

The Oral History of Alice Rios, former KRLD Radio Anchor and Reporter

Journalist and Mayborn graduate student, Rebecca Aguilar conducted the oral history interview of Alice Rios. She is the former anchor and reporter at KRLD radio. The interview was conducted on November 14, 2018 at Mountain View Community College in Dallas, Texas.

AGUILAR: Where were you raised? What were your parents like? Tell me about the family?

RIOS: I was born in Houston... in the Heights. We lived there until I was seven. Then we moved to northwest Houston near Jersey Village and that's where I grew up. My parents are from the valley, Edcouch Elsa, which is near Weslaco. A very small town. They were high school sweethearts. My mom was twenty, and my dad was twenty-two when they got married. Not long after, they moved Houston.

AGUILAR: Tell me the personality of Houston Heights. Is it Latino, is it White, is it African-American?

RIOS: Back then there was pretty good mix of people. It wasn't a minority community, but it was a good melting pot. Now the Heights has turned into an Austin-esque scene. A lot of big, renovated homes. Growing up in the Heights, we lived in a small two bedroom house. We did have great fig trees out back.

AGUILAR: What were your parents like. What did your mom and dad do? Also how many kids did they have?

RIOS: My dad worked for the U-S Postal Service. He was a letter carrier for 36 years until he retired. When they came to Houston the first job he got was at the Baird Bread Company. Then he found out about openings at the area post office. He went and took the exam, which he passed, then became a letter carrier. My mom was an accountant. In high school she'd worked at a couple of offices, so when they came to Houston she got a job in the accounting department at Fox and Jacobs. She did wait until my brother started kindergarten. I am the oldest of three, by the way. So my mom worked for a few companies over the years. The last job she had, she worked in accounting for a company out of Mexico called Girsra International - a rubber manufacturing company. She was always in accounting, accounts receivable, crunching numbers.

Neither of my parents went to college. My mother did try to get associates. She went to school in Houston community college system for about a year and a half but she got overwhelmed, raising three kids, trying to go to school plus working full-time. It just became too much. She lacked 20 hours to get her associate's degree so that was goal she unfortunately never accomplished.

My dad didn't desire higher education. He was a breadwinner and that was that. My father was a hard worker, motivator, incredibly caring and the most supportive person I ever knew. Very soft spoken.

Flash forward to high school graduation. My parents still today live in the house we grew up in in Northwest Houston. They pretty much sacrificed everything to put me, my sister Debbie - who is a year younger, and my brother Arturo Jr., through school. Debbie is the family brainiac. She got a full ride to UT and is a civil engineer. My sister and brother both went to UT. My brother is in medical supply sales. I graduated from Stephen F. Austin, in Nacogdoches in the piney woods of East Texas where I got my degree in Communications, Radio and Television with a minor in Spanish.

I always get very emotional, thinking back on the sacrifices our parents made so that we could finish school. I never had to get student loans, nor did my brother. And as I mentioned, my sister got academic scholarships all the way through. For the numerous sacrifices our parents made, I will be eternally grateful.

Aguilar: Was there a push in your family that all of you have to go to college? You have to do better than us? Or was it more like you do what you want to do but just be a success?

Rios: There was a push...strong encouragement definitely, As we reached sophomore, junior and senior years in high school, and as our friends were starting to go on college visits, my mom would say "you decide where you want to go." There was decided encouragement and yes I guess you could say an expectation. Their plan as parents, was for us to go to college. They did not go, so it became their life goal to make sure they afforded us that opportunity.

Aguilar: Both your parents are Hispanic?

Rios: Yes.

Aguilar: So you're Latinos. What was the make-up of elementary school? Was there something that you remember that "shaped me, Alice?"

Rios: There was! Funny you should ask. In the first grade, I remember, the population of our entire school was probably 90% Anglo, 5% Hispanic, and 5% Black. We grew up in a predominantly Anglo community. I remember in the first grade, my teacher sent a note home with me. Legally and on my birth certificate, my parents named me "Mary Alice," but I was called "Alicia" by family members. Anyway, one day my first grade teacher sent a note home with me and it said, "Dear Mrs. Rios, please teach your daughter how to spell her name correctly." I spelled it A-L-I-C-I-A. She thought it should be spelled, A-L-I-S-H-A. "Alisha" the English version. My mom went ballistic. She went up to the school and explained this is how she spells her name,

what gives you the right to tell me I didn't teach my daughter how to spell her name correctly. This is how she spells her name. Talk about an lifelong, impactful moment and lesson. When that happened it made me realize that people can attack or and shaming comes in many forms, but when your parents support and stand up for you, you take note and realize that standing up for yourself and what you believe in is one of the most important lessons a parent or parents can pass on to their children. When you're that young, seven-years-old, and you see the example of your parent, it helps shape you as an adult..

Aguilar: What did that teach you about your mother? Because you said she is the strength of the family right? Your dad is off working. She showed something else that day.

Rios: That she's protective, stands up for herself and her children. She is not going to allow someone to tell her that she did something wrong when she did not. The thing is, she wasn't ugly or rude to my teacher. She just stood her ground.

Aguilar: And your name is your name?

Rios: Right! That's my name. That's the way it's spelled; my given name. Our parents were incredibly supportive, encouraging, loving. We took trips to the Rio Grande valley all the time. I grew up in a very close family as my mom was the oldest of 11, my dad the youngest of 8! Haha. As I went through elementary, junior high and high school, I made a lot of friends along the way.

Aguilar: Are your parents outgoing too?

Rios: My mom is; Outgoing. Self assured. My dad is...was...very soft spoken. He was the observer, sat back, loved everyone. Family was everything to him. He was quiet but with a quick wit about him. Our mom was definitely the strong personality. They were opposites, and it worked beautifully. We lost our dad November of 2017, 4 days after Thanksgiving. Three days after seeing the movie Coco in Arlington, where my parents spent Thanksgiving with us. If you've seen it, you can appreciate how incredibly meaningful that movie is to me.

Aguilar: Tell me about high school?

Rios: High school was fun. English was my strong subject. Those were the classes I excelled in and should have focused on. I wish I'd gotten involved with yearbook staff, the debate team, although I did compete and did well at speech tournaments and with extemporaneous speaking. Hindsight is 20/20, right? Math - forget about it. I took algebra three times in college to make a "C."

I was involved in so many activities - cheerleading, softball, volleyball every sport. It was hard on my parents because before we were old enough to drive, they would leave work and spend their evenings running the three of us around all the time to practices and games. It wasn't just

me. My sister was on the drill team, and played volleyball. We were very active in school, which kept us from getting into trouble for sure.

I was a good student. I didn't really have to study much. Had I studied more I could have done better. I just didn't have to. I could make "B's and A's" without studying. My sister was the bookworm. Hence the scholarships.

I had fun in high school, enjoyed it. There are things that I would have done differently. I would've dropped cheerleading and focused more on my writing and literature classes. But there is nothing in my life up to this point that I have regretted.

Aguilar: But cheerleading makes you outgoing, and puts in front of people.

Rios: At the time sure...but in hindsight, it was a waste of time.

Aguilar: Really you look at it as a waste?

Rios: If I were to get a do-over, I would have focused on other things. When you go back and think about choices you could have made, I would have not done it at all. Unless you want to become a collegiate cheerleader it's not going to help. It was fun but not great use of time later in life. Well...except for the fact I was a captain so I guess in high school I inadvertently got my first leadership experience.

Aguilar: When did you realize you wanted to become a journalist or a writer?

Rios: So growing up, one of the things both my parents instilled and probably more so my mom, she made us all as a family, watch the 6 o'clock news. If we were busy, we'd watch at 10pm. But no matter what, we were watching the news as a family.

Aguilar: How young do you recall? Like a little kid?

Rios: Yeah, like 5 or 6. When I was 12, that's when I got the bug. We always watched Channel 13.

Aguilar: KTRK?

Rios: Yep, exactly. Elma Barrera. I became obsessed with her. I didn't know it at the time, but after having researched her as I got older I learned she was the first Hispanic reporter in Houston. And she became an anchor at Channel 13 eventually. I remember when I was 12 and watching the news, I just became fixated. I was fascinated by her and her professionalism. She was so good at what she did. She's articulate and Hispanic, so she became my role model to a point of obsession.

I wanted to emulate her and thought - I want to do that. I knew. I never changed my major in college from a Communications/Radio and Television major. Never changed. I stayed on track.

In fact, I reached out to Elma a couple of years ago. When I left my previous career I had a little break before getting into marketing. I thought - I want to meet Elma. I'm going to reach out and at some point I'm going to meet her just to let her know what an impact she had. So I did reach out and I found her on Facebook and we connected. We chatted. I haven't met her yet, but one of these weeks or weekends when I go visit my parents I intend to reach out to her again and treat her to lunch.

Aguilar: What college did you decide on and why?

Rios: Stephen F. Austin. So what happened was one of my best friends in high school was going to go to A & M. Another wanted to visit Sam Houston, and then SFA. Me and my mom first joined my friend on the visit to A&M. Too big, too much, not my speed. Then we go to Huntsville, and I was like "ugh, this place is dead." The last stop was Nacogdoches and SFA. I knew my limits and even at that age I knew I wanted the balance. I wanted to get my degree but have fun at the same time. The piney woods, all of the green acreage, it was beautiful. My mom and I looked at each other and literally said "this feels like its right" and it was. I had the best time of my life there, took all of the journalism classes I could and that were required.

While at SFA, there was one communications professor, Dr. Oliver who was hard, hard nosed. He was very tough on us. He taught a news writing course. Interestingly, because of Elma, I went in thinking I'm take some classes. I'll start in radio but then get into TV. Everybody wants to do TV, right? But Dr. Oliver was a radio guy. He was a news radio person. He made no bones about the fact that to him, and he would always say this, in radio you have to rely on your words in order for the listener to visualize and imagine your story. You have to tell the story through words. In TV they have photos and videos to cover a story. So radio, in his eyes was harder, because you have to be a creative storyteller. Dr. Oliver taught us the art of the writing technique of three lines in, soundbite and two to three lines out. That's how you write for radio. Short and tight. Which is of course different than writing a 2-3 minute story for TV after having edited sometimes hours worth of tape.

My radio news, broadcasting career spanned 32 years, 24 of that was at CBS radio.

Aguilar: Before we talk about your career, let me back up a little bit. When you left for college and had to say goodbye to your parents, that is a very big moment. Tell me about moment?

Rios: It was so tough, and I'm the first born. First one to go to college. My entire family took me to the school (SFA). My brother and sister, we're all in the back seat.

Aguilar: I ask you this because these are important moments that create your strength as a journalist later on, because we're constantly moving around from job to job. That's really the first time you have to say goodbye.

Rios: Oh my gosh yes! We get to school and all the parents are dropping off their kids, and we unload. We get my room set up. It's that moment when they hop back in the car and my mom and I are standing on the sidewalk and it's such an emotional, bittersweet moment. You're about to branch off on your own and your parents - they are proud but again bittersweet because they know they are saying bye to their baby. It was very touching and tender separation but there were tears. She knew she was letting go and I knew I was going to head into this next chapter of my life. Huge moment. You're right it's a very big moment in a young adult's life.

Aguilar: Did this school have a journalism department?

Rios: It did. We had a TV station and a radio station. I took both. I took courses where we were behind the camera. We were producing. We could be in front of the camera, and I did some sports anchoring at our college TV station. That's what I wanted to do. I enjoyed the sports angle. I also had the radio station and that's where I got my first taste behind the console. I'm talking...two turntables and a microphone. Hahaha.

Aguilar: You're spinning records and doing news?

Rios: At the TV station we wrote and produced our own news program including sportscasts. At the radio station we were playing music and had 3 minutes news cut-ins once an hour.

Aguilar: In high school you were very involved in extra curricular activities. Was that the same thing in college?

Rios: Not as much. I was a resident assistant though, and I did play intramural softball but that's about it. I spend a lot of time at the radio station and focused on classes. I had fun. I was young enough but oddly wise enough to realize that if I did well in school I could do well in a career.

Aguilar: Do you remember the first thing you ever reported on or wrote, because you were working at a radio station.

Rios: I worked at the campus station and then got a job in town at a local AM music station. It shut down at 6pm. Literally, we'd power down at 6pm.. From that station, a guy heard me on the air and called to ask if I'd like to do some news cut-ins at KGCS which was a local country music station. They had news at the top and bottom of the hour. It was a five minute newscast.

Aguilar: So you're a college student and you're already jumping into the professional world?

Rios: Yeah, I was almost 20 because I started college at 18. By my sophomore year I'm already working part-time, like three hours a day. Keep in mind, at KSFA we did the swap shop show where people would call in to report their cat or dog was missing. Small town, not to diminish the fact that I was young or anything but yes. The news director, calls. Says he's looking for a reporter and he'd heard me on air on the AM station and asked if I was taking classes. "Yes". Are you taking writing classes? "Yes" So he called me, real nice guy, Kevin Kelly. He pretty much said "OK this is what I'm going to do. I want you to calls these people, get some comments from them" and yada, yada. So, the first few assignments were very generic. But the first big story he gave me was to drive to Lufkin, which was 30 minutes away, and go interview the police chief. He was celebrating 15 years as the Lufkin chief of police. And he said, "I want you to get his story. Get him to tell you about himself. How long he has been there. What does he like about it, and what does he not like about his job." I go and interview the police chief. Back then we had these big recorders.

Aguilar: Big tape recorders?

Rios: Right. I get back and I'm transcribing the interview and I realize this guy gave me all the fluff and all the great things about his job. So here I am, I'm 20, and I called him back and I was like

"Chief Williams"

"Yes"

"this is Alice Rios at KSCS"

"Yes"

"I just realized that you told me all the positive things about your job. I need to hear more; the other side of it. What about some of the things that haven't gone so well. That you don't like about your job and you know, things you wish you might've done differently."

Then there was a long pause and I hear him chuckle and he says "you're going to be OK in this business." Like I said, I came back and realized all I got the nice clean version but needed the meat. It can't all be a bed of roses.

Aguilar: So by that time you knew what is needed in a good story?

Rios: Right, you have to have a balance and of course the classes helped tremendously. I thank God for Dr. Oliver. No one liked him at the time but I guarantee there are a lot more of me out there.

Aguilar: You're going to the school. Are you balancing a professional and a school life at the same time?

Rios: Yes, freshman year taking care of basic classes, sophomore year I'm already working at the campus station. But by the time I got a job at a real station, I was no longer participating at the campus station. I was getting paid now. I was making \$4.50 an hour. (She chuckles) From part time work at KJCS for 2 years I went to a full time job in Bryan College Station. The owner of KJCS also had stations in B/CS. Ben Downs owned the station in Bryan and said "Hey we need a news person over here, a news reporter/anchor at KCBS. So he transferred me. Now I'm big time making 15-thousand dollars a year. With a college degree, mind you. I worked there for one year, but it was split shift. I was going in at four in the morning to do newscasts from 6 to 9, but in at 5. Then I had a mid-day break, and I had to go back from 2 to 6pm. I hated it.

Aguilar: When did you go to school?

Rios: The promotion to Bryan happened about 5 months after I'd graduated from SFA which was in December of 1989. When you're in Bryan-College Station, and you're not an Aggie it sucks. I didn't like it there at all. I was there for about a year. But...in that time that I was at WTAW/KTSR, I was sending air checks to a man named Rick Ericson at KRLD, which is the CBS radio station that I spent my career at. Every three months I would send him an air check. Then on a Friday, it happened. I got a phone call transferred to me. Around 3pm on a Friday. It's Rick Ericson the news director at KRLD. He says "Hey got your air check,,again. I wanted to see if you want to come in so we can talk to you about potentially working as a traffic reporter for us."

Aguilar: Let me back up. When did you graduate from college?

Rios: In '89.

Aguilar: In 1989 you get this job in Bryan-College Station. You're there one year and the smart thing is you're in touch with Rick Ericson all this time.

Rios: Yeah. Within a few months of working there in Bryan-College Station I was miserable. The hours were horrible. So I was always forward thinking. In all honesty, I must tell you that at the time I was dating a pilot who used to live in Nacogdoches as a charter pilot. He got a job at Love Field. So he was already in Dallas and kept telling me, "There's a station I listen to. It's KRLD. Some of the people on the air on the weekends are horrible. You are ten times better." He encouraged me to apply at KRLD which I did. I knew enough to send the air checks every three months. To the same man, Ericson, just fresh newscasts. I was persistent. Finally an opportunity. Interesting to me that to this day Rick Ericson, that first news director - best boss I ever had. And what's funny is you don't realize it when you're 21, 22 that that person who gives you that first big break, after all the incredibly horrible news directors I ever worked for, he ended up be-

ing the one who with his calm demeanor yet seriously keen news sense was the best. Rick gave me a shot and helped mold me. If you make it to the big leagues in such a horrible dog eat dog business- as you of course know - and have a boss who is a jerk, I can see how that might've scarred me for life to where I might've switched gears. He was solid. I still keep up with him today. He runs his own very successful PR firm here in Dallas. In fact the American Airlines Center is one of his big clients.

Aguilar: Let me back up again. You were given the name "Alicia." When did you decide, I'm going to be "Alice" and why?

Rios: (She laughs) When I was born my mom was all doped up.

Aguilar: (Laughs) Wait lets clear that up. You mean your mom was on meds because she was having a baby.

Rios: Hahahahahaha. correct. Yes, immediately after having given birth she was kind of loopy. My dad wanted my birth certificate to read "Mary Alice." My mom wanted it to say "Alicia— Maria Alicia." They had this battle before I was born.

Aguilar: She wanted more of the Spanish version and he wanted more of the English version.

Rios: Exactly. So when I was born and the doctor said "What's her name?" In her groggy state, my mom said "Mary Alice". So my birth certificate says "Mary Alice." My dad won! All my life it has been so confusing as to what people call me. So "Mary Alice" on the birth certificate. My grandmother is the only person whoever called me "Mary Alice." And so for the majority of growing up years I was called "Alicia." (Spanish pronunciation)

Aguilar: Back to KRLD. You're a traffic reporter?

Rios: For three years.

Aguilar: How was that job? Obviously you know the city.

Rios: He (Ericson) calls me. He knows I'm from Houston. He knows I live in Bryan-College Station and he says "Ok how well do you know the streets of Dallas." I said, "I don't." He said, "You're going to get here, I'm going to get you a Mapsco (map book) and you're going to flip through Tarrant County, flip through Dallas County and you're going to learn these streets, because if you don't you're not going to get the job." So I had to flip through, read and try to memorize names. Of course you had streets like you know, Grawlyer that always causes a debate, Monticello, Lancaster the street versus Lancaster the city and other oddly named streets. So for the first year it was a bumpy learning curve, but they believed in me and gave me a chance. When I think back on those first years at KRLD I know the key to longevity for me, because I

was there for 24 years, was flexibility. I worked 7 days a week to start. I went from making 17-thousand to 23-thousand within several years and while I know by today's standards it's not a lot of money - you know Rebecca...anyone who works in this business does not do it for the money. The pay raises were a sign of respect and I know in my heart that when you work the awful shifts, and don't cause trouble you stick around.

Aguilar: And a good attitude I would think?

Rios: Absolutely. A positive attitude. I was young, single no family responsibilities so I was capable of working seven days a week. Once hired and working as a traffic reporter, there came the opportunity to go out and get a small story. Just a fluff story. I was always a "yes man" for sure. I always worked whatever hours they needed me to work. Flexibility, adaptability and truly being a team player are keys to survival for anybody, right? You cannot use yesterday's solutions to solve today's problems. You get left behind if you do.

Aguilar: To succeed in journalism?

Rios: Yes, to succeed in journalism. More importantly to succeed in life. I was always a good writer. Not the best, but good. Remember that my career path was truly centered around news broadcasting. I have had success in being a servant employee and eventually in my current role, a servant leader. A servant leader asks those around them..what can I do for you, to make your jobs easier? You don't have to be the most talented to be the most valuable if that makes sense. Anyway, by the third year of traffic reporting, I was getting bored. Time to move on. I went to Rick and I told him that I thought I needed a different challenge and I thought I was ready to start reporting. I had some reporting experience before. So he sends me out to cover something at 7/11 that had happened. It wasn't even a big deal. It was something like a Free Slurpee day or some such promotion. Totally insignificant, but I went and did it and got some cool nat sound and a couple of sound bites. He was like, "Okay." So he moved me off the traffic desk into the newsroom. Now I'm doing some in-house reporting and as an in-house reporter, you record phone interviews and take in feeds from the reporters out in the street. You get the audio, and you're splicing tape and on a reel-to-reel, and so basically I'm on fluff assignments or the features beat. But then came the opportunity to start anchoring on the weekends. That's where the passion for anchoring, for broadcast news was solidified for me. After four years of being at KRLD, I started anchoring weekends at 6 in the morning on Saturdays. I was actually an anchor. In Dallas. I was on top of the world. I knew I had an authoritative, smooth voice and I knew it was my destiny. My career.

Rick Ericson was a great boss and I will forever be indebted to him. He gave me my big break and because of him I stuck with it. Because of him, I spent my career at KRLD. When ratings are bad, news directors are the first to take the bullet. He left and after Rick, twelve news directors sat in his office. Only one of them a woman, and only temporarily. Janet Evans was great. Night

and day, having a female boss. It was enlightening and empowering, even for the short while she was there. In 24 years. one female news director. Sad. So you're talking about an average two years per news director.

Aguilar: How was that? For other journalists who are going to read this in the future; how was that every two years you get a new news director? Each one has different demands, different personalities, and sometimes they come in with their own teams. How were you able to succeed or survive?

Rios: I mentioned earlier, flexibility and adaptability. And let's face it when they aren't paying you much but you have a pretty solid voice, delivery and can write they keep you. It's unsettling. When Rick left, I was in my mid-twenties, maybe 25 or 26. When he left, I remember thinking, and I was too young to know, when new blood, new management comes in they usually bring in their own team. And that's true. Happened time and time again. But when you are not the highest paid employee and you are able to work seven days week, they are going to keep the people who are going to work any shift. So even though some people were let go, you survive by doing your job and not making any waves. I do not intend for this to sound boastful but when you are a female, have a strong on-air presence and a sense of humor that certainly didn't hurt.

Aguilar: Let me throw something else into the equation as one Latina talking to another Latina. Were your newsrooms in 24 years at KRLD and your previous other radio stations...

Rios: I was the only one.

Aguilar: I'm sorry.

Rios: I was the only one if that's what you're going to ask.

Aguilar: The only Latina.

Rios: Yeah or Hispanic at all. There were no males. I was the only one. Was I a token? I certainly would hope not. I don't believe so. I was strong on air, as a person and as a team player.

Aguilar: I never think of us as tokens. I think of us always adding to the newsroom. How was that or did you ever put that in your mind? How much being a Latina play into your life in moving up in our career or moving up the ladder?

Rios: You know it's so interesting. In those years I'm in my mid 20's, and I realize I am the only Hispanic in the newsroom, the only one. There were 25 or 30 of us and working different shifts. We had a couple of African-Americans. One Asian-American producer and reporter. Loved her. In the beginning that part of the equation wasn't as much of a concern to me as was simply being a female in a male dominated industry.. Because at the time all the men got all the plush as-

signments. There were so few women that we didn't get to cover the good stuff or the big stories. In fact, we only had female anchors on the weekends. I mean Suzanne Calvin was a woman ahead of her time. She was the most amazing woman and another role model. She became a morning anchor in the mid to late 90's. KRLD was so far behind the times in how they treated men compared to women. I'm talking about as recently as the mid 90's, an operations manager said to me, "Can you believe over at Channel 5 they are trying to pair two women, two female anchors together for a 10pm newscast?" He said, "This market is not even ready for one strong female anchor let alone two female anchors sitting side by side." I couldn't believe this man was telling me this to my face. Dallas market. DFW. I thought... is this 1960? I was young but the Latina flared up in me real good. Yes, he was white. No, I did not say a word. I was so angry and just walked away.

Yes, I was aware that I was the only Hispanic female, but the bigger battle was how men and women were treated so horribly differently.

Aguilar: In those 24 years at KRLD, you become one of their main anchors for how long?

Rios: For 15 years.

Aguilar: In those years did you see more on-air Latinas or Latinos or is always just you?

Rios: Well, along the way there was a reporter or two, male reporters who were hired. But no (shakes her head no). Not many at all. —What's sad is when you don't have the representation in the newsroom it reflects on how well....or how poorly.....your responding to the community in which you live and serve. When you do not have that diversity you do end up covering stories that are slanted towards one particular audience. And that audience is the audience that drives BMW's, LandRovers, Mercedes, and shops at the Galleria and You are not being inclusive. You're not telling the stories of the people who live in West Dallas or Oak Cliff or the different communities. They are like the unheard voices because the big bosses, that's not the story they want. They want the story about the money makers, the movers and shakers, the attorneys, They want to put shows on air paid for by filthy rich companies who have nothing better to do with their money. The stories that are geared towards a certain...

Aguilar: Group?

Rios: Group of advertisers and listeners who make above a certain pay grade. It's all about the dollar. It's about the advertisement.

Aguilar: Did you ever find yourself that there would be a story, and you're thinking "Wait a minute guys I am reading this story and guys this is not a way it's going to come off." Did you sometimes feel that you're the only one who can speak up for people of color. I have to say it.

Rios: Interesting you bring that up. More times than you can imagine. The problem was when you are sitting in that chair and you're supposed to be unbiased as an anchor, you cannot offer your opinion on way or another. There were certain stories that come up and that we had talk shows, right. One of our hosts — and there were issues that would come up and they'd ask me to step in. There was no way I could give my opinion. Did I want to? Of course. I couldn't. That was the hardest part about being in the position I was in and as a broadcast journalist you cannot ever let the public know where you stand on any story or any issue or who you fight for. Now was I involved in some organizations outside of the office. Yes. They couldn't do anything about? Yeah.

I can tell you this now. If I didn't agree with the story that was coming up that I was suppose to read, I would time it just so....and get up and go to the restroom at a certain time or start fake coughing and make the guys read it. In radio news you alternate stories. If I knew a story was coming up, yeah I would excuse myself and go to the ladies room. So I wouldn't have to read it. Towards the end, I would simply tell my male colleagues, "I'm not going to read that story,"

Aguilar: What message do you tell journalists when you know you are reading a story and you know it's anti-Hispanic, anti-Black, anti-Gay. You know story is kind of written in that way. Not everyone can get up and go to the restroom.

Rios: Right. I had a team. If you are a journalist covering a story you do not agree with you have to make a choice. You take a stand for what you believe in, because someone has to pay the bills. Or you stand up in what you believe in and walk away and know you find a job somewhere else and if you're a hard worker and a good journalist you will find another job. But having said that it is not easy. Not one bit. When you ARE the main breadwinner sometimes your integrity is compromised and that is THE most horrible place to be in your head. It's crushing to who you are and what you're made of.

So I would say don't ever be afraid to stand up for what you believe in because in this industry it's all and only about the money. You should enjoy for what you do for a living, but you do have to pay the bills.

Aguilar: You said Elma (Barrera) was an inspiration to you. I'm sure you have been an inspiration to people who have heard you on the radio in the morning. Have you had people reach out to you and say, "I used to hear you on the radio or a miss you." What is that like when you now are the inspiration?

Rios: When I interviewed for the job here at Mountain View College in the marketing department, it just so happens that our director, Jill Lain, she is a KRLD listener. She told me well after she hired me, that she felt like she already knew me when I came in to interview, because she had heard and listened to the station for 15, years. What was nice about that is, she was one of many people I meet who've said "I feel like I know you. I know about your son, Lee. What you do in your free time, the names of your family members, you make me laugh." You don't realize

the impact you have on people until they tell you “I’ve been listening on my way to work for 20 years and I feel like I know you.” There is heartfelt appreciation in that.

In my role now as the assistant director of marketing it’s been interesting because I have professors who will send communications students who want to get in radio and TV and I’m like “come on in and let me tell you why you should or shouldn’t. Let me give it to you straight.”

Aguilar: So you decide to do something different in your career and you come over to Mountain View College. What year was that?

Rios: The summer of 2016.

Aguilar: What has that shift been like?

Rios: It’s an interesting transition. It’s actually been an awesome transition because when I first came on I started writing media releases and articles. That’s what I did initially. I know what appeals to the media and what they will or won’t cover. There has to be a story. There has to be a story about a student who came from Nepal who was there when the earthquake was going on and now she is here taking classes. That’s what the media wants. That’s what they will cover. She has a story to tell.

I write stories that are student centered. And I cannot begin to tell you how rewarding it is mentoring these students. In fact, Melva Yanez, a first generation graduate of MVC who now attends UNT. Graduated with top honors as a dual credit student. I met her my first year on the job and in fact I took her shopping and bought her her prom dress. She spent all of her time studying. My boss, by the way, has been an incredible mentor. She gave me an opportunity, even though I didn’t come with a background in higher ed. She saw the potential of bringing in diverse people from different arenas. We have a great team here.

Aguilar: Do you ever miss the news?

Rios: (big sigh) Do I miss serving as the voice for the people and to get message out about a story or telling a story, I miss the storytelling. But in that business, you are nothing but a number. In football terms they call it meat on a hook. Once you are useless to them they toss you aside and bring in the person who will work for a third or less of what they were paying you. It’s all about the money for corporations.

Aguilar: The beauty of our business is that we are exposed to amazing and interesting people and events. I’m sitting in your office and I see of pictures of you and President Obama. What year was that?

Rios: That was 2015.

Aguilar: That was a big moment for you, right?

Rios: (nods yes)

Aguilar: Tell me three big moments in your journalism career. What was that like with President Obama?

Rios: I want to tell you about that day in particular because it was cathartic from start to finish, for so many reasons. We're on the air one day and I'm reading my email during a commercial break. I see an email that says from the White House. I open the email. And it says "Hi Alice this is Keith Maylee from White House. I'm with the media relations team for the southwest region. I'm writing to see if you would be willing to come to the White House in two days to interview the president?" That's all it said. One line.

Aguilar: What are you thinking?

Rios: Interestingly, Karen Borta had the same experience two years prior and I remember hearing the story that she thought the email was spam. She didn't reply. So her boss calls her in and says "Hey the White House wants to know why you're not responding?" I knew it was legit. I open the email and immediately on a break called my bosses and say "you need to come see something." He reads the email and he's like "Holy...let me go upstairs and see if I can make this happen. Two days?" I told him, yes two days.

Aguilar: Who is paying for the trip?

Rios: CBS is paying for the trip, not the White House. It was a two day turnaround so as not to even have time to really think or prepare. Healthcare Marketplace was about to roll out the beginning of the third enrollment period.

I go to Washington. I get five minutes with the president. That day was probably the most memorable, the most profound day of my career, because come to find out they selected five radio, specifically five radio news anchors from across the country: Tampa, Kansas City, Seattle, and of course Dallas. I did find out from a paige, when I asked how the five of us were selected, that our social media pages, followers, longevity in the market - all of it was factored in. Social Media...monitored for months.

Each of us got five minutes with the President in the Oval office. Leading up to that we're being prepped in briefing rooms and then they call you in, one by one. You come into the waiting area, and I'm sitting on a settee with my hands folded in my lap. There is a Secret Service guy standing right across from me. At one point the Secret Service guy looks at me and says Ms. Rios are you ready? I stood up.

Aguilar: Were you nervous?

Rios: Was I nervous?!? I was nervous. I looked to my right and the door to the Oval office opens and he's standing there with his hands folded. I start walking towards him and he says "Ms. Rios, welcome to the White House" and extended his hand. It was a surreal moment I'll tell you that. It was surreal to say the least and...

Aguilar: It's surreal because here's this little girl from Houston...

Rios: Absolutely!

Aguilar: ...Little girl from Houston who was raised by parents who didn't go to college and you are in the White House with the President of the United States.

Rios: Right! That's exactly how I felt. At that very moment I so wanted to tell him how the night of the election in 2008 and as soon as the election was over, I printed that one liner from the AP Wire that said, "America has just elected its first Black president." I printed that and put it in a folder, put it in my drawer at work." Sadly, I was not there to tell him what an emotional election night that was. I was there to do a job.

So I sat down with the president and I was instructed by my boss to ask some hard questions and not throw softballs. Well, I come out of the gate acknowledging the great number of people being helped but with a quick follow-up asking him why people are having issues with the health-care system and premiums are all over the place; inconsistent. It was a little jarring. He expected ...

Aguilar: You were doing your job.

Rios: Yes, I was doing my job. The interview was quick but it was incredible, and a great experience. So when your five minute are up, he shakes your hand, quick photo op and they quickly escort you out to the media briefing room. So there is no-one in there, because we're going one by one.

I'm sitting there, in the room where the President holds his briefings. It's kind of dim. I'm sitting there taking notes. I open my laptop. I'm jotting down some notes, and the tears—the tears. I sat there thinking about my parents and for all they sacrificed, and like you said, here's the girl from Houston. In the flipping White House. (Smiles big) And as my brother said, "There are three women who have interviewed the president in the Oval Office: Barbara Walters, Oprah Winfrey, and Alice "flippin" Rios. (She laughs) That's what he told me. Anyway that was definitely the pinnacle of my career, because no one can ever take that away from me.

Aguilar: Ok so you had Obama. Who else? Two other "aha" moments in your life?

Rios: David Koresh of the Branch Davidians when all that was happening in Waco in 1993.

Aguilar: The Waco cult leader.

Rios: Yes, David Koresh. The day before a lot of what happened at the compound when down, David Koresh called into the newsroom. It was him.

Aguilar: Let me back up. So David Koresh had holed up at his compound with many people of his cult. The ATF is trying to get everybody out safely, but they don't know what is going on.

Rios: Yes, law enforcement is totally surrounding the compound.

Aguilar: The media from around the world is outside, also waiting for him to come out and make his next move.

Rios: Yes and apparently he was a KRLD fan. So he calls.

Aguilar: Do you recall what year this was?

Rios: 1993. So I'm at the traffic desk and the phone is ringing and the red light is on. Anybody can answer the phone, from any position in the newsroom. "KRLD, this is Alice.

He says "This is David Koresh. I need to speak somebody."

"I'm sorry."

"This is David Koresh and I'm calling to speak to somebody in management."

I set the phone down, jumped up. It's like holy cow. And so I go find the nearest manager. He comes to the phone. And sure enough. David Koresh on the phone.

They didn't put him on the air right away, but they pass him to a producer, of the guy who was on the air, and then the station manager and the GM go back to the studio and they are on the phone with him for about ten minutes. They verified it and at some point they put him on the air. They knew they were taking a risk.

Aguilar: Because the ATF and FBI want to talk to him and he's talking to the media.

Rios: Correct. Our bosses just went with it and it ended up really being him.

Aguilar: So what happened? Did you guys put him on the air? What did he talk about?

Rios: The fact that he wasn't going to give up and that he wasn't crazy. He blamed the ATF.

Aguilar: Who got to interview him?

Rios: If I'm not mistaken it was Jody Dean on the air at the time. Yes, Jody Dean.

Aguilar: What an interesting little nugget. What about number three?

Rios: There are so many people that you interview and talk to. Mark Cuban was another one that stood out as a favorite because I am fascinated by him.

Aguilar: This is before Shark Tank?

Rios: This is before Shark Tank. This when he was geek Mark, right? The thing about Mark Cuban in my eyes is that his vision was so ahead of its time and even though now he's become this incredibly savvy yet genuine businessman, yet he's never lost his connectivity with the community. He's a smart man. Yet I have always found him to be very genuine and personal. That's my take. I don't know what everybody's thoughts and ideas are about Mark Cuban, but I truly believes he cares about all races, diversity.

In fact recently Mark Cuban hosted a group of regional marketers from a Mountain View College conference. He provided tickets to a game and spoke to the group. There were around 50 of us and spoke to us. It was pretty powerful, inspiring. I am a big fan of his.

Aguilar: Before you switched careers, was there anything in journalism that you didn't do?

Rios: Had I known in advance how things would end in that career, I do wish I had had the courage to start a talk show with female Latina hosts. A dear friend proposed the idea and it would have been the ideal way on the ideal platform with such a powerful coverage area. Not-necessarily covering only stories affecting women specifically, but with a hard focus and concentration. There are so many stories that should be heard in the Latina community, here in DFW and across the country. There are so many stories, untold stories that deserve to be heard.

When you have that voice, when you have that ability on that spectrum and 50,000 watts to share a mic, share a story, and tell other people's stories that is a very, very powerful thing. I regret not having pushed for it. I think ...

Aguilar: It's missing.

Rios: It is missing. Having something like that could have been impactful.

Aguilar: We've come full circle. Your parents, how do they feel with what you've done in your life?

Rios: My father passed away a year ago. On November 27 of last year and it's been hard. For everything they did, the hard work, living in the same little 900 square foot house in Houston, all the sacrifices; I know they are proud. I mean incredibly proud. It's good to know that all of their sacrifices are what led to their children's successful careers and happy and healthy lives.

Aguilar: What do you want your legacy to be?

Rios: Oh! (Takes a big breath) to be one of those people you hear about on NPR. (smiles.) To have one of those foundations that helps others. That maybe I opened doors or simply opened someone's eyes or touched someone's life in some way. Simple really.

Aguilar: What else do you want to accomplish?

We all have an end day. What is that one thing you want to do before a higher power says "it's time."

Rios: When I do retire, I do want to retire to Mexico and live in Mexico and help children there, either teach them English, maybe help nurture a desire to attend college and help raise money to do so. I haven't been told what I'm supposed to be doing, but I am waiting and I know it's not here. I know it's in Mexico and I know it's helping kids.

I have one son. Lee. He's 23 and about to graduate from Texas State University with his Bachelor's. He will be a special ed teacher and football coach. And he will be fine. The circle of life!

Aguilar: And you're married too?

Rios: Yes.

Aguilar: What's your husband like.

Rios: He puts others before himself. Always has. He puts toothpaste on my toothbrush every morning. He leaves the house before I do. It used to bug the independent me. Now, if he forgets...I miss it. Oh he makes a mean fideo! And he's white! Haha. It's the little things. Life is great.

