

**Oral History Collection**

**Cindy Lucio**

**Interviewer:** Leslie Luna

**Date:** April 30th, 2024

**Place of interview:** Unknown



Leslie Luna: Okay, I am taking a history of Latin American food course, and they wanted us to interview somebody that has some experience in the culinary arts and in particular there is going to be some questions about your background. Obviously, I know a little bit of information about some of your businesses. So, I would like to ask some of those questions from there. Okay, I will go ahead and start. Do you mind telling me your full name please?

Cindy Lucio: Cindy Lucio.

Leslie Luna: Okay. What was your date of birth, and can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

Cindy Lucio: October 16, 1962. I was born in Dallas, grew up just South of Dallas, and then when I graduated from high school, I met my now husband and we started dating and it was very interesting. I'll bring up some points that have to do with what you're studying. So, the place where I grew up was a very white suburb of Dallas. We had basically two Hispanic families in the high school and maybe two black families in the high school as well. Otherwise, everybody else was just white. So not

diverse at all, but it was a great public education because at the time there just weren't issues that we have today. But, anyway, so Javier and I met, and we started going out, and when I went over to his parents' house, I had always grown up in Dallas, and my family was from San Antonio, so I had definitely been around the Hispanic population and the food and the culture from an outsider. Later it's very different once you kind of enter into this home that Spanish is spoken, the food is only Mexican food. And I mean the house, you know, the home is the same. It was in the neighborhood right down the street from where I grew up, and we went to the same schools. My husband was actually born in San Antonio, but both his parents are from Mexico, so his mom does not speak English. And so, you know, I show up and she's only speaking Spanish. Well, luckily, I had four years of Spanish at that point, and I can speak enough or understand enough and then she understood enough English, so we learned how to have a two-way, two language conversation. So, I understood enough Spanish so she would speak Spanish, and then I would speak English and we could answer back and forth in our

own language that we were more comfortable with. We had dinner that first time that I was over there and she stood in the kitchen and was making all the food and put it on the table, but never sat with us. She always was, you know, making sure everybody had their tortillas or if they wanted extras or anything. And I just kept asking Javier, when is she going to sit down? And he is like, she won't sit down until we are finished, and then she'll sit. You know, we were still at the table, but then she would sit down. And that went on for 20 years. And then finally, Javier's two sisters started helping. They did not help much. They, I think, were just not that interested in doing the daily things because their mom brought, you know, the culture of Mexico to the home, and the food, and everything else. And the girls at this point were like, I don't want that. I want to be more American. And I know this is a typical thing. So, when I was interested, because I've always liked to cook, when I was interested, I went up to her and I was like, how do you make this? How do you make this? And she was like, no, you don't need to help. I'm like, no, I want to know. I love to do

this. So, she never had recipes. So, I started writing, of course I asked, but I started writing recipes and she only, you know, was speaking to me in Spanish. So, Javier's dad spoke English, so he was helping me. So, I wrote down her recipes for tamales, rice, and beans, and everything. So, when I finally tried them on my own, I was like okay, this just isn't working right. But, then I realized okay, you gotta do this in the molcajete. You gotta do this, you know, certain ways of doing things too, so I learned all of that over time. It was very interesting just the cultural differences. But, I think because I was so willing and wanting to know, and I think they saw that and helped me with it basically. So, that's kind of the beginning of all of this.

Luna: That is so awesome! I did not know that, okay.

Lucio: Yeah.

Luna: Yeah. Okay, well, another question that I have for you was a little bit more questions about Javier, let's see.

Lucio: Mhm.

Luna: Well, it was just some background questions. What would you describe that you do for a living was well as your partner, Javier? And then some of your hobbies and interests, passions?

Lucio: Okay, so currently, like, you know, we are leaving out about 50 years, but, you know.

Luna: Yeah.

Lucio: But currently, I do cook for other people because I sold the bed and breakfast I don't do breakfast hardly at all anymore. Javier has never been a breakfast eater. Well, he is. He eats cereal and yogurt, but that's it. So, on the weekends, I'm like, okay, are we going to have breakfast because I can make it or we can go out, you know, after church. Anyway, so I cook for people now, so if somebody is sick, or if there's a death in somebody's family, I will take food, and it's almost like a comforting thing right now is mostly what I find myself doing. So I catered an open house down at Sam Houston State two weeks ago, so I cooked all this stuff, pulled it down to Huntsville, which is almost to Houston, and we set up this wonderful little finger foods for an art

auction that the graduate arts students were having, and they were all impressed because over the last few years they've had bought cookies and bought veggie trays. So, if my friend was the art teacher, is the art teacher, she was able to use the word chef, and then they let somebody, you know, because I have a commercial kitchen. They let me do that. Versus, you know, because university schools are very strict about, they have to be commercial kitchen or whatever. So, in all of the things she advertised chef Cindy Lucio. I was like, why did you do that? And, she said I had to in order for you to bring food that wasn't, you know, from the grocery store. So, that was -- that was interesting. And then just this last week I catered an event for about 50 people at Catholic Charities. They were opening a new program that they have, and they wanted a little open house, also finger foods. So, I did that, and I didn't charge them to do it. They just paid, reimbursed me for some food. So, you know when people are so grateful, and you've made a big difference otherwise again, they would have had to go buy veggie trays or whatever it is. And when you can have a curried chicken salad,

sandwiches, and fresh hummus that I made and several other things, you know, they were just impressed. And it sets a good, what do you say? A good representation that this is nice, you know, kind of thing. So, anyway, then we've had unfortunately a lot of deaths of our friends lately, so I always take food because I know there's going to be family members over there. Set up a meal train because that's always comforting. You know that you can have some good food not just always fast food or whatever it is. So right now, I volunteer at a place in their kitchen.

Luna: Yeah.

Lucio: It's called Taste Project. Do you know of this?

Luna: Oh, I've heard of that!

Lucio: Yeah. So, I volunteer over there in their kitchen. They help train people that want to work in restaurants, and it gives them not a culinary certificate, but almost.

Luna: Okay.

Lucio: It gives them some kind of certificate. And so, I help in the kitchen to get these kids like knife skills

and stuff like that. So, that's what I'm doing with my cooking right now. And then I experiment. I cooked for, I made lunch for a friend who is going through cancer, and she goes for follow-ups over here not far from us. So, she always comes over here and we have a two -- or three-hour lunch and I've made all these fun things. So again, more of a comfort food kind of thing.

Luna: Yeah. Well, that's amazing.

Lucio: Yeah. So that's what I'm doing with mine right now. What did you ask about, Javier? Something else about Javier?

Luna: Just what he does for a living.

Lucio: Oh, that's right.

Luna: Yes, Ma'am. That was all.

Lucio: Alright, so Javier is an architect, and he does a lot of pro bono work. So, he designs churches, and he usually doesn't charge them for his time and helps them to get a church that's within their budget because a lot of these smaller towns don't have money. So, he just did one out in Comanche, which is about a two-hour drive from here. It's down by

Stephenville, and it's a Hispanic community and they just they just couldn't come up with hardly any money. So, he put together this church, and it ended up being amazing because of all the travels we've done throughout Mexico. He wanted it to feel like that, but it wasn't going to be a 200-year-old building of stucco and all of the wonderful materials that they have available. So, he did it out of metal like a barn would be, so it was a little more affordable and then he added to the outside of that and put a big circle window over the altar. And, they were able to find this beautiful crucifix from some other church and pews that had been discarded by some other church and the parishioners refurbished them and everything. Anyway, the Bishop came out, of Fort Worth, and blessed it so that they could open this church. And everybody was just so impressed that they were able to do this on the budget but the interior mostly it just felt good. It was a light blue. It's a light pastel blue, and it has kind of a golden color to it and then it has some green. So, it's just not what you would find in a typical church in the US, you know. So it was nice, and all of

the I'd say 95% of the parishioners are Hispanic. They were all like ohh, I love it. You used our colors, and you know, so that was fun. So, he does fire stations, and he does city halls and community centers. It's called small commercial, and he'll do homes and smaller business type things for people as well.

Luna: That's awesome. That's so interesting! Yeah. Okay, let's see. So now I wanted to ask a couple of questions about the bed and breakfast. So, a part of the classes too is talking about sustainability and things like that, like the professor is very keen on like locally sourced products and stuff like that so I just wanted to ask a little bit about your cooking at the bed and breakfast, where you purchased the produce, if it was locally sourced, and how you handled food waste, if you did anything like that. Because I remember a little bit about having like a compost bin and things like that!

Lucio: Very good. Yeah. I was gonna say you could ask your mom about all this, too.

Luna: Yeah.

Lucio: Let's see. Okay, we got married, and right after undergraduate school, we both went to University of Texas Arlington, and then we moved to Boston, and we lived there for eight years. We both went to graduate School, and we had both of our boys up there. And Cambridge, Massachusetts, much like Vermont and California, are big into sustainability and composting and recycling, so before those kinds of things move their way down to Texas. They've been a staple of the way of life in the northern part of the US, especially the two coasts for a very long time. So, in Boston, and now this has been 29 years ago that we've moved back to Texas, let's say 38 years ago or 7 years ago, we were doing recycling and curbside recycling, and composting, and we lived in this cool old apartment that had a compost bin in the backyard. And then the guy that lived on the bottom floor, he was always, you know, taking care of it and turning it. Yes, we had rodents, but that wasn't the garden where there were kids playing or anything, and then I took care of the front lawn. And we had one of those push mowers; It's not electric, or gas, or anything, it's just a push

mower and we had a big tree I remember saying, oh my goodness, we can't get any light here because it was so shady. So, I did all this research, and I did all this permaculture stuff using compost in our beds and everything. So, it was interesting because I learned a lot from that experience. But, my dad was a farmer from Illinois, and he taught me gardening as well at our house. So, I've got a background in it and then going to live in Boston just that was everyday life you composted everything, you recycled everything, you didn't have waste. And then... When I went to Africa and you see there is no extra water. So how they, a lot of people deal is, they have a tub, a bathtub and probably four or five people take a bath in that water and then --

Luna: Wow!

Lucio: The water stays in the tub, and they put it in big five gallon buckets that never will go down the drain and they use it. Then they fill the back of the toilet so that little lid on the back of the toilet is not there. They're always filling that water so that you can flush the toilet. Like you

know, it's like wastewater. So, then they also had buckets just piled up around to water their garden because they had to be as self-sustainable as possible. So anyway, after that experience, I came back and I was like, we are never throwing water out. So, it's a matter of like brushing your teeth. You turn on the water, but you turn it back off. You don't run the water for 10 minutes before you get in to take a shower, you know. Washing dishes in the sink they don't have to be rinsed off, they can just be scraped off and put in the dishwasher. So, it's all this kind of composting and preserving and all of that that I have a background in and I think about those things. It's not like, oh yeah, I should do this! That's just part of my daily life and our kids as well. So uh, when I had the bed and breakfast, I was composting and taking it home and my, it was just so much compost! I couldn't keep up with it! And it's not like we threw a lot of food away, people did eat their food, but you have egg shells, and you have the tops of carrots, or whatever it is. So, I found out about a company called cowboy compost and they were just getting started, and I asked if they could do commercial

and they said no, they're only doing residential. Actually, they were only doing drop offs. They would give you a bucket and you had to drop it off. And then they started picking up residential, and I said, well, I'm like residential. So, people stay here it's not a big business. So, they did it for me. I was the first commercial account that they had. So, we grew to where we would need two of those big bins a week and then they give you dirt because they would compost it and turn into dirt and then they would give you dirt back based on how much you recycled or composted with them. So yeah, part of the routine at the bed and breakfast was to take the compost outside. We don't leave it in the kitchen. We had, you know, bin and bin, probably three or four bins after one meal, and we would go take those and dump those. As far as buying local produce, a lot of times, especially if we did special dinners, chef dinners, and graduation parties and all that kind of stuff. I would always go to the farmer's market and get fresh produce when I could. And because we did breakfast on Saturday morning, I couldn't always go to the farmers market, so I got some of the

vendors' names and I would ask them to keep it for me. So, I would basically pre-order and they would hold it so that until I could get there after breakfast and then it would be for the next week. And then there's a company that I would have deliver food every once in a while. They're out of Dallas and it's Texas based, local based. And then there was a little place that did, gosh, what did they call it? Where? So in my neighborhood there's a little garden shop and they promote people to do gardens and to grow extra.

Lucio: Mhm. So, if I decide to grow extra potatoes, I can take those and sell them to this garden shop. And they had people. Why can't I think of the term? They had people that would, and I was one of them that would do produce box. Weekly I would go pick up a produce box and I wasn't always sure it was seasonal, but say that person took extra potatoes. So however, many people, let's say 10 people did this program they had, so they had 10 extra potatoes everybody got five. You know, they split it up. They would equal it out. So everybody, however many it worked out and somebody else grew extra carrots. Somebody else had lettuce. So, my

box weekly would have different things, but then I would take it back to the bed and breakfast. I'm like, okay what are we having this week? You know, because it was local, and it was fresh. And then there's a company that I used to order these boxes from also out of Dallas and same exact thing. I never knew how much or well I knew about how much, but I didn't know what all I was getting. So sometimes it was squash, and I had to figure out okay how can I incorporate squash into my breakfast? That's how I started doing like a veggie hash. Because I would get a lot of squash during the fall and I would get lots of tomatoes, I always requested extra tomatoes, cilantro, and the stuff that we needed for our Saturday Mexican breakfast. Sunday, we needed lots of berries and apples and pears when those were in season to go with our waffles or whatever it is. They also did local meats, so I would get pork and turkey ground and make my chorizo out of that too. So, I did a lot of it. And then do you know about blue zones?

Luna: Uhm, No ma'am.

Lucio: So blue zones is a program here in Fort Worth that our mayor promoted. It's a nationwide thing and Fort Worth was, I don't know, like the second or third city to do it. It promotes healthy eating. It promotes if you're ever at certain grocery stores. If you park out further away, they call it blue zones parking, so that you get a little more exercise. You walk, you know, all the way into the grocery store. If you make just healthy habits of walking and all that. But, it also has to do with not having a saltshaker on the tables, and using, this is a weird one to me, they wanted us to use goat milk yogurt instead of cow's milk yogurt, which is more expensive. So, I did it for a little while, but it's kind of hard to find and we went through so much yogurt at the bed and breakfast. That didn't work out so well, but I did keep up my blue zone's status through teaching your employees to eat healthy and making sure your employees got a certain amount of steps, and just promoting, you know, healthy eating, healthy snacks, healthy workplace environment basically. And so as far as like my menu? Uh. It did change according to the season and according to like I said, what I would

get in my farm box, that's what it was called Farm Box.

Luna: Oh, cool. I never knew of it. That's so awesome.

Lucio: Yep.

Luna: My professor was trying to find -- I think one of her goals was to build an onsite university garden where we build certain produce, so that leads into my next question because she, I forgot what part of Mexico she was from, but we talked a lot about milpas. Have you ever heard of the style of milpa?

Lucio: Yep.

Luna: So, we learned about that a lot, and I was going to try to lead into all your travels in Mexico and see if you were able to experience the milpas way of cultivating produce and just some differences that you've noticed between how Mexico cultivates their produce versus maybe how the United States does that?

Lucio: I don't. Yeah, I don't have a lot of experience with that. I would love to. There is a guy I don't know if you know or if y'all have discussed... This guy I can look it up in just a second, but he is a chef

up in New York and he was noticing... he has a background, I don't know if he's from Mexico, but maybe his parents are. And, he discovered that everybody was using the MASECA brand and he's like, there's gotta be something else, you know, there's gotta be something higher end. There's gotta be somebody making this, you know, because there is somebody in every field that you know is going to make some nicer organic or whatever it is. So, he started doing all this research well, it took him to Oaxaca, and he spent all this time in the corn fields because Oaxaca is where corn originated, they found the very first kernel in Oaxaca. So that's a big deal. You don't ask for flour tortillas in Oaxaca; they'll give them to you, but they just kind of like, really, we're king of corn around here, you know. So anyway, in their botanical garden, it is behind their museum of cultures you get a tour, and it talks about the trio, they call it something else. Of corn, now I'm blinking on the three plants. Corn, beans. And one more thing, that all grow together, and the nutrients enrich each other. Do you know the third thing?

Luna: Is it any Chili's?

Lucio: No. I'm gonna have to look it up and what they call it because they don't call it a trio. I don't think. Anyway, it's very interesting because you'll see it in. Let's see. I've got a Oaxaca magnet right here. See it? So, it's got the outline of the skull for Dia de los Muertos. It's got a little grasshopper because you know that's one of their big sources of protein. If they have no money, they're going to have the chapulines. It's got mezcal. It's got agave, and then it has some words. Mole, chapulines, tlayuda, chocolate, calenda, tejate but it has all these pictures of corn. So, corn is a huge deal. But it's called something I'll have to look it up.

Luna: It might be squash. I have some notes over that.

Lucio: Ah, I think it is squash. They eat so many squash blossoms in their quesadillas. They have squash blossom soup. I think you are right.

Luna: Yeah. Yeah.

Lucio: I think you're right and did you find what it's called, the trio? Or do they just call it a trio?

Luna: No, I haven't. I don't think we took any notes over that.

Lucio: Okay. But yeah, I think that sounds right. So, they talk about growing those together, so you know how a lot of farmers do, squashes over here, and corn is here, and beans are here. They tend to grow them together. So like big fields of cotton in West TX every once in a while, we used to go that way when our kids were in college, and you'd see all of these sunflowers. That is beautiful! I didn't know they were cultivating sunflowers around here. Well, it's to put nutrients back into the ground so that cotton can keep growing because it pulls all of these nutrients. So, I think it's every three years or something, they will plant all these sunflowers to put that nutrient, whatever it is back in the ground. Yeah. So, I think that's what the corn, squash and beans are doing for each other when they plant them like that.

Luna: Yeah, that's awesome.

Lucio: So yeah, so this guy discovered an heirloom corn and the way that they do the Nixtamal and all of the stuff they do in Oaxaca and brought that knowledge

back with him and coordinated efforts with the oaxacan people, and now he sells his brand of masa. Masienda. He created a company, and they sell it all over. They just got in. I just got an e-mail. They're now in Central Market and Whole Foods.

Luna: Oh, cool. Okay, let me, im going to write that down!

Lucio: Masienda. It's a little more expensive, but it's not that much more expensive. Maseca is so cheap, so maybe a a small bag of maseca, the blue corn, maybe it's \$3 and maybe this is 6\$. You know? It's sure, it's twice as expensive, but it's \$6, right?

Luna: Yeah.

Lucio: It's not outrageous. Anyway, so, I have red, white and blue corn masienda. And you get on their e-mail list, and it's very interesting because they will give little bits of history every once in a while. And this guy was talking about, he wrote a book called Masa. And it's really good. It's a really good cookbook. It's not just a cookbook. It's talking about his story. That's why I know so much of his story. And, how he took this back to the most famous restaurants in New York. And they loved the Masa. They started all making their own

tortillas out of Masienda and doing the whole process like they do it don't like their meals, they actually do the mix them well. They do everything there. So, I think there's been a resurgence. I know there's been a resurgence over the last more than 10 years of going back and paying attention to the ancestral recipes and way of cooking. So yes, I am very much into that and every time I go to Oaxaca I take one to two cooking classes and I've been doing this for ten years. I find different chefs. Sometimes I go back to the same chef and I'm like, okay, let's do something different. I take all my groups to do a cooking class. The chefs there that I select are always really good. They take the group to the Mercado. They point out all the different things, whether it's what we're buying or not. But you know, this is so and so she grows, let's say, spinach up in the mountains. And no, she wouldn't be in the mountains that would be below land. What do they bring down? Oh, they bring, hongos! They bring the mushrooms down from the mountains. They bring corn from not high in the mountains, but a little bit higher than the valley. So, as you drive on some

of these trips, you'll see corn fields, and you'll see cotton fields, and you'll see the bean fields and the alfalfa. It's really clear. I mean, I don't always know what they are they'll point them out. But it's really clear that that is this person's land. These are not massive farms like they have in the US it's like, I don't know, it's like our property, the size of our property, where our house is. That's how big, you know, their land is. So, whatever they grow, they then take that into town and sell it at the Mercados. So very, very local, very fresh, and they'll do that on a daily basis and then they have pop-ups. So in in all the neighborhoods, so the people from the neighborhoods know that there's going to be a pop up on Friday or the pop up is Saturday or whatever day. And they're huge. They're huge pop-ups. I don't even think that's the proper word. They call them the tianguis.

Luna: Oh yes.

Lucio: Yeah. So like in the neighborhood where I usually stay it's on Friday. So, there's like one or two little clay ceramic artists. There's some resale clothes.

There's just a couple of weird little things, but then there's like two blocks worth of produce. And that's one day a week. So, they have to take everything down, haul it away. Like why don't they just take their stuff into the Mercado? And my friend that lives there said it's because in the Mercado, you know, they have to pay and the tianguis they don't have to pay. This is just, the city you know, just gives them all this land to come to every Friday. They have to take their tent. They have to take their coolers or whatever. So, and the locals like that better than the mercados. But if it's Monday and you need fish, you're gonna go to the mercado. But if it's something you wait till Friday because you like this guy that has this fish, you're gonna wait, you know. So anyway, I love that. And when I go, I don't usually cook because I'm in a hotel or something. But this last time I was there for three weeks last month, and I was in an apartment and I had a kitchen. I was like, okay, I'm gonna cook this time. I'm gonna go to mercados, and I'm gonna cook. But it was 97° outside and no air conditioning. I was like I am not cooking!

Luna: Yeah!

Lucio: So, I did reheat, like, I would have leftovers, so I did reheat a few things at night. But yeah, so that's the other thing. It's really hot. And these people, they don't complain a lot of times they'll have their comal outside. Like most of the time, their comal is outside, you know. Propane gas and it's big. It's like their comal is, you know, huge and they're making tortillas all day long, you know, so. At the Mercado, sometimes there's a lady. I go and eat her breakfast and she's just making tortillas, and somebody just comes and picks them up. Somebody buys them or a restaurant comes and gets them. It's very different right from here. But anyways, always local, always local and in season produce too.

Luna: Yeah. Oh, cool. Do you go to other places in Mexico besides Oaxaca?

Lucio: So, Javier and I over 40 years have been traveling and we've been to 17 of the 32 states.

Luna: Oh wow!

Lucio: But lately, like when I take people, everybody wants to go to Oaxaca because it's been on the best place to travel in the world for two years in a row, and so more people are finding out about it, it's becoming very popular and people that I've set up tours and we get access to some of these artisans, the weavers and the clay and the alebrije has that my guest can't get in access to these people. So I've put together these tours. So it just makes it an easier way to travel for people. And a lot of people want to go because it's the food capital and because of the art, but they may not speak Spanish. They're -- maybe think it's not safe. And I just tell them that, you know, this is one of the safest places in Mexico. My Spanish is good enough to get us by. And you'll feel safe and we get to do all these amazing things, you know, having to do with art and food and culture. And the people are very welcoming, and they don't always speak English. They even not, not all of them even speak Spanish. There are 16 indigenous tribes. Throughout Oaxaca and they're the ones coming in to sell their things, so they can't read, they can't write, and they don't even speak Spanish.

So they're speaking mixed, what is the other like Zapotec. That's what most of them speak. Yeah. So, like, Jacobo, the artist that I have been setting up this tour, he never used to do tours. He started it with me. He speaks Zapotec and he purposely will speak Zapotec to his parents while we're doing the tour so that we get to hear it. Now, you would notice the difference, but people that don't speak Spanish will not notice a difference, right? But I noticed a difference and it's interesting because it's still Latin based so you can hear some of the words similar to Spanish or some of them similar even to some English words but yeah.

Luna: How cool. Ohh my goodness. Okay, let's see. I didn't know. I'm sorry. I didn't know that zoom had a time limit, so I only have I think a minute left.

Lucio: Ohh a minute. You know what you'd have to do? You have to create another link and we'll have to do it again. If you want to do more.

Luna: Really.

Lucio: Okay. Or if you want to just send me some questions.

Luna: Okay, let me see what else I had. Sorry, just one second.

Oh, I was just gonna ask. Let's see. Hopefully we have enough time. I think we should. Did you notice or do you notice and during your travels in Mexico? Any like food scarcity, kind of like how you mentioned in Africa. There was certain ways that they had to be sustainable with water, with food. Do you notice that in Mexico as well because it's technically still considered like a third world country or developing country?

Lucio: In Oaxaca, in particular in Mexico City and in the other places that I've been because they're a little more touristy kind of places, I don't see it as much. They're having a huge, huge water shortage throughout Mexico, mostly Oaxaca and Mexico City. So that's a huge problem. They are delivering water to the hotels. In apartments, but not necessarily to residents. So, they're going without water delivery, meaning in their shower, in their systems, and then they have to also go get those big bottles of water for drinking water. So, that right now is a big problem. But I've heard stories that if people can't afford --

**[End of interview]**