

April Cruz 'A'

Nathan Hester

My name is April Cruz, and I am thirty-five years old and my birthday is February 18, 1983 and I was born and raised in Barrio Anita.

Yeah, so my grandfather, Don Chico Cruz, came here from Mexico and um, came here from Mexico and he married my grandmother who was at least like, at least twenty-five years younger and just started building the first original house, which is not the house that I'm in right now, this is the property but it was a different house back then, for her. My grandma already had children, so he started building a house that was big enough for her and her children and it was, from what I hear, they say it was like a thirteen bedroom house. They just kept adding to the house and the backyard, it's humongous, there was even like another like kind of little apartment, shack, place for even more family members to stay there.

Trinidad Cruz, and she was also born in Mexico and came here. I don't really know the story of how she got her but I know that she was not born here.

Just Family, all about family, everybody knows everybody back then. I mean as far as I can remember, a little girl, five-years-old, I'm walking to Ory by myself, then along came my brothers and there they go with me alone, walk to Ory from sunup to sundown, you walk back home, but you know, just hanging out at Ory 24/7, go swimming. Like I said, we grew up where everybody knew everybody, so we were very good friends with some neighbors that lived down the street, the Espinosa's, and you know, basically it was a day to day thing, hanging out with them and being at Ory, playing sports, going to Davis.

You know the ones that we hung out with a lot was Claudia, Pedro, Pablo, Juan Pablo, and Donnie, Luis, oh my god my friend Gloria, and the Cortez's, Fernamble, you know, they're my neighbors, to this day his mom and dad are still our neighbors. You know, we'd walk to school starting Junior High, we'd walk to uh, high school, we'd walk to high school together and, you know, and his family still lives there.

Yeah so, during the year, even during the year I mean a lot of people had to be home at a certain time, but not us, not people in the neighborhood that we grew up with. Ory would have like, you know from school they would, we'd walk to Ory and they'd have an after school program that was free for us and we would just go there, do homework, or play outside, they had a lot of sports going on, so every season there was a sport and my brothers and I were always involved with the sports.

Like Volleyball, basketball, soccer, we did a lot of soccer. What else did we do? Volleyball I remember, soccer, basketball. That was pretty much it. So it was pretty much year round with those sports and you know they had a van and we would go to Ory and if it was a night we'd play sports, we'd play sports and they'd drop us off at home after the sport was over and if there was no sports going on during the school year, we would just stay at Ory playing pool, foosball, it was open, so we could come in and out as we please. There used to be a 76 across

the street, so if we had money, we'd run there and if we didn't have money we'd ask somebody at Ory for money like Chino or any of the workers, we'd be like "hey we want to go get a soda, give us some money" and they would. It was not a big deal. We'd go walk to Burger King, and you know in the summer, they had a summer program, the summer program ended at, what, four or five pick-up? Not for the neighborhood kids, we were there until like ten-o'clock at night, waiting for Chino or somebody to drop us off at home, and they would. He'd be in his red truck and he'd come by and just drop us off, and it was like that every single day.

Oh, Chino's awesome, I love him. You know what, he was our mentor, our main person at Ory. He was there, it was all about us, it was about the people in the neighborhood. He would go above and beyond for everybody. Rather it be, we didn't have money for sports, he'd pay for the sport, rather it be one person couldn't go to the field trip, somehow somehow we went to the field trip. Anything with my grandma, and my grandma was, you know, by the time she was raising us she had already been a widow, her husband died, so she stopped her life, took us in and thanks to Ory, I mean we stayed on a good track. I mean Chino had a lot to do with that, letting us stay at Ory from open to close, we never wandered the streets, we were always safe to walk there, walk home. It was never like, "Oh I don't know what time they're coming", my grandma would call Ory and talk to Chino and she'd be like "You can spank them if you want" you know, that's where home was, it was home and Ory 24/7 and you know they definitely kept us on the right path.

Oh yeah like in the summer time, they'd always like, even now with like the Parks and Rec, summer programs would offer field trips, and sometimes, like "You wanna go to Breakers?" Everybody, every year, us neighborhood kids waited for Breakers because we never got to go to Breakers ever. So breakers would be like even \$8 a person and you're like "Man my grandmother's got four of us, how is she gonna pay \$8 for four of us, there's no way that's gonna happen." Obviously, she'd have to like ask somebody for money or the staff would feel bad so they'd pay for us because we were good kids, we just grew up poor, with one income and my grandma raising us. She couldn't do it. So you know, Chino, Jack, Paul, all those workers, Ruben, someone would be like "Okay so who's paying for what kid, let's take them." Or sometimes it'd be like, "Oh well, the extra money that we got for snacks, we are just gonna pay for the Cruz's and we're gonna take them." You know, it was never like, they never not included us. We were like the main people for Ory growing up.

Oh yeah, went to Davis. I loved Davis. My principal in kinder was Dr. Gomez, and then after Dr. Gomez it was Dr. Romero, who I still see on and off to this day and she is amazing. She has a lot to do with it too. They would do home visits here at school because they knew my grandma was old and was sick and couldn't really be in and out of the school. She didn't have transportation, they would come and do home visits here to check on us for our book reports and grades and for parent conferences, they would come here and do parent conferences with my grandma. She would have food ready for them and it was very welcoming. They were a big part of us, you know, us growing up at Davis with Dr. Romero so involved with the family,

making sure that we were okay. Even to this day, she found out that I had kids because we had seen each other. She asked me, "What car was it?" she went outside while I was in the store, met my kids, gave them money. She saw me at the dollar store once and went outside and gave my kids \$20. I didn't ask for it, she just was like "I'm so proud of you, you guys were good kids" and they had a lot to do with it.

Oh Mr. V? oh yeah, I got into florico, that was my thing, so I started to dance. I never really was a singer or played instruments but I danced. My other brother, Javier, danced. My brother Fernando kinda just played sports. And then we went on to Rosridge and Dr. Gomez was my principal at Rosridge too, and he still looked out for us and the neighborhood. He made sure that the neighborhood kids, coming from Davis, from Barrio Anita especially, we taken care of and were treated good at Rosridge, and he did.

I mean, like the families that we grew up with that are still here? Like a few houses down, the parents still live here but the brothers and siblings are in and out 24/7 so they're still there. So I recall then the Cortez's, they live in front. I remember when we were all young kids, there was a lot of us. Donnie and Luis Carrillo, the lived across the street on Consen. They moved out of the neighborhood, but they still live right by the neighborhood. Teresita used to be here, she lived in front of the Espinosas and she passed away, and Monica, she lived right across the street, she was an elderly woman too. But we were the only *kids* kids in the neighborhood. There was us, and like the people that I mentioned was pretty much it when I was young growing up.

Obviously there was gangs, my older cousins were, you know, gang members here in the neighborhood but it was never like they were causing problems in our neighborhood with people in our neighborhood or stealing from people in our neighborhood. It was like, if they did what they did, it was outside of our neighborhood. It was to other neighborhoods obviously. But it was never like, something that you worry about like me walking to the park and somebody kidnapping me or trying to offer me drugs on the way to the park or somebody trying to steer me in the wrong direction. It was never like that when I grew up. I could walk to Ory in the middle of the night. I could do anything. My grandma would leave the doors open, our gate would be unlocked. Now I got a gate lock, I got cameras outside my house you know because its just not the same anymore.

Oh its definitely changed. I mean a lot of people that I grew up with, obviously went onto different paths and the ones that have stayed here are all good kids. The ones that I know, the ones that I mentioned. We all work, everybody is a good asset to the community and they've done something with themselves. Obviously there's a lot of other ones that just took the wrong road and they're not the same, but its just, I wouldn't leave my doors open anymore and I would never allow my children to walk to Ory alone or to walk back from Ory because its just not what it used to be. You used to be family, youd look out for each other, help one another. Milk, sugar, food, you know, that was like nothing. It's not like that anymore. I don't even know the people that live next door to me here or who moved into the houses way down there. Like

its just, "lock your doors". Its just not the way it was. And I mean a lot of people moved out and passed away, but the ones that are here, I still don't even know any of them.

I just think that a lot has to do with, like, it was a lot of Mexicans before, and like a lot of the people that Ive seen in the neighborhood now, there's a lot of white people that have moved in and Im sure that they love the neighborhood and they love the history but because there's not all these Mexican families that we are so comfortable with each other growing up. Its just not like that anymore. I don't see a lot of people with kids. I think that by the Gracie's store, there's a couple of kids that live there that are young but besides that you don't see anybody playing outside. My kids ride their bikes on the street still. Well I'm out there with them, you know, but I don't see anybody else the times that I'm out there with my kids, and I'm out there almost every day when the sun is going down, with my kids. And you know the park? The park used to be open 24/7 basically. Monday through Saturday, from open to close, free. Come in, pool tables out, ping pong tables out. If you wanted to hang out, everybody was at Ory, and that's where it was, and it's not like that. I still go to the park now. A few days a week for my son's basketball practice or even before that I would go take my kids bike riding and hang out at Ory but the doors aren't open to go in and hang out and play pool. You know? Its just not like that anymore. So I think because of that, people just stayed there themselves.

I know it's crazy, I'm 35 years old and its even crazier that my two brothers still live here with us. Like that is not normal for a lot of people that I tell. They're like "What's wrong with you?" but I think its because of my grandma. We took care of my grandma until she died, and it was probably the worst day of my life, when she died in 2006. She died a few weeks before her birthday. She actually passed on my brother's 21st birthday. You know, probably the worst thing that could have ever happened. I thought "there's no way we could survive without her." But we did, and unfortunately this house probably would have been paid off but she took out money I guess and don't ask me where the money is because I have never seen it. And it could have been so easy for us to let this house go, like I had work like two jobs at one point to try to pay the taxes because she didn't have the taxes in it. It was bad. It was horrible. But I said "It doesn't matter. I gotta do what I gotta do because this is all I have left of my grandma." And if she would have left it to her kids, this house would have been *sayonara*. There's no way, because my grandma and her husband, my tata, used to own property on Consin and that just went out the window. You know? And so this house is just her. It's her memories. Her. This car port right here? This used to be her car port. I can imagine her coming in her wheelchair watering her plants outside. Its in every room, I can still feel her and I still see her. So I think that's what it is. Like, I love the fact that I was raised here, and I'm raising my children here. That means something to me. They may have not met her but they will know of her. My grandma taught us good, and I feel like it doesn't matter where you grow up because other people that I've mentioned, they all grew up and did fine, just like us, but I can't leave. Trust me, I wanna go buy a brand new house and we thought about it like it'd be great to just go buy one of my friend's houses. They have beautiful houses and you're like "Oh my God", and I do

want one but then on the other hand, its like I've worked too hard to keep her house, and I just cant let it go.

I would definitely say Ory. Like Ory has to be what it used to be. And I don't think it ever can but I think that it can definitely go back to open rec. Stop charging these neighborhood people that live her. You know, free play, the way we used to go there. Bring back sports for these kids. I would love for my kids to go to Ory and be involved in stuff that I was involved in. I think that that has a big part of it, and I think also, you know people meeting, you know, like the people that you don't know because obviously that's a big thing about it. Like there has to be something that we can do, where everyone can come together and meet each other and try to be friendly with one another. I could probably see somebody at Anita Market that lived down the street and I wouldn't even recognize them. You know, there has to be something to make us go out there. You know, I have three kids so I don't really go out a lot and do a lot of stuff with my kids out, especially right now when it's cold but there has to be something that can reunite the people to know each other a little bit better. I don't really know what would work but I mean that would be good, you know? And get all these bums

April Cruz Part 2

Transcription by Ricardo Flores Garcia

Interviewer: One of the things that I have been (uhhh) really appreciating in these interviews is listening to you know stories of resilience and (uh) personal strength you know and not to try force you into a kind of box or something. If you could just, whatever you're comfortable sharing, just talk a little bit about you know about yeah, growing up with your parents.

Cruz: Yeah, I mean, I was raised, it's no secret I have nothing that I'm ashamed of and nor am I embarrassed that the way I grew up because I-I-I-I know that I'm a strong woman. And I'm all about my family, it's all about my family. Growing up, it was my grandmother raising myself and my three younger brothers, and I had to pick up a lot of slack. I did a lot of the cleaning, I did a lot of the cooking, to this day I still do it for them you know, because that's just, I'm used to doing it for my brothers. (umm) But we went without you know living off the government every month (um) to make ends meet, my grandma just did what she could for us, but both my parents, grandma's house is my dad's house, my dad's mom you know. And unfortunately, my dad still makes bad choices and I mean I'm a part of my dad's life and I love him to death, but that's his life I can't change him you know. My mom passed away of a drug overdose and that's just what happened with her, a couple, few years ago. And so my whole life has just been revolved around my grandma taking care of us, and I took care of her until she died in her deathbed and made all the decisions for her (ummm) you know.

Interviewer: Did you have to leave school to take care of her?

Cruz: Yeah, she got really, really sick when I was a junior in school and (umm) basically needed 24-hour attention. So, they were gonna put her in a rest home, that was the plan. But my grandma had talked to me a little before and was like “I have my own house, why am I going to go to a nursing home, I’m going to go to my own house.” And after talking to her I just said “you know what, I-I love school, I loved school, I was involved in sports, I was always a good student, and I just said you know what my grandma stopped her life to raise my brothers and I and taking on three kids that’s, that’s a lot. She did it all by herself, there’s no way I’m going to let her go to a nursing home.” I just went and (umm) I was already emancipated because both my parents you know weren’t really around and it was my grandmother, so I already had that right. So, I went in there and I withdrew myself from school, went home and just told my grandma “I’m gonna take care of you, that’s it I’m gonna do everything.” And that’s what I did around the clock for her.

Interviewer: What was her reaction to that?

Cruz: She didn’t want me to, she said “ay no, because it’s gonna be hard for you to go back. And I don’t want you to, there has to be another way.” Pero, it’s like who else, no one else is gonna do it you know. No one else wants to stay here 24/7, even her own kids, nobody really stepped up and said “I’m gonna stay there 24/7 and I’m gonna stop my life for my mom.” So, I did. She did it for me, and it was you know. The doctors told me, “If it wasn’t for her taking care of you and your brothers, she would not have survived another 15 years.” She had a triple bypass done, and they said “she could’ve died on the table, she only made it because of your brothers and you. You guys kept her going.” And you know, we did, my brothers, all of us, we all took care of her and I mean don’t get me wrong. Somedays it was like the hardest thing to wake up and at all times stop your life and take care of your grandma, but I-I would do it again in a

heartbeat and it doesn't matter, family is first, that's what she taught me. Take care of your family, it doesn't matter, you NEED to take care of your family, so I did that for her.

Interviewer: That's a strong, really strong bond that had a lot of love there.

Cruz: Oh yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Amongst, I'm also sure that your brothers....

Cruz: Oh yeah, they did the same thing. A part of their lives changed taking care of her. I mean they, if I had to go to work and they were here with her, they would pick it up and she wouldn't let us do a lot of stuff, she would try to like do it by herself. She would try to water her plants and would fall over and we would yell at her "don't get up, you can't do it!" And it was hard for her you know to like let us do everything for her. She would try to do stuff on her own and would fall or try to get up and make... one time my brother got so annoyed of her it was during Christmas and she made tamales. Oh my god I could hear the noise in my bed and I would already know what was going on in there. I came into the kitchen and I saw that there was red chile everywhere! The counters, the floors, she had two tables set up, it was just a mess! And I was like "ugh" I have to clean all this up, but she tried to make tamales for us and she did! You know but, we tried to let her do what she wanted, I-I, we would go eat dinner/lunch at El Minuto once a week I'd take her there. And I would take her to a thrift store because she loved to go to the thrift stores of course. And, I would say "get everything you want!" And I was working so you know she would go and fill up the cart with so much stuff, I wouldn't even know what to do with it. But she was so happy they fit, this clothes and stuff and I would go pay. And she would be like "why did they give us that much money." And I was like "I don't care, just get whatever

you want here.” And that’s just, you know, there’s nothing I wouldn’t do to make her happy, or give her anything that she didn’t do for us to repay that for somebody.

Interviewer: Yeah. Wow. And uhh how many kids do you have now?

Cruz: I have three. Yup. I have a five-year-old, Max, a three-year-old, Thesies, and a three-month-old baby girl, Ariel.

Interviewer: Ok. Yeah. That’s pretty... Can you tell me the story about how you met your husband?

Cruz: Yeah. Oh god it’s a long story, well not long, but a funny story! I was just out with some girlfriends and we were supposed to go to a party. And uh we met uh her friends, I guess some girls she was talking to, we all met up at a Circle K on Park and Speedway. And so, I got out and I started walking to his car, he had a white Cadillac and he was parked at Circle K. And she was walking there and I was walking with her and I could see him already, his glasses, I could see him walking and I was like “Oh my god he is so good-looking.” So of course, I’m trying to walk fast and be relaxed and I saw him and you know I don’t even know if I said hi right then and there, they were just talking about follow us to the party. So, they followed us to a party and I was waiting all night to see if he was gonna talk to any other girls he was with. Because I didn’t wanna, I didn’t know if he had a girlfriend. Sure enough, at the end of the night, I asked him to dance. So, we danced and then literally within a month we got together, we moved in together, we uh, we’ve been together ever since. And my grandma met him. So, which was really cool because she got really sick and was in the hospital once, and I was at work. So, he took her some

flowers or he did something but he took her something to the hospital and she told him “you better take care of her.” And she knew that he was going to be the one, it was weird. So yeah...

Interviewer: Hmmm, that’s great. Is there anything else that you’d like to share about your neighborhood or about your experience as living here, growing up here?

Cruz: I mean I just think that the overall it doesn’t matter where you grow up, every neighborhood I’m sure has great history and that people have done something. But, you know I think that, it’s just what you make out of it. Like you can’t, you gotta do it for yourself, you can’t like, you know it’s so easily for me and the people who grow up here, for our friends who have gone down that bad path, you know, but we did it. We went above and beyond and we just did what we had to do to be stronger and make better choices for ourselves. You know and take the responsibility for yourself, either you’re gonna go bad and you’re gonna do bad or you’re gonna do good. And that’s it.

Interviewer: Why do you think you were able to make that choice?

Cruz: Oh god, just my parents. Just them, just them. I mean our whole life, in and out of our life, I mean just, never putting us first, and just leaving my grandma to do it all, and sometimes being there and then not being there, or going to prison and being in and out, us visiting them in prison. You know, it’s just something that, man like how, how didn’t they change for us, but they didn’t. You know and that’s just something that they are going to have to live with, or they lived with and you know. And there’s just no way that I would ever wanna be like that. It doesn’t matter where I’m out or what I’m doing, I just, there’s no way I could ever wanna be like that, especially after having kids. And to my grandma, I owe it to her, to do something with myself

and be a better mom and be a good grandmother when it's my turn to my kids. And you know, to show them everything that she taught me. So, I just think that me growing up in this neighborhood has definitely, I'm a walking bit, it doesn't matter what happens you can still do good and make the right choices and do good in your life. And I did, only because of my grandma. She raised us to make the right choice, whether she beat us to do it or whatever it worked.

Interviewer: You mentioned there was a 76 across from Ari, was there any other businesses in the neighborhood when you were young?

Cruz: Umm, there was a 76, of course Anita Market was there, it was there and then they moved it. They ended up buying a house in the neighborhood and then they moved later on. Um, there was also a little store, like a Chinese store, or something I guess. Still like right here on Anita. I only know that because we used to play and they used to get mad at us because we would be playing at night throwing rocks and paying right there. Um, but there was a lady actually in the neighborhood that I would always go and get Mexican candy from her, every morning on my way to school. My grandma would give me food stamps and she took food stamps (laughs) and it was when you got the paper ones, so we used to go and give her and she would give us candy. I mean buy candy in the morning, after school, that was like the main thing for us to do when we would go to school. So, we looked forward to that.

Interviewer: That's great. I think we might have interviewed her.

3rd Person: Yeah, she's still there!

Cruz: Yeah, I see her, she just lives on Anita but at the end, right? Yeah, I see her all the time, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, we interviewed her husband. He said that they used to sell candy.

Cruz: Yup I, Yup, we used to go buy it. And they were always nice and they had every Mexican candy you could dream of so, I was like “Yup, gotta go to that store every morning.”

Interviewer: I think that’s pretty much every, yeah most of the questions I’ve been asking everybody, um, so yeah, thank you for your time.

Cruz B (April3audio.m4a) Transcription by Ricardo Flores Garcia

Cruz: Get them outta here. And you know all the drug addicts whether they have been in the neighborhood or not, get them out. They’re not doing any good for us, I don’t want them around my kids.

Interviewer: Why does that kind of population of homeless folks, what do you think draws them. That’s a problem that a lot of people have talked about who have been to some of the community meetings at the end of the month and that always comes up. Um, why do they hangout around here?

Cruz: I don’t know if it’s people. I sometimes see people that I know that are now homeless. And obviously it sucks to see them that why but they made those choices, I can’t. It takes a lot for me to feel bad for somebody. I’ve had a really crazy life, so for me to sit here and say that I feel bad for that person because of drugs and what their parents did, I don’t really, I don’t buy into it because I come from parents who were addicts and are addicts. And that doesn’t, I never

went into that direction and made those bad choices. I said “hell no, I’m gonna change, there’s no way that I’ll go down that path.” Same thing for my brothers, so I don’t feel bad, it takes a lot for me to feel bad, so when I see these people that I know that are homeless on the streets in my neighborhood, it’s just disappointing you know but, I think some of them are people who have lived in the neighborhood or maybe this used to be the neighborhood where people could get drugs these days, so a lot of them just come back here and that’s what I think it is.

Interviewer: You mentioned a few things before we started taping you know some of the...