SANDRA CISNEROS INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Sandra Cisneros
Author
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Interviewed by: Ann Sorkowitz
Total Running Time: 1 hour 11 minutes and 56 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Sandra Cisneros

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INTERVIEWER:

I wanted to start out talking about your family and your childhood. Can you tell me a little about where you grew up and what your family was like?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

Yeah. I'm an only daughter in a family of six boys, but I'm in the middle. However, I was my father's favorite child. I think that women who are in these very strong positions, or at least in my own personal interviews when I've asked Latinas who are extraordinary in their fields, they invariably tell me they were their father's favorite child.

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I think there's something there. I was my father's favorite child. I was an only daughter. I'm the third in a family of seven children. My mother was a housewife. She worked in a factory before she got married. She only had an eight and a half year education and had to start working because she came from a very poor family. My father is not an economic refugee, but he was a kind of emotional refugee.

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My father came from a military family, a middle class Mexican family from Mexico City. I like to think that if he didn't immigrate to the United States, he would've had a better life in Mexico. I say this because he came during a time when Mexico was flourishing; during the two world wars. We forget that, because Europe was at war, we were at war, and we were having a depression during the thirties, we forget that Mexico was doing really well.

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INTERVIEWER:
You talked about you being your father's favorite and what impact that had. Can you tell me, what did that do for you?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
In a full sentence, if you can.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yeah, yeah. Let me tell you a little bit about... I think I can't explain myself without explaining my father. That's important. I feel that my father shaped me to be a different kind of woman, and my mother also shaped me to be a different kind of woman. The combination of those two were very important for making Sandra Cisneros.

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My father, I think he recognized in me, himself. Of all his children, I was his clone. I was like him in having a very hypersensitive, being a very poetic soul, someone who was very gregarious and very generous in spirit. My father saw himself in me. I understood him in a way that my mother never did. My mother, on the other hand, wanted to be an artist. She was a girl who dreamed of maybe singing, playing an instrument, being on the stage, or drawing.

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She had all these artistic talents; an intelligent woman who was limited by her economic circumstances. She regretted that she didn't have that life, and she raised me very different from any of my girlfriends, any of the neighbor little girls who were all learning how to make *sopa de fideo* and how to diaper

their brothers and how to clean a house—preparing to be housewives, in other words.

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Whereas, my mother never taught me to cook. I had to be in the kitchen, but I wasn't really good at it. My mother, as long as she saw me with a book, it could be a library book and I could be reading a novel, she would leave me alone. That's very different from the little girls I knew who couldn't come out to play because they were making tortillas. My mother's dream of living a life that was an artistic life, and my father understanding me because he saw himself, these two combinations were really important for allowing me to develop in a very different way from other little girls.

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I say that because they nurtured my sense of spirit. I think when you're an artist, it's not that you know how to draw, you know how to write. It's a way of looking at the world that you have, even if you never discover your genre. I was one of those little kids that liked to be by themselves, that used to climb trees and talk to the trees, and more important—the trees talked back.

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Later on when I went to theology classes at university, and you find out about peak experiences by Maslow or Mercy Oduyoye talking about these spiritual experiences, you say, "Well, yeah. That happens to me every day. It doesn't happen to you?" “No, I guess it doesn't,” but I didn't know that. I had a childhood that was filled with things of the spirit. I think artists have that kind of childhood. I was very lucky that my mother and father, perhaps without knowing it, were nurturing me to be the woman that I am.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
Cisneros Family in West Chicago

INTERVIEWER:
What do you feel like, having a father really adore you, does for a young girl?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
My theory is that women who have fathers that adore them, it builds a core of self-esteem. Even though life will give you the beatings that every woman has, if you have that sense of self-esteem, you can go back to that. Maybe you're destroyed for a couple of months or years, but you can go back to that sense of love and sense of wellbeing. I think that's so essential.

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I tell fathers that when I speak to schools, that it's really important for the fathers to love their daughters and think they're the greatest things and they can do anything. That's so important. My friends who have done films, who are painters, or who are in the business world, each of them, all of these Latinas, we all have in common that we were our father's favorite. Our father believed in us, and somehow that allows you to have maybe a little life jacket to survive all of the deluge that life is going to give you.

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INTERVIEWER:
What were the expectations that your parents had for your future?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

In the beginning, my mother's expectations for me were rather low because they were kind of low for herself. She had worked in a factory, and then had to give up her job when she became a mom of seven kids. I remember as a child, she would tell me, "You better learn how to type so that you can be a secretary because their hands are clean." I remember her saying that. "And they wear nice clothes."

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That always hurt me to think about my mother's dream is a job for her daughter where her hands are clean. I knew, then, how hard she had worked in a factory. Later, that would change. She would say, "Go to school, and you never know. You make sure you have an education because you never know." I'd say, "You never know what, ma?" "Nevermind! Just you never know!" I would think, "What's she talking about?", but I kind of got it.

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I was just kind of teasing her because I wanted to hear what she would say. Did she mean her life? Was she stuck with my father with seven kids when she really wanted to be sitting on a piano singing? Or dancing or doing something creative? Painting? I don't know. I just remember her always reinforcing that idea of, "Make sure you go to school and study". Especially because I was so lousy in the kitchen she'd say,-

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Sandra Cisneros
5th Grade School Picture

SANDRA CISNEROS:
-"Make sure you go to school and study. Who's going to marry you like that?" It was true. I still burned the rice.

INTERVIEWER:
You've written about your father telling your brothers that they had to take care of you.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
What message did that send to you, and how did it impact you?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I grew up as the only daughter, and I grew up in really rough neighborhoods; neighborhoods where other writers grew up as well, but they wound up in gangs, and where other girls wound up pregnant before they were in high school.

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I had this very strict father, a kind of arrogant father, which turned out to be good, and a mother who had this compulsion to open the path for me because

it hadn't been open for her. My father was of a generation of *caballeros*, gentlemen. He believed that if a woman got on a bus that he knew, and if he didn't have her car fair, he would sooner climb out the back door then be shamed that she got on and he didn't pay.

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That was the world he came from in Mexico. It was this kind of Don Quixote. My father was an upholster, but he was Don Quixote the way that I see Don Quixote gardeners, Don Quixote landscapers, and Don Quixote handymen/construction workers coming from Mexico with this sense of obligation and duty. Part of that obligation was to take care of his wife and his family. It was a real definition of an *hombre macho*; a real man who knows the obligation of taking care of his family.

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He taught my brothers that they had to take care of me, that I was the most precious thing in the family, and that they had to go to the corner and wait for me when I came out of my job at high school and walk that half block from the bus stop to our house, which by the way, was a battle zone. They were there. They didn't want to be there, but my father made them.

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Throughout my adult life, not just my childhood, there was that sense of, "Your sister's moving to a job teaching in California. You're going to go to help drive her there. You're going to go, too, and you're going to deliver her furniture." There was always that sense of-

INTERVIEWER:

What sense did it send to you of your being able to go out in the world and take care of yourself and accomplish things?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Some of the things that my father did were well meaning because I grew up in such a dangerous neighborhood, but some of the things that he did were very frustrating.

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He wanted me to go to the university because that was my wish, but he wanted me to go to university to find a husband. It wasn't because he wanted me to be educated. He thought I'd find some nice professional man. There was always this sense of, "Somebody's got to take care of her because she can't take care of herself." That's just the world he came from. Especially after I finished university, because I would take these minimum wage jobs.

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I was always working teaching in the *barrio* or teaching in the arts world, which doesn't bring any money. There was always this sense my father had of, "This girl doesn't know what she's doing, so she needs to be taken care of by somebody." I think my father putting up these restrictions like, "You don't do that. You've got to do that"... I'm glad I had that father that said, "You can't go off to live in another state and go to graduate school." I'm glad I had that father.

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Because that made me want to do it. That sense of, "Don't do that!" Okay, let me try this. I knew he wasn't going to be angry at me forever. I was his

favorite child. He'd get over it. I broke his heart a lot. I made him cry, I have to admit.

INTERVIEWER:
But you had a sense of, you were able to accomplish things for yourself?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I don't know where I got the sense that I could do half the things that I did. Now when I think about it, there're some things that I did that were rather brave.

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It wasn't that I was brave. I was foolish and afraid, like everybody, but maybe I was brave enough to say I was foolish and afraid, and that I would do it anyway. I was afraid of doing all the things that I saw white women do. I wanted to do things that white women did. They walked around naked in the locker room. Latino women don't do that. We all hide behind towels. Somebody holds the towel, and then we change. We're very modest. I wanted to be comfortable in my skin. I wanted to be able to walk on a beach topless.

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I want to jump out of a cake. I want to be able to travel to Europe alone. I want to have my own apartment like white girls. In a way, my father was right that all that education that I had ruined me. It ruined me, corrupted me, because I picked up all those white women values. It wasn't that I wanted to be like white women. I just wanted to be comfortable in my skin. I wanted to be able to do things that I might want to explore.

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I was trying to be like women in Europe, women in Mexico, women in India. Wherever I would read about women doing extraordinary things, I'd say, "Ohh..." I was trying to find myself because I didn't know how to become a writer. I didn't have anyone in my family that had connections with a publishing house. There wasn't anyone that my father or mother knew that could show me how to live a life of letters. All I had was models of men behaving badly; men going off to Europe in the twenties.

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I thought, "Well, I'll do that. Maybe I'll get over my fear of traveling if I go to Europe." I made a lot of mistakes. I did things because I was trying to invent how to be a writer. Coming from the neighborhood I came from and the family I came from, I just didn't know how to do that. When a little bit of money would come in a grant, I'd say, "Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, they were in Paris. I guess I'll go there."

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I'd buy a one way ticket from New York to Athens and start journeying because I was afraid of traveling because I never been anywhere because I was an only daughter. Because I always went to Mexico as a sister or daughter or a granddaughter or a niece. I never went anywhere alone. I didn't have that kind of imagination or money until I got a grant in my hand, and even though I was afraid, I did it.

INTERVIEWER:

You've also talked about the difficulties of moving back and forth and straddling two cultures. Can you tell me about the difficulty of that?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
We traveled back and forth when I was younger, from Chicago to Mexico. After third grade, it started slowing down, but it seemed as if we were there a lot in my preschool years and pre-middle school. We would go to visit the relatives in Mexico City. Not my mom's relatives; my father's relatives in Mexico City.

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My father was very attached to his mother. We would go back there, I think, because he felt homesick, and also because his mother was very possessive, and also because we didn't have any money. And so you go visit a relative, and you get a vacation in a sense. Although, it wasn't much of a vacation for my mother, as you can imagine visiting her mother-in-law. I don't know that it was so upsetting for me to go to Mexico. I think it was upsetting for me to go to the United States.

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The way that I remember it, sometimes there was a trauma. Because when you're little and you're a Mexican girl, your parents don't tell you what's going to happen like they do now in the United States where you sit down and say, "Now Karen, what would you like for breakfast?" No, that doesn't happen in a Mexican household. "Give her that." It happens to you. Life happens to you. You don't choose. I remember being in the car sometimes,

and maybe I was always a little bit out of it and daydreaming. I'd be in the car and I'd say, "Where are we going?"

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My mother would say, "We're going to Mexico." I'd say, "Mexico?!" And I'd look out the window at our apartment, and we'd drive away. It was that kind of trauma. One moment you were at home, and the next moment you're going to Mexico. But Mexico was a familiar and a loving place. It's when I came back to the United States that was traumatic because we would move. We'd pack up things and leave them at my mother's father's house, go to Mexico until we ran out of money, on a shoestring, come back, and whatever time of the year it was, we'd have to start all over again; whether it was the beginning of the school year or not.

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That was traumatic. Being in a new school, being the new girl, being in some new place. Starting all over again, that was traumatic for me. Going to Mexico, I knew everybody there. I think it created a sense of high self-esteem about being Mexican because no one could tell you anything bad about Mexico. You saw it yourself. It was wonderful.

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Who else had pyramids right next to the church downtown, people flying feather dancers, and just amazing things? You had this sense of happiness when you were there. It was kind of like a carnival. Then you came home to this dump called Chicago, at least the neighborhoods I lived in. Bleak and dark and people shouting at you, and the sense of fear. I always feel a sense of

fear when I'm in a big city because it reminds me of Chicago. At any moment, somebody might leap out and hurt you.

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On a bus, if you're sitting somewhere alone, a man might open his raincoat and flash you. If you're in the subway and you look really hard, you will see all the mice and the rats. It's a sense of fear, and I didn't feel like that in Mexico. I felt protected, maybe because I was with family. It's not to say that there isn't all of that there in Mexico, too, but in the context that I went, the memories that I have, it was a very intimate and tender place.

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INTERVIEWER:
What kind of student were you? I know you've brought your old report card when you speak to young women. Can you tell me why? How would you describe yourself as a student?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I have this report card that survived all these moves. For some reason, this one report card survived all these moves. It's this fifth grade report card full of C's and D's. I like to take it with me when I do presentations or blow it all up and show the students what kind of student I was. To tell you the truth, I never remember being stupid in that year.

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I remember being out of it. I remember daydreaming. I remember that the class was crowded, and if you look at the report card, there were 44 students.

I remember the teacher was unhappy. I remember that it was a place of high anxiety, and I remember that that teacher called my mother to a class meeting and complained that I daydreamed too much. I thought daydreaming was something bad. My mother was really upset because she had seven kids to cook for, my father to come home to.

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It's too much work to do to be talking to the Sister, and the Sister complained that I was a daydreamer, so my mother scolded me to pay more attention. But, you know, it was like anything. When I got bored, I'd look out the window and start imagining things, or I'd look at the kid in front of me and say, "Wow, his shirt is really dirty and he's all wrinkled. Oh, he must have a lot of work to do at home. Maybe he has little brothers. Probably his mother's too busy to iron his shirt. Oh, I bet I know where he lives. Where my auntie Timmo lives, there's a house that's really dirty. I bet he has little brothers. He has to make cornflakes in the morning, and that's why his hair's like that."

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Then, Sister would call on me. Of course, I didn't know where we were. I had this whole interior story for the poor kid in front of me, and I've written about that poor kid.

INTERVIEWER:
Basically, you were sitting in school and making stories?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

I think that I was recognizing someone that came from the country that I came from; poverty.

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I understood why that mom didn't have time to iron his shirt and why that little boy didn't have time to comb his hair. I knew what it was to have a lot of little brothers and a lot to do, and delegating things so that children are taking care of children and things just don't get done properly. That's what I saw, and my heart always opened to parts of myself. I was looking at myself.

INTERVIEWER:
Do you remember specific moments of sexism that you had?

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SANDRA CISNEROS
You know, I was a very beautiful young girl, and I feel sad when I see beautiful young women. I feel sad because I feel like that's a cross for young women in this world. I feel sad for them because I feel like we glorify that, that we don't tell them how to defend themselves. You go into the world; I did, as a daughter who was treated really well by my father, my brothers, my family; and you are so naive about that beauty.

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You think when someone's kind to you, "Oh, this man looks like my grandfather. He's so nice. He looks just like my grandfather." Then he says, "It's my birthday today. Could I have a kiss?" You think, "Oh, he looks just like my grandfather. I think I will give him a kiss." Then he grabs you in the face

and doesn't let you go. That's such a horrible thing to happen to a 15 year old girl. That happens a lot to beautiful women.

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I think, for me, there was all these moments when horrible things, shocking things, would happen that you don't realize that you're carrying in this body. I don't think of myself as a woman. I think of myself as a little ball of light. When you're a beautiful woman like that, men see only the outside. They don't see the light. I think that when you're raised as sheltered, you trust everybody.

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There are a lot of instances of men, through their own eyes, I know now that they saw it as something nice, but it was very frightening. Many instances. That's just one. When I was, seventh grade, my father used to let me take art classes with a friend. He would only let me take them if a girl went with me.

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The girl was very sophisticated. She was really sexy and pretty. She was a little street wise. I remember that once I came home in my neighborhood, which was very rough, which is now Wicker Park and very gentrified... The only reason I was allowed out with this friend was because we could walk home at the same time, and because she was smart and street wise, and I was very young. I was still in seventh grade, but I looked like I was in fourth grade. These two boys came walking towards us.

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You know how, when you're a sophisticated girl, you can tell trouble's coming. She got off the sidewalk and left me there, and this boy just grabbed me and

took my face and he tried to kiss me, but I was a little frightened, so he kissed me on the eye. I'm sure that kiss tasted like the ocean. There's in my stories always a kiss that tastes like the ocean. It was like a rape to me. That was my first kiss, to have this boy laugh and just ... like if you were a donut, just take a bite.

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INTERVIEWER:
How did it make you feel?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
It made me feel embarrassed and I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't talk about it for years. This is maybe one of the first times I'm telling you. I feel like just being a pretty girl was a horrible thing, because things like that happened all the time. Where like, there's a cupcake, I think I'll take a bite. It was like that throughout my life and I never saw it coming. I would always think, this is somebody that looks like my father or this is my brother or this is my friend.

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INTERVIEWER:
How did that impact who you are, who you became?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

Well, I write about the things I don't talk about. I write about the things people don't talk about. When people tell me that story, because I have that in my heart, I go there. Even if I'm writing about something and it didn't happen to me. If someone tells me something that I can match it and say,-

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
Sandra Cisneros
Photo by Diana Solis

SANDRA CISNEROS:
-I'll take your story and I'll take what happened to me ... which was just a kiss on the eye. I'm going to take your story about something bigger and I'll use that emotion and I'll tell your story. That's how I do it. I think that's something that happens. I feel sorry for women when they have beauty. I do, because I feel it's just a-

INTERVIEWER:
What message did it give to you?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
It just makes me want to protect them.

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It makes me want to protect women, because I feel as if I hadn't had that beauty, maybe those things wouldn't have happened to me, or if I hadn't had

that sense of wellbeing in my house, maybe I wouldn't have been so trusting. I don't know. You can come from a really rough neighborhood, like I did, and still be absolutely sheltered. That's a kind of irony.

INTERVIEWER:
What did it want to make you do for yourself?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
I think it made me want to hide and it made me keep secrets. It made me not talk. It made me realize that when you don't talk about these things, that they get bigger than they really are. That there are things that we write that we don't talk about that are essentially the best things to write about that. Those are the things that are most powerful. The things that we can't think about, the things that when we go to bed we say, I'm going to put that seal, that tape, that do not pass, the way that police put that tape when there's been a murder, there are those files and those thoughts.

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I'm not going to think about that. It's when you lie down that they come up and that's what I write about. That's what I write from.

INTERVIEWER:
When did you know that writing was going to be your path?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

I was an artist before I was a writer. Everybody's an artist.

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Why do they stop? I don't know. I don't know what people do that don't have art, because I think that's such an essential part of processing things that happen to us that we can't talk about. For me, I switched from drawing to language when I was in middle school. I think it was because I was living such a rich interior spiritual life. I was an only daughter and socialized not to play with my brothers.

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Once they found their friends, they didn't play with me. I spent a lot of time having interior monologues or exterior dialogues with trees, and things of nature. When I was in middle school, about that same year that I got scolded from being a daydreamer, around then, I started reading poetry in textbooks in school and I started writing them in secret.

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I wrote about things that were the kind of things you would never think a child would write about. I wrote about trees and sunsets and clouds, things of the spirit. That's what I was writing about. I kept it a secret. Nobody knew I was doing this.

INTERVIEWER:
What did it give you?

SANDRA CISNEROS:

I think that for me it gave me a sense of language for explaining things that flooded my heart.

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I think there are things that happen to us and they're the most beautiful moments in a day. I think that's what it was for me. It was a moment in the day that I could translate into language to give me a joy. I think that's what it was.

INTERVIEWER:
That's pretty unusual for a child, would you say?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
No, I don't think so. I think that kids have this very rich interior spiritual life, I'm assuming. I think that they take it for granted.

INTERVIEWER:
As for you, as a child, what's that?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yeah, I just felt that those were the best parts of the day.

INTERVIEWER:
When did you know that you were going to follow that path?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:

I think girls should say what they want to do in life when they're in middle school. I think it's really important when you're 11 or 10 or 12, to say, "This is what I want to do in my life." Usually at that age you're, you're thinking about your wedding dress, but I tell little girls, think beyond your wedding dress. What do you see right here in that third eye that you'd like to do in your life? That's when it happened for me. I was in middle school, I was in the library. I went to the library every weekend and I was looking for a book.

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At that time, the card catalogs were those big long drawers with a metal pole in the middle of the index card. And I was looking for a book and I came upon this card that was really dog-eared and dirty and I passed it, but I remember thinking as I passed it, this must be a good book. Then I went back and said, "That's what I want." I want my name on a card, Cisneros, Sandra, and the name of a title of some book and I want it to be dirty and all just smudged from so many hands touching it.

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That's when I saw what I wanted for myself, my name in the card catalog, which now I think is egotistical, but at least that was a place to begin, to see my name on a card that was well worn and books that were well read. Later, I would visualize the spine of a book with my name. That's how it began.

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INTERVIEWER:

When did you start to write in earnest?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I started writing in middle school in my notebook and poetry first and fiction later, but it wasn't anything that I showed anyone. It wasn't for school. It wasn't something I could share with the six brothers who would make me cry. I couldn't show my father who would understand, because it was in English and he worked hard. My mother was always in a bad mood. She was a "prisoner of war" wife in the kitchen banging pots and yelling. It was something I kept to myself.

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INTERVIEWER:
When did you decide to pursue it as a career? How did that go?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, I always thought that the writing would be something that I could do on the side. I was raised to think about making money, to consider making a living. Even if I married, I had to have an education and I had to have parachutes, just in case, as my mother had said.

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I didn't think that it would be viable for me to be a writer, because one, I didn't know how to become a writer. Two, I didn't know how to make money with writing. I saw that other women taught English, so I would say to people publicly that I was going to teach high school English. In my mind, I thought,

on the weekends I'm going to write. I was just too afraid to make that claim. I didn't have the voice to say, I want to be a writer.

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I didn't know anyone who was a writer and I didn't know how one became one. It was silly, like saying I want to be a magician. This was something you don't want people to laugh, so you keep it to yourself. In my mind, the plan was to teach high school and to write on the weekends and summer.

INTERVIEWER:
When you started you to do that, what was that like, managing, working, and writing?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, a shift happened, in that a professor advised me that I could major in creative writing and minor in the other.

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It didn't have to be the other way around. I didn't know you could do that. A shift happened also, once I started teaching and writing on the side, I realized that I had to write small things, something that I could finish, little vignettes, things that were small. The stories and poems that I started writing started incorporating the lives of my students. They were a way for me to be able to go to sleep, because the girls and the young men that I was working with had lives that were much harder than mine.

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I thought mine was hard, but compared to them, I had lived like a princess. I started weaving their stories into this neighborhood of my past.
The piece I was writing became a novel as opposed to a memoir. Writing them maybe didn't help my students directly, because they didn't see the pieces, but it helped me, because I was looking for another way to be.

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I'm quoting Rosario Castellanos, the Mexican feminist. There had to be another way to be than the way the girls were living, than the way my mother and aunts were living. I didn't know Rosario Castellanos, I didn't know Latina feminism. I was just hacking my way through the jungle and making a path for myself by writing my way through. That's how I found my feminism, writing my books and by finding Latina writers through my writing.

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INTERVIEWER:
It sounds like you wanted something different from yourself.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I didn't know what I wanted when I was in my 20s, but I knew what I didn't want. I didn't want to live my mother's life and be married and have children and get stuck in Chicago and be frustrated. I didn't want to live my father's life either. He wasn't living the life he wanted to, but he had to work and he worked with his hands. I didn't want that life. I didn't want to stay in Chicago.

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I didn't want to live in a neighborhood where there weren't flowers and trees, but I didn't know how to become what I wanted to be. I think that I was very lucky in that divine providence always shown a little light. Not that far, just a little headlight just for one step and I would take that step. I was wise enough to know, well that looks right, so I take one step. Then it would shine a light over there and I would take that step. I always followed this.

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Now that I look back at my life, it was there all along, but it just wasn't giving me the whole picture. It was just giving me one step at a time. By following that, it took me to places better than if I had planned.

ON SCREEN TEXT:
1983

INTERVIEWER:
How did you select the title? What's special to you about the house and what's special to you about Mango Street?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, when I had that moment in Iowa, when I thought about what was the thing I'm so ashamed about, and I think all of us as human beings have places where we have low sense of self-esteem, low places of shame. Those are places, rich places to explore writing about.

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For me, I wasn't an alcoholic and I wasn't a drug abuser, but I did have issues of sexual recklessness that I was silenced about. Instead, I took an earlier shame and I thought about my neighborhood and my poverty. I began from a real house, a real street, and I used that feeling of unworthiness and shame to explore things I couldn't talk about.

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I decided to focus on the house, since that was the core issue for me. I decided to name it a name that would evoke Latin America. The real street was not Mango and I wanted something that sounded like that, but that would evoke something Latin American. My favorite fruit was the mango, so of course I took Mango.

INTERVIEWER:
Tell me about your character, Esperanza. It's like, it's a word for hope, but she's also pessimistic.

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, when I began as Esperanza, she didn't have a name and she began as a voice for myself. The book changed and she became my students and she became many women, not just my story. I don't see it as my story. I see it as having strands, the way hair is made up of many strands. Some of the strands are mine, but then I started collecting the strands of my students and braiding it all together. I can't see it as my story. I see it at all of our stories.

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She didn't have a name. She was just in the first person. As the story evolved and started incorporating the stories of my students and of my neighbors and of my mother and relatives, I realized she was going to have to have a name. I thought I could bypass that problem, but it became clear, I had to have a name, as I was finishing the book. The chapter of my name came rather late in the process. I wanted to give her a name that maybe would be symbolic, so I didn't know what to call her.

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I would meet people and as I met them, I would roll their name around in my brain and think, could that work? One day, I don't even remember when, the name Esperanza appeared, and it seemed to me to be right.

INTERVIEWER:
Optimistic, but pessimistic.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, I think we're all both. We're optimistic and pessimistic, but I like to think of Esperanza in the end of the book as being full of hope and being a woman that's gone through her doubts and darkness and arrives at light.

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INTERVIEWER:
What were the, I guess… the secrets of life in the *barrio* that you wanted to bring to light? I know you talk about abuse and sexual assault.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
When I was writing *The House on Mango Street*, there were books written by men about the *barrio*. We're talking about poets who had written about the *barrio*. I wanted to respond to those Latino writers, as well as writing my own work, because I felt that their bravado and pride of the *barrio* wasn't what I felt.

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I felt trapped and frightened in the *barrio*, and I wanted to give my viewpoint as a female. I was looking, not to negate theirs, but to add my point of view about the *barrio*, that it wasn't so colorful and it wasn't *Sesame Street*. I wanted to write about my own dangers. They had theirs, wandering those streets in the male body, but I wanted to talk about the world I knew as a woman.

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INTERVIEWER:
Unlike the women around her, Esperanza could leave but could also come back to help. Can you tell me about that dual feeling of wanting to leave but wanting to stay?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
When I was finishing *The House on Mango Street*, I thought it was very important for me to clarify what I was trying to say. I wasn't trying to write about people moving out and buying a house in the suburbs. I was talking more about a spiritual home and about an obligation to community.

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I hope the last chapter of *The House on Mango Street* makes young people understand that if there are issues in your community, whatever they may be, even if you grow up in a very lovely community, there's always negative issues, maybe things that aren't seen publicly, maybe private sorrows. That we are privileged to be able to see people who are suffering the same issues we suffer, and that we have an obligation to go back and make that change. That's what I was trying to say to my readers.

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You could grow up on Park Avenue or you could grow up on Mango Street, but there's some work for you to do, some healing work that needs to be done that only you can see, and it's up to you to go back to do that.

INTERVIEWER:
Do you remember the moment when you found out that *The House on Mango Street* was being published?

ON SCREEN TEXT:
1983

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yes. There wasn't a moment that The House on Mango Street wasn't going to be published. There were stories that I was publishing that were part of a larger project, and I published them individually before it became a larger

project, so I never had any doubt that it wasn't going to be a remarkable book. I just knew, because I worked very hard on each one.

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I just said... I had a kind of moment of clairvoyance that I could see what I was doing. I knew I was going to publish it as a small press first and eventually, I would sell it to a larger house. That was very clear. It wasn't a sense of entitlement or ego. It's, sometimes, we get moments of clairvoyance, and you can see. I have that. You have that. We all have that gift where we can get this little light beam and you can see your future, and you'll say, "Oh, okay." I just walk towards it as if it was my *destino*, and it was.

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INTERVIEWER:
If someone had told you back then that the book would never be out of print and that it would be required reading all over the country…

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, now that didn't come to me. I did see that my book was going to be read by all ages, but I didn't know it was going to be translated, and that I'd go to China, and that it would be translated into Persian. I didn't see that. I just said, "Oh, this..." I got a moment of clairvoyance when I saw that it was going to be a book like The Little Prince, a kind of book that could be read by older people and younger people at the same time, and that it would have a long life.

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I got that clairvoyant moment, but I didn't get the details about the languages, and all the cultures, and the different countries that take me to. I see now that that was part of my *destino*. I didn't choose that. I think your *destino* gives you what you have to fulfill. If it had been that I'd wanted the fame and the money, it wouldn't have given it to me because I wouldn't be the right person to fulfill the obligation.

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But, it was given to me because I didn't want it, and because I was shy, and because I was humble. Sometimes I think, "Oh what a lot of trouble this is," because it gets in the way of the writing. But on the other hand, I feel I have to, an obligation to do this work. It's a spiritual debt. I was given this, so I must do that. It's not something that I chose, but I must do it because I was chosen.

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INTERVIEWER:
Why do you think the book resonates so much, with young, with old...

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I can tell you. I think this book speaks to so many cultures and so many people because it's a spiritual book. I didn't know that when I wrote it, but I see now that it's a book that speaks to people's spirit, especially when they're silenced, especially if they're in a culture where they're silenced. Maybe they might be silenced politically, or they might be silenced in their home, or they might be silenced by their self.

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And it speaks to that interior life that we have that has such great longing to express itself, that witnesses and feel things so deeply, and sometimes we don't have the language for it. It's a poetry that doesn't intimidate people. I think it allows... It speaks for people and the things they feel inside their heart.

INTERVIEWER:
What do you think its success did for you, and what do you think it also did for Latinas?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, the success for me has gotten in the way of my writing, because I have to fulfill so many obligations. There's so much need. I have to go out to the schools, or I feel that there's so few of us that are in positions that are in front of cameras or microphones. There's so few of us, and the need is so great, and it's getting greater, especially now. The success for me means more political work, more work as a spokesperson, more public work.

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The public work is the opposite of the writing. The writing is private and interior, and it's work you have to do alone. But I understand the obligations, and it's hard for me to find that balance for me now to retreat and be the writer. That's what the success has meant. It also has meant some very good things that I've been able to start, some foundations and help other writers,

and help to pay a housekeeper who has a daughter, and pay a gardener, and pay an assistant who is a student.

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There are people I'm taking care of, and that's good and bad, because it takes me away from silence of writing.

INTERVIEWER:
What do you think the book itself has done for the Latina community?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I think my books have allowed people to see themselves in literature. People who never saw themselves in books are startled to say, "Hey, that's my story." Suddenly, it makes them aware of the power of a book to transform their life.

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I think communities that feel very disconnected to literature, especially American literature, who have never seen their story told, feel just a tremendous impact when they see themselves on paper, or when they hear my story, because I perform them, and feel like, "That's me." I think it's very empowering and transformative to their spirits. The work I feel that I do is one of healing spiritual work. I'm not a healer, but I do heal.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
Sandra Cisneros Book Signing

INTERVIEWER:
How do you think, to someone who's suffering, literature can save a life when they're battling with survival?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, I think we all have moments when we become very self-destructive. Sometimes people commit suicide, and some people take drugs, or some people abuse others, or we abuse our bodies sexually. There's all kinds of ways that we can kill ourselves without killing ourselves. I think art is there to heal us, to transform that pain to enlightenment.

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I think that's what art is about. It's work of transforming darkness to light. That's the work we do. But not everyone's aware, or not everyone can find that art that will move them. I feel very lucky that my work goes out and I witness that transformation. Many writers write, and they never meet their readers. I am rather young, and have met hundreds and hundreds of people who give me testimonies of how my work has changed them.

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I meet young women who are in graduate school now, or who are professionals and say, "I read this when I was in middle school. My counselor told me I wasn't going to amount to anything or to go to a vocational. I was very angry in middle school, and I read this book, and I'm finishing up at UCLA," or "I'm teaching now at San Francisco," or "I'm working now here." Men and women tell me this, so I believe art can change lives, can save lives, can transform people's lives.

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I don't buy when people say, "Oh, art doesn't do anything." Well, you haven't met my readers. I have a long list of people that come up to me and feel as if they know me, and bless me with their stories, and hug me and kiss me. It's a little startling because you're meeting strangers, but they know you, and your work has done incredible healing and brought light to them. They hug me because they think I'm the light. I'm not the light.

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I just channel it. I'm so happy when I get that confirmation that the work I've done has changed their world.

INTERVIEWER:
When you wrote *Caramelo*, you said that you wanted to tell the story of your father.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
And also through him, the story of untold millions of immigrants.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Why is it important to you to document their lives?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
When my father was dying, I felt that his life didn't matter to American history unless I wrote about it.

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I felt that my father's life didn't count, that he wasn't in the history books. Especially since 9/11, there's just been such a horrible, horrible view of migrants and their contribution in the United States. I don't sit down and say, "I will write the story of Mexican people. I'm going to defend migrants." I don't do that. I write the story that tells itself to me in my heart, the one that is ways in my heart.

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When I read the paper, especially since 9/11, and hear all of these horrible things being said about people I love, I take it personally because these are my relatives. My father was a migrant, and I know the migrant community very well. I just feel like a lot of things have been written to vilify that community. But when I was running *Caramelo*, I wanted to tell not the whole migrant story, I just wanted to tell one migrant person, one person who immigrated, and he wasn't your typical migrant.

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He didn't come up working in the fields. He ran away from home during World War II, served in the Army, and never learned English very well, and was dying as I was writing the book. I thought, "If I don't write his story, he's not part of American history." You can watch these documentaries about

World War II that we see, and they never mentioned the contributions that Mexicans, and people from Argentina, and the Spanish and exile, and the Mexican-Americans, they don't talk about the Latino contributions.

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So I thought, "If I don't write about it, it never happened. If I don't write about my father, it says that his life didn't matter," and I knew that. I wanted just to write one man's story. In the course of writing his story, I started reading testimonials, testimonies of men in World War II, testimonies of people who had been migrants, testimonies of people who had lived during the years my father lived, so I started kind of collecting more than one voice, and I started looking at the history of immigration, all the way back from when we were just a colony.

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The more I wrote, I thought, "People are just going to read this and think I'm just telling an invention. I'm just making this up." So, what about if I put the history of immigration in the back of the book? What if I add a footnote? Just one. Well, maybe two. Well, okay, 15. The book kept changing and becoming this kind of experimental novel with footnotes and a little chronology in the back. I realized I was telling more than my father's story.

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I was telling the story of all migrants, whether they came from China, or whether they came from Mexico, or Germany, that we've had these issues with other migrant communities where the Germans were attacked for not learning English during World War I, and they had to change the name of their streets to English so as not to be vilified. The Chinese had the same

issue that the Mexicans are having now, and there were laws against them coming and bringing their wives back in the 1880s, that we've had this history, and it just keeps repeating itself and repeating itself, and the ethnic groups just keep changing.

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I wanted to bring that to attention. My heart hurts when I hear things in the news or when I read things, and I don't know what I can do. I'm just one human being, but I ask every day, "What can I do?" The answer came to me when I was writing *Caramelo*, page by page, and I finished the book. The world is worse than ever for Mexican migrants, and we're living extreme Mexi-phobia, and I ask every day, "What can I do?"

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I'm as ignorant as the next person of what I can do to make change, but at least I know to ask, and that answer comes a little bit at a time.

INTERVIEWER:
You also said that until you met other Latina writers, you didn't know what extraordinary work you were all doing. What do you mean by that?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, I would meet people like Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, way later in my life. I first started meeting Chicago writers, like Dr. Norma Alarcon, before she was a doctor, when she was just a grad student. She started publishing the Midwest Latina Women, bringing us together because there

was no magazine, and she started Third Woman Press. Meeting her made me aware of feminism, and how important feminism was.

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Because when I was in college, feminism just didn't have any resonance for me. It wasn't until I started meeting Latinas and the issues that they brought up of color and class, that the gender issue made sense. I remember that, meeting Norma Alarcon when she came to visit me the very first time. We had just met each other, and I'd stayed at her home at Bloomington when I did a reading at the Indiana University.

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I reciprocated and said, “When you come to Chicago, you can stay with me." She walked through my apartment and looked around. I didn't know what she was looking for. She was looking for toys. She was looking for men's clothes. Then she said, "You live here alone?" I said, "Yeah." Then she leaned forward, and she looked me in the eye, and she said, "How did you do it?"

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When she said, "How did you do it," it was the first time I met a woman who understood how hard it had been for me to get that space of my own as a young woman, 25. I wasn't a white woman with my first apartment. I was a Latina woman who had not been kicked out of my father's house, and who had to fight to get out of my father's house as a single woman. I had not been exiled out of the family. I had fought for that space, but no one had ever said, "How did you do it," until that moment.

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I remember just the tears flooded in my eyes and I thought, she knows. That was the beginning of my feminism.

INTERVIEWER:
How did you do it?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I went to graduate school in another state, at Iowa, and when I came back, I was forced to live at home for a little while until I got a part-time job. I kept saying, "I want to live in my own place," and it took a lot of fighting with my father.

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First we compromised, and I lived in a basement apartment of a building that he owned where my brother lived on the top floor and I lived in the basement, but that didn't last long. Eventually, I found my own place and I just did it. My father would get angry, but I realized, I don't care. He'll get over it. I'm his favorite. And, he would. He never liked it. He would come and look around and say, "Why is she living with the space heaters when we have a house with central heating? We used to have space heaters and we moved up in the world to central heating, and now she's going backwards. What's this about?"

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He could never figure it out. He thought that I was choosing poverty. He thought, "Well, she went to graduate school. She could have a nice job. She could be a weather girl. They're Latina weather girls. Why doesn't she just get

a job? She's pretty. She could be on television talking about the weather." But, I didn't want to be a weather girl. He would say, "Mija, when are you coming home?" I just had to make my father suffer a lot. He had to make me suffer a lot.

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At the end of his life, we understood each other, and we made peace. My father apologized for things that he had said or done, and it was all right. We understood each other. He wanted me to be safe. I wanted to be happy. At the end of my father's life, he saw that I was earning enough money to pay for my own house without borrowing any money from him, that I had a gardener, and an assistant, and a housekeeper, and a house sitter, and I lecture all over, and I was doing it all by myself.

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And instead of saying, “When are you going to get married,” My father said, “*Mija*, don't get married. He'll just take your money from you.” And then I knew that we had come to peace.

INTERVIEWER:
Was marriage always a given, growing up?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Marriage was always a given. He gave up on the children. He didn't have to worry about that, but he wanted me to be married.

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He had six other children that could have babies, but he wanted me to get married. And once I won the MacArthur, that's when he said, "Don't get married. He'll just take your money." I thought, "Amen." Oh, we understand each other.

INTERVIEWER:
So what did it take for you to buck all that tradition?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
I had to be *necia*, stubborn, and I was just driven. I said, this is what I want in my life. I want this, children may be later, marriage may be later, but this is what I'm working towards. Even if I just have a day job that pays me minimum wage, by the time I'm 30, I want a book done, and I want a national award. By the time I'm 40, I want this book done, and I want this kind of award.

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I had an agenda, the way companies have agendas, five year, 10 year, 20 year, and a vague plan like that. I still have those kind of plans. They've changed over the years. They're not the same as when I was younger. And then some awards came that I never planned for. Like the MacArthur. I didn't plan for that.

INTERVIEWER:

Knowing that you brought the life of the *barrio*, so to speak, or your heritage, to millions of people worldwide, their stories to so many people, what do you think it's done for the Latin community, the Latinas?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, I wish other people to write more stories because I can't tell everyone's story. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of telling everybody's story. And yet every book I've written, I've had that responsibility. So I'm looking around trying to open doors for other writers. That's what I do with my foundations. I have two foundations that work with creative writers, and I can't tell everybody's story. And so I work to try to open doors for other writers to write their stories.

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INTERVIEWER:
Why do you think that there are so few Latinas who are big in the American publishing scene, or become household names like yourself? What do you attribute that to?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, part of the reason is we don't have Latinas making the selections of the books. We don't have people in the publishing industry who are reading or making those big decisions. I think that's part of the reasons why we don't have as many Latinas.

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When we have Latinas who are major editors and owners of those publishing houses, then we'll see more books. And the other thing I think, is that sometimes people want to publish and want the material rewards too quickly. And I think it takes a long time to make anything good. I think we have work at our craft. That's certainly important. But a lot of things, what I've seen in the publishing world, it's about connections, it's not about craft.

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And I think that until we have those connections in the publishing world, and until we take control out of publishing our own work, perhaps we'll do that more with eBooks. When we are in those positions of power, of deciding which books, then we'll see more. I believe that.

INTERVIEWER:
I guess many people, no matter how much of an impact their roots have had, feel like they want to move away from that. You've always kind of moved back. Why do you feel such an… what obligation do you feel and why to your community?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
It's a good question right now, because I'm looking for a new home. I feel as if the work I'm meant to do on this planet is to translate the stories of community that I come from. But you know, you could move me to Finland

and I'd still find the same oppressed community. Maybe it'd be migrants from, I don't know, Bulgaria. I'd be writing about *los de abajo*, the underclass.

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I feel however, that we're living in a state of extreme Mex-ophobia, and a real war on the border. And there's so few that are there, that are able to do something positive. So it's not that I want to do it, but we're hemorrhaging. I've got to do something. If I don't do something, I'm part of the problem, and I have to live someplace near that community. That community can be practically anywhere in the United States these days.

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But I have to be somewhere with my ear to the ground, and I have to be near the border. And whatever border community that is, whether it's the border community in the Midwest or in Queens or in Albuquerque, I don't know, someplace that I feel connected to, I can translate those stories, that I can serve.

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Because my question is, how can I help? That's the question, that mantra I put out there when I read the extreme fear that we're living in, that's blocking light. And I feel like I'm in some place that I'm channeling that light, that it's my responsibility to channel that light. So I have to be of service because if I'm not of service, I'm part of the problem.

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INTERVIEWER:

Let me move on to being... feminism in a way. How much do you consider yourself a feminist and why? If you could talk to me in a sentence about that.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I do consider myself a feminist. And why wouldn't I? I'm always startled when people say, oh, I'm not a feminist. I think, well, you must be misinformed if you don't know what a feminist is. I just think it's a wonderful thing that I try to explain it as people who are concerned about the rights of human beings.

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It's about being concerned about the rights of human beings, and the weakest part of humanity. That's what a feminist is about, about seeking and protecting the rights of the weakest parts of humanity. And my feminism is very much concerned with migrants and women and children, and those are boys and girls and animals and plants. And I think everybody, men or women would want to be a feminist. No? That's the way I see it.

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INTERVIEWER:
Why do you think so many American, young American women consider feminism [inaudible 01:18:33]?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
Well, that's because I think young women don't know what feminism is because it's been misinterpreted by men, and frightened women, and uneducated people, and maligned in the media.

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So I don't think it's been taught in a way that even any human being understands what it is. I think it hasn't been taught by women. I think if it was taught by women, and international women, women across the globe, not just women of a certain color and class, that people would soften and open and not be afraid. I think there's a lot of fear, fear that people in positions of power are afraid of sharing or losing that power. And they're the ones that define feminism.

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INTERVIEWER:
It's sometimes been criticized for just being too focused on middle class, well educated women.

SANDRA CISNEROS:
It has been focused on well educated middle class women. Yes, that's true. But I feel that feminism often doesn't address working class people, and people of color, and certainly didn't appeal to me in the beginning, but I've aligned myself more with global issues and global feminism.

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So I see as the white middle class feminism as being in the minority. If you look on the planet and see the issues that women are working on, they're major issues that I feel connected to. So I feel as if it's the white middle class women's narrow view that they need to get on board and get on the program and really see what's happening globally. But they're my sisters and there are

many things we have in common. It sometimes does not include issues of class and color.

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INTERVIEWER:
What do you think the biggest challenge is right now for Latinas?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I can't even answer in one simple sentence. It's like everything. I think for young women right now, for young Latino women, it's such a maybe the darkest hour for being Latina. Even I growing up, when I grew up, it was a better moment than it is right now because we're seeing such a vilification of Latino people.

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We're living in such a fascist time, in such a horrific moment for Latina women in the United States and in Latin America. We're talking about a time in which women can't imagine themselves in positions of power, if you come from Latino neighborhoods, that… just a sad time.

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Women have no imagination of seeing themselves, except maybe… a impossible dream. Maybe they'll see Jennifer Lopez or Kim Kardashian that kind of looks like them, and aspire to having a big butt. That's the model of greatness now. Oh, if I could just be like this girl and have a big butt, I've got it made.

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How are you going to get that unless you've got good genes? That's our model for Latino women right now? I'm telling you the truth, I'm not exaggerating. I'm talking about young women that work with these young women, and tell me that these girls have no idea of themselves other than the celebrities. And it's all about body. So it's worse now than ever. At least when I was growing up, we didn't have Kim Kardashian on television with the big butt.

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Now it's like that's the model of what empowerment is. And we have a reality of these girls growing up in schools where they're not going to even finish their education. And we have the reality of, they're not going to be empowered about controlling their sexuality. So if you can't control your sexuality, how are you going to control your life? So you have this silence about their sexuality.

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They want to get in love. They fall in love. They just want to be loved, doesn't everybody? And you have this model of beauty that is so preposterous and cartoonish. It's a sad place that we are right now for Latino women, and we have the reality of girls coming in and migrating and being violated in positions where they have no power. So I see it worse than ever.

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They're not going to get the stories unless I visit a school or somebody reads it to them. I feel saddened by where we are right now in history. I think it's such like a dark place. I'm aware of the women who've been changed by my work, but I'm also aware of all the girls who have never heard of my work. I know this, I'm not exaggerating it because I talk to their teachers. I talk with

the young women that work out with those girls that are looking at the television celebrities.

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I know. So even though I've done a lot, there's so much more to do and I'm only one person. So it's overwhelming. And I try to do what I can do by working with other writers, creating two foundations that's going to nurture writers of all colors. And then another foundation that works with writers who believe their writing can change the world. And I have to do that because I can't do it all.

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And there's so many more young women being born, so many more migrants coming in, so many communities that don't have access to the books. I hope that I am teaching other writers that will go out and do that work, that their books will become movies or that their work will help influence women to tell their stories through whatever that art form may be. But I feel overwhelmed by the work that has yet to be done.

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I can't just sit back and say, “Okay, well I'm happy,” because that would be naive. I think that I'm an optimist because I know that there's a lot of work that I've done, I know there's a lot of work to do. But I'm an optimist because I believe that there's a little bit more positive than negative. And when it becomes more negative, when I read the news or I see something that happens to my community that hurts me, then that inspires me to do more work, just to balance the planet back on its axis.

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INTERVIEWER:
What's the most meaningful piece of advice you've ever received?

SANDRA CISNEROS:
I guess the best advice I got was from reading Thích Nhất Hạnh that the moments that break your heart, sorrow are opportunities for spiritual growth.

INTERVIEWER:
What about—everyone's asked this question I'm going to give you—what's the one piece of advice you would give to a young woman on building a career?

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SANDRA CISNEROS:
I'd say that the advice I'd give to a young woman is she has to be *chingona*. She has to be a fucker, and you can bleep me out. But you know, you really have to use all your energy and your anger, which we're told as women, "Oh, be nice." No, you have to be a fucker, and you know, have to use that in a way, a good way of not using it against yourself. You have to say, "I'm mad as hell, there's no book written about my neighborhood. I'm going to do it." Use that something negative to a positive result. Don't shoot yourself in the foot.

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