

Oral History Transcript

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Narrators: Cecilia Santillán-Robles and Diana Parra- Villaseñor
Interviewers: Andrea Jauregui and Angelina Sotelo
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Angelina: My name is Angelina Sotelo.

Andrea: And I'm Andrea Jauregui. We are here today in Chico State in the recording studio on October 28, 2024. It is 1:30 P.M. And we are here today with Diana Parra Villaseñor and Cecilia, sorry last name.

Cecilia: Santillán

Andrea: Santillán-Ramos?

Cecilia: Santillán-Robles

Andrea: Santillán-Robles, Okay.

Angelina: We appreciate you guys for being here. We were not expecting you here today, Cecilia, but we're so happy you can make it. We want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this oral history project. I want to remind you that this may be published as part of the oral history Archives project for Dr. Gloria Lopez in my ethnic studies methodology class at California State University Chico. And I need your permission to publish this transcript in part or in its entirety. So, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Diana: Yes, you do.

Angelina: Do I have your permission?

Cecilia: Yes. You do.

Okay. Perfect.

Andrea: Thank you. We appreciate you being here. You know, we brought you in here today because you two are the founders of Sigma Omega Phi that originated here on Chico State campus. So, let's start. How was your experience here at Chico State as a student? What was your major? Were you involved in any clubs or any interest groups?

Diana: This is Diana. And as a student, I, you know, coming here to Chico State because my parents only went to third and sixth grade in Mexico, I was honestly overwhelmed and a little scared and nervous

about the just how the whole experience was going to be, and I have an older brother, but he had gone to a four-year University. And so, Cecilia and I had been part of the Upward Bound program in high school, which gave us an idea of what college would be like. We were on a college campus. But we came to Summer Bridge through the educational opportunity program, and that started our college experience here. We developed a family, we took some classes, and that was a really wonderful experience. And then as a student, starting to take classes and first I was a business major, and then I switched to sociology and Chicano Studies. I was involved in Mecha, which is Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, and we were very much informed about social injustices and making a difference, and I really, really enjoyed that. But I was missing the sisterhood. I wanted like the family away from home. And then that's why I think brought us to Sigma Omega Phi. So that's a little bit about my experience or background before starting the sorority.

Andrea; Thank you.

Cecilia: Oh my gosh, can you repeat that question one more time [laughs].

Andrea: How was your experience here at Chico State as a student? What was your major? Were you in any clubs or interest groups?

Cecilia: Okay. So, it to a lot of Diana said, growing up in Gridley, being the first in the family, having parents that neither had a college degree. Both of my parents went to sixth grade. Being the oldest traditional Latina family household, very strict parents. But having opportunities with other educational programs really opened the doors to seeing that the university experience was a possibility. So, Chico State really offered us a home away from home. I was not as involved in Mecha as Diana was because she moved out initially and I was commuting. I was going back and forth from Gridley to Chico. But the sorority became an interest because it was something new, different, and we really liked what it stands for. So there was already 13 young ladies that were having conversations about starting an organization and then Diana and I were actually the last two to join as part of the 15 founding mothers.

Angelina: So, there's 15. I did not know that. Wow. That is amazing.

Diana: Yeah 15. We could tell immediately when we met with them because honestly, both of us, you know Cecilia, called me. And She's like, "Are you really going to that meeting?". And I said, yes, let's go. And I think because we've known each other, we had grown up together. We're already sisters. We felt that we were going to support each other and weren't really sure, didn't know a lot about because of our upbringing about sororities and fraternities. But we're sort of interested by the group of girls that we did know that were coming together were intrigued and wanted to see what

it was that was going to start that was going to be new. And so-

Cecilia: And our meeting was here in Meriam Library.

Diana: It was.

Cecilia: This is where we met. Mm hm.

Diana: In front of 15. Then just being in that space where they already were young leaders, one of the founders said, Oh, I was the first Latina Student body president in my high school, and somebody else was like, Oh, I know that I want to be a lawyer, and then others, I know I want to be a teacher, and I remember thinking, we're so young [laughs in disbelief] We're 20. How are you all, how do you have your lives figured out? And I think being in that space where there.

Cecilia: [Mhm]

Diana: was these young, educated Latinas was really empowering. So, we

Cecilia: [Mhm]

Diana: knew that this was going to be something special and different that we hadn't experienced before.

Cecilia: Yup

Angelina: That's beautiful. Obviously, you guys stayed here in Chico for a reason. What are your roles now? Are you guys both a part of Chico State's faculty? If you could tell me more about that.

Cecilia: So, we're part of the Chico State staff. We work under the Division of Student Affairs, and we're both administrators. I'm the early outreach and Support Programs director. I have the honor and privilege of overseeing seven programs, one of which is Educational Talent Search, Upward Bound, the Trio Student Support Services Program, Pat Scholars, the Dream Center, and EOP. I think I captured all of them. And just been really blessed to have had such an amazing professional experience here at Chico State. And being able to give back to the programs that gave us so much when we were students.

Diana: So, the program that I had mentioned, Summer Bridge, the educational opportunity program.

Cecilia is now the director of it. [clears throat] and I think that's really, I think back to our college experience, and there was not a lot of Latinas in leadership positions that were directing programs. I think that's why I didn't imagine myself as a director. I thought oh maybe sometime, a long time. I don't know when I'm about to retire, maybe. But we didn't see a lot of people like us in Director Leadership positions. I have the privilege of being the Educational Talent Director

[clears throat] [repeats] Educational Talent Search Director here at Chico State, and it's a trio program.

Trio program started in 1964 as part of Linda B Johnson, President Linda B Johnson's war on poverty. And so, they wanted a lot of low-income students to go to college, similar to the educational opportunity program. And so, our program, educational talent search, helps prepare and motivate low-income first-generation college students in grades six through 12. And we serve 1,350 students. At 24 schools.

Andrea: Well, you guys have Definitely made your mark here on campus that will be passed on for generations. But bring us back to how it all started, why, when and how did you get to introduce this organization to campus?

Cecilia: Ayiyiyiy,

Diana, Angelina, Andrea: [Laughs]

Cecilia: I want to say that Diana heard about it first. One of the girls that was already part of the group approached her and shared that they were interested in starting a new sorority at the time when the sorority was just a conversation. There was only A couple of other organizations that were really Latina based, huh.

Diana: [Mhm]

Cecilia: And so, when we spoke.

Diana: And not that old.

Cecilia: And no, [agreeing] not that old. In terms of how long they had been on campus. Well, the organizations that were available as sororities at the time, there wasn't very many. But very much Latina Based sororities and even though the irony is that the 15 founding mothers in Sigma Omega Phi, I think a majority of us are Latinas. And We really were interested in doing a multicultural sorority, so one that would welcome any one from any walk of life to be part of the sisterhood. And so that was really intriguing and then to start something new was really intriguing to be able to be part of something that was just beginning was also enticing, but I'm not going to lie and say that I wasn't a little nervous about making this commitment only because we do kid that we had to sign a contract and we're like, Oh, my God, we just signed our life away. [giggles] Did we do the right thing? What were we thinking? Because we didn't know very much about sororities. But the idea of being able to do you know community service, to be able to uplift the women in the organization, to be that support system, that home away from home was very enticing and so to be able to be part of the beginning of it. Right Diana? I don't think we have to answer every single question, both of us because I could be like adding to [laughs] what Diana said. Did you want to add anything else? [talking to Diana] Diana: I think you know along with what Cecilia said, and it was a big deal to be

multicultural. Then I think now very much, equity and diversity is celebrated. But then I think so- we did get a bit of backlash and inclusion, yes, definitely now. But then there was a little bit of backlash, like, oh are you not proud to be Latina, and which we very much were, but we also wanted to learn about and celebrate other cultures and definitely have culture be a pillar of our organization. So, it was- there was then African American fraternities were on campus, and there was a lot more of them then. So, it was a little bit different to be multicultural and that just space focused on us being a Latina based, but we were Latina based, and we're very proud of our culture and celebrating it.

Angelina: Where did the name come from?

Diana: Sigma Omega Phi standing on pride. We were all so proud of who we are, of our families, of our culture and wanted to come here and embrace being.

Cecilia: [clears her throat]

Diana: in the university and growing academically. But then you know still our roots, celebrating our roots, celebrating our culture, celebrating who we are, being proud of being young, educated women on campus and just a lot of different aspects of our life. It's the name of the organization. Also has a hidden message- meaning [starts laughing]

Cecilia: [starts laughing]

Diana: I mean obviously only sisters would know. But definitely standing on pride, I think encompasses the organization who we are and how we carry ourselves.

Angelina: So, what were some struggles you faced when starting Sigma Omega Phi?

Diana: Oh, wow. I think being that it was a new organization, and we had a very different backgrounds. Some of us came from very traditional Mexican homes, had not gone too far from home, and then there was others that, you know, had just had I think different maybe ideas about what the organization can be. Because we didn't have someone, like when you both joined your organization, you had somebody teaching you or now, you know, the girls are taught Having to all agree, the 15 of us, what are we- what are our colors going to be? What are we going to stand for? What are the bylaws going to be? I had never written bylaws before. I've been part of some student organizations in high school and then you mention when I was here, but we didn't write the bylaws in the Constitution. So, all of that was foreign and new to me. Um so Deciding what we're going to do, how we were going to bring in our first class. You know so the 15 of us had started. [clears throat] But then what was that process going to be like, what were we going to teach them? What were they going to do? What were they not going to do? What were we going to allow? Were we definitely going to stand up and say no, it's not what we do. This also was a time where honestly,

the harder you pledged, the more you were respected.

Cecilia: Mhm [agreeing]

Diana: And that was something else that was very difficult. Some people were like, how could you just purchase letters and wear them? That doesn't happen. You know- some of these organizations, like some of the African American organizations were like, Martin Luther King was a part of our organization. There was so much history.

Cecilia: Mhm [agreeing]

Diana: to be starting something new. We needed- we all said that we wanted to make sure that until we stood.

Cecilia: [clears throat]

Diana: for something until we had our pillars, until we knew what our community service, our philanthropy, what it is that we were going to do, how we were different, how we were going to represent ourselves. Then we would wear letters with pride. Like we have earned them because we stand for something. We did not immediately decide and then go purchase letters and start wearing them. We needed to know what do we stand for? What are we going to do? How are we different? Then we could wear them with pride, and that took a while.

Cecilia: And we took turns- we took turns holding each other accountable. So, we would assign, you know, correct me if I'm wrong, but we like, you know, two to four individuals that we would rotate.

Diana: Mhm [agreeing]

Cecilia: So, then we needed to make sure that we were following through with our commitments, but we were also taking turns on who was taking the lead in terms of holding the rest of us accountable. So, we could get to a place where we felt like. Okay. We're ready. We can wear any letters now and it had to be an agreement of all 15 of us coming to that decision. So, hope that answers your question.

Andrea: Yeah, were there- like mentors or people that influenced you guys to help you guys on your journey to becoming a sorority?

Diana: You know, being in Mecha [clears throat] Excuse me, there was Dr. Lawrence Benton, and he was a Chicano studies professor on campus. He would say that he was Latino Mexican at heart. And. Yeah.

Cecilia: he had a brown heart.

Diana: Yeah, he was just amazing. And he would say, I don't know much about a sorority, but I'll here

be here to support you.” And so, he was just amazing and so supportive, would attend our events if we had fundraisers and you know we would just absolutely love Dr. Benton, he would take amazing pictures of us.

Cecilia: yeah, he was our unofficial photographer. [laughs]

Diana: [laughs] Yeah. He was our photographer he would take pictures of us.

Angelina: Do you still have those photos?

Cecilia: We do.

Diana: Yeah.

Angelina: I would love those after.

Diana: [laughs]

Cecilia: yeah [laughs]

Diana: Dr. Benton, I think, was amazing, um.

Cecilia: Well, he was faculty. So, he was a professor on campus, very well respected as a faculty member and very much down for the cause, so he was like Diana said, didn't know much about sororities, but was more than willing to support us. Navigate the bureaucracy that you know being on a campus and becoming an active organization can come into play. So, he was very supportive.

Diana: And then Maria

Cecilia: And then Maria. Yeah.

Diana: So, we had other advisors when he said, okay, well you know, I think you all should get another advisor to also support you. And so, then we had some other advisors that also took us under their wing and would help us whether it was with the organization or academically or personally, you know we could go to them, and they were supportive of us also. Andrea: How did you guys want to influence students' lives with Sigma Omega Phi? What are some examples?

Cecilia: How did we want to influence you said?

Andrea: Students' lives.

Diana: Well, you know, when we started, we um- we knew that we were going to be different and we didn't want to, there was a sorority stigma of Oh, you know you're just going to come and be in a sorority and it's all about partying and drinking and all of that. We wanted to be different. And so even if we had a social, then we would dress up and you know [laughs] if there was any alcohol, you're drinking it in a cup, or you know something like that. And not wearing any letters.

Angelina: 21 and plus or course

Everyone: [laughs]

Angelina 21 and plus [laughs]

Diana: Over 21 and there was no letters. And so, anything we did, we tried to do with more sophistication. And It's not like we had been raised this way, but we're like, this is how it should be, and this is how it should be in the future. And so, I think um- a woman's symposium, also, you know some of us are like, Well, what's a woman's symposium. So, we started planning events on campus for women empowerment and talking about women's health and women empowerment and each year we have a different focus. We did the women's symposium. We also there was Adelante Mujer Latina. There was a conference that we were part of the planning committee and that was for young Latinas in the area. We get keynote speakers. We were part of the planning committee for that and each year, about 100. 100 young females would come. And so, we did the women's symposium. We were involved in the community. I was looking through our scrapbook, which I couldn't bring it. It's really big. But there also was a Martin Luther King commemorative walk. And so, some of our sisters, I think you can see in here, [showing us a pamphlet] um I have some pictures of there like Viva La Mujer and so we were involved in community.

Angelina: Oh, these are so cool.

Diana: [points to pamphlet] Right here equal rights for women. And so, anything that could promote education, could promote the upliftment of women, you know, we were a part of that. And how are we going to do this? And then you know we also had a scholarship that we gave out to a local student that was going to go on to college. I believe coming here to Chico State. We would recognize them at our spring banquet, hosting formal events. And so, even though we started in a short amount of time, because I remember by the time I graduated saying, Oh, I hosted formals and Women's symposium, and you know we had all this planning event experience. I remember on the interview panel they're like, did all that as a student, and I'm like, well, yeah, we started an organization, and you know then just went with it. Angelina; So, is this organization funded by the school? Or how do you guys raise money to keep it going?

Diana: I know we paid dues.

Cecilia: [giggles]

Diana: {giggles along} There was no money.

Cecilia: Yes, we started.

Diana: We started with zero.

Cecilia [agreeing] Yes, zero

Diana: Yeah.

Cecilia: Again, we ended holding each other accountable. Who hasn't paid their dues? Now there's late fees. [chuckles]

Diana: Late fees, then fundraisers.

Cecilia: And fundraisers [agreeing]

Diana: There was a lot of fundraisers Fund raisers,

Cecilia: Yeah

Diana: We would do dances. We'd get a DJ, hire a DJ and have dances, um- have fundraisers. There was a lot of fundraisers, like in the BMU. We'd do where you had to make something at home, like a little bake sale.

Cecilia: Mhm [agreeing]

Diana: We would wash cars.

Cecilia: Tamales [laughs]

Diana: [laughs] We would sell tamales.

Angelina: That's good. That's a good one. [laughs]

Cecilia: Mhm

Diana: Yeah, so we did a lot of fundraisers because we started with no money.

Cecilia: yup

Angelina: Going back to a different question because I see the colors [pointing to the pamphlet]. I really want to know what made you guys choose those colors, which is green, black and white.

Diana: Yeah, the forest green, black and white. Each of them has a significance along with the swan, the black onyx, and the single white rose. We decided at a retreat.

Cecilia: [whispers] It took a long time.

Diana: [laughs] Yeah, it took a long time. Because again, think about your coming and what are we going to stand for, what are our colors? What are our symbols and everything? And so, they have a very special meaning to us as sisters, but it's forest green, black, and white. And there's being open minded and education, and we have our reasons for the colors, but we absolutely love them.

Angelina: [moves mic on accident] Um so, oops [giggles]

Diana: The crest- um the crest is, also has significance to the organization. We had come up with lots of

different ideas for the crest and then putting together now what we know is our colors and our symbols, and everything, then I helped design it like sketched it, and one of our sisters that was a graphic designer, brought it to life.

Angelina: That is so cool.

Diana: Mhm [agreeing]

Angelina: It's a good community to make that. Well, I wanted to ask you guys a question. So, do you guys know what social activism means?

Cecilia: and Diana: [shake heads signing yes]

Angelina: You do. Okay good, but I also have the um- actual meaning of it here and I want to read it to you guys really quickly.

Cecilia: Okay

Angelina: Even though you guys already know it. So social activism is a practice of working with others to change society by addressing social issues. So, would you say this resonates with Sigma Omega Phi's values in any way, and if so, how?

Cecilia: Well, I think just the mere fact that we were interested in having it be a multicultural sorority speaks volumes of our inclusivity and diversity and wanting to advance how organizations that um- that were currently on campus, we wanted to be different, right so, being able to bring different walks of life into a space and definitely the upliftment of women and being supportive of one another in terms of personal, professional, leadership skills, I think is also very much embedded in our belief system and what we do as active sisters.

Diana: And I think also modeling you know, I think when you see somebody that looks like you or came from a similar background, then you can start to envision yourself at a university. And when we were hosting events like Adelante Mujer Latina, um- giving out a scholarship to a young student that was in high school that wanted to pursue a college education. I think just by modeling in the fact that we're in college and we're studying and we're talking to them about our major, um-social activism in itself and encouraging them to also pursue a higher education and graduate. Because they graduate, it's not going to help themselves, but also their families and their community and has this large ripple -

Cecilia: Mhmm [agreeing]

Diana: Effect of, you know, they can have better access to healthcare. They can have a career. Like, I grew up working in the fields and cleaning houses, and it was more survival mode. It was not like,

Oh, I can't wait, to you know to get up and go work.

Angelina: [chuckles]

Diana: And now,

Cecilia: Cause you want to clean somebody's else's house, not just yours [sarcastically]

Everyone: [laughs]

Diana: And now we're blessed to be you know in an institution, where we're making a difference in students' lives. And so, in the sorority, really, we were starting to do that already at a young age. I definitely think by modeling.

Angelina: [moving mic around]

Diana: Going out to the community, encouraging them to also pursue higher education. And learning about other cultures

Cecilia: Mhm [agreeing]

Diana: We always were involved in the international Festival that's hosted here on campus.

Cecilia: [whispers] Oh yeah that's right.

Diana: And then we would be involved in the Halloween Carnival and where a lot of the community used to come and bring, they're little kids. And so, you know even at a young age, seeing like- Wow, they're at a college campus.

Cecilia: Get together boots and have a theme.

Diana: Mhm [agreeing]

Cecilia: Yeah, that was fun. The campus doesn't do that anymore.

Diana: No- they should do that. [giggles] and we would also, we would partner with uh- MEChA.

Cecilia: Yup

Diana: And they would go to the Hamilton area and then give out little school supplies or little gifts for Christmas, and so we would help them fundraise for that and help distribute some of that. Again, promoting higher education.

Cecilia: Mhm [agreeing]

Andrea: Starting this organization, was it hard to recruit girls? How long did that process take?

Diana: You know, I think we were surprised when it was the 15 of us, we were just excited, and we were just going- weren't really thinking: are others really going to want to join us? But I think by wearing our letters with pride, because we had met, and we came together, and the organization was recognized by Chico State on November 28, 1990. That's when we had to submit our paperwork and

our bylaws and our Constitution and what we stood for, and everything. It took us a some months to even decide what are we going to do and who are we? And then we started wearing our letters with Pride. So I think the fact that we would just wear letters with pride and then also we really wanted to um- never talk poorly about other organizations, just sort of all support each other, so we would support their events and we joined the Greek community, especially the multicultural Greet community. Um- And [laughs] I just lost my train of thought, um- Oh with recruiting!

Everyone: [laughs]

Diana: I was just like, I was just thinking about it, about supporting others. There wasn't a lot of them then. But then we found out we're like, okay, let's hold our first informational. And then girls came and we're like, Oh, wow, and they said, Well, we see you all, just walking around campus and so prideful, and we see you involved in the community and we see, and you know then we were able to talk about you know community service that we were planning a woman Symposium, all of the things that we were doing. Um- and the first time that we were going to, they were going to start the process, the pledging process or the rushing process. We were in tears. Cause we were like, wow, others want to join us, and we don't know if this is going to last a year, or you know, we had no idea. You know, 30 some years later, we'd still be here. But I remember we-we, prayed, we cried and um yeah, we had no idea how it would continue. We were just excited that girls were interested. Um so it wasn't really hard to find girls that were interested.

Angelina [interrupted] Where-?

Diana: Because we were involved on campus also, we worked for EOP.

Angelina: Oh, I see, yeah.

Diana: We worked for admissions. You know, we met.

Angelina: Get the word out, too.

Andrea: Yeah.

Angelina: But were some events you guys put on?

Diana: Um- so as I mentioned, we hosted a woman's symposium.

Angelina: What is that?

Diana: And that was, we would rent a space here on campus. We would get presenters, and then each month or each year, we would have a focus on

Cecilia: A theme

Diana: Yeah, or a theme on women's health or women's empowerment or women as leaders or

different cultures. And so, we hosted a women's symposium. Um- I hosted our formal just to celebrate, you know, that we were Latinas in college, the founding mothers were, but then with our Alpha class, we had more diversity and Beta class. Um- Those were a couple of them that we hosted because we participated in a lot of different one.

Angelina: What was your guys- What was your favorite?

[mumble]

Cecilia: Um- What was our favorite, [deep breath] Well, I think they have two different meanings. Like If I'm going to piggyback on what Diana mentioned in terms of the women's symposium, that was an amazing event to be able to bring um- a theme to life, like Diana said, like women's health, so we would have partners that would come and they would table, so there'd be a resource fair and then people would speak on certain topics that were related to women's health. And it was super successful because when people would show up and participate and thank us for doing the event. It made it worth all the time and energy that we would spend outside of the classroom outside of our work time to be able to put this event on. It wasn't just for us; it was for the community. And so those events were fun. But there's something special about formal because it's an opportunity for us to come together as sisters and really celebrate the work that's been done throughout the year and celebrate the um- academics that happened. We've had awards that have been given to the organization for the highest GPA as an organization and the highest GPA as a active sorority sister, not that long ago one of Diana's daughters received that award. So, to be able to come and just be amongst our sisters and be able to reunite and celebrate, I think. But we also have to put in the work to put on the celebration. But it's a- it's a fun time. It's Yeah.

Diana: Because then November we always host our formal, and then in the spring we host a spring banquet and that's to recognize our sisters Graduating.

Cecilia: The graduates [agreeing]

Diana: And sort of reflect on the year. And now, with our current actives at their spring banquet, um- my daughter, my daughter who is one of the sisters, um- puts together this beautiful video and it's just got pictures and videos of the whole year and everybody's like laughing or crying, just like, Oh, that was so beautiful. Yeah, and so- so yeah, I'd say the formal and the spring banquet are really special to celebrate sisterhood and everybody's academic and personal successes.

Angelina: How does it feel, knowing- because how many daughters do you have?

Diana: Three.

Angelina: Three. And two of them are in this sorority, correct?

Diana: Mhm [nodding]

Angelina: How does it feel? I feel like I would feel so accomplished and it's amazing to see kind of

Diana: [giggles]

Angelina: like go down through your- through your lineage. It's like Amazing. It's crazy.

Diana: You know, I never- I never ever since they were little, I never ever, ever told them, you will be a SOPhi (Sigma Omega Phi) someday, you will join the sorority. I wanted them very much to have their own experience. I didn't want them to feel like, say they were interested in a different organization to feel that they were letting me down. So, honestly, they knew I was a founding mother. I never ever ever If they ask questions here and there, you know, what about this? I would answer, but I never said, "You know I expected them to be in the organization. Um and then my middle daughter started school during COVID. And then, she was in her room. She's like, is my bedroom going to be my college experience? And so, when she came back to being on campus, um- she looked into different organizations. And then she said, I think Sigma Omega Phi is for me." And I was like ahhhh [squealing with excitement]

Everyone: [laughs]

32:23 Diana: And she goes, are you excited? Of course, I don't want to tell you, I expect you to, but of course, you know, of course, I'm proud.

Diana: And she's done amazing. She was a wonderful president and then my older daughter was studying abroad when Olivia joined and then when she came back, she saw how Olivia was grown, the leadership position she had taken as president, the sisters that she had met and had already developed a bond with, and then she joined. And then my youngest just started, Sophie just started this semester. Then Cecilia also has a daughter, Viviana who just started this semester too.

Cecilia: And her and Sophie better not just- [Cecilia and Diana laughing]

Diana: And Cecilia tells her you will be SOPhi someday [Cecilia laughing]

Cecilia: I only have one daughter.

Angie: Oh, you only have one? Awe

Cecilia: She's my middle child. So basically, I had what Diana's mom had, a son and a daughter and then a son. So, yea so I think for her um she's wanting to find that sisterhood because she doesn't have another sister. She's got a cousin that they're pretty close but she's two years younger than her and then um meeting Diana's girls and being around them and stuff and so now Sophie and her are in the same class together because Diana and her family, they live here in Chico. So I live in Gridley in

still.

Angie: Oh, you still live in Gridley?

Cecilia: Yea, so we've never had an opportunity to have our kids grow up together in the educational system. So now they're able to be together at Chico State, so I'm not telling Viviana she has to do it.

[Group laughter]

Cecilia: She's welcome to do whatever she wants, but she's already gone to a couple of um informationals, and activities and she really likes the girls so

Andrea. Oh, that's cool

Cecilia: Yea so...

[Group laughter]

Cecilia: So, we'll see cause its first semester.

Andrea. Well, I know Cecilia you said you're a little more attract- no, how do you say it? More distanced from the sorority now. But what are your guys' roles? How are you guys still involved with the sorority itself? Is there something that you particularly do with the girls every year?

Cecilia: Well I was the advisor for many, many years, and then you know, life happens and work, it's a little bit more demanding, and Diana stepped into the role perfectly at the perfect time when her girls are now you know active and involved in the organization, and she's been an awesome advisor to the girls so it's been really nice to be able to be on campus and have the girls still recognize that we're here and want the incoming classes to get to know us and stuff. So, in that regard, I'm still a part of the organization. I'm just not as active as Diana right now, but I did buy my ticket for the formal that's coming up, so....

[group laughter]

Cecilia: So, my husband and I will be going to the formal

36:19

Diana: And they're so excited. They're so excited, I think anytime the girls interact with any of us, they're so cute. And I think when we were students, um you know, now like to be able to offer our homes, like, come into our homes and to host something. I was telling the girls when they came to the Spring Banquet to our house because part of it was at a restaurant, part of it, we came back for awards and like desserts to my house and then just said it warms my heart to see you all here, support each other, love each other. I said because I didn't have this as a college student. You know, there was our advisors. They were amazing but we never went to their home, and I remember going

to one professional Dr. Chela Mendoza Patterson. I remember going to her home as a student and I was just in awe. I was like wow she has her doctorate and her husband does too. I had just never been in homes like that, where both parents had gone to a university and I was just in awe of that space and I never told her that until years later. I said, I remember going to your house once and then just like wow this is a really special place and so now my husband too works on campus and now to have girls come over to our home and I'm like you know, you're welcome here, whenever you'd like. So, they usually come over for Spring break and winter when they host sorority rush events. They come into the office because when they're tabling, like when we would table, we'd have to have everything in our car and take it to our apartment, which was already small and crowded. So, to be able to offer our offices, they've used both of our offices to put their big letters and some of the tabling supplies they need. To talk to us when they're having good days, bad days, um just to be there for them. We continue to support them to talk about the history, to talk about anything, they can come to us, like all you might have advisors, but to have a founder that they can say, what do you think about this? And what do you think about that? To be from the organization. I think to them it means a lot. Then we've also been supportive of like, we used to do this, and now we can't to change a little bit to do this. That's wonderful.

Cecilia: We had our time.

Diana: Yeah.

Cecilia: Right.

Diana: Yeah. and then to see them, you know, still to be recognized and then um to receive an award because this is what they presented at their informational and they put the little list here of, you know, what they more recently with the 2024 multicultural Greek Council sorority of the year, 2023 [page flipped]

Diana: FSA Excellence and Philanthropic endeavor Award, 2023 MGC Community Service Award, 2022 GC highest Chapter GPA, and then individual accomplishments, 2023, 24 MGC highest individual GPA, 2023 MGC Chapter, president of the year award. And so now I think the university to recognize them as leaders and all of the amazing things that they're doing, it really means a lot but we serve as positive role models, mentor them, support them any way that we possibly can

Angie: So, you guys started in 1990, what month?

Cecilia: Well, we got officially recognized in November 28, 1990. So that's one-

Angie: November 28th?

Cecilia: Mhm yeah.

Angie: And today is the 28th... Of October

[group laughter]

Diana: that's true

Angie: How many years?

Diana: 34 years almost

Cecilia: Started when I was ten. I was child prodigy

[group laughter]

Angie: Did we go over your philanthropy?

Diana: Our philanthropy is child abuse and neglect awareness.

Angie: Okay. Tell me more about that because I feel like we skipped over that, and I want to make sure I get it in here and make it known.

Diana: So, you know, when we started, we were talking about what should the philanthropy? What is it that we want more awareness of? And so, the girls still to this day will hand out the little blue ribbon and then give us information and statistics to promote awareness. And then they've had fundraisers, and they have donated to local organizations and really, I think, promoting awareness of its importance.

Andrea: What would you say your first event was when you guys first started?

Diana: Our very first event... Do you remember?

Cecilia: Maybe a social

Diana: Probably a social. Probably a social, funds to meet others and we didn't have any money so definitely fundraisers. So, I'm sure that November 28, I mean, right after that, you have the end of the semester and so a Christmas exchange, we would do a Christmas exchange among the sisters.

Angie: When you guys do fundraisers, how much of it goes to your philanthropy? Like how do you raise money for your philanthropy? How do you guys support it in what way?

Cecilia: I think when we did the event for the philanthropy, all the money would go to the philanthropy. We wouldn't keep any of it, so if it was designed for our philanthropy, then all the proceeds would go to the philanthropy.

Andrea: We wanted to talk about, I don't know if you guys are allowed to say what roles in the rule book are most important or if that is something between sisters or if you could tell us a little bit about which you guys enforce the most.

Diana: A rule, is that what you said? A rule book?

Andrea. Yes

Cecilia: Opening minds through culture education and unity

[laughter]

Cecilia: No seriously, I think that's what's really important in helping the incoming class understand the importance of that and what that means and teaching them what it means to us as an organization and providing them with opportunities for them to learn and for them to teach us.

Diana: And there is in the process, and I know you all, both of you are part of an organization and there is some of them, I'm assuming, that are similar and that you're going to learn history, right?

[Angie and Andrea in unison.] Mhm

Diana: You're going to learn about what is the purpose of this organization and for them. Yeah, so for them definitely to learn the history, what the organization stands for, there has to be communication amongst the line, but then also for their big sisters and um so I don't know if there's a number one, like you have to. The whole process has a purpose, literally starting from the interview to when they first start until the very end when they've become sisters and so yea, i don't know if I would say there's one thing. That we can share obviously.

[group laughter]

Diana: You know, that's very difficult. Can both of you say the one thing that's like the most important for when you joined yours?

Angie: When I joined mine? That is a hard question. I'm a part of, letting the audience know I'm a part of Gamma Phi Beta

Andrea. I'm a part of Alpha Gamma Delta

Angie: She's...She's pledging right now.

Andrea. Yeah

Diana: Ohhh

Angie: Yeah, I feel like it's just loyalty to your sisters and being there for your sisters and building that connection. I think that's really important. Yeah, I feel like that's one of the most important ones. I feel like it's not a rule, it's kind of what you expect out of the girls being a part of the sorority.

Diana: That's true

Angie: But definitely sisterhood

Diana: I think the word rule was like a rule!

Angie: Yeah

Angie: What is your guys' values? You guys have a saying that you guys have?

Cecilia: Opening minds to culture unity

Angie: Oh, okay, I didn't know if it was it or not.

Diana: That's okay.

Andrea. We had talked to some of the girls from the sorority. They had said something about you guys calling each other ladies. That that is something very important to you guys, and I don't know, I kind of appreciate that in a way because I guess in my sorority, we just say girls, or you know sometimes you guys. I just thought that was something that really spoke to me, if you could speak a little bit more about why you call yourself ladies.

Angie: Why you ladies say you ladies?

Diana: Oh my gosh, there's a student in her office, her name is [unintelligible]

[laughter]

Diana: She's going into history now. You know, it comes back to the upliftment of women and all of us and even at the young age when we started. We thought we all come with different leadership, maybe self-identity, esteem. We're all at a certain level. But I think when you carry yourself a certain way and then we were all uplifting each other like really uplifting each other and saying positive things to each other because you know how sometimes you can have just self-doubt and like, what am I doing here? And imposter syndrome and so we, from the very beginning, were like, okay this is where we're starting and it's all about uplifting and what is the next level? How can we help each other and so that's why I think how we refer to each other, as sisters and as ladies, is really important. So, it's all about the upliftment of women. Also respect.

Angie: Yes

Cecilia: You want to call if you say somebody's a lady too, I think it comes with a level of respect, I'm not trying to diminish the- the girl thing or the bro thing or whatever, cause that just means that there's a level of comfort of when you're saying that but just recognizing we are all women and ladies

Angie: Do you ladies have a chapter house?

Cecilia: No, we do not

Diana: For a lot of the multicultural Greek council student organizations, Greek organizations. They're a

lot smaller and I know I don't know if both of yours have a house but no, I know that also the dues are a lot more. A lot of times students-

Angie: Yeah

Diana: A lot of times students will join organizations because they are looking for that family, that sense of belonging away because they are looking for that family, that sense of belonging away from home, they really want the sisterhood, they want the brotherhood and its bout that and so if we were to say you're going to pay \$100 a month for dues, they couldn't afford it. They wouldn't be in it, so that's why the dues are much lower, so that's why we can't afford a house and then we're paying off our own homes.

[group laughter]

Diana: We can't afford to have a home to provide a house for the girls, wish we could. Wish we could. But for our organization, it still continues to be about the brotherhood and the sisterhood of multicultural big organizations supporting each other and helping each other graduate from the university and community service, and then them growing as leaders. And so, I wish we had a house. I would love for us to have a, but we don't currently. Maybe in the future.

Angie: We heard about the amazing events that you guys put, and the money you guys put towards. How much would you say you raise with the event that you guys put on for your philanthropy?

Diana: don't know how much they raised. The girls. That's what I was saying, it would have been nice to have a couple of the active girls now. Yeah. Cause I don't know how much they've raised recently. But throughout the whole month, I know that they will promote awareness. And then I don't know if they even had put on little workshops for awareness, found out about resources in the community and had handouts, and then had fundraisers and then donated. But sorry, I don't know exactly how much they raised.

Angie: Do you guys do any like hands on volunteering with any organizations like in our community?

Diana: I know that the girls have a requirement every month. They have community service. That's. Yeah, every month, I'll hear them say, oh, we have this community service over here because once a month, all of them are required to be involved in some sort of community service. It might be like in partnership with another organization. Partnership with another organization. It might be volunteering even in our office for our program if we have an event in the community. And so, I can't think of community services they've had recently they once. But every month, they're invol-community service. Didn't they participate in the, the park cleanup or something? They've done that before. Yeah, I can't think of they have everyone.

Angie: Would you say a lot of the founding mothers, their daughters are now in a sorority?

Diana: no Well I am assuming a lot of people moved out from Chico in the area, so I'm assuming that's why because there's also a Sigma Omega Phi in Sac[ramento] right? Tell me more about that. Did you guys start that up too or how did they hear about it and start up?

Diana: So, we have how many chapters now?

Our beta chapter is Fresno. And so, we found out about some girls in Fresno that possibly were interested. And then also, we were young professionals on campus, and so we also at our conferences, we're meeting, but we had found out some girls at Fresno State were interested in starting a chapter and so then that's our Beta chapter. So, for them to rush or to pledge them, they would come up here or we would go down there, which is far. It's 5 hours away. Move start like a little caravan, and we would be driving down there, or they would come a weekend. Mm hmm. Yeah, for the weekends, would come here. I think now because of the social media and Zoom and Facetime, and it's so much easier the world as become so much smaller. That didn't exist then. So, we literally -literally have to go on the phone and then have to drive down there. Not a cell phone either. And had to be a landlord. I was a landlord. I mean, we literally had a phone trees we need to communicate something, if we were going to have an emergency meeting or something, it was okay, starting with the board, and then who they're going to call and all the way down and we'd say, a. So, it was very, very different. But I think even with starting another chapter is difficult because we know we're here in Chico, and so you know, you know, sort of like what Chico's going to be like and to have another chapter was honestly a little scary because we're like, well they're friends now, you know, and they're going to be doing their own things and their own community services in that area that we weren't aware of or familiar with. But also, exciting when they came there, I'm very excited too.

Angie: Who keeps track of all the chapters? Who keeps track of all the chapters? Like I there's chapter and the Executive Board. Do you guys have headquarters? I guess Chico is kind of your headquarters because this is where you guys originated? Yeah. If someone wants to start a chapter, what does that process look like to them?

Diana: What happens is they have to communicate with their school with their university and see what the requirements would be. Like the requirements to start an organization here, or you needed to have at least ten members, and you needed to have bylaws in a constitution and so each university. And then the university has to approve it. I know that right now the multicultural Greek council, there is an organization that I guess wants to start here. And so, the MGC council is going to decide

yes or no. So, there's requirements at each school or university for how many members, but then also the school has to be like, okay, they're accepting new student organizations, and they have to say yes or no. So, we do have other universities right now where there is girls that are interested and some of our girls are going to the other universities and interacting with them. Because we are close to, for example, Gaza Alpha or Now Alpha Kappa, there's fraternities that the girls are close to. Then their chapters. Usually the guys at that chapter, whatever organization it is, will host us and then they know girls and that's how you get to know different campuses.

Angie: Do you guys have a brother?

Diana: No, it's not official. They're close to different organizations and some of the girls might start dating some of the guys and they spend more time together. But I always tell the girls, you just support all organizations. I see if three or four or five of the girls are dating somebody from a certain organization, still support all of them, talk to all of them, because I think that's really important. Yeah,

Angie: How do you guys create and ensure great unity amongst all of the multicultural sorority and fraternities or even non multicultural?

Diana: You know, it's difficult. One of our ETS alumni that used to work here on campus in a different office was a part of another organization. She came to me one day and she's like Diana, it's so divided now. How was it when you were in college? I think because there wasn't that many of us, we supported each other. Oh, someone's doing a dance, let's go. Someone's going to community service. Let's go. For let's partner to do this together. Yeah, still we're very proud obviously of your own, but there's a lot more now. There's a lot more multicultural. Organizations now. I think they're not as united. I do wish that they would be more united. Maybe we need to host more events or get to know you and support each other. I know everybody's really busy each organization. Their students also, they're planning their events, but it would be nice to do more unity events. That's okay.

Andrea: How did you and Cecilia ensure that Sigma Omega Phi created a long-lasting effect on campus, even after you guys?

Cecilia: I think I think, honestly, by Well, first of all, supporting as much as we possibly can and being positive role models, and all here, the girls say, oh, I know that you are a pi and you know I think serving as positive role models. But besides us, the girls are doing an amazing job of promoting and, you know, sort of selling or uplifting, continuing to lift the organization by graduating, by, you know, earning awards. When they table, they can put their awards out. They do a great job. So, we

definitely cannot say oh, it's because of us. I think it's a small part, because of us because a lot of students will say, "I hear so far you're a founding mother. But honestly, the girls, when they table, when they present themselves, when they interact with others, when they host events, they're doing a great job I think promoting and continuing to celebrate the organization. We sit here and, in our offices, and just try to support as much as we possibly can remind them what the organization stands for, let's say, I don't know, something happens with the sister, they immediately have an emergency meeting and immediately talk about it. They also self-regulate because we understand your young college students, you're going to have fun. You're going to learn, you're going to grow, you're going to make mistakes, and that's part of life and you're growing. They continue to support each other, communicate with us, abide by the rules of the university. It's completely different now when it comes to hazing. The alcohol parties and everything and so they understand that they have worked so hard to be recognized at this university that it is a privilege and that they want to continue to be recognized by the university. They do an amazing job of continuing to uphold the pillars that we stand for and so itself.

Angie: Well, I want to congratulate both of you and the rest of the founding mothers for starting this amazing chapter that I have now learned more about. I'm so grateful to have learned more about. I think I was so excited to projects. I have two friends in Sigma Mega Phi. I've I feel like a lot of the sororities are kind of distant. I wanted just to know more because my self being Latina, I was like, this is really cool. This is a great community you guys have and it's beautiful. You guys we're both a part of it and are still part of it to this day. We appreciate you guys coming and talking about it. Do you guys have any last words or Andrea?

Andrea. I mean, it's kind of How do I say this? Like searching up this like sorority, you don't see much out there. You don't see your guys' names out there and this is why we wanted to make this interview so it can be out there and someone can know who you guys are. You guys are still here if people want to come to you and talk to you about sorority because you guys' love talking about it. I can see it in your faces. And we wanted to do this to bring this out and bring more awareness to sorority and then take Cal Sorority is more but yeah, thank you for your time, B. Those are all the questions.

Cecilia: I just want to say thank you for offering us this platform to be able to highlight the amazing work that Sigma [unintelligible] did and continues to do. So, it's really an honor to be in this space with you and be able to share from the heart. Thank you. I completely agree. Then also just wanted to say that we're here to support you all too. I remember as a student, thinking because there were certain people on campus that were part of maybe another organization. I always thought, if I

worked at this university, I would treat everybody the same, whether you're a sister or not. And so, we're also here to help support the two of you in any way that we possibly can good day, bad day, come by our office, grab a little snack. And so, anything that we can do to support you, too, because, you know, we were in your shoes, the same just like you are going to school, in an organization, trying to navigate, being a student, and then communicating with your family, maybe back home. If you're in a relationship, roommates, just everything that happens, when you're in college. So, we're here to support you. Yeah. Wife. But thank you for Thank you.

Angie: Thank you, ladies.

Diana: You're welcome, ladies.