here. We already took him to the morgue. And, that's all I remember.

But my daughter got there. My other daughter got there after we did, and she talked to a head nurse. I think they talked to her because she was still in her scrubs and stuff. But anyway, they talked to her, and the head nurse told her that they never took my son to the hospital. There's a lot of questions about that because my son died right away, so why would they take him to the hospital? I mean, they shot him, like, fifteen times in the back, twice to the head, and, like I said, the kill shot was the heart, so there was no way he lived. I think it was their way of keeping us away from the crime scene and calming us down at the hospital. I don't know. I don't even know their reasons. All I know is that it was pretty crazy. And then, when I asked—I called the coroner's office the next day so we could identify his body. They said they didn't need us, that they had his ID. And then, his wife called, and they said, One of us needs to identify him. We wanted to make sure, right? I mean, we knew, but we still wanted to see him. And, the coroner's office refused to let us see him. I just remember he died Friday. Saturday I got together with family and friends, and we had a vigil at Walmart. That Sunday I started protesting, Monday I had an attorney, and that's where my work started. I haven't stopped since.

[01:00:30]

AC: How was your family's reaction to his death?

TS: Of course, our first reaction was lots of anger. We were very pissed off. Shock, I think that was huge thing, shock. I mean, you just talked to somebody fifteen minutes ago, and then they're dead. And, you don't know why. You're not getting any answers. You're not able to see them. It was very, very, very difficult, very difficult for all of us. All of us. And, I'm not just talking his brothers and his sisters. I'm

talking family in general. Even friends of his that I hadn't seen in years. I mean, everybody heard about it. Everybody. Everybody was devastated, his friends that hadn't seen him, family. For days, our house was full of people. I mean, you could barely move in the house there were so many people. I just know that the hospital was full when we got there. When we got home—my daughter lived in a condo, and I just remember those people outside and the patio, they had taken up the whole entire alley way, parked. There was people there. The entire place was full of people. Everybody was outside. I don't even know, there was just so many people you couldn't even move around.

I just went straight to my room. I just didn't want to see anybody. I couldn't deal with it. I couldn't even fathom that somebody had just shot my son, and I don't know why, and the police to boot. And, knowing he wasn't doing anything wrong, knowing he wasn't on probation or parole, knowing he didn't have any warrants or wants, why would you kill him? So, it was extremely devastating for all of us, and he was very close to his siblings, cousins, a lot of aunts and uncles, his children. His children, I don't think they—well, none of us—you immediately cannot even grasp that they're dead. I mean, it's just, what do you mean he's dead? You know? Like I said, for his children it was very hard. It was very hard for the boys. It was extremely hard for the boys, very hard. I remember that night me and one of his sons—there were so many people, like I said—we took a walk by ourselves because we needed our—at that time I appreciated everybody being there, but I just didn't want to talk to anybody. I just didn't want to say anything, so him and I took off. And, because I left, he said, "Where are you going, Grandma?" And, I said, "I need to go for a walk. I need to go for a walk." So, he walked with me. I said, "I need to yell. I need to yell." We walked to the end of the alley, and I mean, that was only way to get our emotion out was just to scream and holler. Yeah, it was pretty bad. It was pretty bad.

And, I think the hard thing was is that I'm trying to be strong for my kids, and my kids are trying to be strong for me. And, I don't know. I am a really strong person, strong willed, and that had to be my weakest point in my entire life. I had no control, no control whatsoever over my feelings or over myself. I couldn't fathom losing my child. I couldn't do it. It was just I wanted to die. I think every mother I've talked to has said the same thing. I wanted to die, and, of course, I wish it would have been me. I lived my life. He still had his life to live, you know. He had five boys. So, yeah, it was pretty bad. I just know that I didn't want to live. I didn't want to live. And, I had to snap out of it because I have other children that wanted me to live and grandchildren, so it's a really bad place to be. It's a really bad place to be because you don't want to take away from your other kids, and I didn't want my kids to think that I loved them less. I told each and every one of them, "If it would have been you, I'd be going through the same thing. I'd be going through exactly the same thing. I'm not going through this because it's Caesar. I would be going through exactly the same thing," because my youngest daughter said, "I wish it would have been me, Mom." And, that broke my heart. I said, "Don't say that." She goes, "No, Mom, I know my kids would be taken care of." Her first boy is not from her; it was from her husband. She goes, "I know you would have taken care of Junior. And, I know Joseph would take care of Monique and Jeremy." Unfortunately, my daughter-

in-law was in a really bad place without giving too much specifics. She was in a really bad place. She goes, "Who is gonna take care of Caesar's kids, Mom?" And, I said, "I don't care. Don't say that. Don't say that. I wouldn't want to lose you, either," because I almost did lose her when she was little. She was not quite two. She got run over by a car. They ran over her head, and so it left her blind in one eye. And now, she has seizures because of it. So, I almost lost her. Another time my husband was changing the antifreeze, and she didn't even drink a lot. She just tasted it because she was just a baby. She almost died because antifreeze is very, very deadly. She almost died when she was a baby, so I almost lost her twice. And, when I had Caesar, he wasn't breathing when he was born, so I panicked because, you know, when you have your baby you hear him crying. I hear the doctor hitting him and hitting him, and nothing's happening. And, I'm, like, freaking out, and finally—and it was because one of his lungs hadn't developed right. And then, one time he was in a really bad accident.

So, yeah, a couple of times I almost lost my children, and that was scary. That was scary as hell. That's why I never let my kids—I mean, I was really over protective of my kids. There was no way I'd let them go outside without me. They could never be where I couldn't see or hear them. I had that big fear that they would be kidnapped, or even when they used to be asleep at night, I'd get up in the middle of the night and make sure nobody kidnapped them and make sure they were breathing. I'd always feel them to make sure their heart was still pumping and go like this to make sure that I could feel air from their nose. My husband used to hate that. He used to tell me I was crazy. (laughs) I just always had that fear, and, unfortunately, I had to face that fear. That's why, when I hear of somebody losing somebody, to violence especially—you know, in doing my self help, trying to help myself after my son died, in everything that I read, they said the two worst deaths are homicide and suicide. Usually, homicide because it's so sudden, and it's so, usually, bad. It's really bad. And suicide is bad because when somebody commits suicide, the other person thinks, Oh, I could have done something. So, those are the two because, you know, when people are sick you kind of expect it, and if they're in an accident, I mean, it just—but a sudden, especially like this, sudden and killed by someone is a very, very hard thing to try to go through.

And, it takes a lot. It takes a lot. It takes a lot to go through it. It takes a lot to realize. It takes a lot to accept it. You never let it go because people say, Oh, you just need to let it go. Uh, are you gonna let go of *your* child? Are you gonna let go of somebody you love? So, don't tell me to let go. I will never let go. I can't say it gets easier. It does to an extent. It's not like I'm crying every day now, but you always have fits of crying. You hear a song, you see something, and you're either gonna laugh about it, reminiscing, or you're gonna cry because you miss it. I don't ever take away from the father, the siblings, the children, but the pain for a mom is different because you carried that child for nine months. That child grows inside of you, and I loved being pregnant because I could feel that life growing inside of me. A lot of women don't like to. I loved being pregnant. It just was just so awesome that I knew that a life was growing inside of me. You give birth to them. You take care of them. You're actually, I don't want to say hooked up, but (laughs) I mean, you're attached by that umbilical cord. Everything you eat, breathe, think, feel is

going into that child, and so that is a part of you. So, when that person dies, you die. That part of you dies. So, to tell me to get over it, I'm not gonna get over losing a part of my heart. It's not going to happen. Like I said, it's a little bit easier, but it's not something I'm gonna get over, ever, ever until the day I die.

[01:12:33]

AC: When you first talked about the anger that you felt, what were you or your family angry at?

TS: I was mad at everybody. I was first mad at God because I felt like, well, I was trying to negotiate with him, which was (laughs) my first mistake. I was mad at the police who shot him. I was mad at the hospital. I was mad at everybody, everybody, everybody. I was just mad. (sighs) I think the anger that you feel is hard to explain because it's—this is one anger that is very hard to explain. Like, you can get mad at people when they do you wrong, but losing somebody, the anger is totally different. It's just different, and, like I said, I was mad at everybody. I was mad everybody. I was just how could this happen, you know? *How did* this happen? *Why* did this happen? And, like I said, usually your first reaction to death is always anger, and half the time you don't know what you're angry—you're angry at that person for dying. How dare you leave me? So, yeah, you're mad at everybody, even the person who's gone. That's an ugly way to feel, but it's a natural part of the feeling. It's a natural part of the grief. It's a natural part of losing somebody you love because you are angry at them. I mean I am. I was mad. I was like, how dare you? How could you die, you know? Hello, you're my son. I was supposed to be dead before you. So, it's hard to explain the anger, but it's an ugly anger. It's ugly because you feel ugly. You don't feel whole. You don't feel. It's like all your emotions are gone. You really don't care. And, that's not kind of a good place to be for me, personally.

AC: Was there any video evidence of what occurred, or were there any witnesses when it happened?

TS: Well, there was a lot of video. Walmart has the best security systems in the nation, and I know that for a fact because, when I worked in criminal justice, a couple people on my caseload were in there because of video from Walmart. My attorney and I went out there, and there was probably, like, maybe six or seven cameras. We only got three videos, and Walmart says that's all they had. They said they gave all the videos to the police first, so we only got three, and you can't see much. You can see, but you can't see much. But, we are not allowed to show them to anybody *at all*. We have a gag order, even now. Even after the lawsuit, we still have a gag order. I can't show those videos. I can't talk about a lot of things because of the gag order that they put on our case. And, you think, at Christmastime? At Walmart? Oh, yeah, there was a lot of them. A lot of them were threatened. A lot of them were scared. I only talked to one person who actually witnessed it, and he was an employee from Walmart. He told me that the district attorney took all those people in and questioned them, so when the DA uses them as their witnesses, we cannot use them as ours.

AC: Do you think that the media accurately reported what happened?

TS: Nope.

AC: Why not?

TS: The first report that went out there was by Rick Garcia from Channel 7 News, and he said that there was a wild shootout at Walmart, with a, what do you call them? With an ex-felon gang member. And then, he said that he got shot, so I was not a happy camper because that's not what happened. Because the original story was that Caesar was in Walmart with a gun, and then it was that he had a shootout. Ultimately, they're saying that they shot him because when they boxed him in—because when they followed him into Walmart—I already knew what happened even before I saw the video. He went into Walmart because Caesar was smart. Caesar was smart. He went there because there was cameras. He saw them following him because he was constantly stopped by the police because of his appearance, and I know that. When you know Caesar was just smart—I had already told him, you know, "This is what you do, and this is what you say." So anyway, when he pulled in there I know that it was because of the cameras, but a couple of the cars came in front of him and some came behind him. They're saying, Well, when he went up the aisle—because he comes around the back, and he goes up the aisle—and he sees these cops coming at him, he starts to back up. Well, they're saying he rammed into them. He didn't. I know he didn't. And then, of course, they said that he got out of his car and that he reached in his waistband with his right hand, and they feared for their lives, so they all shot him. He got back in his car after they shot him, still strapped in his seatbelt. First of all, his door did not open. It was broken. Caesar could only get out if he jumped out the window or got out the passenger side. He was not right handed. He was left handed. So, even if he needed to get out, he would have reached with his left hand, not his right. They didn't know he was left handed. All the bullets were from behind, not from the front, so he was not facing them.

[01:20:00]

AC: In one of the articles that I read, it mentioned that he had a gun in the back of his car?

TS: It was in the back, then it was in the middle, then it was next to him. The story changed all the time, and that was the media. So, yeah, I don't have much faith in that kind of media. Independent I do because they do a story the way it's told, and I will say the *OC Weekly* always told my story the way it was supposed to be told. If they interviewed me, they never put more into it or not, and if I asked them not to, off the record, they never mentioned it. And anything that they did say was fact; it wasn't what they heard. So, it depends on who you talk to in the media. I was fortunate enough to have somebody who interviewed me from the *OC Weekly* quite often, and I actually had somebody from the *Register*, who did better stories than anybody else. I was just fortunate to be blessed with those two people because they were really good, but all the other media, I mean, just the things that they would put

and say—I mean, they were saying he was a gang member. Caesar was not a documented gang member. I'm sorry. He was thirty-five years old. He had kids, you know. Yeah, he was in a gang when he was younger. It was, like, six guys, man. It was, like, six guys. Really? They all hung out together. They would get him drunk, and then they'd bring him home, okay? That was his *gang days.* Yes, he had a lot of tattoos, and he was bald. But, half of the police force is bald and has tattoos, so evidently, they're gang members, too.

AC: So, you said that his door wouldn't open. He had to go through the other door, the—

TS: He had to crawl out his window or go through the passenger side.

AC: Do you think that's one of the reasons why he might have gotten shot because he couldn't open his door and get out?

TS: Maybe he was trying to get out. I don't know why it would take five police officers to kill a man that's still strapped in a seatbelt. So, even if they were saying that he was trying to get out, *he was still strapped in his seatbelt*. That's my whole point. I've made that very clear in all my interviews. He was still strapped in a seatbelt. That's why I took pictures of his body because you could see the burn from the seatbelt. And, his neck was kind of, like, broken. It's like he yanked or something because his neck was literally like this, and his hands were tightened. His hands were still like this. Because when you die, you stay kind of in the position that you're in, and his hands were like this. So, I don't care what they say. I mean, I don't care what the police say. I know what I saw. I know what the coroner said. The coroner said it was homicide, but they were never convicted of homicide or even nothing. I mean, it was just, like, well, they didn't do any wrong. I went to Victim Witness to see if they would help me with his burial. It took me a long time to even hear from them or to get any response, and when I finally did, they said no because it was his fault that he got killed by the police so they weren't gonna help us out. They wouldn't even offer the kids counseling.

AC: And, how did that affect the children, not being able to get counseling?

TS: Well, I mean, they've talked to me. I've been their counselor, but they've never really had professional counseling. They still haven't, and so they still have a very difficult time of it. They do carry a lot of anger, and that was something I didn't want them—I mean, it's okay to be angry, like I said, because I'm still angry. But, I don't want that anger to consume them or to lead them in the wrong way. So, yeah, it was very important. I mean, for our lawsuit I asked for it, and we didn't get it. (laughs) For them, they're happy that they have me because, like I said, I'm probably a better counselor for them than other people because we do talk a lot, and I encourage them to cry. I encourage them to be angry, I encourage them to talk about his happy times, and I encourage them to feel any way they want. I tell them, "You're gonna be angry, and you can be mad as long as you don't hurt yourself or anybody else. But, you're

entitled to be angry." So, that's the counseling they've gotten; it's from their grandma. (laughs)

AC: Can you talk a little bit about your lawsuit?

TS: Yeah, it took us, what, almost six years? And, we finally got our lawsuit. It was a really hard decision to make. You know, I didn't really want to settle, but did I want to take it to court? Like I said, the DA justified it. The judge didn't even want us to have a court date. We had to fight for that court date, and that's when we finally got a court date, when we went to the Ninth District, because we didn't even have a court date. So, they finally gave us a court date, which would have been now in December, and then that's when we started talks about settling. Of course, we asked for more than the amount that they gave us, and we had to fight for the amount they gave us. They didn't even want to pay us that, and it was only $175,000 split between the eight of us and our attorney. So, the amount that the boys got won't even take care of them for a year. But, I'm a realist, and I already know that this judge was not happy because the Ninth District Court kind of sissy slapped her in the face for not taking it to begin with. So, she wasn't happy. That's why it's taken us so long to get a court date because we went to the Ninth District Court more than a year-and-a-half ago, and she wouldn't even let us have a court date until almost two years later. She's been stalling this whole time because she wasn't happy. Well, she got spanked a little bit by somebody higher than her.

And then, I had to think about—and I don't even care anymore—all the lies that the police said and people will believe them, and I know they will because I always go back to the Kelly Thomas case. Now here you have a case of six men beating the crap out of this mentally ill guy on video. The entire world saw that video, the *world*, not the nation, the world saw them beat this man to death, and not one person out of twelve could find them guilty of even excessive force. Okay, you didn't get him for manslaughter or second degree murder, but that you did not even find them guilty of excessive force? Were you not seeing his face? Did you not see them beat him up? That shows me what society thinks. So, did I want to chance it and take it to court and have society look at my son, like, oh, yeah, he was just a thug and drag his name and all of us through mud because that's what they do? They drag you. They bring up all your past. They bring up every piece of dirt, and they dig it up as far as they possibly can dig. And, you cannot say one bad thing about them, so who is gonna win? The cops who have no background. They've just been great cops, but you have this family who's been in jail and been thugs and whatever they want to say. Society is not gonna side with us. I already know that. That's the only reason I agreed to settle is because I couldn't chance losing and his boys not getting nothing. I am not happy with the amount they got, but they got something. That's an admission of guilt. Otherwise, they wouldn't have paid us.

AC: So, do you think that the video that you found in the Walmart, if you could have used it, would have helped?

TS: Um-hm.

AC: What do you think it would have done better, or how would it have helped?

[01:30:00]

TS: Well, the only way it would have helped, it would have shown that Caesar was not attacking them (laughs) like they wanted to say. I mean, in the reports they put that they stopped him for a traffic stop, for a traffic violation or whatever. His light was out. And, the Ninth District judge said, "You mean to tell me you killed a man for a traffic—" "Well, no, that's not why we killed him. It was because we had a confidential informant who called." And, he said, "Where's the confidential informant?" They never produced a confidential informant on video, writing, or in person. So, the judge says, "I think your police officers made up this confidential informant. They're lying and they just killed him. Because I don't care if this man was committing a crime, he was entitled to his due process, which your officers did not give him." So, I was very happy with the Ninth District Court. (laughs) I said to my attorney, "I don't care what happens after today. To hear somebody actually ask questions and make comments like I would have, I'm happy with it." The Ninth District Court had, I think, made me feel more at ease, so after that I was more comfortable because finally somebody saw that this was wrong. That was the only reason it got reversed because they said, No, your officers were wrong. Like I said, once again, being a realist, taking it to court, was a jury gonna find them guilty? Highly unlikely that they would have found them guilty. Very highly unlikely. Like I said, I always talk about the Kelly Thomas case—I talk about the Ernest Duenez, yeah. He was shot getting out of his car, and it's very similar to my son. Somebody made a phone call, an officer follows him, and he's getting out of his truck. His foot is stuck in the seatbelt, and he's trying to raise his hand. Have you seen the video? Yeah. And, I'm very close to that family. We're family now. We're not even friends; we're family. Our stories are very similar, lives are very similar. Their family is very similar to mine, and so we have a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful relationship. We've become family, literally family. I mean, when I'm going through something, they're the first ones who call me or text me, Are you okay? It means a lot to me.

So, I think even if we have video—it's just like the body cameras. Everybody is really excited about body cameras, but they can turn them off if they want. They can *accidentally* turn them off and accidently just, (inhales sharply) I realized it was off after I've done what I've done, and now I'm gonna turn it back on. Not only that, they are not required to show it to the public, so what good are they? They record it so that they can see. I mean, it was a big push for the body cameras. I think the only way it's gonna help is if you have a complaint about them, and they can look at the complaint and say, Oh, well, yeah, maybe he did say something wrong to you. He'll be disciplined. But, in a shooting, they're not gonna say nothing. They're not gonna release it, and they're not gonna say anything about it because they don't have to, so what's the point? What's the point in having a body camera if you're not gonna use it to prove that you didn't do something wrong? So, like I said, everybody was excited. Everybody pushed for it, and we got it. And, it's really not that big a deal.

AC: So, how did you perceive the police prior to your son's death? What were your thoughts about them?

TS: I don't know. I didn't have much of a—because I've known good cops. I've also known bad ones, and I guess experience before my son was shot with other people the way they were treated or things were handled, I know they weren't the best people. Some of them were not the best people in the world. On the other hand, I've known police that could be okay. You know, community policing has become a *huge* word in law enforcement. They're all doing community policing, but I think their idea of community policing and the community's idea of community policing is totally different. Police have asked me, Well, what do you think community policing is? I said, "I think community policing is having a good relationship with the community. I think you should know the community you're in. You should know the people. You should get out of your cars and go see them and go talk to them, get to know them. Let them get to know you." Well, this is what we're trying—I said, "Well, they're not doing that. What they are doing is coming into the neighborhoods, intimidating and threatening and, you know, just really being very—how would I say—unprofessional because they are very disrespectful." They just come in, and I've been there when they've done it, and I'm not just talking here. I've seen what they do. They did it to my son on several occasions, just pull up and jump out and just start asking him all kinds of questions and trying to do all kinds of things. Thank God I know my rights, and I know his rights. I stopped them from doing a lot of stuff with my son, and I've done it with other people. So, community policing is being thrown around quite heavily in law enforcement, but, like I said, they really need to change that. Body cameras, like I said, they're good for them.

Police oversight—you have police oversight, but they don't have any power. We can't continue to ask for things and then they just throw us kibbles and bits and we're supposed to be happy with them. There needs to be a change, their mentality. It says on their cars to protect and serve. Um, who are they protecting and serving? Each other? Because it definitely isn't us, so this is a hard thing to do. It's very difficult to try to change decades of the way they think because the way I feel—now this is only me, personally—is that they are able to feel that they are above the law because they continue to get away with things that we as citizens do not. The laws should be applied to them as well as us. They can kill a person and get away with it because they fear for their life, but if we kill them because we fear for our life, we either get shot or get put in prison for the rest of our lives. So, are you saying that their lives are more important, more valuable, than the citizens you're protecting? I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't think so. And, the things that continue to happen, happen because laws are not changing. They're not changing, and as long as they continue to get away with taking people's lives, they're gonna do it. Because we do have people in law enforcement who, some of them, probably have PTSD from being in the military. Some of them have, I don't know, Napoleon Complex. They were bullied, so now they can bully, you know.

They're not required to take psychological evaluations periodically. They should. They're not required, only in an incident. They should be required to take that periodically. They do have a dangerous job. I've never taken that away from

them. They do have a dangerous job, but it isn't *the* most dangerous job. It's ranked, like, nine or ten on dangerous jobs. The most dangerous job is a fisherman. Construction workers are on top of them. I'm serious. This is, like, so you do have a dangerous job, granted, and maybe you do see things that people don't normally see, but this is a job you chose. This is what you chose to do, so if you feel that you're always in fear of your life, maybe you should quit that job and go be a waiter or go sit behind a computer where you don't have to deal with people. So, it's all of that involved. Just think about it. It's, like, okay, you have a dangerous job, but they have the highest rate of alcoholism, domestic abuse to their wives, suicide, divorce, so this is what I'm telling the police. I'm, like, Okay, you've got all this going on and then they kill somebody and you don't think that they should have periodic psychological evaluations? I said, "That doesn't make sense. They need it. They need it because of the job they have and what they see. They need it because they are more susceptible to these things. So, you've got a person out there whose wife just left him. He's an alcoholic. You know, he sees somebody out there, and he gets pissed off and shoots them. And, you justify it because he feared for his life?" No, they need to really take a step back and realize that they are not above the law. They're not. And, we as people need to start standing up and letting them know that they're not above the law by helping to—I think the best way to make change is be more active when we're trying to change laws. Be more committed. Know your rights. Make yourself knowledgeable because there's nothing more powerful in this world—not even money—than knowledge. People just tend to sit in their little bubbles because they're comfortable. They don't want to know what's going on out there, and then, when it affects them personally, then they're yelling and screaming. So, I just think people should be more knowledgeable. There should be more—I mean, there is more awareness now, of course, but don't ever think that it can't happen to you because it can. It can happen to anybody at any time, and it's not a matter of just being a young man with tattoos and a bald head anymore because they're shooting children. They're shooting women, handicapped, elderly people. And, we're just gonna let it happen? No, it's got to stop. It's got to stop. They are here for a job: to protect and serve. They are not here to just take lives or beat people up because they think they can.

[01:43:43]

AC: So, when you first started your activism, what was your goal?

TS: To get accountability for my son's death.

AC: And, how has that changed now? What is your goal now?

TS: Well, because I know I'm not gonna get that accountability for my son, my goal is to help make it happen. That's my goal. I would like to see accountability, so if it means helping to lobby for new laws or to make people aware, whatever it takes, I want that as my goal, that they will be held accountable for their actions the same way we are. That's my goal.

AC: What was the climate like when you first started your activism?

TS: Emotional. Yeah, it was very emotional because, you know, myself and my family, of course, we were emotional, and then as more families, started joining us and stuff, the emotions would always be brought up again because they just lost somebody. So then, you feel that emotion again. I think especially at the beginning a lot of people were afraid, so people were kind of fearful.

AC: What were they afraid of?

TS: Being harassed or shot, being targeted because we were standing up for something, so yeah, a lot of people were afraid. They were afraid to stand up because they were afraid that they would be the next victim. I know when people joined me, they're the ones that had been killed a couple of years, three years before my son, and they said they didn't have the nerve to go out there because they were afraid that they would be retaliated or that they would be killed, also. So, a lot of families didn't go out there until I did. But, the climate was always kind of mixed, you know, real mixed because sometimes you had anger. Sometimes we would just be—and it sounds funny—but we would just be happy because we were all together doing something together. So, it was always different, and then, like I said, when I first started, most of it was my family, and so it was emotional because my family was very emotional about this, very angry. Sometimes it was hard to control that anger, but I always made them, *I made them* respect while they were with me. They had to do that, or they couldn't come around. (laughs) I reminded them that Caesar was a man of respect, and if they wanted to represent him, they had to be people of respect.

AC: So, how did your family respond to your activism?

TS: They totally supported it. Like I said, I've always been a fighter, and I've always fought for my family for whatever issue. I've always stood up. Because none of them are like that, none of my family is really like that, so it's kind of, like, yeah, they really encourage me and support me.

AC: When you first started your activism, where did you start? You said you started on Sunday, but—

TS: It was at the police department, Anaheim PD, and that's where I was at every weekend for two-and-a-half years: sick, hot, cold, rainy, roasting, sweating. (laughs) I wanted them to know that I wasn't going away. I was here to stay, and whether I'm out there protesting or not, they still know that I'm here. I'm not going anywhere, and I'm not. I'm not gonna go. I don't care that we've settled our lawsuits. I'm not gonna go anywhere. I'm still gonna be here. I'm still gonna still be an advocate. I'm still gonna continue to fight for a change. Something has to change. It's gotten worse. It's gotten worse since my son was killed. Especially, these last couples of years have gotten really bad. I mean, every day there's a killing by law enforcement. Every single day. There's been, I think, seven hundred people killed by law

enforcement this year alone. I have to get the correct number, but it's about seven hundred or more. We only have 365 days in a year, so that's averaging two people a day?

AC: So, after you started at the Anaheim Police Department, how did you get in contact with these mothers? Like, how did you start organizing?

[01:49:52]

TS: I reached out to a couple of them, but a lot of them heard that I was out there. Joey Acevedo's mom, I've known her since she was a little girl. She was good friends with my son and my younger sister, so I've known her since she was little. What we also have in common is one of the police officers who killed my son killed hers. So, two of the police officers who killed my son killed two people, two more people afterwards, and they're still on duty.

AC: How does that make you feel?

TS: Hm, pissed off. (laughs) That's the only way I can say it. I mean, that's pretty bad, but that's how I feel. I'm pissed off. I mean, how are you still gonna be on duty, you know? You're not in jail but you're still on duty and you've killed other people. And, nobody sees that there's anything wrong with that picture. So, I mean, my feeling is some of these police officers are serial killers, just because if you kill more than one person—I don't understand. How do you go to sleep killing a person, period? But, killing two or three people, I don't know. Do you have a conscience? Do you sleep at night? You seem to love your job because you're still doing the same thing you were doing. I don't know. It's just crazy.

Yeah, a lot of mothers heard about me, or I reached out to them. Usually, what I did is if there was a killing, I would try to go to wherever that person was killed and reach out to the family and just let them know who I was and what had happened to my son and that I was protesting, but they didn't have to come out there until they were ready. I've always encouraged the families to first try to process that their son has been killed and try to bury them. That's the most important thing. That's the first thing. That's the first thing I'll tell any family. You handle your business first, take care of it because right now you're still trying to process that they're gone, so you do what you've got to do. Bury them. If you want to, this is what I do. You can join me. And, that's how I work it. I would never take away from them. For me, it was different. I mean, some people are different. Like I said, he died on Friday, and Sunday I'm already protesting. That protesting came from actually his son. He said, "Come on, Grandma, let's go protest." I said, "Let's go." We called a lot of family members, and everybody was, like, let's do this! I didn't think that they would be so willing because some people don't want to make waves, but, like I said, they really loved Caesar, so everybody was out there. I got a lot of family members out the first month.

Yeah, because when it first happens, everybody is out there, and then it just dwindled off. Finally, my son would go with me, or my daughter would go with me.

A couple of times they didn't. I went out there by myself, and one of the activists saw me on Facebook by myself. She was an activist for Kelly Thomas, and so she came the following Sunday. And, she said, "I saw you were out here by yourself, and it broke my heart. You will never be out here alone again." And, I was never alone. She was always there. And, if I couldn't make it because I was out of town or, you know, something—because I did miss a couple of weekends—she was there for me. That's why I'm saying I was there. Even if I was personally not there, there was somebody there. She stood by my side all the way and never, never, ever, ever walked away or failed, and, if it was just me and her, it would be just me and her. But, she made that promise and kept to her word, and I have mega respect for her for that because not everybody is that committed.

For me, it was commitment because he's my son. A lot of mothers went out there, maybe just a couple of times, and then they couldn't do it. It's hard. Like I said, it's hard, and one of the mothers said, "You know, I get tired of them talking about my son so bad, you know." They just don't want anything to do with it, so they just kind of just, I don't want to say crawl into a hole, but pretty much just stay away from everything. So, the ones that don't have families that are out there to support them, I've always made sure that I always mention them as much as I possibly can when I'm at other places because their sons are still important. I know they're important to them; they're just not able to. So, that's just how I feel. When we're doing certain things in our activism, they'll say, Mention the person. Well, I start mentioning my son and all these other people and not even just from here from Anaheim. Then I start mentioning other people who don't show up from L.A. County or from up north or something. Sometimes I miss somebody, and it just breaks my heart. I don't mean to ever miss anybody, but sometimes it's really hard to remember people. But, if I haven't been out there, there's been people who have always mentioned my son for me because it's just karma. You know, you do things. You don't do it because you want anything in return, but in sharing theirs, if I'm not there, they'll share. You know, they share for me, also. We have that one thing in common. We lost a son. We don't do things the same, I'll tell you that. We don't. Everybody does something different, but we do have one thing in common, and that is losing our child. And, if somebody does this this way, and I do it this way, and another one person does it that way—but I tell the mothers, "Whatever your passion is to do, do it. This is how I choose to do things," because not everybody agrees with some of the ways I do things because I guess I'm not mad enough for some people because I'm not yelling and screaming. I am mad. I just don't yell and scream.

But, I am always constantly trying to help make a change or see what else I can do. I tried to start a nonprofit, like, five years ago. It still hasn't come to fruition, but I keep putting it on the back burner, too. It's called LEAN which is Law Enforcement Accountability. Right? I've been trying to get that thing off the ground for five years, (laughs) but I always get caught up with something else. It's, like, another issue comes up, or something else comes up that has to do with this, and I get involved. And, it's kind of hard, but I said, "I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna do it, and it'll happen just like everything else that's happened. It's all gonna happen. It's gonna happen in God's time, not mine." So, like I said, I know it will happen. I think I have more of a chance because, when I first started it, everybody was, like, oh, my

god, we can't go against the police, you know. But now, everybody is against them. (laughs) Not everybody, but more people are apt to say something or stand up or stand with me. So, I think it might be a little bit easier because I know back in the day when I brought it up, people were, like, You need to change that. I'm, like, "Why?" I'm not asking—I'm not saying anything. I just want accountability, and even in my mission statement it was just to build a bridge between community and police. That was my whole mission was to make things so that it's not like this. To help the youth, to do what people are doing right now. That was my whole mission. That was my whole vision of LEAN was to inform other families, to network, you know, like, what are you doing over here? That's how you do things. You network with other people, and how are you succeeding in what you're doing? Or, you know, maybe I shouldn't be doing something. It just was just the whole network to have accountability, and, like I said before, it was just like, ahhh. Now I think I might have a better chance because I do have people, organizations who will stand by my side now. So, that's where I'm at with that.

AC: So, what does the communication between the law enforcement, city hall, and the community in Anaheim look like right now?

[01:59:19]

TS: (sighs) It's not good. The community feels like, even though they go up there and they talk, and they tell them what they need, they always say, Well, this is what we're gonna give you. There's no trust. There's none at all, and most of them don't even want to have a relationship with them. And, they definitely don't like the council people at all. In Anaheim, it's all about Disneyland. We protested one time at Disneyland, and Disneyland called the council and said, "Get rid of those people." And, we were just on the four corners, like, on Harbor and Katella. We weren't even in front of Disneyland, but they freaked out when we went out there because nobody had ever done that. So, it was me and my daughter and my grandson and two other friends. It was only five of us, and we just walked the four corners. People were stopping, and that panicked them. So, they were, like, get rid of them. And, people were, like, You need to stop that, and I'm, like, "Why? I don't want to." So, we did it a few more times. We always expected a bigger turnout, but we never got more than, I don't know, maybe ten people. That might have been the most. People would, Oh, yeah, we're gonna do this. We're gonna go to Disneyland! And then, nobody showed up. So, we kind of just stayed, and we went back to—Anaheim PD was our base, and we did go there. We protested with other families in other different places. We pretty much have supported each other.

But, you know, the council leans towards whatever Disney wants. And, they fight the mayor every step of the way. Every step of the way. I don't care what that man tries to do good, they never support him. They never do. And, the police, you know, they talk about they're promoting their programs and Cops 4 Kids, Coffee with a Cop, you know, everything is about doing something with the police, the Chief's Advisory Board, the Chief's Community Policing. So, everything has to do with the police, and they're promoting that right now, how great a job they're doing. And, as

they're promoting this, they're still in the neighborhoods harassing, intimidating, arresting. So, you could PR this, but what are you actually doing down here? Like I said, there's no trust because they've tried to work with them, and then they turn around and do something. And then, the people are like, Yeah, we're not doing this. Then they started doing gang injunctions. They started one here.

So, I mean, how do you expect to ever build on this bridge that has this huge gap when you don't want to really help the community? You say you do in words, but you don't show it in your actions. So, yeah, they don't trust them. There is no trust. There's not even any dialogue anymore. Where there could have been dialogue, they don't even want dialogue anymore in Anaheim. So, it's—will it change? I don't know. You know, they keep [saying],Well, you have a Latino chief of police. (laughs) And? See that doesn't make any difference to me. I went to council, and they said, What would you want in a chief of police? I said, "I want him to be tall, dark, and handsome." They just looked at me and they laughed and they said, Okay. (laughs) Yeah, I can be sarcastic sometimes in a good way. I just said, "You know, we wanted a chief who cared about the people. I don't care what race you are. I don't care what color you are. I just don't care. The only thing I care about is that you really care about the people, that you care about your community." It's not impossible, but it's extremely hard to find people in law enforcement who really care about their community, like the higher ups, the chiefs or council. Like I said, Anaheim has all these people who always side with Disney, and they all live in Anaheim Hills. And then, you have Santa Ana. They're all Hispanic. What do they do for their community? So, it doesn't matter which race you are. You are elected by the people. You should be doing what the people are asking you. Instead, you are telling them this is what you're gonna get and just be happy with it. I think if people were brave enough, they could just recall them all, just constantly recall them. Every time they get somebody they don't like recall them. Then you get people, like, Ah! Ah! It's just getting people to really do things, you know, just really commit and say, okay, enough is enough.

And, you're not gonna do it by burning things down or by yelling. You're gonna do it by changing their system because we need a systemic change because it's not even—I can't even say it's broken. It's corrupt. We've got our district attorney who is being reviewed by the attorney general and the Feds because there's so much corruption going on, the sheriff's department. I mean, they are more corrupt than criminals. Really. When you see the things that they do compared to what we do, they are much more corrupt. Because they're a gang, too. They're a gang. And, when people say, Well, why don't the good cops talk about the bad cops? I said, "Have you ever been in a gang? Because when you're in a gang and you snitch on somebody, guess what happens? So, you think that this gang is any different? It's not. So, if a good cop snitches on a bad one, he's gonna pay for it somehow. Realize that, so stop knocking the good ones, because there are some. They're not gonna tell on the ones that are doing wrong because they will have repercussions." So, it's a hard thing. I'm sure it's hard for them, the ones that are good that are in there. It's got to be hard for them because they have to be with them all the time. Even police are starting to realize—you know, there's a police officer in New York who quit because—his grandfather, his uncles, his dad, they were all police officers, all of

them, his whole family. So, of course, he wanted to be a cop, right? He becomes a cop, and he sees all the corruptness and rats on them and quits. He said, "I don't want to be a cop like this. I was here to protect and serve people, not to do all this other stuff." So, he quit, and he said it broke his heart because that was his dream his whole entire life since he was a child because everybody in his family—they had the history, you know, and he had to quit a job that he loved because he couldn't stand the corruptness. I'm not saying there's a lot of them like that, but, yeah, it's starting to come out and little by little. So, with police officers talking about their corruption within, people being more aware of it, I don't know—I mean, I really hope there's gonna be a change. There's got to be, you know. Something is gonna happen.

AC: How has being a Latina affected how you've been treated by the police and city council?

[02:09:05]

TS: Hm, for me personally, it hasn't affected me at all because I don't go in there—like I said, I repeat myself, I'm not just a Latina. I'm a mother. I'm a human being, and so are they. And, I am at a point in my life where I don't allow anybody to think that they're above me but neither is anyone below me. So, yeah, it doesn't really affect me. I don't allow things like that to affect me because of my race. I would be really highly upset if somebody did it. Yeah, I wouldn't like it at all, but me personally, I haven't had any problems with it at all. I know some people have, but I haven't. I know sometimes they look at me like they might think they're better than me, but they're not. Like I said, we're all human. I mean, we all sit on the pot the same way. I'm sorry! Even when I worked, I never allowed a manager to yell at me in front of people or make me feel less than them because I would go in and talk to managers and tell them just what I felt. Like I said, I've always been a person who I say what I want, and sometimes, I don't have so much finesse. Most of the time I do, but I was always able to walk in the manager's officer and tell him things. And, people would tell me, You can't just go tell him that. I'm, like, "Why not? Why not? Don't they sit on the pot the same way as I do?" I know, but they're the manager. I said, "And? And, what are you trying to tell me? Because they have a title that they're better than me or more important? No, no, no, I'm not having that." And, I guess that's why I'm not treated—I don't allow people to treat me that way. We have to be confident in who we are. That's what it is. You have to be confident in just the person that you are, regardless, and not a lot of people are. They're intimidated.

AC: So, how has it been gathering with other mothers who have lost their son in police shootings?

TS: You know, it's always hard because you're not only feeling your pain, you're feeling theirs. So, it's not sympathy that you have. You have empathy because you've been through it and know what it feels like. You still feel it, so it's a very, I always say this word, but it's emotional. I mean, like I said, when I talk to mothers and they're crying, I can't help it. I'm gonna cry with them, you know? If they're having a bad

day, I'm gonna have a bad day with them. I always try to throw a little humor so that they don't stay too bad, but I know mothers who have been very close to the verge of suicide. That's when I get a little bit more tough. I mean, when they're grieving I'm just, like, I don't care what they say or do because we all have a different grieving process, and we grieve at different—there is no set [process]. They say there's seven steps, and there is, but they don't come one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. They come mixed or they come together but those are all part of the grieving process. It can come one at a time. It can come three at a time. It can come all of them at one time, and it's okay. So, I think with the mothers, that's pretty much what I try to do with them, allow them to feel the way they want regardless of whether I like it or not because that's their grief, not mine. So, it can get pretty draining because you're not only feeling your pain, you're feeling theirs. That's how I feel about that one.

AC: So, what motivates you to keep demonstrating?

TS: My love for my son.

AC: What unique contributions do women make as activists against police brutality?

TS: We're mothers. It's hard to argue with a mother because we all have one.

AC: Why do you think mothers are more involved than fathers in these cases?

TS: (sighs) In every walk of life, and even with animals, the mothers have always been the protectors of their children. I mean, if you go to attack a cub, the lioness is gonna jump on you faster than the lion. I think it's just natural for a mother to always protect her children, alive or dead. That's what mothers do: they protect their children. They fight for their children, because when they hurt, you hurt. So, yeah, that's just the mother. And, I'm not taking away from fathers because they love their sons or their daughters or whatever just as much. They do. Trust me, I know they do. But, their way of activism would probably be punching somebody out because that's what men do. They're physical. Women are emotional, so it's easier to reach somebody on the emotional level than on the physical. Because if a man meets up with a cop and he socks him, you know, that's pretty much what will happen, where a mother will say, "Shame on you." There's a big difference. So, I guess it's not that the father loves his son any less than the mother; it's just that we're different.

AC: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement in the Assembly Bill 953?

TS: Yes! I got introduced to that with, um—I volunteer with OCCCO [Orange County Congregation Community Organization], which is, oh my gosh, why did my mind just go? Anyway, it's an organization called OCCCO, O-C-C-C-O. It's with another one, them and PICO [People Improving Communities through Organizing]. Anyway, I started volunteering with one of the leaders that works there, and they were going up to Sacramento to introduce the bill. I had gone with her to a couple of other things. So, she asked me if I wanted to go, and I said, "Yes." I mean, god, to be a part of

introducing a bill was like a *huge thing*. This is what I've been kind of been striving for is changing laws and making things happen. So, the first time I went is when they were introducing it. It was amazing because there was people up from all over California, all different places. Everybody had a story, and everybody had a reason for being there. And, everybody had been involved for years, and they want to make the same changes.

So, I was there when it got introduced, and then we came back. We pushed. We actually went to visit our local legislators to get it through appropriations, and it passed the introduction appropriation. And then, we all went to Sacramento to get it passed through the Senate. Now we were up there again so that Jerry Brown, Governor Jerry Brown, will sign it. It's been quite an experience. I'd never been involved in something like to get a law passed, so it's very exciting to be a part of that. I love it. The people's energy is so positive and so gung-ho about it. It's hard to find that in other things, and especially in this bill, like I said, the bill, it's not a big deal. I mean, all it is, is we're asking them to give data on everybody they stop or harass or shoot. Not a big deal. And, they are making a big deal out of it, like, yeah, it takes too much time to do that, and who is gonna pay for it? That means we have to hire more police. No, you don't. It takes a couple of seconds. I mean, it takes you longer to stop at the donut shop, okay, than it does to put in this information, and it's not gonna cost you anything because they already have funds for it. So, now what? What are you hiding that you don't want to give up this data? That's how I feel. You've got to be hiding something. Why don't you want us to have this data because as of now we don't have it? People have their own personal data that they've researched, but we don't have actual data. So, we can say there's racial profiling, but until we have that data stating that there is racial profiling, they're gonna continue to say that it's not. So, it's just a way of helping to prove that they are racially profiling people because they keep saying they're not, but there's quite a few people of color being killed here. So what? So, that's why I think it's a very important bill. It's not a big deal. It's not even that big a deal. It's like they're making this huge deal about it, and like I said, once again, it's why don't you want it? What are you hiding? Why don't you want us to have this data? Because you know it's true, and it's finally gonna be put down? So, that's why I think it's an important bill.

[02:21:19]

AC: Why do you think these institutions are backing up the police?

TS: Because the police association supports a lot of people. They have a lot of pull financially. They support the governor. They contribute to his campaign. Ultimately, everything is about money. Everything in this world is about money, and as long as people are supporting them financially, you think they're gonna go against them? We already know that the police association does support, in his campaign, Governor Brown, and quite a few—I mean, they've got their hands in everything. Kamala Harris, attorney general, she would definitely not go against them because she works very closely with police and the police association. A lot of the legislators, that's why they won't do it, and that's why the police association continues to help

them financially. They're, like, Okay, well, we helped you financially to get your campaign. You'd better back us up. So, that's why I'm saying, "Voting, people. Voting!" It's important, and people don't realize it. Like, especially now, people who come out who have been formerly incarcerated, a lot of them are gonna be eligible to vote, and I think they should because they haven't been able to. And now, they will, so they need to get out there and vote. You know, we keep fighting for Latinos, but Latinos don't fight for themselves. They need to get out there and vote. If you can vote, get out there. And, if you don't like who is on there, put somebody else. We'll vote them in by not even having a campaign. It can happen. So, we'll go onto the next question because I'll just keep on making fun of them.

AC: How do you stay so involved?

TS: I think I stay so involved because I've met a lot of people. I've been to a lot of events. A lot. There's a lot of organizations, and I get asked quite often to be involved personally.

AC: How do you feel when you attend vigils?

TS: My heart just aches. My heart aches really bad. Like, I feel like I can't breathe. And, that's all I can say about that because that's not—I mean, that's what I feel. I feel like it's, whew, takes your breath away, Oh, it takes my breath away.

AC: Do you consider yourself a core organizer for your community?

TS: I don't know if I'm a core organizer. I'm a core team player.

AC: And, what does that mean for you?

TS: I try to help out as many organizations or causes that I possibly can. I get invited to a lot of events, a lot of meetings, and so I try very hard to attend them and get involved because a lot of these organizations might be different, but all of them are entwined. Everything is entwined, whether it be police oversight, community policing, the school to prison pipeline, the immigration, the Prop 47, the AB 109, AB 953, all of it entwines, all of it. Because we want better police, but we still have police that are arresting people not only for crimes but then they get turned over to ICE. They're deported. So, you know, there's a lot of immigration. I think people who get out of prison should have a second chance. A lot of these guys don't want to go back, but they can't find a job. They can't find a place to live. I think they need help. Starting to put kids on a gang database in junior high that affects them the rest of their lives—you know, it's hard for them for school and for everything else, even to find a job. I mean, they're already in a database, so you're putting them from school to prison. All of it entwines. All of it. These bills that need to be changed, bills that need to be introduced, the bills that will change a system, all of this entwines, and all of this is to make a change. And, the reason the police associations fight this so hard, so much,

and DAs and stuff like that is if the positive change comes about, they start losing jobs. And, they're afraid to lose their job, so that's why they fight it.

AC: What were some of the obstacles that you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

TS: I think the obstacles I faced was actually from within the activism. People have different ideas. They want to do different things. They have different opinions. So, that's a huge obstacle because we should all be entitled to having our own opinions and doing our own thing without putting another person down for doing it. And, like I said, another big obstacle is not uniting. You know, there's not really a lot of unity. Somebody gets something started, they're going somewhere with it, and they don't want to share it. It happens a lot with not only activism but even with organizations. So, I think that's a huge obstacle that we're not uniting, and we're dividing instead of uniting. It doesn't help any causes when we divide. It really doesn't. It just makes our opposition stronger because they still stand together, and here we are fighting for one cause, and then, all of a sudden, we fall out. So, if we can't get along together, how are we gonna stand together to fight this opposition? So, that's a huge obstacle.

AC: And, what are some of the things that call up this disunity in the activism?

TS: Well, like I said, it's the difference of opinion, the different ways of doing things. Some people want do it this way. Some people want to do it this way. And, I think people should just respect what the other person is doing and not knock it. Or, if you don't want to be a part of it, then don't. But, don't knock it, you know? If you can support it in any way, support it. And, if you don't feel like it, then don't, but don't make it where it's separating each other because you're doing different things.

[02:30:38]

AC: Was there ever a time you were discouraged or wanted to stop doing what you were doing?

TS: Um-hm, several times.

AC: And, what did that feel like, or what made you stop or think about stopping?

TS: I think it was all the dissention within the activists. Like, there was so much (sighs) I want to say—and it's kind of a difficult way to put it, but, like I said before, we all do different things. And, I just feel like I guess I wanted to stop, and I didn't want to be a part of anything when people just started attacking each other. We were here for one cause, and nobody is more important than the other one. We all are important in the cause, and when people realize that everybody is important, not just one or two, and work together, regardless of whether you agree or don't, I think we could have been very powerful. We *could be*, but once again it's the different personalities, different situations. I know for me it's been difficult because—especially that I'm

more easy going and more forgiving. A lot of people don't like that. They think I'm crazy because I'm not yelling or screaming or because I forgive the police who killed my son. That was a hard thing to do, but it released me from that bitterness, because bitterness and anger will consume you. And, it stopped me—I couldn't focus. I couldn't because I was so angry all of the time because I was just—I just—I couldn't focus. I couldn't. I just felt like every time I thought I could do something good, something would happen, and I'd be, like, oh! And then, I'd get all mad, and I can't deal with negativity. I'm not trying to make a negative change. I'm working for a positive change. That's about as simple as I can put it. Does that make sense?

AC: Yeah. How did you manage family life, your job, and your activism all at the same time?

TS: Well, fortunately, I'm retired, but I still have a job. I take care of my great-granddaughter. Because I do take care of my great-granddaughter and I am committed to her, I usually work around her schedule. It's not real difficult with my family because my family is very supportive of anything I do. So, even now, like I said, I do take care of the baby—I keep calling her baby. My great-granddaughter, her grandma, my daughter, or her other grandma are always willing to take care of her if I can't, because her mom works and goes to school. We all work together so that I can do what I need to do, which is good. So, that's what really helps me out is everybody pulls together. If I tell them, "I need to be at this event," or "I need to be here," everybody works so that it can happen for me. My family is very supportive of it. They're not out there. They don't do the things I do, but they're very supportive of what I do. And, it's important to me, so, yeah, that's it.

AC: How would you describe your leadership style?

TS: I think an important part of being a leader is being committed, and I'm very committed to whatever I do. Caring is another. You have to care, you have to have a passion, and you have to have knowledge of what you're doing. And, you have to have a good relationship with the people that you're working with, especially in the communities. You have to have a good rapport with them because if you don't, they ain't gonna work with you. So, it's real important. I think that would probably be about it. It's just that relationship.

AC: How did you learn to be an activist or learn about all of these qualities?

TS: I don't know. I've kind of been like that all my life. (laughs) Yeah, I just kind of have been that way all my life, and I've always had compassion for people. If I commit myself to something, I commit to it. I mean, I've committed to some things that shouldn't have been committed to, but I committed myself to them. And, like I said, I really care. I really care about people. I really do, and I've always been a more positive than negative person. So, I don't know. I've just always been this way. I can't remember being any other way.

AC: What has been your greatest challenge as an activist?

TS: My greatest challenge? I would say moving out of my comfort zone because I was always here, like, locally. My activism was just locally here and Anaheim, and now I'm spreading my wings. I was kind of a little nervous at the beginning, and now I love it. I love it. I just love it, and I think that would have been my biggest challenge was trying to get out of my comfort zone.

AC: So, what would be your greatest accomplishment?

TS: Getting out of my comfort zone.

AC: Did you encounter any forms of prejudice or ignorance in your activism?

TS: Yes.

AC: And, what did that look like?

TS: Ugly, real ugly.

AC: What would people do?

TS: Okay, I'll give you an example. Not last year, the year before, I had a vigil for my son. I always have a vigil on his angelversary, right, and normally, I'll either do it at Walmart or APD. And so, that year I did it at APD because the year prior to that I did it at Walmart, and I fell apart so bad. Literally, it was like I felt the way I did the day he died. I fell apart, so I kind of didn't want to go back there. We went to APD, and we had a vigil. He died December eleventh, and then the next day is the day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Well, a blogger did an article, and he put a bunny, a teddy bear, like, all ripped up and stuff, like he was having a vigil for this dead bunny, a teddy bear and then a candle of the Virgin of Guadalupe. So, he was kind of making fun of—and then he made comments, like, *Yeah, these people do these vigils*. You know? I can't remember the whole thing. It was just really ugly and nasty. He was actually making fun of us having these vigils, and it made it worse because then he's making fun of our Lady of Guadalupe on her day. It became a very ugly situation. Like, it became really bad. He ended up losing two contracts because he was a consultant. Each one paid him $50,000 a year, so he lost both of those. They made him apologize. He tried to say that it was just a joke, and that he found it and blah-blah-blah-blah, but, no, he was being very racist. He actually worked for the Chamber of Commerce. Yeah, he got quite a bit of backlash. He lost a lot of supporters because it was very, very, very disgraceful, what he did. And then, the comments that are made whenever they do an article, *Yeah, well, he deserved it. He was nothing but a thug. You know, he was nothing but a—you know, these Mexicans, they're just*—you see all these racist remarks on comments after an article. So, the one with the teddy bear had to be the worst. I mean, people make comments. They make really bad comments, but that had to probably be the worst because he was

making fun. And, although he said he wasn't, he was. So, like I said, he did have to apologize publicly, lost $100,000 in contracts, and I think he lost his job at the Chamber of Commerce. Yeah.

[02:41:48]

AC: How does it make you feel when you read these comments about your son being a thug or being gang affiliated?

TS: It doesn't bother me anymore because their comments are not who he is or who he was. It's only their preconceived idea or whatever they want to think about him. It's their notion. It's not who he is. I don't care what they say. I know who my son was.

AC: What is your solution to the problem of police brutality?

TS: A complete overhaul of the police department.

AC: What would that look like?

TS: Well, I mean, they have to lose that mentality that they're above the law, that they're untouchable. They work for us. They should be drug tested. They should have psych evaluations. If they have done something that requires them being fired, that they should be fired. (laughs) I think if they had to pay out of their own pockets or out of the police association money, instead of the general fund, for lawsuits, that might change them a little bit because touch them in their pockets, it hurts more. So, I think if it came out of their pockets, or like I said, this police association, they might think twice about taking somebody's life or beating him up. I think, unless it's a real situation where they are defending themselves—although they keep saying they are. I mean, it would have to be an actual, somebody's got a gun to their head, okay, now you're defending yourself. Okay, I believe that. But, if somebody is twenty feet away from you, coming at you, and she's a female with a knife that weighs a hundred pounds, and you fear for your life? Yeah, that doesn't make sense to me. If somebody is running away from you and you fear for your life, that doesn't make sense to me. So, like I said, if they actually have a real, real *I feared for my life* type of thing—because when you fear for your life, human nature, you want to defend yourself. But, I just think that they a complete overhaul. If somebody's got PTSD, they shouldn't be on duty. They shouldn't be out on the streets at all. A lot of them do have that, but they should not be out on the streets. Put them on disability. I don't know what you want to do with them, but do something with them. Don't let them be out there with people. Yeah, they should be held more accountable for their actions.

I think they need to go back to real community policing, like, really getting to know their neighborhood, really getting to know the people who are there, really getting out of their cars. Not running after people and harassing them, but get out of their cars and tell them who they are and get to know the people who live there. Get to know them. Really get to know them so that when you drive by, they can say, Hi, Officer Bill, and you can say, Hey, Juan, how are you doing today? Did you pass that

test you were telling me about? That's important to have that communication, not, like, you know, lock their hands up and get in and blah-blah-blah. They already know they're gonna be handcuffed and sat on the curb if a cop stops them. That's horrible. No kid should think that that's what's gonna happen to them. They should be able to talk to them. Okay, they're having problems? Find out what's going on. Find out what's really going on. Why? You know, why did you steal something from the store? Maybe because you haven't eaten because you don't have any food? I don't know. You'd never look at that. It's just, Oh, you're just a—you know? That's what I'm saying. There needs to be a complete overhaul. We're not gonna just change spark plugs and wires. You need to take that engine apart and put it back together with new parts so that it works and functions well.

AC: Yeah. What do you think it takes to be an effective activist?

TS: You have to have, of course, good communication skills. You do. You have to be able to communicate. When you're an activist and you're fighting for a cause, you need to know that cause. You need to know all about it. You need to do your research, and you need to know about it. You can't just start saying, "Oh?" Because that's what happens to a lot of people. They get into it, and they have no idea. And, I think you have to be a realist. You have to be a realist because we would like a lot of things, but reality is different than what we want. So, I think you would definitely have to do that, be a realist and, like I said, care about it enough to commit yourself to the extent that you can commit yourself, because some people overcommit, too. So, you commit to what you can do, and like I said, I think communication, just having a good communication with people is really important because nobody wants to talk to somebody who is yelling or who doesn't say anything at all. I mean, there are people that don't say nothing, and there's people who say too much, too loud, too soon. You have to know how to finesse that. If you're lacking in one, then you kind of finesse it better. It takes time, and it takes a lot. I mean, you have to be involved and know what you're doing and how to do it because a lot of people don't know that. They get involved, and they're, like, yeah, you know, this happened and blah-blah-blah-blah. And, you're looking at them, like, yeah, those are not the facts. So, you also have to have your facts straight. I think that those are really important.

AC: How have you grown since you've started and up until now?

[02:50:00]

TS: Yeah, I've really grown. I mean, I literally started out crawling, *literally*, and I'm walking at a very fast pace right now. I'm not running yet. I haven't reached running, but I am walking pretty fast. So, yeah, I've gone from crawling to running walking fast.

AC: And, what does that mean to you?

TS: (laughs) When I first started, I didn't know what the heck I was doing or how to do it and how to go about it, what was right and what was wrong. But, by trial and error, I've learned how to become a better activist and what it takes to become a good activist. I've learned from a lot of good people because it's not just me. I'm learning from other people. I'm open to any constructive criticism or positive feedback. I don't really deal well with negative. I mean, you can give me negative. I will definitely take it, but I'm not gonna allow you to put me down. You can tell me what I'm doing wrong so that I can try not to do it again, make every effort not to make that same mistake. Yeah, that's probably what it would be is constructive criticism and just learning from other people, especially people who have more experience than I do. I have really learned so much, especially in this last six months, so I am excited about that.

AC: What's the most impactful thing you've learned or the one that stands out the most to you that you've learned?

TS: What's impacted me the most has watching how bills come into effect. That's a process. It's a process and—(couple heard shouting through open window) They fight all the time. They've already gone in for domestic abuse. Oh, my god, they beat the shit out of each other, they beat the shit out of the daughter, and then the next day they're all lovey-dovey. That's why I don't pay attention.

Like I said, I think it's just that being a part of how a bill is introduced and all the process of it trying to be passed has made a huge impact. It takes a lot of work, takes a lot of commitment, and it takes a lot of people just standing together. It really does. I mean, people put a lot of work into this. Those lobbyists put a lot of work into this stuff, and people up in Sacramento really put a lot of work into what they do. They're very committed, and they are the most beautiful people. They are such beautiful people, the ones—well, anyway, the ones I work with. So, yeah, I think that's had the biggest impact on me is just being a part of a bill and maybe, you know, hopefully (knocks on wood) pass it.

AC: What was your most hopeful experience with activism?

TS: (Man in the background keeps shouting) They drive me crazy. My hopeful experience— you know, I don't know. I don't know how to answer that question really because I've been hopeful about a lot of things, but I don't want to say that they've been experiences. I was hopeful for a lot of things, and I felt very discouraged with a lot of them. So, I don't know that I've really had that great a hopeful experience. I mean, like I said, I've grown. I've experienced different things, which have been amazing. It's very gratifying really. I think I went so many years where it was just like in a lull. I just wanted to stop. I was just tired. I was just so tired. But, for some reason I kept getting pulled into something else and something else and something else, and it just seems like the more that I find out, the more I learn. The more I want to learn, the more I want to find out, the more I want to be involved. I mean, I'm already involved, but I even want to be involved more. If

it was up to me, I'd be doing this 24/7, literally. And, it is tiring, but it's also invigorating.

AC: What's invigorating about it?

TS: I don't know. For a long time, I felt like I was only kind of, like, half alive, and it just seems like it's bringing life back to me. I feel like I'm becoming alive again. I just feel like, especially, when I'm involved in some of these things, it's just an amazing feeling that I feel. I'm also involved in a program called Alternatives to Violence. Have you heard of that? It's a wonderful program, and it was started, I think, by people who were incarcerated. They're a big part of this organization, but it's Alternatives to Violence. And, what it does is it—it's really deep. I went to the training and finally became a facilitator. I thought I had dealt with some of my issues in my life, [but] going to these trainings—have you ever heard of healing circles? It's a lot of healing circles. Now those things really touch you deep where you think it doesn't exist, and then, all of a sudden, it comes out. It kind of makes you change the way you think because you realize you're not the only one going through that certain feeling or experience, and you find a place where you're safe to talk about it. When I went to this training, I'm not kidding you, I really cried. I mean, I just bawled my eyes out. It was really an emotional release. And then, when I'm in Sacramento and we're really lobbying for this bill, it's just like, oh, my god, you just become alive. Even protesting, you know, sometimes, depending how the protest is going. When I am able to go to a council meeting and not just talk but make a statement, that means something. When I share my story and people really listen—I've grown a lot. I guess that's the only word I could use. It just makes me feel like I'm coming alive again because being stuck at home thinking of what I want to do for a while—and I did that. I just felt like I was in this deep abyss, and I couldn't get out. I'm not in that abyss anymore. So, yeah, it is invigorating. I feel like I'm alive.

AC: What other programs have helped you or are you involved in other than the one that you just mentioned?

[02:58:42]

TS: OCCCO and Project Kinship, PICO, there's a meeting that they have every Wednesday, Los Amigos. There was a youth group that just changed their name that I was working with, because the youth are just full of wonderful ideas. Man, they really are. They're our future. They're our future. And sometimes, we get caught up with old things because we're old. I get caught up with old things because I'm older, so it's invigorating to have the youth, like, hey, you know? They have all this energy and stuff, so youth has a real important part in what I do. So, I try to get involved in all those things. I get involved with a lot of things that happen on Anna Drive, a lot of events.

I actually had an event myself in 2012. Did you ever see those? They did an article about that. Anyway, when they had the back-to-back shooting and we had the uprising and all this, I was just so tired of all of the madness and all the ugliness and

just the violence, just everything that was going on. It was just insane. Then I went to council, and I asked them for a day of love. And, they gave it to me! I had to plan it, (laughs) never planned an event in my life. I just wanted to have a picnic, like, everybody get together, and can't we all just get along type of thing. Right? Well, it turned into a huge event, and we had a lot of people volunteer, donate everything. I mean, we had a stage, a *huge* stage, and we had this one organization, Rythmo, they work with the youth and everything. He does music, and he helps people who are underprivileged I would say get into classicals or rap, whatever kind of music. Anyway, he helps them with all that, so he had his youth jazz band and a couple of other youth sing. We had people who do the Irish clog. We had flamingo dancers. We had a church choir. I mean, we just had entertainment the whole day. The people from the Cinco de Mayo, they gave free snow cones to everybody all day long. *Excélsior*—you've heard of *Excélsior*, right? It's the Mexican newspaper. They gave free popcorn. Fresh and Easy donated lots of food—not food! We just gave out hot dogs and waters and stuff, but we fed over two thousand people. All the food was free. Another organization donated 250 sack lunches and stuff for the homeless because I personally went and invited all the homeless in the park to my event because they're never invited. They're always asked to leave, and I wanted them to be a part of it because they are in that park all the time. So, I invited them, so they danced and they ate. And, a lot of them cried and hugged me and thanked me for inviting them because they said they've always been banished from these events.

But, it was everybody coming together. I even had Cops 4 Kids, so I got a lot of flack about that. They were, like, how dare I invite the cops? I didn't invite the cops. They were Cops 4 Kids. We had the fire department there who came and showed the kids how they use the jaws of life. An ambulance came out so the kids could walk through the ambulance, and then UCI sent over there a thing for a free screening. We had counselors, grief counselors, if anybody needed it. So, it turned out really nice. Like I said, it was my first event, and it turned out, like, really good. We had clothing for the homeless. We just did a whole bunch of stuff, and the kids loved it. Oh, volunteers from Disneyland came and helped them to draw Disney characters. One of the guys from the arts had the whole—because we had different booths around, but the guy in the middle had all this different art work. The kids could just paint, color, do whatever because that's how sometimes kids get their emotions out is by painting and drawing. So, it was for them to help them kind of heal a little bit. People were, like, How do you expect us to heal when they just killed two people? And, I'm, like, "I know, but I just want a day of love. I'm tired of all this madness." So, it turned out very well.

Actually, the city helped me out with it. They wanted me to do it every year, but see, my son—we did that. We planned and did that event in six weeks. Yeah! And, my son did almost all the legwork, and he's not here no more. He's in Texas. He said, "I can still do it over the phone, Mom, or through email," but it's a lot of work. He's working full-time, and sometimes he works overtime. He works two jobs sometimes, but I know if I asked him, he would do it. So, I think it might do it again this year, not the same way. I'm thinking about doing it. I mean, anytime I ask them—I want to have this event, I keep telling them, and they're like, Just let us know. We'll work with you, do whatever we need to. So, I might do something for

Christmas, have an event like that. It was called Coming Together but having it maybe a little before Christmas and then just have people donate toys and gift certificates for the kids. So, make it just, like, all one big, huge event. I don't know. I haven't figured it out yet because I've been so busy with this other bill, but I'm strongly considering doing it again. So, I went off the track. Anyway, that event turned out really well.

AC: What role has your faith had in your activism?

TS: A huge role. Huge, I couldn't do anything without God.

AC: How has that kept you from continuing on?

TS: How has it kept me from it or how has it helped me?

AC: Helped you, yes.

TS: I don't know because every time I think I want to stop or do something else, God opens another door and says, "You're not done yet." (laughs) So, yeah, everything I do is His plan, not mine, because, even when I have plans it usually falls through. So, anything that I've had any success with has been because it's been his plan.

AC: Why is social justice so important to you?

TS: Because there's so much social injustice.

AC: Other than the police brutality that you're involved in, what other social justice issues are you considering maybe moving onto or do you think need attention?

TS: Well, you know, the youth, the school to prison pipeline, the—[1]

END OF INTERVIEW

[1] Interview ended unexpectedly because the memory card ran out of space.

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: THERESA SMITH

INTERVIEWER: Analia Cabral

DATE: October 22, 2015

LOCATION: Placentia, California

PROJECT: Women, Politics, and Activism Since Suffrage

AC: So, this is a second part of an interview with Theresa Smith on October twenty-second for the Women, Politics, and Activism Project at the home of Theresa in Placentia, California, and the interview is being conducted by Analia Cabral. So, how has your faith motivated you in your activism?

TS: It's been my motivation. I think without my faith, I wouldn't be able to do any of the things I do. I'm not a real big churchgoer, but I do have a lot of faith in God. And, I do have my relationship. I pray to him every morning. Normally, before I make a decision, I pray on it. So, I think my faith has a lot to do with what I do. I mean, it's having faith in God and knowing that He's gonna do what's best. His will is always better than my own.

AC: Why is social justice important to you?

TS: It's always been important to me since I was young. I think I mentioned this to you before, when I was in junior high when they called me a Beaner? I just always felt like social justice was always important to me, even in some of the work that I did, especially when I worked in criminal justice. They were judged by so many people, and they're just like human beings. So, it is an important part for me because we're all human beings, and when people are labeled by color or their status in the world or their education, when they are, I want to say, profiled or judged by other people, I just have always not been comfortable with that. We're all human beings, and we all have a place here. We all have something to do, and God has a plan for all of us. And, just because people are not smart does not mean that they're not hard workers, or just because they don't have money does not mean that they don't have—people who don't have usually have more than people who have. So, in looking at social justice and how, I want to say, corrupted it is right now, there has to be a change at some point.

AC: And, why do you think it's important for women to be involved?

TS: Because women have always been the ones that have made these movements. It's always been mothers, usually, you know. Not to say—I don't ever take away from a man. Don't get me wrong, but it's the mothers. Mothers are very passionate, and we think. Men normally don't think. They go by actions. They're very physical. Women think things through, and they're very, normally, protective of their family, especially their children. I think that's why women are so involved in activism. Like I said, they don't go by physical contact. They think things out usually.

AC: And, what kind of a voice do women have in activism?

TS: A very big voice. Like I said, especially, I would say, if it pertains to their children. It doesn't even have to be a bad thing, you know. I mean, if their kids are in school and something's not going right, it's the mothers that stand up for their children in school. They stand up for them in healthcare. They stand up for them in the criminal justice system. They stand up for them when the children are in sports. (laughs) They're the biggest cheerleaders. I think it's just women are cut out to be activists. *I* think. That's just how I feel. I watch a lot of TV and the movies, and I don't know about anybody else, but when you watch a movie, it's usually the woman who comes out the strongest, especially in a live or die situation. In *Aliens*, I mean, it was Sigourney Weaver who was the strongest of everybody, and it's like that in a lot of movies. You see that the women are the ones that are—they go through a lot, even the physical part of it, and it's not always a good physical. I mean, they get raped, they get beat, but they stand strong. I think mentally we're just built that way. We're very strong mentally. We can take things a lot better than men. Like I said, men are physical, and so, if they can't beat somebody up, they don't know how to outthink them sometimes. I don't know; that's how it feels. Women are just very passionate about things, more passionate than men. So, I think that's why they are more successful because they have a passion.

AC: And, what are your views on people that say that women are too emotional, or they're weak because they show that emotion?

TS: Showing emotion never makes you weak. Showing emotion, to me, makes you stronger. When you are not afraid of your emotions, you are much stronger than the person who hides them.

AC: And, what would you tell a young woman who wanted to get involved in activism today?

TS: I would tell her get ready for a roller coaster ride because there's so many ups and downs in activism. One minute you're high. I mean, you're at the top of the hill, and then in the next moment you could be at the bottom. But, like I said, because we are passionate, we'll fall for a minute, but I would say a majority of the time you're gonna get up. And, it's a full-time thing. It's not just like a part-time thing. Activism is not part-time. It's not part-time at all. It's every day, all day. You might

go weeks without doing anything, and then, all of a sudden, every day for 24/7, you're doing something. So, you have to be willing and able to be committed to whatever you are passionate about and give it your all. Give it your all, always.

AC: Do you consider yourself a feminist?

TS: No.

AC: What is feminism to you?

TS: Well, to me, feminists feel like I can do whatever a man can do, and maybe that's true, but I don't think I'm a feminist because I still like men to do masculine things. That's what balances our world out, you know? You have to be feminine at some point, but, in activism, you can be feminine. You can be a feminist. I mean, we had the feminist act of taking off your bra, you know? I don't know what that proved, but I mean, they took off their bra. And, I mean, I don't know what really—what that meant, you know. Most women take their bra off at night, so I guess you're a feminist every night. But, yeah, I don't consider myself a feminist. I mean, I am fighting for justice for a lot of issues, unfair issues to human beings.

AC: What aspect of your activism are you most proud of?

[00:09:00]

TS: Being a part of making changes. For a long time, I felt like I wasn't going anywhere, and nothing was happening. I wasn't doing anything. And, being a part of introducing a bill and getting it passed was very rewarding because—I mean, it wasn't because of me, but I was a part of something. And, I was a part of a bill that is now a law, so I'm very proud of that. I think I'm proud of being able to, I don't know, especially, in regards to the police brutality, be a part of a lot of things that have started to change: having dialogues with law enforcement, people in government, stating my opinion, talking about my personal story, how I would like to see a change. So, to be a part of that feels good. It feels really, really good to be a part of that. I always wanted to, and I didn't think I'd ever be able to do this. But, like I said earlier, I mean, the passion that has made me feel very good about a lot of things that have been happening—I mean, you know, maybe some of the things that I wanted didn't come out exactly the way I wanted them, but they happened. And, we're not always gonna get what we want in life, but we have to keep pushing forward. We have to keep trying to make it better. The police oversight in Anaheim is a perfect example. We have an oversight, which isn't really good, doesn't have any teeth. I mean, it's just a board of people, but we've continued to push and push and push. It's now starting to—at least it's got a little jumpstart where we're seeing them at least having an interest in it now. I've been told it's not set in stone. It can be changed. It is a pilot program. So, we have to continue. We have to continue. Those are the things that you have to continue to work with to make sure that they work right, to make sure that it is something that is really gonna help to make a change in the things that we'd like to see change. And then, it's different for

everybody. There's a lot of different issues in our society right now. You know, we have a lot of domestic abuse. We have police brutality. We have child abuse. We have the LGBT abuse. I mean, there's a lot of abuse—drug abuse. There's a lot of abuse right now, and so I think, for me, I've had personal experiences with almost all of them. So, I do have a passion because I have a personal involvement in it. I guess that's why I feel the way I do. (laughs)

AC: What do you think that you've changed in your community?

TS: I think the change would be that—that's a hard one because some people don't feel like there has been changes in the community, which I don't blame them because there really hasn't. What has changed, for me personally, is I have a good rapport with a lot of people in the community now. They know who I am. They know what I do. They trust me. I think that would be the change, having the trust of the community because it's hard for the community to trust anybody. So, that would be the change is that I have that trust with the community.

AC: Okay. Is there anything that you want to add to the interview?

TS: I don't think—I mean, I talk a lot, so I've said just about everything, and I think I've touched about every issue. I'm very honored, and I feel very good about the interview. Like I said, I do feel honored to be a part of this. I hope that whoever listens to this interview will learn something from it. The work that an activist does is not easy. It's not easy at all. There's a lot of people, even people you work with, that will fight against you. Sometimes it takes away a lot of your time from your family, your personal life. You don't get paid for it sometimes. I don't get paid for any of this. An activist really doesn't get paid for this. They do it all on their own time, but, in the end, and especially when you see some results finally come to fruition, that, in itself, is the greatest reward or award you could get is to see that you've been a part of a change for the better. I do this, like I said, for my son. I do it for his sons, for my grandsons, for the future of all of our sons and daughters because, in activism, there is no gender, race, religion. We're all one human race.

AC: All right, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW