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## A Podcast - Inspirando el Futuro: Stories About Latina Leaders in Northwest Arkansas

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A Podcast - Inspirando el Futuro: Stories About Latina Leaders in Northwest Arkansas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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by

Wendy Echeverria  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2017

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## Abstract

This project aims to showcase the Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas and empower other Latinas to dream and achieve more. With the Latin American and Hispanic communities growing rapidly, it's essential to highlight research and changes being done in local communities. The project is a five-episode podcast. Each episode features a Latina leader and experts, and it takes a deep dive into who Latinas are, their challenges, successes, and so much more.

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## Introduction

When it comes to leadership roles in the United States, women, especially Latinas, are underrepresented (Paludi & Coates, 2011). Latinos and Latinas make up almost 19 percent of the population in the United States (U.S. Census, n.d.) and are considered the largest group of women workers (Delamater & Livingston, 2021). Reports show that Latinas make up 16 percent of the female workforce (Delamater & Livingston, 2021), but they are still underrepresented in executive and/or leading positions (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). According to the U.S.A. Today, Latinas and Hispanic women make up 1.6 percent of senior executives at leading corporations in the United States (Guynn & Fraser, 2022). Yet, according to a report from the National Women's Business Council Hispanic, in 2016, Hispanic women lead almost million businesses in the U.S. (Hispanic women entrepreneurship..., 2017) and are considered to obtain less than two percent of "venture capital funds" (Pierre-Bravo, 2022).

Many factors play a role in why Latinas struggle to obtain leadership roles or when owning businesses. For example, internal factors such as not feeling good enough or capable, harmful stereotypes subconsciously influencing others on what Latinas are like, and society's view on gender roles (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Despite those factors, several Latinas have managed to overcome these obstacles and emerge as leaders.

The purpose of this project is to showcase Latinas who have and are continuing to break down barriers and are becoming leaders in the Northwest Arkansas region. This research project is a podcast featuring Latinas in Arkansas, and it takes a deep dive into who these women are and their personal stories leading up to their roles in the community. This research also features experts from across the nation who talk about Latinas in leadership, the Latino/Latina/Hispanic community in the U.S., and so much more. The goal is to establish an open dialogue with Latinas in leadership and to understand not only the systemic struggles within the workforce they may face but the many life challenges they've encountered and have overcome in their lives which have built them to become the leader they are

today. With the Latino/Latina/Hispanic community growing rapidly (Nadeem, 2022), it's important to acknowledge the community's needs by understanding who they are and where they come from. Currently, research on Latinas in leadership positions is limited (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011), which is why this project aims to showcase Latinas working to create change. As a Latina, I believe it's important to highlight my community's struggles and successes. I believe that Latinas want representation, and this is one way of doing just that. My research and literature review is composed of various articles, books, and in-person or online interviews with experts and Latina leaders featured in the podcast project.

### **The United States Appearance Changed in the 60s**

Latin Americans have been known to migrate to the United States since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Gregory, n.d.). However, the beginning of a drastic change in the U.S. commenced when President John F. Kennedy campaigned to remove legally sanctioned immigration quotas based on nationality (Paludi & Coates, 2011). In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was established and signed by President Lydon B. Johnson (Kennedy, 2019). The act removed national origin quotas (Kennedy, 2019), and during our interview, Juan Noe-Bustamante, a Pew Research research associate, said the act allowed many individuals to come to the country, from direct family members to skilled workers. Noe-Bustamante stated that no visa limit was placed on the number of family members of U.S. citizens who could enter the country annually. And reports show that it allowed more people from Latin America and Asian countries to migrate (Paludi & Coates, 2011). Noe-Bustamante said the act first allowed people located in countries from the "eastern hemisphere" to enter, and those countries he said were given around 170,000 visas per year with a 20,000 restriction per country. Noe-Bustamante said people from "western hemisphere" countries were then permitted to come with 120,000 visas per year with no exclusive country restriction. This allowed many immigrants into the United States. Noe-Bustamante said that in 1960 there were about 10 million immigrants in the U.S., and the number began increasing, and in the 80s, he said the number jumped to 14 million. Today, reports show that almost 48 million

immigrants live in the United States - which has been stated as a "record high in American History" (Camarota & Zeigler, 2022). However, the Hispanic and Latin American population in the U.S. has outgrown the number of immigrants in the United States. There are 62 million Latin Americans in the U.S. (Funk & Hugo Lopez, 2022), while there are about 48 million immigrants (Camarota & Zeigler, 2022).

### **Latin Americans in the United States Are Powerful and Young**

As of 2020, The Latino, Latina, and Hispanic community in the United States is the largest minority group and the second largest racial group, with more than 62 million individuals living there (Funk & Hugo Lopez, 2022). Juan Marcelo Ruiz, the director of research at Lopez Negrete Communications, the largest Hispanic-owned and operated marketing agency in the country, said that the Hispanic community is "young" with the "medium age" of Hispanics being "29." The population is youthful because the community is steadily growing due to childbirths rather than immigration, according to Luis Noe-Bustamante, a Pew Research associate. During our interview, Juan Marcelo Ruiz said that if the Hispanic community in the U.S. was its own country, it would be the "fifth largest economy in the world" and mentioned that there are more Latinos, Latinas, and Hispanics living in the U.S. than in some Latin American countries like Argentina, Venezuela, and Spain.

The buying power of the Hispanic community is another critical element to keep in mind. Reports suggest it is about \$2.5 trillion for the Hispanic community (TelevisaUnivision, 2022). A community's buying power is essential to the economy, and most marketers and companies look toward it to create significant revenue for their clients and businesses. The community's buying power will only continue to rise as reports show that the Hispanic community will grow from 14 percent of the population in 2005 to 29 percent in 2050 while the non-Hispanic whites decrease (Passel, 2020). This is an indication of the importance of the community and the way our country is heading.



These facts indicate the essential matters for understanding the value in the Latino, Latina, and Hispanic communities and key elements of why the community must obtain more representation in all spaces, especially in leadership positions. Hispanics have been known as important job creators, according to Juan Marcelo Ruiz. In 2020, a report showed that Hispanic-owned businesses employed about 2.9 million people in the U.S. and provided more than \$470 billion in annual receipts (Lee, 2023).

### **Latinas in the Workforce and Leadership**

Data shows that over the past decades, women have entered the workforce at a fast rate, and with the Latin American community quickly rising in the United States, experts believe this community will also grow within the workforce (Paludi & Coates, 2011). Hispanics are also known as “important job creators” and own over 5 million businesses in the U.S. and subsidize over \$800 billion to the economy (*Hispanic Heritage Month...*, n.d). It's no surprise that Latinas have made headlines because of their entrepreneur spirit. An article published in 2022 from NBC News showed that Latinas owned about 2 million businesses in the U.S. (NBCUniversal News Group, 2022). Latinas and Hispanic women are known to be vital to the U.S. economy (Acevedo, 2022), and account for almost half of the Hispanic workforce (Paludi & Coates, 2011). Although Latinas and Hispanic women are more active in the labor force than white women (Delamater & Livingston, 2021), they are landing leadership roles with the top U.S. companies at a much slower rate than other groups (Guynn & Fraser, 2021). According to the U.S.A. Today report, Latinas and Hispanic women make up only 1.6 percent of senior executives in leading companies in the country. (Guynn & Fraser, 2021). Despite these low numbers, researchers have found that Latinas possess important leadership qualities that could help propel a company or organization in the right direction (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011).

Around ten years ago, Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez conducted a study on Latinas in leadership and found 43 characteristics that they possess, including being “positive, good listeners, creative and passionate” (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Latinas are impacting and creating change in the U.S. but are still

at times struggling to obtain the leadership roles they desire due to many factors (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez said some reasons could be “systemic issues, cultural obligations, and family responsibilities.” Latinas are often seen as “caretakers,” and this view may come because of culturally induced roles (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Experts like Juan Marcelo Ruiz said that gender roles are still prevalent in the Hispanic culture. Men are often seen as the breadwinners, while women are responsible for the home operations. Nevertheless, Juan Marcelo Ruiz also stated that women are often the “gatekeepers” in the family because many of them tend to spend more time with the children, causing them to have more influence on the next generation. A 2020 report from Mintel showed that 68 percent of Hispanic moms wanted their children to receive a college degree (*U.S. marketing...*, n.d.), and recent data indicates that Hispanic enrollment into colleges has “doubled in the last two decades” (Mora, 2022). The number of Latin American students enrolled at a four-year college from 2000 to 2022 rose from 620,000 to 2.4 million, and “Hispanic women ages 25-29” were more prone to obtain a college degree than Hispanic men (Mora, 2022). Many Latin American parents come to the U.S. for a better life, and seeing their children accomplish things they could not is part of the American Dream. During my interview with Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, we discussed the importance of higher education for Latinas, and she said that these degrees may not lead to an immediate high monetary payment, but it could lead to opportunities and could get Latinas “foot in the door.”

However, Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez said she found that Latinas still struggle with reaching leadership roles because of the misperceptions associated with leadership. As mentioned above, Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez found 43 characteristics a Latina possesses and narrowed it down to four: positive, good listener, creative and passionate (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez explained that she found that most Latinas felt pressure to acquire all those characteristics, which she considered as an “unrealistic” expectation, because leaders are not perfect. Yet, at times a leader is still portrayed to be unflawed - resulting in some Latinas doubting their own abilities and feeling incapable of obtaining

leadership roles. It's important to note that this phenomenon, commonly known as imposter syndrome, is not limited to any specific race or ethnic background, as many individuals from diverse backgrounds experience it.

Imposter syndrome is defined as a psychological experience that makes a person doubt their capability to perform a task or skill (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). It makes one question their worthiness. This experience can halt a person's life and career, and researchers have found that women and individuals from unrepresented communities are more likely to encounter this feeling (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). This response could lead to serious mental health issues (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020) and, at times, because of cultural views, it can be difficult for Latinos and Latinas to express and seek help when experiencing it because of the way they might be viewed (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Still, Latinas and women are making strides to create change, which is the reason so many of them push for more visibility in leadership roles.

It can be difficult at times to pinpoint the problem because everyone has a different perspective and view on certain matters, they may have difficulty advancing in their careers, and there is limited research on Latinas in leadership, but this does not mean that Latinas are not breaking barriers and leading in their own areas because they are. Successful leaders are defined as individuals who have a "strong goal orientation, are self-confident, proactivity, and can act quickly rather than passively" (Mozzarella & Grundy, 1988). Being a leader goes beyond salary, a job or occupation.

## **Production Timeline and Short Thought Process**

I wanted to give Latinas and experts the space to speak on the significance of Latinas in leadership, and I wanted to showcase the complexity of what it means to be a leader and who embodies the term. I don't believe it's black and white or easily defined. A leader can be anyone, and I wanted to showcase that by incorporating Latinas who lead in all places like corporate America, at home, or at a local college. The goal of this project from the beginning was to bring a fresh take on what it means to be a Latina leader through their eyes and to display the barriers that are being broken down every day.

One thing to keep in mind is that this project's style of key elements turned out to become an "artistic" approach. I learned this in my marketing class with Dr. Jeff Murray. I immersed myself in projects and stories. As I conducted each interview, I let the story take me and ultimately let it help me identify the structure. I had a plan, but I also allowed for things to change as needed throughout the process and added more guests when I believed the stories needed a deeper explanation, even when I didn't plan for it. I believe that doing this allowed the narrative of Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas to flow better. The Latin American and Hispanic community is very complex, which is also the reason using an "artistic" style is more natural and ideal.

My research and interest in Latinas in leadership began in the fall of 2021. I began to do research on Latinas in Public Relations and some of the challenges they faced. I began reading different research articles about Latinas in Public Relations. This research was originally planned to be a traditional thesis, so I was going to conduct a survey and write a full report on my findings. However, after speaking to several Latinas leaders and some mentors, I found myself desiring more. I wanted others to hear these individuals, so I decided to quickly change it to a podcast thesis sometime around December 2021. During the winter break, I drew an outline of the podcast series. My initial outline was to have the podcast be a three-episode series with Latinas leaders from across the nation, but I

contacted KUAF to ask if they were willing to air the thesis podcast. They agreed to it but suggested that it feature Latinas in Northwest Arkansas. Thus, I began to seek Latinas in the local area for the project.

In December 2021, I began to read books like “Women as Transformational Leaders” by editors Michele A. Paludi and Breena D. Coates to learn more about women as leaders, especially Latinas. I began looking for research like Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez's dissertation that focused on Latinas leaders and some of the characteristics they possess as well as obstacles and positive factors. I also began reading and looking into data from Pew Research about the Latin American and Hispanic community in the U.S. During this time, I also began to investigate the Northwest Arkansas community and point out Latinas that I wanted for the podcast, and I contacted Dr. Luis Fernando Restrepo for some recommendations on Latinas leaders in the area as well. In late December or early January, I had a few already selected, like Juanita Franklin and Damarya Barker, but Dr. Restrepo gave me some extra names, so I began to contact them. During this time, I also began to create a list of experts that I wanted Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez and researchers from Pew Research to speak on the data about Latinos, Latinas, and Hispanics in the U.S. and found Luis Noe-Bustamante. Since I worked for Lopez Negrete Communications, I decided to reach out to our director of research to speak on the Hispanic, Latino, and Latina communities buying power, G.D.P., and so much more. I also reached out to another important expert and Latinas leader during this time – Beatriz Acevedo. Beatriz was on Forbes 50 over 50 in Investment and wrote an article for MSNBC about the importance of Latinas to the U.S. economy. I also contacted Professors like Dr. Juan Bustamante to talk about Latinos, Latinas, and Hispanics in the Northwest Arkansas area. In January, I began all interviews with the plan of finishing them by early February.

From January to early February, I began interviews in person and over Zoom. Dr. Juan Bustamante, Damarya Barker, Veronica Garcia, Beverly Grau, and Juanita Franklin were in person during the month of January, and then I had Zoom interviews with Luis Noe-Bustamante, Dr. Damary Bonilla-

Rodriguez, Juan Marcelo Ruiz and Beatriz Acevedo. When those interviews were completed, I began to restructure my podcast. At first, I wanted to have three episodes, but when meeting and learning about everyone, I decided to expand the project to five episodes.

For the first episode, I decided to keep the same structure and idea that I had from the beginning of this project, which was giving the history and brief on why the Hispanic and Latin American community is so vital, and then I went into Juanita Franklin's story. Her parents migrated to the U.S. for a job. I believed at the time this was a good start to the project. I wanted to explain that every Latino, Latina, and Hispanic comes to the U.S. for a different reason but usually for an opportunity or better life. At the end of the first episode, the topic of the Hispanic and Latin American population is introduced by giving a glimpse as to the reasons they may be moving away from countries like El Salvador and Guatemala and states like California. One reason, according to Dr. Juan Bustamante, is starting a local business which is where the second episode takes the listener.

In the second episode, the audience learned and heard from Daymara Baker, C.E.O. and Founder of Rockin Baker, a local business, and Beatriz Acevedo, C.E.O. and Founder of SUMA . SUMA is a non-profit aimed at educating the Hispanic and Latin American communities on building wealth and finances. The goal was to just have two guests, but that changed. I decided to add another expert – Dr. Alejandro Velasco. Daymara explained she moved to the U.S. because her safety was put in jeopardy because of the situation her country was going through. I thought it would be a good idea to give the audience and myself a little more context and background as to what was going on and why Venezuela, Daymara's country, was so dangerous. Dr. Velasco is an associate professor at New York University and has written several books on Venezuela. Daymara's story also opened an opportunity for another expert guest to join. Currently, Daymara owns a local bakery, Rockin Baker. The bakery empowers neurodivergent adults by offering them job opportunities. To have a better understanding of what it meant to be neurodivergent, I asked Dr. Camil Aponte to join as a guest. So, as a recap, I was only

expected to have two guests but ended up with four, which I believe it was necessary to give the complete and complex story. The second episode then leads to the third episode, which is about Latina leaders in the corporate world and opens the conversation on some of the factors Latinas bring to the table as well as challenges they may face.

In the third episode, I showcased Ireliá Navarro's story and had Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodríguez as the expert. Ireliá Navarro is the vice president of business development at Fiserv, a technology company. Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodríguez is the C.E.O. and founder of Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodríguez and Associates L.L.C. As mentioned at the beginning of this production process, I came across Dr. Bonilla-Rodríguez's dissertation about Latina leaders and thought she would be ideal to talk about the positives and challenges Latinas face since she had extensive research on the topic and continues to advocate for the community and leadership. Ireliá Navarro brought the local Latina leader aspect to the episode, which was extremely important. While speaking to Ireliá, I learned about her role within the N.W.A. Hispanic Leadership Council. I then decided to reach out to the non-profit and ask if I could meet and talk to individuals from the mentoring program that was started by the council. I was introduced to two Latinas: Alejandra García and Anna Salazar. Alejandra is Anna's mentor. I conducted an in-person interviews with them and incorporated them into the story to give a little more context to the organization, specifically the mentorship program: LatinX on the Rise Mentoring Program. At the end of this episode, I connected all the women together as leaders and mothers who lead inside the home as well. This introduced the fourth episode, which was about mothers being leaders.

For the fourth episode, I originally was only going to focus on stay-at-home moms, but after the interview with Beverly Grau, a stay-at-home mom, I was left thinking it would be best to expand it to other moms. She brought up an important subject about our community and the countries we come from. She talked about the wealth gap in Guatemala, and how different poverty is in our countries compared to the U.S. When speaking to her, I was reminded of my mom's story, and how she left her

country to give my sister a better life, so I decided to include my mom into the fourth episode because I believed my mom's journey and courage to come to a new country for her daughter showcased her as a leader. Both Beverly and my mom made tough decisions for their children, something every leader must encounter, and it's something I believe most Latina moms go through. I did not have an expert for this episode. In the end, I introduced the future - upcoming Latina leaders.

For the fifth and last episode, we meet a Latina graduate student at the University of Arkansas, Veronica Garcia. I was introduced to Veronica by someone from the Walton College of Business who worked with her. After interviewing Veronica and learning about some of the challenges she faced with navigating the academic world, I began to think about the other side – a professor. I became interested in understanding how a professor's thought and their encounters with Hispanic, Latino, or Latina students and believed it was important to show that perspective. I also wanted to show the leadership occurring within the classroom - which is the reason I asked Dr. Yajaira M. Padilla to join this last episode. She brought an important perspective to the conversation because she understood Veronica's feelings about navigating the system. In this last episode, we talk about Veronica's story and resilience but also talk about imposter syndrome, something many students feel is essential to talk about. In the end, I close with two guests giving Latinas and women some words of encouragement by empowering them to dream and look at themselves and their stories as a superpower rather than a hindrance.

In the middle of February, I began to write the stories and scripts. After having them reviewed by my chair, Tiffany King, in early March, I began to do my voice-over for each episode. For this project, I decided to take it episode by episode – so I would voice over an entire script and begin to work on piecing it together with the other soundbites and music on adobe audition. This process took me a few weeks, but I finished editing all episodes by late March and handed them over to my chair, Tiffany King, to review.



**Reflection on Project**

The biggest challenge of this project was getting too attached to the stories. As a journalist, we are often told to keep ourselves and our opinions out of the story. Since I am part of the Hispanic and Latin American communities, I have a natural pull and desire to immerse myself in the story. Through this creative research project, I was given the freedom to give some insight because I am a Latina, and this project directly affects my community. Being part of the Latin American community helped me tell the story better and challenged me. The stories made me reflect on my own career path and trials. I believe this project showcased the resiliency of my community and the strength each person contains, no matter the obstacle. This project changed my life, and I'm so thankful for it.

## Scripts

### First Episode

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 1) "To me, a leader is someone who influences others that can be at any compacity, and I never associate leadership with title."**

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 2) "To me, a leader is someone who coaches, guides, inspires, listens to, and empowers others to work toward a shared or individual goal."**

**(Veronica Garica, sound bite 3) "What a leader is to me is a learner. I think a leader should always be in a state of trying to learn more."**

**(Daymara Baker, sound bite 4) "A leader is someone who can recognize the talent in others and make them see themselves and what is already inside them."**

**(Beatriz Acevedo, sound bite 5) "My definition of a leader is somebody who is very committed to opening doors and advancing the generation of leaders."**

A leader can be a CEO of a company, a student in an MBA program, or a stay-at-home mom.

Anyone can be a leader, but I've decided to focus on Latinas in leadership in Northwest Arkansas for this podcast. Throughout this five-part series, you'll hear personal stories from Latinas impacting and leading their community, as well as experts from across the nation. As Latinas, we may all come from the same community, but our stories and the way to leadership are vastly different.

Hi, my name is Wendy Echeverria, and this is ***"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."***

Latin Americans have migrated and lived in the United States since the 16th century. Still, experts say that a radical change and the beginning of modern migration in the country happened because of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

**(Luis Noe-Bustamante, sound bite 6) "That replaced the national origins quota system with a seven-category preference system emphasizing family unification and skilled immigrants."**

That's Luis Noe-Bustamante, a research associate at Pew Research. He says the national origin quota system limited the number of immigrants that could enter the country. However, the efforts to open the country began in the 1960s after President John F. Kennedy pushed to vanish legally sanctioned immigration quotas – in other words, they wanted to eliminate the limit on visas given to each country.

Luis says the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 allowed individuals from Latin America, Europe, and Asia to come.

**(Luis Noe-Bustamante, sound bite 7) "In 1960, there were about 10 million immigrants in the U.S. 1970 that number remained steady, was still about 10 million, but then by 1980 it increased to 14 million, 1990 20 million in 2000 31 million, and we're currently at about 44-45 million immigrants in the country."**

Today, the Latino, Latina, and Hispanic community is considered the largest minority group and the second largest racial group in the U.S., with more than 62 million Latinos/Latinas.

And this community is made up of more than 30 different countries, which means that the Latin and Hispanic community is very diverse.

However, before I continue – I would like to note one thing - throughout the five-part series, I'll be using the terms Hispanic, Latina, and Latino interchangeably because the way research for this community has been collected. However, these labels have different meanings. Hispanic is used for those who speak Spanish, who live in the U.S., and are from a Latin American country.

Latina or Latino is usually used to describe a person descended from Latin America.

**(Luis Noe-Bustamante, sound bite 8) "At this point in time, about a third of all Latinos/Latinas living in the U.S. are immigrants, and two-thirds are U.S. born. Especially over the past decade, the Latinos and Latinas born in the U.S. are definitely driving this increase in the population."**

Some research experts like Juan Marcelo Ruiz say there are more Hispanics, Latinos, and Latinas living in the U.S. than some Latin American countries.

**(Juan Ruiz, sound bite 9) “We are the second country in the world in number of Latinos, just behind Mexico. It’s amazing, but we have more Hispanic or Latinos here than in Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, even Spain.”**

Juan is the Research Director at Lopez Negrete Communications, the largest independent Hispanic-owned and operated marketing agency in the country.

Juan says the Hispanic and Latin American community in the U.S. is powerful and young, and the community’s GDP has reached 2.8 trillion dollars in 2020.

**(Juan Ruiz, sound bite 10) “There is some stats that shows that if we would be a country, we would be like number five biggest economy in the world.”**

Like stated earlier, the Latin American community is so large in the U.S. because of births rather than immigration.

Regardless every Hispanic, Latino, and Latina in this country has a different path as to how they ended up in the U.S.

As both researchers stated, many are born in the U.S., and others choose to migrate.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 11) “You know, you hear people say, ‘oh, why don’t they all do it the right way’ and all that certain stuff, and that makes me so angry because I believe that if my father hadn’t gotten this opportunity, he would have found a way to bring his family to the U.S.**

There are many reasons why Latinos and Latinas want to move to the U.S., some due to violence, economic distress, natural disasters destroying their homes, or a new job. No matter the cause, each person who leaves their home usually seeks a better life or opportunity.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 12) “The reason I am privileged and that I had the big privilege of being born an American citizen is because of my father and him taking an opportunity that was offered to him.”**

That’s Juanita Franklin. Juanita says her father came to the United States to work as a bracero.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 13) “The bracero program was something that the Mexican and U.S. governments created. It was a program during World War II to help the U.S. because so many men obviously were gone to war, so they needed braceros or arms. Bracero, that's where the name came from to work, to work on farms, to work on factories, you know, different places.”**

Juanita says her father was appointed to work in Colusa, California, a small farming community. He traveled back and forth from Mexico to the United States for xxx years, even when he married Juanita's mom.

Before the program ended in the 60s, Juanita says her father was surprised by his boss's unexpected offer.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 14)“He asked him, 'what are you going to do now because, again, that was just a temporary thing that was not that he got to stay. He said ‘well Ima go home and raise my family’ So, he asked him would you ever want to bring your family to the U.S., and he says well, I'm pretty sure the answer is yes, but let me talk to my wife. And she's all like, yeah. You know? They were, again, living in poverty, doing a little better than some because of this opportunity to be working in the U.S. But they decided, yes, they would come. Because of that program, this employer got to sponsor him.”**

And in 1962, Juanita says her father, mother, five siblings, and grandma all moved to a farm in Colusa. Three years later, Juanita was born. She became the first U.S. citizen in her family.

Juanita says they were one of a few Latin American families who lived in Colusa all year round, and during her formative years, Juanita learned the value of hard work from both her mom and dad, but she says, looking back, she's in awe by her mom's example.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 15) “That my mother was a strong woman that. If it wasn't for her we wouldn't have done as well as we did without her working those times she did work during the year. Like during the summer, she worked, and so we got to buy new clothes, new shoes, and clothes for**

*school, right? We didn't buy everything new. We went to segundas a lot to yard sales and things. Shopped at Kmart. You know? And so again, if it wasn't for her, we wouldn't have had that, right? And then same thing her working in the fall. Out there I mean, on her knees picking literally with her hands picking walnuts that was so, we can have Christmas. Right, so. At the time, I don't think I realized that we were poor, and again even later, later in life as an adult, even kind of recent, did we realize that my father even was not really paid what he was worth. You know he was in charge of this farm."*

Juanita saw the challenges and injustice her parents experienced and now uses it to help others. Her parents scarifies, and mentorship has created her to be the person she is today.

However, Juanita does regret one thing.

*(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 16)" Is that I didn't ever talk to my parents about this, but I do know that in our home, we didn't talk about college in any way, negative or positive, right? And I believe now it's just because my parents didn't know anything about it, right? And they didn't have an education past, probably my mom, maybe third grade. My dad, I think sixth grade, so I think that for them because they always were on us like have you done your tarea? Have you done your homework, right? My dad always went to parent-teacher conferences, so we always had to do our homework. There was never a question on whether we would go to school, graduate high school. That was always, of course, we're gonna do that."*

After graduating high school, Juanita went straight to work.

*(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 17) "So, I always say that without the words actually being said, I got the message you are not going to college."*

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Blog, in 2021, Latinas were quote less likely to have completed education beyond high school than other groups.

However, Luis Noe-Bustamante, a research associate at Pew Research, says Latino and Latina student enrollment at college/universities has increased across the country.

**(Luis Noe-Bustamante, sound bite 18) "It's about to 2.5 million to 3.7 million. In yeah, uh, yes, in recent years, so even in the past decade, it has increased by a substantial number."**

According to a report from Pew Research, there are more Latinas enrolled in at least part-time college compared to Latinos, and Hispanic women ages 25 to 29 were more likely to have a college degree than Hispanic men.

Juanita Franklin worked in the food industry for almost 18 years. She was happy as a server until she and her husband moved to Northwest Arkansas in 2004. Juanita says she started working at the Northwest Arkansas Community College, also known as NWACC, and life changed.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 19) "I saw that one of my benefits was free tuition, so for fun, I took the compass test and placed into comp one and beginning Algebra, and I thought, huh - maybe I'll take some classes just for fun. I was thinking, so I took comp one, and even though I tested into beginning Algebra, I was so scared because math terrified me. I took Pre-algebra. I took an even lower than, I was so scared. It had been 28 years since I'd been in the classroom, right? So, I started taking classes and comp one was like wow, this is kind of cool."**

And at the age of 40, she fell in love with learning.

With hard work and the help of her loved ones and mentors, the doors opened for her to pursue and receive two associate degrees.

Today, Juanita Franklin is the director of Hispanic Initiatives for the LIFE Program at NWACC, where she opens doors for those in need.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 20) "So, LIFE Program stands for learning, improvement, fun, and empowerment, and we're big on the F and the E, and then the learning and improvement kind of happens without students realizing it. So, we're an outreach program too. Our target is Latino high**

**school students, right? It's a program that was created proudly at NWACC, so it's a homegrown program. It was created in 2012 by my wonderful friend and colleague, Cody Ryan."**

The goal of the program is to expose students to higher education. Juanita says she wants to give Latinos and Latinas a choice.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 21) "Even though I work in higher education, I don't believe that everybody has to have a degree, okay? However, I do believe that everybody should have the opportunity to if they want it, right? And that's the big difference you decide if you want it or not. And if you do, and if I can help you, I want to help you. And I want you to know what your options are, right? So, I think that's one of the things for people to not feel embarrassed or ashamed if they don't have one, but if they do want it that they should be speaking up and saying, 'hey, I want that how do I do it? Will you help me?'"**

Juanita says she will never regret waiting tables or working long exhausting hours because she learned so much from it, but she does wonder at times what life would've been like if she had gone to college.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 22) "I want to give that opportunity to others. That's where my passion is. You know, so, I often tell people when I come to work in the morning, I'm thinking about that. I'm thinking about - I want to be for these young students and their parents, the person that I and my mom and dad didn't have but should have had."**

The Latino, Latina, Hispanic community is consistently growing, and in Northwest Arkansas, we have over 100,000 Latinos and Latinas.

Dr. Juan Jose Bustamante, a sociology, and Latin American Studies Professor at the University of Arkansas, says many factors play a role as to why more Latinos / Latinas are calling Northwest Arkansas home and maybe moving away from their countries like El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala and states like California.



**(Juan Jose Bustamante, sound bite 23) “The driving forces can be the cost of living there in California. Can be also work, job opportunities. So, when it comes to attractive forces, Northwest Arkansas is an ideal place for the working class. There are plenty of opportunities in the construction industry and the poultry area, and there is also many opportunities for entrepreneurship.”**

Latin Americans and Hispanics are known as quote “important job creators” because they’re owning and developing businesses at a faster speed than other groups.

In fact, in 2016, the National Women’s Business Council, Women Hispanic-owned almost 2 million businesses in the U.S.

On the next episode of *“Inspirando el future: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”* I’ll introduce you to Daymara Barker - the CEO and Founder of a local bakery – Rockin’ Baker.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 24) “I think everything got triggered, really, first car stolen, gun on my head, second car stolen, and that's when I said okay, that's it.**

Dayamra moved to Northwest Arkansas from Venezuela with the hopes of finding safety, a better life, and to empower others.

This is *“Inspirando el future: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”*

## Second Episode

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 1) “ So there I am with this drug guy, totally high, a gun on my head, asking me to get off my car. I did, and I just asked him I need my purse, and of course, he pressed the gun harder on my head, and I just said, 'guy I need my I.D.,' and he said ‘you, women, you better shut up, or I’ll kill you. Why do you want to kill me? I want my I.D. because I need to vote.’”**

If faced in a critical situation like this one, would you do the same? Ask for your I.D.

Terrified and confused, Daymara Barker knew she was facing death right before her eyes, but she found strengthen within to speak up and not just herself but for others. Voting meant choosing a path, a set of policies, and a leader for her country that would affect her people and their future.

Daymara instantly knew her reaction was not normal.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 2) “After that one happened, I questioned myself, ‘Daymara, what were you thinking? It’s a stupid I.D. You could have gotten that one in a few days. What were you arguing?’ I don’t know. My brain just acted that way, and even today I don’t understand why I behaved that way.”**

But it was what was in her subconsciously. It was the leader inside of her speaking out who was determined to stand up until the end.

Daymara says that experience changed her life forever, and it ultimately guided her to where she is today, leading and fighting for individuals who society may overlook.

Hi, my name is Wendy Echeverria. In this second episode of *“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”* You’ll meet Daymara Baker, the CEO and Founder, of a local bakery - Rockin’ Baker.

This is *“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”*

Daymara grew up near the northern coast of South America, a country called Venezuela with her mom, dad and two brothers.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 3) “I used to enjoy the seaside every single day, and that’s one of the things that may be the saltiness in the air. The sounds of the waves always reminds me that things can become one day and then suddenly it can get really stormy with the way feeling that they can almost engulf you and take you with that, but then you know the storm will pass.”**

At a young age, Daymara says she learned to be resilient since most times she was the only female in the group.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 4) “That taught me to be strong. I’ve always had a strong will and being around boys taught me how to stand up on my own feet, and how to make my point come across**

**because typically you know they treat you like “you play like a girl” – and I always had to prove otherwise that no I can also play tough if I wanted to.”**

Daymara says she always saw herself as an equal and even tasked her brother to always take on some of the work around the house - she believed that it was fair and just because she was a girl didn't mean she was obligated to do all the chores.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 5) “Being the only girl among two boys, the society tells you that as a woman your supposed to do things differently than they do, and I remember at home I was expected to be doing dishes and doing this one, but I said no, no. I created my own calendar. I said he does the dishes at noon, and I do it for dinner.”**

At the age of 16, Daymara Baker graduated from High School and pursued a degree in Engineering. After a year of attending a private college in Venezuela, Daymara realized that Engineering was not for her, and she dreamed of studying in the U.S.

She says her brother was given the opportunity to study at Cambridge but two weeks before leaving he changed his mind and didn't go – that's when Daymara seized her chance.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 6) “If they were able to offer that opportunity to my brother, I don't see why they cannot offer it to me. I mean I didn't see any difference me being a girl and my brother. For me we were equal, right?”**

Not knowing anyone, the language, or the area, Daymara moved to a small town in Pennsylvania and attended Beaver College, but her time in the U.S. was short.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 7) “Almost a year I was going through English as a second language, that's when the economy of Latin America fell, and I had to go back home.”**

Venezuela's economy collapsed during the 80s and 90s due to the country's major product – oil, and at that time Government officials were forced to shut government programs and funding – which affected a major portion of the population and caused violence and crime to increase.

**(Alejandro Velasco, sound bite 8) “Lifestyle conditions deteriorated as the broader lack of government spending also begins to decline, and that’s in part what leads to some of the violence that you’re describing, right? So, crime begins to increase significantly in the 1980s, you have the rise exponentially of corruption as being are chasing fewer dollars and of course there is also less oversight in the part of the state because of all the austerity that’s happening.”**

That’s Dr. Alejandro Velasco, an associate professor of Modern Latin America studies at New York University.

Dr. Velasco says the government tried to fix the issues in the 1990s by opening the economy to private investors, but that caused more issues.

**(Alejandro Velasco, sound bite 9) “There was a lot of privatizations of formally state-owned industries. There was a lot of decentralization of you know former purviews of that state, and as that was going on at the same time as austerity really sort of galloping what ended up happening is that inequality really just surged massively.”**

The inequality Dr. Velasco says led to more crime, and this was not just everyday violence but political instability, as well.

Once back in Venezuela, Daymara Baker began pursuing an associate degree, but like Dr. Velasco described the situation in the country was only getting worse to the point that Daymara was faced in a life-threatening situation.

She says a man approached her one day with a gun, placed it on her head and demanded to take her car.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 10) “When I had the gun in my head, it was happening very common. There was a period that it seems to be I forgot how many cars was stolen every day, and it was really leading to the election.”**

Instead of running, screaming, or panicking, Daymara says she could only think about one thing – her right to vote.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 11) “and, I just asked him I need my purse, and of course he pressed the gun harder on my head, and I just said guy I need my I.D., and he said you woman you better shut up or I’ll kill you. Why do you want to kill me? I want my I.D. because I need to vote.”**

Daymara says growing up she was taught two things – the importance of her right to vote and paying taxes, and with the upcoming elections, Daymara was determined not to back down.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 12) “When something is not right, I just automatically stand up.”**

And that’s exactly what she did. She knew elections were important to her country’s future.

Unfortunately, Daymara says that wasn’t the last time an incident like this happened. A few years later, on the first day of an executive leadership management program in an institute in Venezuela, she was put in a similar situation.

But the moment that Daymara realized her time in Venezuela was up when an employee at the company she worked at was shot.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 13) “Fortunately, he wasn’t shot in his critical organs or anything, but the bullet went through his arm, and when I saw that one it was like another, okay I think too many signs are coming your way.”**

Daymara says she worked to save as much money as she could to return to the U.S.

In 1995, she applied for a visa, bought the ticket and was ready to go.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 14) “A week before my time of departure, the currency was devaluated a week and a half before that – so I lost over night over 62 percent of my savings.”**

Daymara was unsure of how long she could afford to stay in the U.S. because nearly 50 percent of her hard-working money was gone – but that wasn’t going to let that stop her.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 15) “I’m just going to get on that plane, and see what happens, and then if I run out of money, I just go back and try everything again. I mean that’s I can do.”**

Daymara was an international student and did not qualify for financial aid, so she moved to Monticello, Arkansas, where it was more affordable to attend the University of Arkansas.

She says the small community was beneficial because it allowed her to focus on improving her new language – English.

Two years later, Daymara says she delighted to be accepted into the MBA program at the university’s main campus in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Daymara graduated in 1999 and went to work in Marketing, and more than a decade later, a new dream emerged.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 16) “That’s when this movie began playing in my head of that I could do, and it was this place that at that moment it was really focusing helping women out of jail get the work experience for them to rejoin society, so that they didn’t have to go back. And this video was so vivid in my head that I really felt that I had to do it.”**

Thus, Rockin Baker was born, a local bakery created to empower individuals in the Northwest Arkansas. Latina’s owning businesses may seem unique, but it’s not. In 2016, the National Women’s Business Council, Women Hispanic-owned almost 2 million businesses in the U.S.

**(Beatriz Acevedo, sound bite 17) “There so much data there that Latinas are launching more companies that many anyone else in this country. Sometimes by choice. Many times, by necessity.”**

That’s Beatriz Acevedo CEO and Founder of Suma. Suma is a digital platform created to empower and educate the Latinos and Latinas on building wealth.

Beatriz says Latina-owned businesses are vital to the country.

**(Beatriz Acevedo, sound bite 18) “Already without any resources, without any support, with very little access Latinas are already contributing tremendously to the U.S. economy employing others, not just**

**Latinos, Latinas but other people in their community, so obviously supporting them would only boost that in the benefit of all Americans it's not just for Latinas. The numbers are so high within our community. They're only going to continue to grow as you know.**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2020, Hispanic-owned businesses employed about 2.9 million people in the country and provide more than \$470 billion in annual receipts.

When it comes to obtaining a better life or giving others job opportunities by starting a business, Latinas are known to be resilient.

**(Breatiz Acevedo, sound bite 19) "We just don't take no for an answer. We do anything that we have to do not just for ours but for our family, and that's definitely been modeled to us by our older family members, but this generation of Latinas that you see really wanting to be better and starting to really succeed in the workplace or in their own companies is a different breed from our moms and Abuelitas that wanted to be sort of invisible by design."**

But Daymara Baker was not created to be invisible. She was forming new paths.

Without any previous experience on owning a local business, Daymara launched Rockin Bakerr in 2016.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 20) "Overwhelming at the time because I have never had experience in hospitality. I have never cleaned tables in my life, and there I am opening a commercial bakery out of the blue, so it took me a lot of research, talking to people and trying to get enough guidance on how to do in an industry I have no experience."**

Daymara's vision to help women out of jail drove her to start the business, yet those plans did not flourish causing her to take a U turn to assist another group.

Coming from an underrepresented community, she realized that individuals from the neurodivergence community were often ignored, which she believed was unfair. So, she formed Rockin Baker to empower and encourage them.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 21) “It is a place where those with intellectual or mental challenges can bring their own self. Bring their talents and feel that they can contribute at the level that they can. Nobody is going to be questioning them. Nobody is going to be judging them. They are not expected to mask their condition.”**

Dr. Camil Aponte, the CEO and founder of Harmonic Divergence, says about 15-20 percent of people in the world are part of the neurodivergence community.

But what does neurodivergence mean?

What does it mean to be neurodivergent?

**(Camil Aponte, sound bite 22) “A person is neurodivergent if they differ from the societal norm of what’s expected, like your brain function, your brain is not what’s considered typical, but it’s from a societal point of view, so it diverges from that norm. It doesn’t mean that it’s broken or, it’s just different.”**

Dr. Aponte says the term neurodivergent is used when talking about a single person and neurodivergence is used when speaking of multiple people or the community.

Those with ADHD, Autism, Down syndrome and dyslexia are part of the neurodivergence community.

There are two models regarding disabilities – social and medical models. Dr. Aponte says the terms neurodivergent and neurodivergence come from the social model which is used for empowerment.

**(Camil Aponte, sound bite 23) “They’re neutral, they’re neutral terms, right? They’re like a value neutral terms. They are not negative or positive – but they are empowering, and they help us define who we are within the society”**

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 24) “I would say that one of the traits that is very common amongst them is that dedication to what they do. It’s just unbelievable.”**

Daymara says she was astonished by her team’s hard work. She wanted to create change when she found out about the underrepresentation of neurodivergent adults, and the employment struggles they faced.



**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 25) " I'm think why? just because they cannot like look at me in my eyes? Or because they speak differently in the way they communication style is different. It's just a matter of social norms. We can adapt and learn from each other. And that realization that there was this void in our community made me realize I'm going to switch, and I'm going to really focus on help neurodivergents to become the person that they could be, so here they can gain the esteem the self-esteem and confidence, so that they can move on to something else in their lives."**

According to the University of Connecticut's Center for Neurodiversity and Employment Innovation, 30-40 percentage of neurodivergent adults are unemployed.

**(Camil Aponte, sound bite 26)" It is known that neurodivergent individuals like struggle with employment, right? This is a big thing. That's why we need more people like Rockin Baker, right? To do things in which involve neurodivergent individuals, and if we're thinking that about 20 percent of the population is neurodivergent, you probably in your business or organization, right? For those that have organizations or businesses. You probably already have neurodivergent individuals in the workplace working with you, so and if you don't you should be asking yourself then why are you excluding that 20 percent? So that's kind of how I see it."**

(NAT SOUND OF BAKERY)

Daymara Baker says she's proud her team runs the bakery on their own, and she's there and ready needed.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 27)" Hundred percent operated by a nero-diverse force. I am now behind the scenes, and they are doing everything. They are managing their own communications. They are managing who is working when. They are managing even talking to the accounts you know the whole set accounts that we have. So, they are doing everything. They doing it from filming then all of that."**

Daymara is a leader. She showcases the compassion many Latinas and women have toward their communities.

As for the future, Daymara says she wants to see more visibility of Latinas in leadership roles.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 28) "Representation matters. You need to see other Latina women, other Latina women also making it and by doing."**

It's important to advocate for ourselves because creating change and increasing representation is our responsibility.

**(Daymara Barker, sound bite 29) "People think that you have to be invited to the table, and I always say bring yourself to the table. Make the table larger for other people to join and just not be sitting at the table. Take space at the table and be seen and be heard."**

In the next episode of "*Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.*", met Ireliá Navarro.

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 30) "I would love for Latinas to have the same opportunities as anyone else to succeed and to grow into their careers. If that's what they want to do. I wish that we didn't have to prove ourselves so hard and do so much more than others just to validate our worth."**

Since the beginning of her career, she's worked hard to become the best leader she can be while also helping other Latinas and Latinos do the same.

This is "*Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.*"

### **Third Episode**

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 1) "It's not that they should have more Latinas because we are Latinas, and we're smart. It is just natural because of how the composition of the workforce is. It should be the same representation at the different levels, including top levels."**

There are more than 62 million Latinos and Latinas living in the United States, and reports from Pew Research project that in 2050, the community will become even larger while non-Hispanic whites decrease.

Even though the Latin American community is growing rapidly, the number of Latinas in leadership roles is rising at a slower rate.

According to a U.S.A. Today's report, Latinas and Hispanic women make up 1.6 percent of senior executives in leading companies in the U.S.

And according to the U.S. Department of Labor, in 2021, a report showed that Latinas and Hispanic women had quote relatively high labor force participation rates and unemployment rates. Higher than adult white women.

The need for representation of Latinas in leadership positions in the workforce is high. Yet, there are Latina women pushing for more visibility, such as Ireliá Navarro, who's carving a path of change through her leadership and experience.

Hi, my name is Wendy Echeverria. In this third episode of *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."* You'll meet Ireliá Navarro.

Ireliá is the vice president of business development at Fiserv, a technology company, and she's the head of operations of the Northwest Arkansas Hispanic Leadership Council.

This is *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."*

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 2) "When I started my career, I didn't think that I was going to be a vice-president, or I didn't start my career thinking, 'Oh, I'm going to be the president of a company. So, some people do have those aspirations early on, and that's what they work towards, but it wasn't my case. I just started my career and progressed step by step, and for me, that was the next steps, and I worked towards achieving that."**

Ireliá worked hard for more than more 20 years and finally earned the title of vice president.

Prior to working for Fiserv, she was with some of the world's most powerful companies, such as Walmart and Sam's Club.

But the path to leadership was not easy, and at one point in her career, a conflict with a peer arose, leaving her a bit shaken up.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 3) "We had a big fight. He would yell at me. You know. That was frustrating, of course. I also had challenges once in a role where I felt I had to contently be justifying what I was doing, and that is hard in itself. I mean you, being in a role where you have, you are delivering to what is being ask for and what exceeding exceptions but at the same time having to constantly justify your role and your departments is really hard and frustrating."**

It's through her career hardships Irelia says she stayed determined to never give up and found support to achieve success.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 4) "There are many people that influenced the way that I am today, and I have been able to accomplish. Obviously, from my early stages and throughout my entire life, my mom has been a key part of who I am, but also others that I've interacted with along the way friends, peers, managers, and leaders. Everyone has put have influenced definitely the way I am, so I cannot just pinpoint one person."**

Irelia was born and grew up in Bonse, Puerto Rico.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 6) "Which is a city in thousand portions of the Island. I am the youngest of five children."**

Irelia went to school in Puerto Rico, and she even started her professional career as an accounting manager on the Island.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 7) "So, I moved to the U.S. a few years ago. I had an opportunity to get a promotion where I was at the moment, and it was a good opportunity for me and for my family, so we decided to move to Northwest Arkansas. It was a significant change for us, of course. It was changing the whole family leaving everybody behind. We don't have any other family in the area. We do have**

**great friends that you know have become our family, but it was that decision to take that opportunity when it was presented that make us make the move.”**

Before moving to Northwest Arkansas in 2013, Ireliá had a whole life in Puerto Rico. She went to college there and majored in accounting, and when the bachelor’s degree was completed, she was ready for a new challenge - law school.

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 8) “I started right after college, but I had to work because I needed to work to sustain myself. I didn't, you know, unfortunately, my parents couldn't afford for me to go to school and live a life in San Juan, etc., so I had to work, so I started to work after I started law school, so I changed to night school and completed the school in a little longer than everybody else.”**

Ireliá had two jobs with two different companies, which she says were very demanding, and through the sleepless nights and exhausting days, Ireliá finished law school in 2004.

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 9) “Being able to pass the bar was a great accomplishment for me. I’ve very proud to be able to do that and being able to complete it.”**

And even though she’s not practicing law today, Ireliá says it’s earning the law degree that will be something she’ll always be proud of.

Receiving a higher education degree is a great achievement, and Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez says goes beyond money.

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 10) “They can't take away the pride and the self-confidence when you build those degrees, too, because that's how you start building yourself up to be able to help others.”**

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez is a leader and advocates for leadership development. She is currently the CEO and founder of Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez and Associates LLC, which she says focuses on skill-building opportunities and important connections for companies and individuals to improve leadership and action.

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez says she's had a heart to encourage, support and fight for others.

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 11) "My grandmother said from when I could talk. I would always say what I wanted to be when I grew which was a lawyer. I did not end up pursuing that career path, but I still am an advocate, and I pursue some of those same characteristics that a lawyer would. In terms of advocating for others and arguing the case, I do that all the time."**

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez is currently the director at large at American Civil Liberties Union, also known as ACLU of Pennsylvania. She also sits on several committees and works with different leadership development organizations.

According to a 2022 report from Pew Research, Hispanic and Latin American student enrollment at four-year colleges in the U.S. reached a new high. The report showed that from 2000 to 2020, the quote "number of Latinos enrolled at four-year institutions jumped from 620,000 to 2.4 million - a 287 percent increase."

And student enrollment is only expected to rise more as the quickly Hispanic, Latina, and Latino population grows.

Something Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez says is important when it comes to representation in different spaces – but should not be where we stop.

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 12) "So, what we have to do is continue the education process, and that is not just formal education. Yes, we need to encourage Latinas to access higher education, formal education. You know to continue to earn those degrees because although you don't see immediate return on financial compensation, sometimes it's those degree that get you in the door, right? But also informal education in terms of educating Latinas to the realization that we can pursue these leadership roles. Visible leadership roles at all levels in every sector across the United States and globally because we deserve to be there. We have something to contribute because our passion and the way that we care about others, and the way we build community is necessary in this overall**

*political insensitive culture that we are currently experiencing where people don't necessarily care about other people, and that's what we're seeing turning into violence, turning into fight and anger, and I believe that we have these skill sets that we bring that builds community in a way that we really could make a difference."*

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez is right. As Latinas, we can obtain leadership roles and should because many of us care, we're passionate about helping others, and bring a different perspective to the conversation. One way to unleash more confidence in ourselves to become the leaders we want to be is by exposing lies that, as leaders, we need to know everything or that we cannot make mistakes and understand that even when we may not feel capable, we can do anything.

*(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 13) "It's important that we debunk those myths that you have to be perfect in order to be a leader that you have to have it all figured out. You are speaking through your work for people that need you to be their voice, and I'm speaking for people. Some of those may cross over, and some of them may not. You may reach people that I won't, and I may reach people that you won't, and that's why it's important for us to frame leadership for every individual to have access to the thought that they can be a leader in their own space."*

Around ten years ago, Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez conducted research and wrote a dissertation on Latinas in leadership. She focused on some of the obstacles and positive aspects that were connected to Latinas. She also classified some important characteristics of Latinas who are leaders.

*(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 14) "Part of my research was an opportunity for Latinas across the country to self-identify to reflect on what they bring to the leadership journey and celebrate in some ways. What I realized was the pressure we were talking about earlier that Latina leaders feel in terms of feeling good at everything all the time, processing every characteristic. You know it's not realistic. In terms of my research, I tried to synthesize how could I make it digestible so that an individual who is younger, who is newer to the workforce, who is returning to the workforce after*

**taking a leave for any reason, who is shifting career paths, who is just pursuing a leadership role even if they've been in the workforce for a long time. How could they process what I've gathered here and just sort of highlight a couple of characteristics that stood out most?"**

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez says she found forty-three characteristics a Latina possesses but narrowed it down to four which were: being positive, creative, passionate, and a good listener. And in order to identify these, she collected surveys from more than 300 Latinas and four interviewees from all over the U.S.

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 15) "And they make sense, right? The positivity, the good listener, the passion. You think about yourself. You're likely going to see those characteristics, and some of those are culturally, culturally encouraged characteristics if you think about it, right? Don't air your dirty laundry. You put a smile out there. Don't you know? Everybody doesn't have to know your troubles, just you know, kind of keep facing. Some of it is good. Now the way we got to them is not good. We should be able to seek professional help if needed for working through a dynamic. We should be able to talk about problems in a way that allows us to problem-solve with other people. We should be able to access support in that way, but it's a good thing to be positive. It's a good thing to be creative. It's a good thing to have passion about what you do, and so by creating, by highlighting what stood out in terms of the top few characteristics but then also by creating categories to group together characteristics, I was able to pull together a piece that could bring clarity to an individual that could create a vision for you or help you create that vision that could be a pathway where you can say alright this is the category where I can most align with. I want to work on finetuning those skillsets and characteristics because I see myself as that kind of leader."**

But even though Latinas have strong and significant characteristics when it comes to leadership, there are still some issues when it comes to obtaining those roles, and some may not want to express or talk about them because of the way they may be viewed.



**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 16) "The issue is that people do not always acknowledge that there are issues, right? So, sometimes you talk publicly about some of the challenges you face, and people say things like that's a victim mentality or you know you are perpetuating staying as a victim. No, there's a reality that happens that we experience that is the hindrance of Latina leadership through many of these experiences and systemic issues as well, but one of the things I discovered is that not having mentors these lack of opportunities that exist because of systemic issues. The cultural obligation and the family responsibilities were areas where Latinas were feeling this is hindering me, right? So not being able to see myself in someone that has succeeded. Each out to someone and talk to them about how I can improve myself. How I can make my journey better. The cultural obligations those gender expectations we talked about, but also family reasonabilities and obligations. The reality that I may not be able to go abroad for my company because I have responsibilities here to talk care of my parents or other relatives, or I'm the breadwinner for the family that means I may not access opportunities in the same way as someone else, and other are all opportunities that can help you grow in the workplace and be able to open doors for you."**

Dr. Bonilla-Rodriguez says it's essential to create a career path for ourselves. We then can help others wanting the same, whether it be through mentoring or sponsoring them.

Sadly, Ireliá Navarro says Latinas lack sponsorship – something that could help them advance their careers.

**(Ireliá Navarro, sound bite 17) "Unfortunately, not many people look to sponsor Hispanic women trying to make their careers right. There are people that will do it definitely but for the most part you. I don't see it. Perhaps it's not as common, or I'm just not aware."**

Sponsorship is different from mentorship.

Mentors guide and can help when it comes to a person's career.

Experts say a sponsor advocates and speaks for a person even when they are not present. In other words, a sponsor vouches for an individual when opportunities arise.

However, Latinas are not the only ones who lack sponsorship – unfortunately, at times, other women from different backgrounds do as well.

And although some may not immediately desire to sponsor another person, Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez says leaders must speak up for those who cannot.

**(Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, sound bite 18) “When you are at a level that you’re able to open a door for another Latina or Latino, are you doing that?”**

Irelia Navarro’s hard work and determination helped her advance in her career – but the support from her peers and leaders also played a big part.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 19) “One of the biggest accomplishments for me is being able to get that additional support from others, people who were interested and were really caring and that really view me as having potential, and those were the ones that helped me move into roles and opportunities.”**

Today, Irelia is giving back to her community by supporting other young Latina and Latino rising leaders in Northwest Arkansas.

Irelia serves as the head of operation of the Northwest Arkansas Hispanic Leadership Council.

The non-profit was created in 2017 with the goal of forming mentorship and networking opportunities for Hispanic leaders.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 20) “We started... started... for networking, and then realized we had so much to give to the community, and in ways that were not being providing our community with some other opportunities that were not available at the time.”**

Irelia says they noticed the need for mentors and support within the Hispanic community, so they created two specific programs aimed to help future and current professionals.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 21) "One is a giving circle, and through the giving circle, what we are doing is promoting individual philanthropy, where you know it's very important for companies to give back and support the communities where they operate, but it's more important for the own people within that community to support each other."**

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 22) "And then the other program is the LatinX on the rise mentoring program, and what we are doing is providing opportunities to college students to have a mentor that is a professional in the community in different disciplines."**

Having a mentor's support and guidance is so important, and at times it's what creates change in ourselves and the world.

**(Anna Salazar, sound bite 22) "I moved to this area Northwest Arkansas area about six years ago, and I still don't know very many people, and it's really hard to network as someone who is first gen. and who's kind of a bit of a recluse. I don't really go out or do anything, so I thought this was a really great way to try and network and get to know more people and put myself out there. And it's been really great."**

That's Ana Salazar. Ana moved to Northwest Arkansas from XXX, and she's currently a student at the Northwest Arkansas Community College with hopes of becoming a Spanish teacher in the future. Through the LatinX on the Rise Mentoring Program from the Northwest Arkansas Hispanic Leadership Council, Ana says it's helped her understand and connect to the other side of herself more.

**(Anna Salazar, sound bite 23) "My dad is Latino, but my mom is white, and I live with my mom, and I know my mom more, so I never got to be around Latinos as much."**

Ana has also built lifelong connections and professional relationships and even got the opportunity to see others like herself in leadership roles – which she says empowers her and other individuals like herself.

**(Anna Salazar, sound bite 24) "It's great. So, it's empowering to see other Latina teachers. When we went on a trip to Little Rock, we saw the first Latina to be on the board of education, and it was so amazing to see that. I hope that one day it's not the first of anything like we just have so many."**

Ana says she's grateful to the program and her mentor, Alejandra Garcia, who has guided and supported her even though they're not in the same profession.

**(Alejandra Garcia, sound bite 25) "So, the LatinX on the Rise mentorship program is a part of the Hispanic leadership council, so what it does is connects professionals with current college students and giving them the opportunity to understand what it is to actually be in the workforce. It provides them, you know, different areas of – for example, right now, my mentee wants to be a Spanish teacher, so I help her connect to professionals within the field."**

Alejandra is an Omni Manager at Walmart and became a mentor in the program because she wanted to provide others the support she received when she was a student.

**(Alejandra Garcia, sound bite 26) "I wanted to pay it back forward. When I was in college, there was a lot of mentorships I was given, and I've been in the workforce for about seven years now, and I wanted to be that, you know, for someone else as someone was there for me. I wanted to make sure that I was putting my little seed."**

The mentorship program was established in 2019, and Hispanic college students in the Northwest Arkansas area are invited to apply each year. The program is said to last about a year, but the relationship formed between the mentor and mentee will last a lifetime.

Alejandra's mentee, Ana Salazar, says she's excited about the future and hopes to give back one day.

**(Anna Salazar, sound bite 27) "I'm hoping to be a teacher for Spanish as well as a few other things, hopefully, but I also hope to get into this mentee program as a mentor when I'm older because I know how much it's given me great opportunities, and I wanted to give back to someone else who needs them."**

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 28) “We want to instill in these students always the sense of paying it forward because they are seeing that there is this mentor that is giving their time.”**

The non-profit offers Hispanic students’ internships that align with their major and career goal because Irelia Navarro says they’ve come to realize many Latino and Latinas students must work while going to school, yet the job they often have has nothing to do with their studies or dreams.

**(Irelia Navarro, sound bite 29)“ We thought that providing those opportunities through the internship program will allow the students to take the time to go through an internship, contribute, learn how to how this organization support the community. Learn about different aspects of the job, like what an internship can provide but also giving them the support of a monetary stipend.”**

For the 2023 cohort, the Northwest Arkansas Hispanic Leadership Council mentorship program has around 29 mentors and 27 mentees.

Irelia says the program helps students from the University of Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas Community College, but they hope to expand to other universities like John Brown University.

So far, we've met three Latinas creating change and impact in the Northwest Arkansas community by leading in their fields. We've met Juanita Franklin, who's making a difference at a local community college by supporting high school Latino and Latina students and their parents when it comes to higher education. We’ve met Daymara Barker, who is empowering neurodivergent adults, and now we've met Irelia Navarro leading change in her work and mentoring the next generation of leaders.

All of these women are leaders in Northwest Arkansas.

They work outside the household – but it’s important to note that they are also mothers and also lead within their home.

And the reason I bring this up is because, at times, we forget how valuable and vital mothers are - to our society and our lives.

On the next episode of *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."* You'll meet two Latina moms.

My mom Maria Hernandez.

*(Maria Hernandez, sound bite 30) "I basically thought I would not like it if my little girl would have to go through what I went through, which was rejection and uncomfortableness."*

And Beverly Grau.

*(Beverly Grau, sound bite 31) "That this is a sacrifice like I chose to sacrifice my career to raise my kids, and it doesn't mean that moms that keep jobs outside the home are not raising their kids. They also are."*

And their dedication and leadership within their household.

This is *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."*

#### Fourth Episode

*(Beverly Grau sound bite 1) "I think a lot about as a woman raising boys, and how I want them to grow up to see women as equal."*

*(Maria Hernandez sound bite 2) "Even though I did not receive a higher education, and I didn't finish school. I thank God that my daughters have accomplished it. For me, it's a big blessing, and it makes me so proud that the two of them are now pursuing a master's degree."*

Raising children is not easy.

As a parent, you care for your little ones when they're coughing up yellowish-green mucus. You make sure they eat at least three meals a day. You force them to take their vitamins even when they kick and scream, and you often embrace them when they feel sad, worried, or happy.

You ultimately want them to have the best life and pray that you've prepared them for the unexpected because life can be challenging.

Hi, my name is Wendy Echeverria. In this fourth episode of *“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”* You’ll meet Beverly Grau, a stay-at-home mom who desires to impact her community while raising her two sons, and you’ll also meet my mom, Maria Hernandez, who left her home, El Salvador, to give my sister a better life.

This is *“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”*

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 3) “So, a lot of people ask like, well, your accent or, you know, like you grew up there your whole life, but I had an she was... an English teacher in the family.”**

Beverly says her grandmother was from Ohio but moved to Guatemala when she was in her twenties to work for a program with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to teach English. She then met her husband, had Beverly’s dad, and never looked back.

Guatemala became her new home.

Beverly was born in Guatemala City in 1985, but her family would travel to the U.S. for vacation during the summers.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 4) “And so, I remember traveling here and thinking how little Guatemala was geographically and how like I happened to be born there and growing up there and how small it was compared to rest of the world, but it felt, I mean – so normal.”**

Beverly attended the American School of Guatemala, which she says was considered one of the best schools in the country. Her grandmother taught English there, and when her father was young, he also attended the institute, so they had her follow in his footsteps.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 5) “It was a bilingual school - and so I had - I think, a really good educational preparation. I feel really privileged for that, I recognized, and it took me leaving Guatemala to recognize the privilege of having been raised with such a good private education that I really think that I took for granted that it was kind of the norm kind of circle that I grew up in.”**

However, Beverly says at times, she felt like she was in between two separate worlds – the very rich and the poor. She says the kids at her school had bodyguards, the newest cars, and much more. But when she traveled home, she often witnessed a different story.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 5) “Having grown up in a place where every stop light was, you know, a six-year-old child caring, you know, a six-month-old baby on their back begging for money... it’s just... yeah, it’s a different perspective... yeah..”**

Beverly was not considered poor, but she says her parents were not wealthy either.

They were considered middle class, but in order for Beverly to receive the best education, her parents worked extremely hard – nothing was handed to them.

Seeing people suffer from poverty gave Beverly a different perspective on the world.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 6) “Obviously, Guatemala has a really big wealthy gap, so there’s the very rich, and there’s the very, very poor, and I think that that’s is very different than people see especially growing up in the mid-west or south, you’re not around big cities really seeing what real poverty is.”**

Thirty-four years ago, my mom, Maria Hernandez, ran away from poverty and was on a mission to give her newborn better opportunities by moving to the U.S.

Like Guatemala, El Salvador, my mom’s country, had and still has a wealth gap.

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 7) “The poverty that I witnessed in my country when I was young was that, unfortunately, many people did not have food to eat. We were thankful we had beans and rice to eat, but there were some people who didn’t have enough to even buy beans or rice.”**

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 8) “Many kids, for example, did not have clothes, and they didn’t have shoes, and it was not because they didn’t want to wear them. They just didn’t have any.”**

My mom was born in El Salvador in 1973. My grandma was a single mother with three children. With no support, my grandma worked vigorously to make sure my mom and my two uncles had food every single day.



My mom says that she didn't fully recognize the situation her family was going through.

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 9) "When you're young, you don't understand, right, but as you get older, you start to realize that you lacked many things like food, shoes, clothes, toys, which is something you desire when you are young – a toy."**

My mom says most kids in her neighborhood played with sticks and rocks.

And ever since she was young, she dreamed of being a schoolteacher. She wanted to go to school and receive an education, but it became hard for my grandma to afford the school uniform, books, and other school supplies.

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 10) "I used to question why it was so hard for us to buy my school supplies or a pair of shoes or clothes for school. And I realized that that's what it was – we didn't have money for it."**

My mom says it was difficult for her to see other kids at school with nice shoes and multiple notebooks while she only had one.

At the age of 14, she stopped going to school – it became too challenging for them to purchase all of the supplies.

A year later, her life completely changed.

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 11) "At fifteen years of age, I was pregnant."**

She was scared because she didn't want her daughter to face what she had gone through as a child and as a teen. She wanted more for my sister, Yessica, and was determined to give her a better life.

In 1989, my mom made the toughest decision of her life - come to the U.S. to work and make money for her daughter – but with the caveat of leaving her eight-month-old behind with my dad's parents.

**(Maria Hernandez sound bite 12) "With all the pain in my heart and soul, I thought if I get the opportunity to go, and I don't want to leave her, but I didn't want to face a situation where she could get sick and not have enough to pay for a doctor's visit. You never know what will happen in the**

**future, which is the reason when the opportunity presented itself, I preferred to leave just for a little while to give my daughter a better future.”**

Unfortunately, my mom says the years went by too quickly, and because of the fear that my sister could face any danger when traveling to the U.S., they waited. But she never stopped hoping and praying that they would see each other again one day.

It took 12 long and agonizing years for my sister and mom to reunite in Los Angeles.

**Maria Hernandez sound bite 13) "It was worth it, but it was not easy. The process was very difficult.**

**Not being with her, not seeing her grow up, not hearing her call me mom for the first time, and having to work and work to make sure she had everything - was important to me. It was like... she had all the essential things. I was not with her. I was not present. I was not able to take her to school, but she was well taken care of.”**

Today, my sister is a U.S. citizen, a mother of two, a wife, a former elementary teacher, and a graduate student. She’s pursuing a master’s degree in counseling – something my mom always dreamed of and wanted for her.

My mom’s example, dedication, and leadership are some of the reasons I’m also here today, determined to get my master’s degree in Journalism.

She’s the leader I would like to be – empathetic, hardworking, smart, and a visionary.

Like my mom, Beverly Grau wanted the best for her children, which is why she decided to step back from her position as the director of enrollment at the Northwest Arkansas Community College in September of 2021 to raise her boys.

Beverly grew up in Guatemala and moved to the United States in 2005 to attend Missouri Southern State University in Joplin.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 14) "They have a lot more international students there, and it was a lot more affordable. It was a small town, and I remember thinking like well, you know Guatemala is small – and**

*so I need to go somewhere small can't go somewhere big. One of my closest friends went to the University of Chicago, and I remember visiting her and being totally overwhelmed like huge campus, huge university. Her dorm was co-ed. It was like, I can't. I won't survive in this, so I went to a small school."*

Beverly says moving to the U.S. was a bit of a culture shock, and even though she wanted to move to Joplin because it was a smaller town – it was different than what she expected.

*(Beverly Grau sound bite 15) "It was the first week that I was here, and someone had taken me to Walmart at night. It was dark, and it was like in a van, and you know, it was lots of passengers. I didn't really see. I just remember that they drove me on this big road, and we got to Walmart. A few days later, I wanted to go to Walmart on my own. I didn't have a car, and there was no public transportation in Joplin, but I didn't feel like it was that far, and it was August, so you know it was really hot. Even though you think, 'Oh, surely Guatemala is hot,' and it gets hot in the summer, but it's actually mild weather year around. And so, it was probably close to 100 degrees that day, and I decided to walk from the university to Walmart, and it ended up being a really far distance, and I remember walking and walking and never getting there and cars pulling over because they were like are you okay? Because people don't walk there, and I was like, why? I'm just walking. Why is it so weird?"*

Like her long journey to Walmart, Beverly's life voyage has had its ups and downs, but she's always persevered to find her own path.

Beverly graduated from Missouri Southern State University in 2010 with a degree in international relations. She says she didn't really know what she was going to do after graduation but found herself in higher education and applying for a job at the Northwest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville, Arkansas.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 16) "Yeah, I remember going to the interview and thinking, there's no way I'm going to move down here for this job. It didn't pay a lot of money. My husband and I were planning to move in together then, but I couldn't even afford my half of rent with what the job was going to pay me, and there was someone in the interview committee that convinced me. He walked me out of the interview back to my car and told me, he said something like, 'I know that this job is probably not what you are looking for right now, but trust me, you are not going to stay in this job for very long you're gonna grow like there are a lot of opportunities here. Take a chance on us.'"**

So, Beverly did and worked her way up to becoming the director of enrollment for the college, but in 2020, things drastically changed for her and the community.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 17)"It got difficult because, well, the pandemic happened, and somehow, I managed to work right here from this desk for a year and half with two kids running around because they were not. You know, my husband and I were both working from home, and they stayed home during the worst of the pandemic, and that got really difficult, and then just the needs of the college just started to change, and yeah, I think it got to the point where a lot of big change needed to happen."**

Beverly says it become very challenging to juggle everything. They also kept thinking about the cost of daycare, which could be around \$6,000 per child.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 18) "And I mean, real talk - daycare for two is really expensive, and we had two in daycare, and just high demands and honestly some frustration of changes that needed to happen that.. that.. that always happens, right? There's always friction in the place of work where people have different ideas of how change needs to occur, and I cared so much. I think that's...it isn't that I wanted to leave, I cared so much, and I felt like it got to the point where I could no longer create change in the position I was in, and I was running out of fuel like I was running on empty between my job as my mom, and I really struggled to not prioritize work... it was really hard not put it first .. not**

**because I didn't care about my family or my kids, but really feeling like if I step away, things fall apart, or big changes will be made without me that I care about so much."**

In 2021, Beverly made her toughest decision yet – but also the most important one.

She left her position at Northwest Arkansas Community College, also known as NWACC.

However, she doesn't regret it because she gets the opportunity to stay home and guide, support, and love her children, who will one day be leaders.

And just because she left her job doesn't mean Beverly isn't running several things simultaneously.

She still does.

Beverly takes her kids to extracurricular activities to keep them engaged and moving - so that when they look back, they can remember the happy times with mom.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 19) "I really value the time with them after school, like we're in swim classes.**

**Soccer is about to pick back up. There's no way I could juggle that."**

Beverly says she keeps busy by doing some freelancing work as well, and last year, she even ran for the NWACC Board of Trustees.

Beverly wants to go back to work one day but also wants to find a job that will allow her to spend time with her family because she wants balance.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 20) "I think about it all the time what am I going to go back to, or will a gap seem.. be viewed, you know, badly, and I just hope that there continues to progress from a social perspective that's recognized that some moms choose to take these breaks, and I'll find myself again, but I also don't feel like I lost my identity, and maybe it's helpful because I did have a career for so long that.. that's a pause.. when I, it was a month after I had left work, I was trying to figure it out. I had two friends ds that told me, 'You know, give yourself some space. It's not gonna click right away. This is like any job. It's going to take some learning."**

Beverly says being with her kids has taught her so much about raising the next generation of independent thinkers.

**(Beverly Grau sound bite 21) "I really have learned that all kids are different, and there is no one size fits all, but I can see the importance of teaching versus just setting rules and enforcing absolute obedience of rules."**

Beverly wants her kids to grow up to become leaders who are empathic and will fight for what's right for the community. She wants them to feel inspired to speak for the voiceless.

Both Beverly Grau and my mom, Maria Hernandez, are leaders who are changing lives.

And just like a company CEO, these women have made and are making tough decisions each day – while ensuring that the choices they make are best for the whole team in their case – their family.

Moms are leaders.

On the next episode of *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."* you'll meet Veronica Garcia.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 22) "We weren't living on the streets. We were staying in long-term hotels, and I didn't fully understand what we were going through. I could feel the tension. I knew something was wrong, but at the same time, as a child, it felt kind of fun."**

Veronica is an MBA student at the University of Arkansas whose life challenges shaped her into she is today and pushed her to strive to become a leader.

This is *"Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas."*

### **Fifth Episode**

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 1) "Because we were staying in a hotel. You know, it seemed to me like this is fun."**

Staying at a hotel is always exciting. You get the luxury of a new bed, T.V., and snacks.

In the mornings, you get treated to orange juice with the best or mediocre continental breakfast – and whatever the quality, it’s different, and you didn’t have to make it yourself – which makes it even better.

Usually, you only stay in a hotel for a few days and return home.

But that was not the case for Veronica Garcia.

Around the age of five, she says she remembers moving out of her home in Springdale, Arkansas, and into a long-term hotel. She did not understand why her family was forced to relocate, and her parents did a great job shielding her from all the problems.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 2) “As I grew older, and I realized that that was an extremely stressful moment for my parents. I realize all the hardship they went through to make sure that I was still going to school.”**

Veronica says her parents did their best to make sure she and her family had everything they needed.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 3) “Even when we had nothing. I still had everything.”**

That compassion, hard work, and dedication to never give up no matter the obstacle poured into Veronica – and it’s part of the reason she desires to create change and become a leader.

Hi, my name is Wendy Echeverria. In this final episode of ***“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”*** You’ll meet Veronica Garcia, a Master of Business Administration also known as an MBA student and chief operating officer of her father’s local auto shop.

This is ***“Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.”***

At the age of twelve, Veronica’s father went through a painful difficulty that propelled him to move to the United States from Mexico - alone.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 4) “My dad moved here because, at that time, my grandpa was murdered.”**

Veronica says through the pain of losing her grandfather. Her dad found the strength to move forward.

He had to.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 5) "In that moment as a twelve-year-old, you know, a child essentially. He saw that there was a better promise of a future."**

Veronica's dad moved to Benavides, Texas, and began working. Veronica says he moved to numerous cities in Texas and, at one point, even lived with a retired sheriff to work on his farm. She says he ended up in Northwest Arkansas in 1985 after someone had told him about the many job opportunities in the chicken factories.

Veronica's mom moved to Arkansas from Mexico in the 90s after visiting family. She says she loved the area and saw potential.

Veronica says she has always admired their courage and grit.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 6) "They came to a country where they didn't know the language. They came to an area of the country that had a very small population of people who even looked like them. They had to deal with racism at a much higher level than I have ever dealt with."**

According to the Northwest Arkansas Council, in 1990, 1.3 percent of the community was Hispanic. Right now, Hispanics account for almost 18 percent of the population.

Can you imagine what that was like for him? To be in a new place and be one of the few Hispanics in the area. It can be daunting, but Veronica says her father never let that get to him.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 7) "My dad has told me stories about him going to bars here in Northwest Arkansas and being kicked out just because they were like no, no Mexicans, and this is in the late 80s early 90s. This wasn't in years ago, like thirty, forty, fifty years ago. I mean, this is recent. Well, I guess that was thirty years ago, but you know, at that time, there should have never been that type of segregation."**



Injustice – Veronica says never stopped her family from dreaming and obtaining their own business. In 1998, they bought a Chinese restaurant from a retired Chinese couple. She says it was a bit unusual, but it was a new adventure.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 8) "A restaurant full of immigrated Mexicans running a Chinese restaurant. It's not very authentic, but pretty good, I've heard, and that was his first business."**

A year later, Veronica says they went bankrupt, which was one of the reasons they ended up homeless and living in a hotel in Springdale.

She was young at the time and didn't understand, but she says she knew something was wrong because her teachers and counselors at her school would ask about her living situation and whether the address on file was where she really lived.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 9) "And, of course, I didn't live there. We were staying in a hotel, and I just remember feeling that pressure of what do I say? what do I say? I knew in that moment that okay is something wrong with the life that we're living because why are these adults pressuring me, and it was scary. You know, and at that point, I, I didn't. I mean, I didn't know what was going on, but I knew that it felt bad for me. I knew that there was something tense, and growing up, I realized just how stressful that was for my parents."**

Veronica says the address on file was her aunt's residence.

Veronica says the first ten years of her life were the most grueling moments for her family, but her parents never gave up, and by the time her brother was born, things got better to the point that he never experienced the difficulties Veronica, and her parents went through.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 10) "I feel so happy that he hasn't experienced some of the hardships we had, and it's just a blessing. It's a blessing to have what I have. I am forever grateful for my parents because even through some of the darkest moments, I, I can say that I was loved for, I was cared for, and I had what I needed."**

Her family.

Today, Veronica's family owns a new business - an auto sales shop located in Springdale, Arkansas, and Veronica is pursuing a Master of Business Administration, also known as an MBA, at the University of Arkansas.

Veronica wants to keep helping her family and their business. By being the Chief Operating Officer, she says her goal is to make her family's auto business as successful as it can be by making sure operations run smoothly.

Part of the reason she wanted the MBA degree was to build more essential skills, but it was also due to the lack of Latina representation getting an MBA degree, and she wanted to change that.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 11) "I Googled something about Latinas in MBA, and I saw this ridiculously low number. I think it was less than ten percent. I can't remember, and I didn't even fact-check or anything. Just the first thing I saw, and I was like, oh, oh okay, if that's it, I'm going to apply, and I applied, and..."**

According to an article from Bloomberg in 2021, quote "Students of Hispanic background made up 9.4% of MBA enrollment" in the U.S.

Veronica says she was accepted into the master's program the second time she applied.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 12) "First time I applied on the last day, and by that point, I don't think they really had any open spots. They strongly recommended that me to apply again, and the director at the time reach out to me, and he spoke with me, and he was like, just apply with the exact same stuff, and because we would love to have you, so again I applied, and immediately I was accepted thankfully."**

Veronica says the rejection into the program was a blessing because it was right when COVID hit the community, so the program was online, which, she says, would have made things hard.

According to the Walton College of Business website, there are 40 active students in the Walton College of Business MBA program for the 2023 cohort, and university officials say Veronica is one of two Latinas in the MBA program for the 2023 cohort. University officials also say race and ethnicity is self-reported by the students, and some may choose not to disclose that information.

At first, Veronica says she was intimidated by the program.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 13) "I remember after the first two weeks, I was like, maybe I should just drop out. Maybe I should just drop out because I hadn't been in school for three years at that point, and I was like, 'Oh, I'm just going to drop out. This is really intense. This is overwhelming, and then I just had to take a step back and be like, actually like I'm just making that up in my head. This is not as intense as it feels."**

Veronica stayed in the program and says she was glad she did because she's made great friends and mentors and has gained a wealth of knowledge.

But this feeling of do I belong? Should I be here? Will I be good enough? Am I smart to do this? Will they find out that I'm a fraud? It isn't new to some Latino and Latina students.

To be completely honest, many students feel this way regardless of their background or race.

And it is often described as Imposter Syndrome, a psychological experience that makes a person doubt their capability to perform a task or skill. It makes us question our worthiness.

Imposter Syndrome can be detrimental and, at times, can hinder a student's success, especially for a first-generation student - which is why one professor at the University of Arkansas says it is important to have people in your corner who understand the difficulties that come when trying to navigate the academic world.

**(Yajaira M. Padilla bite 14) "It is important for us to, you know, as students but also those of us who are in the classroom or serving in other capacities because I think this is across the board in other**

**fields as leaders quote on quote or mentors, right? That being able to show "you know what, this is a space that you can make it in. This is a space that needs you."**

That's Dr. Yajaira Padilla. She's an English, Latin American, and Latino Studies professor at the University of Arkansas.

Dr. Padilla says she's seen Latino and Latina students struggle for many reasons, particularly first-generation college students, because they are often trying to figure out the ways of a whole new system—scholarships, loans, FASFA, internships, research opportunities, and so much more.

And most of the time, they do it alone because their parents want to help, but they might not know how.

**(Yajaira M. Padilla bite 15) "It doesn't really help to say no, no, I don't see. I don't know why you are struggling. No, it's. You need someone that's kind of like, 'I've been there. I kind of understand, right? And you can do this, or someone simply saying if this is not for you. What else can you do? Do you know what I mean? But like kind of being able to at least just be a sounding board."**

It's about being there and listening – that can make all the difference to a student. However, being able to see a person like yourself in the job or position you want to obtain is so vital.

**(Yajaira M. Padilla bite 16) "Visibility matters, and representation matters. It's the same in any field, like I think about it too. We want more representation in Hollywood, like in different roles, though, right? We want to see lead actresses that are Latinas and Latinos that can play everything, not just the stereotype."**

This is why Veronica Garcia wanted an MBA degree. She knew there was a lack of Latinas acquiring the degree and wanted to be the change for herself and other Latinas.

**(Veronica Garcia sound bite 17) "I'm really excited for the future generations, and I am a little bit envious because they're going to be a million miles ahead of us. Exactly how I want it to be, but it's going to be amazing what they're going to be able to accomplish. If my parents were able to**

**accomplish what they've done, and now I'm able to accomplish something a little bit more, and hopefully, my children accomplish ten times more, and their children accomplish a hundred times more. That's what I want."**

Many come to this country seeking an opportunity that will change their lives and to see the vision flourish into existence – well, there are no words for it, to be honest. It's the dream.

Before doing this project, I looked up stereotypes that were associated with Latinas, and they were the following: submissive, weak, and obedient. But I questioned these false views of Latinas, which is also why I wanted to do this podcast. I'm not saying that everyone believes these stereotypes– but I wanted to open up the reality of who we really are by allowing Latinas to tell their story.

When looking up these stereotypes, I also looked up the definition of a leader, and one article described successful leaders as people who have a strong goal orientation, are self-confident, proactivity, and can act quickly rather than passively.

And those are exactly the adjectives and terms I would use to describe the Latinas featured throughout the five-part series in this podcast.

You might have noticed that each Hispanic woman and Latina had a completely different story as to how they ended up in the U.S. Yet, they all had the same goal – a better opportunity or life. Leaving home is never easy, but each of these women showcase the resiliency and beauty of being a leader. They rose to the occasion, made the tough decisions, and acted quickly and effectively for themselves, family – or team – which is exactly what a leader does.

Many of them were afraid at one point in their journey, but – they did it through fear and encourage others to do the same.

**(Juanita Franklin, sound bite 18) "Feeling the fear and doing it anyway. As I say, speak your mind, even if your voice shakes.**

They are meant to be here. They are meant to take a seat at the table. They are meant to lead.

**(Beatriz Acevedo, sound bite 19) "They absolutely belong. They are absolutely enough. They deserve to be in those rooms. Their voice is incredibly valuable in places where there's a sea of sameness. Right. Like, that's their superpower being different instead of again feeling less or feeling little for being the only Latina, the only woman, the only anything. It's like, no, that's your power, right? Like there's nobody like you here. Have incredible. Is that anything that you say will be so different and refreshing and unique, and you are part of the new majority of America."**

Being a Latina is a superpower.

Being a woman is a superpower.

Being different is a superpower.

It's our superpower.

This is "*Inspirando el futuro: stories about Latina leaders in Northwest Arkansas.*"

**END OF PODCAST**

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