Susana Almanza
TCU Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project
https://crbb.tcu.edu/interviewees/alamanza-susana

Part 1 — Segregation and Racial Discrimination in Austin Part One:

Almanza: And the other unique thing about where I grew up is because I grew up on East 10th Street and it was like the demarkation line. I mean, physically. You cross the street and the black community started there. That's where it started. Of course, a lot of my black friends said, "No, that's where it ended." That it started way up there on MLK and worked its way down.

Like, this would depend on who you ask. But I just knew that when you cross the street, it was the African American community. And the same thing for us. We said the Mexican community started there, and the people by the river said, "Oh no, that's where it ends."

So I had a very unique upbringing, because I grew up in that era where blacks and Chicanos were really looked down on us because we spoke a second language. The blacks, because of the color of their skin. And so, it was like riding the bus ... We faced a lot of indignities and I saw them, I lived them. And I remember one story, one time, the Ritz theater was downtown on about 6th and San Jancinto. And my African American friends would say, "Lets go watch this movie." And I said, "Okay."

TCU: About what year was this?

Almanza: And I would say I'm about eight years old. So it's in the 50's. And so, we go to the Ritz theater and the guy says, "Everybody can go up except her. She's not allowed to up with the blacks." So you had to go up a separate entrance to the theater.

But the Latinos and the Mexicans were allowed to sit with the whites. And so, we kinda talked, and we said, no, no, we're not gonna go because I wasn't allowed to go in, they didn't wanna go. So they said, what we'll do is wait and we'll come back later. So they tied a handkerchief around my hair and made sure none of my hair showed, and I'm pretty dark and stuff, and they said, "Don't say nothing. And we're gonna buy the tickets and we're gonna all go up there."

And that's what happened. So, I went up to the theater and I was really shocked, because downstairs they had the wooden seats and upstairs they had these aluminum folding seats. And they had the popcorn machine there with the light but it wasn't functioning, it just had a light.

Downstairs, the popcorn machine was popping and everything. So it looked like they would take the leftover popcorn and move it upstairs. And then the pickles,

they were stale. So it seemed like the pickles that they didn't sell or were old, they would just move them upstairs. And then it wasn't clean. Downstairs, it was clean. And I said, "You know, it's not like this downstairs." And they said, "What?" I said, "No, down there it's real clean. There's wooden seats. The popcorn machine is popping. The pickles are crunchy and everything. It's so different." And I thought, how can anybody do that? How is it because ...

We were all people, that's the way I saw it, and those were my friends, but I saw how, because of the color of their skins, how they were being treated and how it was the same theater, but how the people were willing not to clean it because it was serving the blacks. And I found that really ... I mean, that bothered me like hell.

And you know, that's why I tell my friends, and they didn't know because they were never allowed downstairs. But because we were Mexicans, we were allowed to go downstairs with the whites. And so, I found that really heartening.

And then, when I went with my mom, I was one of the first kids to learn English real good. And so, I was always translating. A little girl, five years old, I was going and we'd go downtown when my mom would say, "I need to ask her how much this is and that is," and all of this stuff. And you know, I could hear people talking about the family.

And as I grew up too, I learned when my mother needed translation or something, I would edit what people would say back. If they were saying something that I knew would really upset my mom, I wouldn't tell her because my mom, as she learned English ... One time, we would always go to the store in Franklin, downtown [inaudible 00:04:28]. Cause that was the store that had a layaway department.

And I don't know. I was, again, about eight or nine. And my mother had saw this fur coat and so she said, "Ask the lady how much it would cost and how much I would have to put down to put it on layaway?" And so, I asked the lady. I told her, "You know, my mom wants to buy that fur coat. She wants to know how much she needs to give down to put it on layaway," and stuff.

And the saleslady, she's white, and she turns to the other white lady and she says, "Can you believe-?" And my mother was kinda a hefty lady. And she says, "Can you believe that fat lady wants to buy that fur coat?" And we had been teaching my mother english, but all this time, she was a Spanish speaker, and my mother turns around, "You son of a pinche! Who are you calling fat?!"

And she just took off and that lady just got ... At that point, my mother went to Spanish and Tex-Mex and everything. But she was really upset, and the lady starts, "Oh I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." And she started apologizing to my mom, and then she helped her to put it on layaway. And after that, it

changed because I think they realized that she now knew English and that she wasn't gonna take it. But that one of the first times where I had seen my mom really get mad and really go off. And that's why, after that, I started editing. Like, okay, what would people say and what was their response to her question and stuff, because I didn't wanna see my mom get really upset about indignities that people would say.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/segregation-and-racial-discrimination-in-austin

Part 2 — Segregation and Racial Discrimination in Austin Part Two:

TCU: ... seems like a big weight to be put on a young child.

Almanza: Yeah, I guess I didn't think about it at that time that it was a weight. I just know that I wanted to make sure that my mom was not unhappy and that she didn't hear a lot of those things that were done. And I think that those are the things, I always tell people, those were the things that helped form me. Seeing how they treated, you know, my African American friends. Seeing how they treated people that spoke a different language. Recognizing that there was a class system that, that there were a treatment between people who made a lot of money and people who didn't make money, and realizing that there was a big divide in Austin. That when you on this side of the highway, that's where all the Mexicans and Blacks lived, and on that side is where all the Whites lived, and everything was so nice and everything as it went. Because even downtown, Sixth Street where we would go all the time shopping and humpty dumpty, and bars, this side was the Black entertainment and shopping, and this side was the Mexican American.

So it went on downtown and then of course eventually they ran us all out of the downtown area. So those are a lot of things that I got to see first hand, was the racism. The racism that existed throughout my whole childhood.

TCU: When you used to go to the swimming pool, was it an integrated swimming pool, or did African Americans hae their own swimming pool, and did Mexican Americans have their own?

Almanza: Yeah. It was a segregated swimming pool. Palms pool was all Mexican Americans, and like Wynn swimming pool, because we had black friends, we went to Wynn, which was an African American pool. And I remember some of the African Americans not liking that our friends brought us along there. And I remember having rock fights with our friends against other groups of Blacks who were not happy that they were bringing us to the Black pool and stuff. And there were some pools where you didn't have the clash like that. Rosewood pool, you would see Mexicans and Blacks. And so there were pools where they were more

integrated with people of color, not with Whites, but just with people of color. So yes, it was very much segregated in those days.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/segregation-and-racial-discrimination-in-austin-part-two

Part 3 — School Experiences Part One:

TCU: Was your elementary school similarly segregated?

Almanza: Absolutely, and we had like a 98% Mexican school, and a few whites that went there and no blacks at all, none at all. So, all the schools in East Austin, if they were in the Mexican community, were all Mexican, with maybe just a few, a handful of whites, but blacks, none.

Then, there were the black schools like [Blackshire 00:00:29], was like 100% black. [Keland 00:00:35] Middle School was completely all black and so was Anderson High, where Anderson High used to be was completely all black.

As a matter of fact, I was the first Mexican American to ever go to an all black middle school, and that was Keland Junior High. I was the first Mexican to integrate that school.

What had happened was, I had gone to Palm School and then in my seventh grade, I had to go to University Middle School, and that's at the UT Campus, which is now the School of Social Work. That's where University Junior High was at.

Because of the line, the boundary line was 7th Street, I lived north of 7th Street, so most of my friends went to Allen. A small group went onto University Junior High. We would have to walk. In those days, there was no busing. I lived on 10th and Lydia, so just imagine where that is.

From 10th and Lydia, we walked all the way. We crossed the highway to go to UT, University, where the School of Social Work, every day to go to school. But, what we did, we'd pick a route and pick up our friends who lived along the way. Good thing they didn't do gangs back there, because we would have definitely looked like a gang as we were en masse going to University Middle School.

TCU: What was that experience like for you at an all black middle school?

Almanza: Yeah. When I was at University Middle School, I disliked it with a passion because there was even more racism there. I had seen racism in Palm School, where I had seen my friends have their mouths washed out with soap for speaking Spanish and get paddled. I mean, it was horrible.

I knew a lot of things not to do to avoid that, but I saw a lot of awful things that happened to my friends. So, when I got to University Middle School, I then encountered even more racism because most of the students were white. We were the minority there. We had never been a minority. We were the majority.

At that school, we were a minority. I felt a lot of racism with the teachers and even ... It was a culture clash too. There was definitely a culture clash because you were going to school with middle class white students who had a lot of stuff that you didn't have.

TCU: You came from a very poor community. You were going to a school that catered to an upper class community. You felt the culture clash right away when you got to that school. There was a lot of fights between the Mexican students and the white students there.

Almanza: In the eighth grade, what happened was my African American friends, said, "Why are you going way over there? Keland is just a block and a half." I said, "Really?" They said, "Yeah. You should transfer over here to Keland." So, I transferred myself. I didn't tell my parents or anybody. I told my brothers they better not tell.

I transferred myself to Keland Junior High and I was the first Mexican American, the only Mexican American there. It was a wonderful experience. It was a wonderful experience. I mean, I had never ... I realized what I was missing because the African American teachers cared so much about the student. If they were failing or they were behind, they'd say, "Come in the morning and let's work on this." Or, "I'm staying later, come and work on this."

Their goal was that no one was going to be failing. That everybody was going to be successful. I'd never, ever experienced that in my whole life. Not only that, they integrated me. They had like the program and they had me like say something in Spanish. They did the English. I felt like I was a queen there. I'm not kidding you. I just felt such honor.

The teachers were like the most loving teachers I have ever met. I was like wow! How lucky the blacks were to have black teachers who really cared about them because I'd not witnessed the white teachers at Palm would tell the students, "As long as he's just sleeping and lays his head there and doesn't make trouble, he can sleep all through the class." It didn't matter if they learned or not because they didn't care.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/school-experiences

Part 4 — School Experiences Part Two:

TCU: Okay so, you were talking about your ... The white teachers at Palm. Could you elaborate a little bit more about how they treated Mexican American students, especially maybe when they spoke Spanish?

Almanza: Well yeah, some of the things they did, were like if you spoke Spanish, they would say, "There is no Spanish speaking in this class." The youth that got caught speaking Spanish, the teacher would come and get them, get soap and wash their mouth out with soap. It was just ... It was horrible, the stuff that they did to students.

I couldn't even believe it. How could you put soap in somebody's mouth, because they spoke their native language? I saw a lot of that, and I saw a lot of friends get paddled too, paddled for speaking Spanish, and they used to have a big paddle that they would hit the students with. So, I was just like, "Golly." It was scary to me to see how they treated them, and there was one Mexican teacher there, and that was Mrs. Reyes, and she taught third grade.

Everybody would be praying, "Please, let me get Mrs. Reyes. Please, let me get Mrs. Reyes." Everybody knew that she was the sweetest and best teacher, and then, I didn't get Mrs. Reyes, and I was real disappointed, with a whole lot of other students just because we didn't get her. She was the only Mexican American teacher there.

At University Junior High, there were none. They were again, all white. So, when I went to Keenan, they were all black, but the students were all black, and I thought, "Why don't we have Mexican teachers?" At that time, I thought, "Well, maybe Mexicans can't be teachers."

I didn't know that people south of us had Mexican teachers, but I know that here, where I was, they didn't exist, but the blacks had black teachers, and I saw the difference. I saw how loving and caring, and how they really cared about the education, even my education.

I was very much enlightened at Keenan Junior High by the teachers and about the Latin culture. I mean, they taught all of that, and that did not happen when I was in with the white teachers in school, in history. Basically we were savages and stuff like that, but yet, I was hearing a different perspective at the African American school, Keenan. So, it was really different, and it made a big difference in my life, and it opened my eyes to a lot of different things, and then, in the ninth grade, they built the new Martin Junior High.

So, I transferred back because some of my younger brothers were going there, and then I needed to watch over them, and it was a new school. So, now Martin Junior High got integrated. It had African Americans, and Mexican Americans.

So, that felt good to me, because I already had African American friends. I'd grown up with African Americans, and so, I had a good rapport. So, things were a lot better at Martin Junior High.

TCU: About what year is this?

Almanza: So, I think I'm like 67, 68 that I'm at Martin Junior High.

TCU: Okay.

Almanza: Yeah.

TCU: Did they have diverse teachers?

Almanza: No. Martin Junior High was the same thing. We had one teacher who was Mexican and that was Mr. Lopez, and he taught science. He was the only Mexican teacher. Everybody used to say, "Okay, there's a Mexican teacher. There's a Mexican teacher," but he taught science, so he was a pretty hard nosed person. But, he was the only science teacher there, and the rest were all white. I can't even remember their being a black teacher there. Basically, I think that there were all whites there.

TCU: Can you remember, or do you remember if there was any tension between the black and brown students when they were all going to the same middle school?

Almanza: There was some tension. There was some tension there, but not as bad ... I think a few years later it got bad, because when my brothers got there then there was a lot of fights and stuff between the blacks and the browns, but when I was there, in that era, when it was opening and stuff, I think for a couple of years, it was okay. I don't know if it was because they integrated more blacks there that changed the boundaries to get the school more integrated, that those tensions developed, but I do remember with my brothers, there being a lot more fights and trying to deal with that whole situation.

TCU: It's interesting that integration, for Austin meant integrating Mexican Americans and African Americans. What about the ... Did you all ever wonder about white students?

Almanza: The whites? No, it's like, at that time whites didn't cross highway 35. You just didn't see them, unless they were whites who had grown there all the time, since they were little, and there were a few families there that people knew that, they'd grown up with the Mexican community there. So, that did exist. There were some, but no, it was mostly the blacks and browns that were being integrated, and I guess, with Martin was a new school, that's when they integrated that school.

Part 5 — Racism and Tracking at Austin High School:

TCU: Can you tell me a little bit about your high school years?

Almanza: Okay. And then what happened was ... again, the same thing. The majority of my friends went to Johnston High School, and I was real sad. Because again, I was having now to go to Austin High, which is now the ACC Rio Grande. So now, were having to walk all the way past the state capitol, all the way to 11th and Rio Grande to go to school. So now, we're going to cross all through downtown to get to school. Because, there were no classes back then.

TCU: And Johnston is the African-American high school?

Almanza: It's Latino and African American.

TCU: Okay.

Almanza: But mostly, the Latino school. But a few of us got to go ... we were going to Austin High and at Martin Junior High, there was a group of us in the Honor Society. So, a group of us got to go to Austin High to get in the Honor Society.

So when we got there, we faced a lot of other realities; that our A-plusses were like B-minus or C-plus. We were struggling, and we would talk together and say, “Well, how are you doing?”, and they would go “Hey, it's really hard. We're doing really bad.” We would go, “How could this be? We are all honors students.” It didn't take us long to conclude that we had gotten a secondary education in our schools. Because, how could we be A-plus students and we get over here, and these students are way advanced from us, and we are having to study three or four times harder just to try to catch up and keep up.

We couldn't get into the higher classes, because they were already tracking us, into the lower or remedial classes; even though we were honors students. We realized at that time that our education was bad-quality education.

TCU: Could you say a little bit more about what you mean about “tracking”?

Almanza: Well, because what we found out later on was that they had put us in classes, like to take bookkeeping, shorthand, typing. So, they had us in classes where we really weren't going to be going to college. We were just going to get the necessities we needed, so much English, so much history and science. And then we were taking these classes that were tracking you to be a secretary or administrative assistant. That's what was happening to us.

I don't know the fields, but they were tracking the guys. The majority of us, when we got into the 11th grade, they were saying, "We now have this program, which is a work release. So now, you can go work as a mechanic or dental assistant or

administrative secretary, and the first part, you will take the required courses, and you get to have money.".

So, they were tracking. They were already saying, “You're not college material. But you'll be able to do these kinds of jobs.” And, most of my friends were being put in to those different programs, along with myself; going to those different programs without realizing what was really happening to us at that high school.

Then the other thing was that you got to see ... because they used the grade point average, so if you didn't have an “A/B” grade point average, you couldn't participate in band, in sports, in extracurricular ... we had people who were football players, and they couldn't do football. We had people who were in band, they couldn't be in the band. You know?

So, they were really feeling it, because all their lives, they had been in the band, and then this and they come to Austin High, and they said, “Well, you don't have the grade point average to be in the band, or on football teams.” and all of this other stuff. So we were going, "This is so messed up. This is so wrong."

Then, when you ran for Student Council, everything was on popular vote. You were a minority there. Even though Austin High was integrated with Blacks, Mexicans, and White. You put us together and were probably at a 40%, and if you did popular vote ... and then, even to try to get your name on the ballot, it wasn't going to happen. It was very, very hard.

So, you know, we saw it. The whole racism, classism. The inequality, the injustice; that system. How it was going ...

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/racism-and-tracking-at-austin-high-school

Part 6 – Cross-Racial Student Protests Part One—

Almanza: And it took us a couple of years before we got organized. And what had happened that, we were caught in that movement, that walk out movement. The Chicano Walkout Movement. And so what happened was in our senior year, we say we're gonna organize and we're gonna do a walkout.

TCU: What year is this?

Almanza: In 71. So we say we're gonna do the walkout and we used the phone directories because they had a directory, so we broke that up with the student committee and we started calling everybody and we said, "Look, this is what we want. We want them to drop the grade point average because you can't get in". We wanted mandatory for people of color to be able to get on the student council.

Those are things that were really important to us. But what happened was we said when the second bell rings, we're gonna walk out of the school. Well, somebody told. So they locked the doors. So we couldn't get out of the school building, and neither could the media get in. But we went to plan B, and we headed to the auditorium.

So went all to the auditorium, we demanded to speak to the principle and that we wanted the superintendent there in that meeting. And we began the negotiations with them about the inequality and the injustices that were happening, we were just pretty fed up to it that, you know.

TCU: How many students were with you?

Almanza: The whole auditorium, we must have had over 100 students there. Over 100 students in that auditorium, because people were pretty fed up with what was going on on, and that they ... and we got a lot of, in that senior year we were able to change the grade point average. We were able to demand that at least one Mexican or one Black get on as cheerleaders. There was a lot of changes that happened.

We weren't gonna benefit from it. But the other students we knew coming up would benefit from it. And the other thing that we did that same year was there was this African American guy, Tyrone Johnson. And he was great, he was a basketball player. He was like the tallest guy in the school. Not only the tallest, but the best basketball player. And he himself could win the game, 'cause that's how good he was.

And so, it was time for the student council elections. Of course, we couldn't get on the ballot. So we told Tyrone, look, can we do a write in? Can we do you as a write in on the student government as the president? And he said "Yeah". And so, again, we got the directory. We broke it up, we started calling people. But then we also called some whites that we knew would support Tyrone Johnson. 'Cause the whites said, you know, like he was a star.

And so after the write in, we did a write in vote. And so after the voting was tallied, they come on the speaker and they said "Well, we don't know how this happened but there was a write in vote and Tyrone Johnson got so many votes". He didn't win, but it was enough to shock everybody that we had did it. That we had gotten him on and that it had gotten notice and all of these, he had gotten all of these votes. And so it was enough that when we did the walkout, that people were aware that you know the student government was not being fair in their elections and stuff, and how we were never able to get on the student body.

And so, those were some of the things, we organized. We did the lettuce boycott, you know [inaudible 00:03:40] is at the school, we tell people not to eat at the

school. We told the schools they needed to buy union lettuce. You know, in support of the farm workers.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/cross-racial-student-protests-part-one

Part 7 – Cross-Racial Student Protests Part Two:

Almanza: We got a lot of education because, since we were just down the street from the University of Texas, we always had a lot of college students there, flyer-ing and keeping up with what was happening in the world.

One of the other things was the Vietnam War was going on in '68 and stuff. We had decided we were going to protest the whole Vietnam War, but we had made some friends with some of the whites that were too. They were saying, "We're going to wear black armbands to say we're against the Vietnam War."

Of course, the principal and so forth found out about it, and they announced on the announcements that anyone caught wearing a black armband would be kicked out of school if they did that. A lot of my friends, they were like, "Aw, I don't want to get kicked out." But one of the students there, one of the white students there, his father was a judge. He said, "Don't worry, they're not going to kick anybody out. Stay with us. And if they do, I'll call my dad. Don't worry about it." We were like, "Ooh, okay, this guy, his father is a judge. I don't think they're going to kick him out."

I told people, "Wear it, don't worry. His father's a judge, and they're not going to kick him out. They gotta kick him out if they're going to kick us out. We can all be wearing the band."

So, we did wear it, and they didn't because there were too many students. The white students had a lot of leverage, and they had a lot of connections. I realized that, that they had a lot of connections, and Austin High was like a higher-class white school. I got to make a lot of alliances too with whites because really that was my first encounter, going to school besides the teachers. But at the middle school, I didn't make friends there with whites. But when I got to Austin High, I also found there were more, I guess I would say, the liberal whites that were there. They were willing to make friends with other people and Mexican people and black people for the cause for things.

That kind of then opened up another door because a lot of the UT students that were always passing literature and talking to us, most of them were white that came. There were things that we understood that was going on. A lot of people, because they had family members that were in the war, that were in Vietnam, that's who was going, who was being killed were the Mexican community. The same for the blacks. We understood that, and a lot of people had brothers and

uncles that were caught up in that whole Vietnam War. We understood the issue very well as to what was happening.

TCU: Did your alliances with the white students ... did they support all the things that you guys wanted to do? Did they strike with you when you were boycotting the lettuce? Did they participate in the walk-out with you?

Almanza: No, they didn't really participate in the walk-out. I think they kind of chose and picked the issues. Maybe they didn't quite understand our issues, like the lettuce boycott. They did understand, and they were there because what happened was they called in the student government when the walk-out ... when we started negotiations. They came in, and they understood about how the elections were.

I'm sure there were some that thought, "What the hell are they mad about?" Then there were those going like, "Oh, that's right. Look, we don't have anyone in student government" and so forth. So, they were there in the negotiations because they were the majority again at the school. I do remember them being there.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/cross-racial-student-protests-part-two

Part 8 — Lack of Culturally Relevant Classes:

TCU: Can you remember if ... like any classes were taught about Mexican history or Mexican American history in high school?

Almanza: No. No classes were taught about Mexican American history or anything. I mean, the history was terrible, even in high school. It was still, the only reference that you usually saw in the books was the savages and like we came from the Indians and the Native Americans and we were like these savages that didn't know anything, or so.

And it wasn't anything beyond that. You know? At least, not that I remember. And there was nothing positive about any time that we were mentioned in any history book, there was nothing positive about us. Nothing.

TCU: Do you remember, can you remember how that made you feel? Like, if you're reading something about that's saying something negative about the people from which you came?

Almanza: Yeah. Yeah I felt like totally disgusted. I felt like, man, these people are so racist. You know? It's that they really build themselves up. And they disrespect everybody else. I always looked at it as a disrespect because my dad would always say "Respect everybody", and I thought ... I have to add one caveat, he would say you know, "Recept everyone", he says, "But Susana, if they don't respect you, you don't owe them a thing".

And sometimes I would get confused, like what does he mean about if they don't respect you, you know? [inaudible 00:01:39]

And I think he just meant like, just blow them off. Like, they don't deserve your time. They don't deserve your time if they don't respect you. Just keep on going, you know? And so, and that's the way I looked at it. I looked at it like this, I've always told my children and my grandchildren, just learn what they tell you and the moment you pass it, throw it out of your brain.

I said, "Don't even memorize it or nothing 'cause it's a bunch of lies". And the way I always look, like, man these Gringos sure tell a lot of lies, you know? That's what I, I would say. [Spanish 00:02:18]

And I would always say, okay. I would study it, I would pass with a passing grade, and if you were to ask me the next day the dates and stuff, I wouldn't know it. I just like, just ... exactly the way I say, just to pass what I need to pass and just forget about it because I knew it wasn't true. In my heart, I knew it wasn't true. Because I knew a lot of Mexican people and I knew how great and special they were, and it was like I can't believe that we're so great and everything and that we come from people who don't know nothing. You know, there's no way. That's not possible.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/lack-of-culturally-relevant-classes

Part 9 — Lack of Counseling and Academic Preparedness:

TCU: I wanted to ask you, going back to this tracking, do you remember if Austin High had counselors. Guidance counselors. If so, how many and do you remember them talking to you all or your friends about college classes, or was that something reserved to someone else?

Almanza: They did have counselors but it was reserved for the whites. They never call ... Like I said, I had a group of honor students that I knew there and then those that weren't. Nobody got called in about going to college. That was throughout my whole life. It was never seen that Mexican students would go to college. Not here in Austin, Texas. Austin is very racist city. We weren't going to be going to college and we weren't going to be seeing no guidance counselor. That was like no, you're not seeing anybody, you're just ... You're fending for yourself. You're just there doing what you can and if you didn't have families that had gone to college like I had, I didn't. My mom and dad didn't even have formal education. They had no way of knowing.

I wasn't in that circle where somebody's saying, "Hey, let me look at the classes you're taking. Oh, you're not taking classes. Why are they tracking you into secretarial position and so forth? Why is this happening?" We

didn't have that. I think that the youth of today are very, very blessed and they don't realized how blessed they are because we didn't have that assistance. I remember when I graduated and there was a program that monies had come in to help Mexi-American students go to college.

I went and I applied and the guy tell me, "Oh, [Susana 00:02:11]." He says, "You won't be able to get in," and I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm a honor student. I made all good grades." He said, "But you weren't taking the college courses that you needed." He said, "You don't have the credits that you need to go to college," and I thought, "What are you talking about? I took all my classes." He says, "Yeah, but they didn't give you any college prep courses than you need to get it." I thought, "Wow." He said, "Well, we can give you some money. You can take a course. Start it with a course at college."

TCU: Do you remember the name of this program?

Almanza: No. I don't remember the name of the program, but the guy that I remember getting the interview was [Joe Loredo 00:02:58]. I think Joe Loredo was a mailman. He was at the East First Street Neighborhood Center because that was a hub of where everything happened. I had gone there to check out the program and see about it, and that's when I learned that I didn't have any college credits. That I've taken sort of like ... I guess they might have been remedial classes or [secular 00:03:25] classes. Like I said, I took bookkeeping, I took shorthand. I took typing. I'm not saying ... All of those things have come in very handy for me in running an organization, but they didn't get me into college.

Matter of fact, they got me one class and I said, "Well, I want to take psychology. I really like psychology," because I took psychology at Austin High. I took one class at the University of Texas. Psychology with the money, they said, "Okay, we start with one class." I don't know how that I got in there but I was taking one class of psychology at UT. I thought, "Oh no. Oh shit. There's still racism." I thought like, "Why when I want to go to college it took me 12 years to get out of all of this racism, and now you want me to go to high level, and now these professors are the same way?"

I had that one lady, one teacher, and I just thought she was the pits. When I'd ask her something or I took the test because psychology is very subjective. It's not like math. You either got it or you don't. World History, you either got the answer or you don't. It's very subjective and I felt ... There was nothing but white students. Again, a totally white students in the class in psychology. I loved it, but I felt so much racism and I felt like the professor didn't want to give me the time of day. Then I felt like she was being real subjective in my grades. I thought, I don't need this. If this

is what higher ed is about I really don't need it. I felt like, "Whoa. I've gone to to much of this already. Now, as a young adult, I'm going to have to go through it again. Maybe I'm taking the wrong class. I don't know."

Anyway, they only paid for that one class. I did. I passed it and I got out.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/lack-of-counseling-and-academic-preparedness

Part 10 – East Austin Neighborhood Center and Grassroots Activism:

Almanza: What happened was I got hired at the East First Street Neighborhood Center so when I graduated I applied there for one of the secretary positions. Of course, I had all this background (laughs) and so I got hired, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me in my life, because the East First Street Neighborhood Center was the hub of all the people who wanted to improve the lives of the Mexican-American community. I'll tell you who was there. What James Farmeed, or as they called him, Crow, was my boss. John Trevino who became the first Mexican-American city council member was there running the Vista Program. Gonzolo Barrientos, who became the first state representative, was working there and so was Amario Rodriguez who became the first Mexican county clerk. They worked with the Catholic Diocese and they were working on immigration issues.

Then you had people like Carl Wood were part of the, and I can't remember Cowboy's real name. He was part of the Economy Furniture, the people who did all the organizing and walk-outs and everything. Then you had Lyncho Hernandez and his family which were big union organizers and real involved with political campaign, and Richard Moyah who became the first county commissioner elected, a Mexican-American county commissioner.

All those people were at that, it was the hub. At that time, the city gave so much money to these districts. The East First Neighborhood Center had so much funds to bring improvements to the community. That's where I was at and I was getting indoctrinated about the changes and people who wanted to. Because I was the secretary at the advisory meetings, I was having to take notes and really listen to what everybody was talking about. In those days if you wanted to be on the advisory committee for the East First Street Neighborhood Center you had to run for office. You had to do a small community campaign, say, "Vote for me. I'm going to work to get sidewalks. I'm going to work to get lights."

So all of this stuff was like, wow. It was just wonderful seeing my raza one to better our raza. I knew that's where I belonged because that's how I was brought up, always taking care of your people, that we were one raza, and all this. Working with them and then every time there was meetings or there was organizing, I was there. About that time the Raza Unida party was born, 1971, so they're going, "Well, you've got to go to the Raza Unida party with us in San

Antonio." And I go, "What?" They said "Yeah, there's a big Raza Unida convention is happening in San Antonio." So, there I go with them.

I go to the Raza Unida, and I walk and I just go like, I'm just like, my mind is just being blown because here is all this Raza talking about running for office, and being so organized. And I'm like 18, okay, so I'm just like wow, this is the most beautiful experience I could experience. It was a spiritual connection if ever there was a spiritual connection of what was going there.

The vibes in that place were wonderful. It was just soothing. Just to see so many people who had a lot of knowledge, a lot of education, talking about it's time for us to take power, to bring changes, to bring funding, to do all of these things, was to me the best experience that I could see and being there where people were trying to do.

TCU: Yeah, it seems like perhaps you got a better education because of your experience in organizing the community.

Almanza: Absolutely. I felt like ... There were things that I wanted to learn that I knew I didn't have the money and I didn't have the background that I needed to get into the university because I did come from a very poor family. So what I did, I wanted to learn the newspaper business. I went to Marcelo Del [Fuero 00:04:47] who headed Echo and I said, "Marcelo, I would really like to learn the newspaper business and stuff," and he says, "Well, I don't have any money to pay you." And I said, "I don't care. I'll do whatever needs to be done if you can just teach me."

And he Zig Romo took me under their wings, and they taught me about selling ads, and back then, the newspaper, I tell people, it was nothing like today. You would have to get the little letters and scratch it out, like E. Scratch and E and lay it all out. You had to cut and paste and type and make sure it was in a line. It was nothing like you can do now on the computer. It as labor intensive laying out a newspaper.

I learned to lay out a newspaper. I learned to cover stories. Then they let me write some stuff. Then I published some poetry in there. I learned all the stuff about laying a newspaper, how to buy ads, how to go talk to people about ads and everything. I learned the newspaper business like the work study, on the job training.

Then I wanted to learn the radio. So, I went to Leonard [Montenango 00:06:00] and I said, "Look, I really want to learn the radio. I'm willing to do whatever." And he says, "Well, you know you have to put in so many hours," because back then you had to get a FCC license. It wasn't like you could just get on the radio. So I said, "I'll do whatever I have to." Basically I was just pulling music and back then they had the tracks on, and stuff like that. He took me under his wings. He showed me and later on, once I got my FCC license, he gave me my own show. I

had La Hora por Mativa and I would invite people and guests on. I would talk about issues. I would play music, because you had to play music, too. I learned the whole newspaper business, I learned the radio business and I learned about organizing.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/east-austin-neighborhood-center-and-grassroots-activism

Part 12 — Susana's Background Information Part One:

Almanza: Well, my mother is Tomasa Calderón Rentería, and my father is Miguel Juarez Hernández Rentería, and I was born here in East Austin Texas, and have six brothers and two sisters, so I come from a pretty large family. At least in those days it was a pretty large family.

My dad was a laborer, and then he just worked as a laborer all the time, my mother was home all the time with us. Of course, she had a lot of children, and basically my mother was like the healer, so whether you cut yourself, or night turns, “curarle el susto”, you know is “cure, heal the spirit”.

My mother was that. She would grow like the spiderwebs and she wouldn't let us harm the spiders, but we could feed the spider. We could feed it ants and just watch how the spider worked its stuff, because she used the web to heal the cuts and stuff like that.

We had our own garden, so we gardened all the time, and we ate everything fresh. We had chickens, and we had rabbits, and so my mother was the one who would say, when I was younger she would say, “You got to work the garden, you got to work the earth, because if you work the earth, if you work with the Earth Mother she'll give you things,” and I used to think, “Is she telling me this so that I could work, or did she really mean it?”

But, when I saw the beans, and tomatoes, and lettuce, and everything growing, then I was like, “She's right,” you know if you work with the soil it'll give back to you, and so in that way I learned a whole lot of things from my mom.

My dad, he was ... Always taught us about respect. He had this one saying, and he'd say, “Susana, you have to respect everyone. I don't care if they're black, brown, white, yellow, or green,” and I would say, "Dad, there's no green people,” and he said, “Well, just in case they come,” and so he was always about respect, and my family was all about being respect.

And the other thing is that in those days you carried the weight of your “raza”, they would say, “No te portes mal, porque,” you know, “You're putting down our people if you do that, so just remember that if you do something bad, you're doing something bad against your whole race”.

TCU: Why do you think that's something you grew up learning? I mean ...

Almanza: Yeah, I think that because they had a more indigenous grounding, that you're not individuals. In modern society they teach you about ... that you're an individual and you're about yourself, but through the indigenous concept you're all ... you're a lot of people, you're a community, you're a village, you're one; and so it was really important in my generation that families were taught that you were not just representing yourself, but you were part of a bigger community, and so you were a reflection of that community. That's kind of the indigenous upbringing that I had, was about being like that.

And then, because my parents both basically always spoke Spanish, but my dad knew a whole lot more English than my mom. As we went to school then we began to teach my mom how to speak English, and we would teach her how to read. We taught my dad how to even write his name, because he didn't use to even know how to write his name.

They were very simple, humble people, very loving, very loving people and that was one thing that I really learned from them, was about ... their love for nature and their love for family, and their love for other people and respect, even for those people they didn't know.

And then, since I had all those brothers, you know? I had all those brothers and so I was always tagging along with my brothers, because during the summer they were great explorers, and they get to go to all the creeks and because life was a little bit busy ... different for the girls back then.

It was basically ... You were cooking, and washing, and taking care of the smaller kids, but I always managed to tell my brothers, “I want to go with you all,” and I'd always have something they did wrong, and I said, “Well, I'm going to tell dad you did this,” or, “I'm going to tell mom,” and they said, “Oh, okay, but you better keep up. We're not going to wait for you”.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/susana-s-background-information

Part 13 — Susana's Background Information Part Two:

Almanza: But I always managed to tell my brothers, "I want to go with you all." I'd always have something they did wrong and I'd say, "Well, I'm going to tell Dad you did this. I'm going to tell Mom." They'd say, "Oh, okay, but you better keep up. We're not going to wait for you." I would learn to keep up with them.

I knew how much fun, because they were always exploring. It was really great, because I don't think there was a creek in Austin that I didn't get to explore, Boggy Creek, Onion Creek, Barton Creek. It was just a fun part,

Waller Creek was ... That's what we did. During the summers, we always was at the pools from the moment they filled up the pool. The lifeguards back then would let us be there when the water was going into the pool until it drained out.

We lived, we literally lived at the pool. We'd walk home to eat and go back to the pool. I guess 'cause there was so many of us, my mom, it was like a break for her. Like it was okay to hang at the pool. Then we were taught this, too. My bigger brother was responsible for the next one. The next one responsible for the next one. The next one for the next one. You go down the ladder, so everybody was accountable and responsible for that one person.

I remember one time in elementary school at Palm School, one of my brothers got beat up. We went home and my dad said, "What happened?" They said, "Well, some little kid jumped on my brother and beat him up." He lined us all up and spanked us. He said, "I don't ever want that to happen again. There's no reason that anyone should be harmed or anything, because you're all responsible for everyone else. I don't ever want that to happen again."

After that people would say, "There comes that [Anthony Izz 00:01:54]. They're bullies. They don't fight fair." They would say they don't fight fair, because if one of my brothers or my sister would be, we were all there. It wasn't that we didn't want to fight fair. It was that we didn't want a spanking from my dad. We're going like, "No. We're going to do what he says."

In a way he was teaching about taking up for your family and how important that was. That you always take up for your family. You don't have your siblings being harmed by someone else, because you have to be a united group of people. You've got to stand for one another.

Those were the kind of lessons that I grew up with my family and having ... I had a very loving and an exploring ... I had a fantastic childhood. I didn't even know we lived in poverty, until I was in third grade. The only reason I found out that I was poor was because of a teacher was taking up funds to buy people a workbook. She asked everybody to bring a soda bottle, because you cashed them in for money in those days. She said, "Well, since I know one of these books is going to be for you, because your family lives in poverty."

Of course, that was a big word for me. I said, "Poverty? What does that mean?" She said, "Well, that means your family is poor." I said, "Oh, no. My family is not poor." She looked at me. She says, "What do you mean your family is not poor?" I said, "Oh, no. My mom says we're rich." She

says, "[Spanish 00:03:35] and we're rich, because we have so much family." She just kind of looked at me, but that's what my mom had always said is [Spanish 00:03:47].

Of course, I learned later on that it was a value system. Where they value money, we valued family. That's why I said I learned a lot of things from my parents who were very humble, simple. Didn't have formal education, but they had a lot of wisdom and knowledge that they shared with us and taught us along that way.

That's why I said and all my neighbors there, they had big families. Whenever we wanted to play like baseball or kick the can, you would think it was a tournament. It could only be two families or three families, 'cause you know, nine and nine is eighteen already.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/susana-s-background-information-part-two