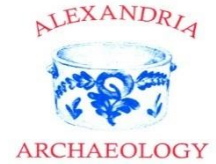




City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** Alexandria Legacies

**Title:** Interview with Mildred Rivera and Yolie Carrasco

Date of Interview: *April 17, 2017*

**Location of Interview:** *Hammond Middle School, Alexandria, VA*

**Interviewer:** *Leah Spellman*

**Transcriber:** *Susannah Philbrick and Heather Hanna*

**Abstract:** This is an interview with Yolie Carrasco, whose oldest son Marcos has autism, and Mildred Rivera, whose twin sons Christian and Brandon also have autism. Carrasco and Rivera have for several years been speaking about autism and other disabilities to school children in Alexandria, Virginia. They talk about how the program got started, and how it has grown, and what they hope people will learn from it. They also discuss some of the challenges of raising autistic children, drawing from their own experiences.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewees and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.



*Mildred Rivera and Yolie Carrasco*

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Leah Spellman:	Okay I see the red button; everything's workin'. So today is April 17, 2017, and I'm Leah Spellman, L-e-a-h S-p-e-l-m-a-n conducting the interview with:
Mildred Rivera:	Mildred Rivera, M-i-l-d-r-e-d R-i-v as in Victor e-r-a.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yolie Carrasco, Y-o-l-i-e C-a-r-r-a-s-c-o.
LS:	Great, and I thought we could give it—get started by learning a little bit about each of your individual backgrounds. So I'll leave it somewhat open-ended, but just your story, where you're from, how long you've lived in Alexandria [Virginia], and just some of your personal background that you'd like to share.
<b>Carrasco Background</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	I'm from El Paso, Texas, and I have two sisters and a brother and a mom and a dad. El Paso's a border town of Juarez, and it's Mexican culture, and my relatives all live in Juarez so I, I love El Paso. And we came in 1993, my husband and I, and we've been here since then. And I have my son with autism, Marcos, he's nineteen, my son is Maximilian, he's sixteen and my daughter Glory, she's fourteen.
LS:	Great. And what brought you to Alexandria?
Yolie Carrasco:	Ah, it was, it was so funny my husband wanted to work at the US Senate, so we had just got married in June and we came just by the seat of our pants. We came to try it out and to live out our dream of being in Washington, D.C.
LS:	Great, all right. Well, we'll get back to some of that in a little bit.
Yolie Carrasco:	Sure.
<b>Rivera Background</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	I was born in the Philippines, I came here when I was three years old, my husband came here when he was four. I have an older sister, she would hate that I said that [general laughter] and a younger brother. Um, I have a finally retired mother, retired from nursing, my mother— my father passed when I was fourteen months old, so mother's been it, so she's like my role model. My husband and I have been married twenty years, but together thirty. Our only kids are my twin boys who both have autism. They're fourteen. One attends Hammond, and the other attends CARD [Center for Autism and Related Disorders] Academy in Alexandria.

	<p>We moved to Alexandria, oh, gosh, a little bit over twenty years ago, before my husband and I got married. I used to live in Baltimore. He's from Oxon Hill, Maryland. But we moved to Alexandria because we found ourselves always coming here to eat and enjoy the recreation that Alexandria has to offer—[general laughter], so we just moved here.</p>
<p><b>Additional Carrasco Background</b></p>	
<p>LS:</p>	<p>Great. I'd love to learn a little bit more about each of those backgrounds so I'll ask some follow-up questions. Um, tell me what it was like moving from El Paso to the Washington, D.C. area if you can kind of remember those early years. What were your thoughts?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Well you know what's so funny is, like, my husband and I, we were nervous of coming, we were just by ourselves, we didn't have a family yet, it was okay, you know what I mean, we had this fantasy of him working at the Senate, at the Capitol, and in D.C., I mean, just the history of D.C. was amazing to us.</p> <p>And El Paso Texas—Texas is very dry, and when we moved to Virginia, I mean it's just so colorful and it was just, it was amazing. Like, also [in Alexandria] we had four seasons where in El Paso we don't have four seasons really, so I mean we had our first blizzard, like in [19]96, so we were like shocked at all the snow, right?</p> <p>We took it as, it's amazing, it's an adventure. Like, we were scared, of course you know, coming to somewhere we had never been, didn't have any relatives here or anything, so it was just, it was an adventure for us, yeah. .</p>
<p>LS:</p>	<p>And what was—did you live in Alexandria at that time?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah, we came to Alexandria right away.</p>
<p>LS:</p>	<p>What neighborhood did you live in?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Well we first stayed with a relative of a relative, and we stayed with them, and it's just, it's just the apartments right here next to Hammond, the apartments right here, it was so funny. And then, ah, we lived in a hotel, like, it's not there anymore 'cause it's by Edsall [Road], there was a little hotel there, we stayed there like I don't know, a couple of months or whatever, then we moved to the Woodmont apartments, in Alexandria. I don't know it just happened that way, that we just moved to Alexandria. It was so beautiful, we just saw it as this little gem, you know? It's hard to describe other than that's how we saw it, you know. And then we just, we're in an</p>

	apartment now for I don't know, twenty-some years and on Duke Street, and it's just the Normandy Hill apartments, and just this area is wonderful, we love it, I love Alexandria.
LS:	Great, and what were—how have you seen the city change since you've been here?
Yolie Carrasco:	Well, it's grown so much, I mean just the simple thing of where we, the first little hotel we were at, it's no longer there. I mean there's just housing and apartments, and all this stuff happening and T.C. Williams [High School. The new school opened in 2007], I mean it's just amazing what it has become, and it's just growing and growing and growing, you know, that's how I see it. It's wonderful to see such diversity, in—'cause you know, in El Paso the majority of the population is Mexicans of course. And I love my people, don't get me wrong, I love, “Viva la Raza,” [Long live the people!] you know, so but it's just, you know, it's just amazing to see so many cultures in Alexandria. I love it. I love it.
LS:	Great, and what about your husband's employment?
Yolie Carrasco:	Well, he's had an amazing career, I mean he was able to work with Senator Biden at that time, and then he worked with Senator Leahy, he worked with Senator Carnahan, and you know, he was working at America's Promise which is [General] Colin Powell's foundation and then he worked in the private sector for a company called Stroz Feiedberg, then then for a federal judge, Beryl A. Howell [currently Chief Judge for the District Court for the District of Columbia in 2018] and right now he's at the defender's office [Federal Public Defender Office]. I love it, I love it here.
LS:	That's great.
Yolie Carrasco:	That's why we're here, for all this time 'cause we love it.
<b>Additional Rivera Background</b>	
LS:	Great. And tell me a little bit more about, um, what it was like for you coming from the Philippines and what, kind of your impressions of the region?
Mildred Rivera:	Oh, wow. I mean, I was three, so—.
LS:	Yeah. No, no, so—.
Mildred Rivera:	But, I mean we moved to Baltimore, Maryland, when we came here and I remember just a few years ago telling my Mom that, why didn't you have me, you know, learn our language? Because now of course

	it, it pays to be multilingual, but I remember her forcing us, my sister and I, to stop talking our language and speak English because she said it would be easier for us in school.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes, yes, that's what happened with Mike's mom and dad too, they told her don't, don't speak to him in Spanish.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	Speak to him only in English, and that's what a lot of families were told at that time.
Mildred Rivera:	At that time.
Yolie Carrasco:	And you know now of course, you know, it's amazing to have so many languages.
Mildred Rivera:	Right.
Yolie Carrasco:	You know, but if you're told as little, just only speak English, then you lose your language.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, I mean I can understand, better than I speak my language, Tagalog, but, I mean, I can get around, but I wish I had, you know, really, really learned and immersed myself, but you know that's, that's the way they thought would help us.
Yolie Carrasco:	Exactly.
<b>Rivera Family and Work</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	You know, but we lived in Baltimore, oh, gosh, until I was probably in fourth or fifth grade, then we went, came to Oxon Hill, Maryland. My sister lives in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, my mom lives in Clinton, Maryland, my brother is now in San Diego, California.  Um, I, when it was legal to work at, what is it, sixteen? I actually worked at a nursing home as a medical receptionist, and my mom was my boss. [laughs] She was the nursing supervisor, so she was my boss, so that was weird. [general laughter] Didn't stay there long. And then, before my last job before I decided to become a stay at home mom, I actually worked with my sister at a developer. Developer, builder, but I, um, I actually wanted to be a psychologist.
Yolie Carrasco:	Me, too! Me, too, that's so funny!
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, I actually wanted to be a psychologist.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes.
Mildred Rivera:	But also, a party planner. [general laughter] But the medical field



	was always where I was in. I don't know if it was just because you know, I worked with my mom first in a nursing home, and then I worked for a urologist and an orthopedist. The orthopedist was actually my favorite job.
LS:	Really?
Mildred Rivera:	I loved it, yeah, although I always wanted to learn how to ski until I met people who—[general laughter]
LS:	Who'd had accidents?
Mildred Rivera:	Who'd messed up their knees from skiing, and that kind of scared me off, but it was really nice. My bosses were great. I learned a lot. My brother is actually a neuroradiologist, but he thought about going into orthopedics because he met with my bosses and actually got to observe some surgeries and what-not with them, but they were wonderful.  But I intended to go back to work after my boys went to, you know, full time preschool, or you know, but they were diagnosed officially at [age] two, but I kind of knew something wasn't right at about a year and a half, so when they were diagnosed with autism, I knew I would be home with them.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	That they needed me more than the work force.
LS:	So that, um, we'll transition to the work you're doing now, but that, reminds me to ask you about your background education and careers just to see kind of what your path has been, so tell me about what you did after high school and—.
Mildred Rivera:	I went to PG [Prince George's] Community College. Again, business, but unfortunately my mom who got remarried to my stepfather, there were some family concerns, so I went to work. I stopped school and went to work to help her out. Yeah.
<b>Carrasco Work and Family</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, me, I just went to high school. I didn't go to college.
LS:	Yep. And then after, after high school?
Yolie Carrasco:	I just started working in retail.
LS:	Yeah, retail? What kind of jobs did you have?
Yolie Carrasco:	It was sales. I started working, that's where I met my husband, we met at this very famous, home-owned El Paso store called the

	<p>Popular [The Popular Dry Goods Company. It was in business until 1995.] And we were in downtown El Paso, so he was working, I was working in linens, and he was working in electronics, so that's how we met. But yeah, I just went straight to working after school and after that, when we moved here I started work, I wanted to work at Target but there was no Target stores yet, you know in the area, I know it's so weird, right, it's a long time ago, I know, cave man time! [general laughter] So I just started working at Potomac Mills Mall, at Burlington Coat Factory, and then I had a fall, so I had to stop working, but I knew when I would have kids, I would be a stay at home mom, that was my goal.</p>
LS:	<p>And how old were you when you and your husband met?</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Well, I think I was twenty-three and he was twenty.</p>
LS:	<p>Um-hm.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>And we were friends and then it evolved into marriage, he was still in college so we waited 'till he finished, at UTEP, El Paso, the University of El Paso. So yeah. Then we got married after.</p>
LS:	<p>Great. I'd love to hear about your families now; tell me a little bit more about what your families are like.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>My mom and dad, they separated, after like I think twenty years of marriage, and my mom never remarried, my dad did; he has two other children, but it was my sister, my sister Gloria who, she's my rock, she's—my older sister is Queta, and then it's my sister Gloria and my brother Mike and then myself. But my mom was, you know, our rock, and she was the one that took care of us most of the time. My dad was an alcoholic so the marriage separated 'cause of that. My mom passed away a couple of years ago and my brother as well, of alcoholism and that's why I choose not to drink. But my two sisters, I mean, they're amazing women and my sister Gloria, she's, she's my soulmate. I love her, you know, very much, and she's always been very supportive and she was the first person I told about Marcos having autism, so, yeah.</p>
LS:	<p>And what—describe your mom, and kind of her characteristics, what was she like?</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>My mom was a distant mom, but she tried, she did the best she could, you know, my dad was her whole life and you know, he left her, unfortunately, and that broke her, very much, but she struggled on, and she worked, and—she hadn't worked, you know, she was a stay at home mom as well, you know, and they got married very</p>

	<p>young, my mom and my dad, I think she was nineteen, or he was nineteen and she was eighteen, very young. I mean she was a very strong woman, ah, my grandmother—I come from a long line of strong women, you know, and, my grandmother was extremely strong, my great-great-grandmother was amazing, um, so yeah, it's—</p> <p>.</p> <p>And my dad, my dad worked in construction, and he was an amazing builder, you know, he built one of our houses in Juarez, and he was just a very smart man, very hands-on man, you know, he was a loving father, always was, you know, when he left us it devastated me as well, you know, I was only like ten I think, and ah, but yeah, it's just something that was very sad for our family.</p>
<p>LS:</p>	<p>Did he move away or was he still—?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>No, no; he was still in El Paso but you know he, he separated from my mom and a little bit from us as well, you know, so there was all that stuff going on. But yeah, I mean my family is, is a very loving and supportive family, you know, with drama, like anyone else, you know, but yeah, so, but my dad is a recovering alcoholic, you know he's not drinking anymore, and he's living with my sister Gloria now.</p>
<p><b>El Paso, Texas</b></p>	
<p>LS:</p>	<p>And what was El Paso like? Can you paint some pictures for us, what would be some of your pastimes there and describe, describe the culture?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Well you know it was—like when I was in high school I was in band, I was a flag girl, and we used to go to this very famous popular place called Chico's Tacos in El Paso, that was our Friday nights after the game, and it, you know, is a popular place to hang out, you know?</p> <p>I mean, we were in Walt Disney World, let me tell you, a funny story, we were in Walt Disney World and we were in line and this lady behind us was talking to her, to her husband or to her mom or something, and I turned around and I said, “Are you from El Paso Texas?” And she's like, “Yes.” You can hear, I don't know what. You can hear the accent, I'm not sure what it is but it was like—and she goes, “Oh my god, yes, are you?” And I'm like, “Yes!” And we started, you know, blabbing about El Paso. And you know El Paso is, is a wonderful town.</p> <p>You know, Juarez at the point when I was little it was a beautiful, beautiful town. Now it's become a drug dealer's—you know, very,</p>

	<p>very sad what's happened to Juarez, but at the time growing up it was a beautiful, beautiful city, you know? Now it's horrible, you know, it's like the, the capitol of drug dealers, and you know, it's horrible. But at that time it's just beautiful. That's what I remember. I'm gonna remember that, you know.</p>
LS:	<p>Yeah. And tell me a little bit more about your family environment, what it was like at home, and just any, any kind of memories from growing up that stay with you.</p>
<p><b>Rivera Family</b></p>	
Mildred Rivera:	<p>My mom finally retired, oh, gosh, maybe four, four years ago from being a nurse from forever, for as long as I can remember. She lived in Clinton, but then she moved to San Diego with my brother, to help them with their new baby and then their toddler, since it's a new place, new move for them. She recently just came back, and now she's kinda like going back and forth. When it's cold here she'll go there, 'cause she says her bones can't take the weather anymore.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>She's so smart. [general laughter] She's so smart.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>But, again my dad passed when I was fourteen months old. Unfortunately, I don't remember too much of him, but all the stories I hear are wonderful. I can see some of his traits in my nephews, in the older nephews, and actually my boys, and when my boys were small, I don't know if you've heard of twin-speak [“Twin speak” is a language developed by twins in early childhood, which they only speak with each other]? I believe in that. Because when they were small even before they could speak, they would kind of babble to each other, and like crack up [general laughter]. I wish I knew what they were, you know, saying. And sometimes they would kind of stare off into space and just kind of smile and I would think, Oh, that's your Grandpa. Is your grandpa you know, telling you a joke or something? But, but yeah, unfortunately I don't remember him too much. He died from a heart attack.</p> <p>When my mother remarried, I think because I didn't have a father figure, you know, I was really hoping for a really good stepdad and unfortunately that wasn't the case. My stepfather passed away a few years ago from cancer. Um, again unfortunately you know it wasn't, for me, it wasn't a good family situation. I always say the best thing that came out of that was my brother. My brother is wonderful. I'm the middle child. It's a few years between all of us; my sister is—I shouldn't say her age.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>No, don't say her age! [general laughter]</p>

<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>But she's older. And my brother is—how old is my brother? I'm going to be forty-nine. My brother is in his late thirties. So, there's, ah quite a few, you know, age difference between, between all of us, but we're close. My sister talks to my mom, like every day, several times a day. I talk to her every now and then. And then, with my brother because he's in San Diego and the time difference we talk every now and then.</p> <p>But we've never been like a lovey dovey family. You know, we've never, you know, ah, we've never shown like public displays of affection, we're just not that way, you know, and even like the, I love you, on the phone, but I've found that recently, as she's getting older, you know my mom's eighty, she had a big huge party that she planned, she wanted to plan herself, luau theme, last year when she turned eighty in August. But I'm finding that now that she's getting older that we are more, I find myself consciously telling her that I love her right before, you know, we get off the phone, and you know even like in person, and I think she's weirded out by it. [laughs] To be honest, because we've never been that way, so she kind of like looks at me like I'm crazy when I'm, you know, saying that in person.</p> <p>But, she, the last few years, I was telling Yolie my concerns, but she's been having a lot of memory problems, and I don't know if you know, or if you have any family members in the medical field but they're like the worst. They're the worst patients, people in the medical field. And she admits it, but we, you know, wanted her to go see a neurologist, and she's like, "I'm fine, I'm old, I'm eighty, what do you expect?" But my siblings and I got together and made an appointment without her knowing and told her like a few days before. She was mad, but she went, and I went with her and luckily you know the doctor is like, "Okay, it's, not too bad", even though it's been, even though it's been a few years where she's, you know, her memory's been off, the doctor is like, "Nope, you've caught it early", and we're like, "Really?" And, you know, so we're giving her medication, it's not too bad, you know.</p> <p>My in-laws are in their eighties. They've been married for over fifty years. They've lived a full life. My husband, Julius, is the youngest of seven kids. All his siblings are in the Virginia/Maryland area except two sisters who are in Florida.</p> <p>Julius has been a controller for over ten years. He works very hard so that I can be there for our sons. I've been a stay-at-home mom by choice since they were born.</p>
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	<p>But my sister still works for the developer, the builder developer, my nephew actually works, my eldest nephew actually works for him as well, so they work together, which I was surprised. [general laughter] Which I was surprised lasted this long. But they work together. I have two older nephews—[phone rings].</p>
LS:	<p>It's okay.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>The main phone, so for like schools and whatnot I have to have it on.</p>
LS:	<p>I understand.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Um, my sister lives in Upper Marlborough, Maryland. She has been married, oh my gosh, I want to say like thirty years? She and my brother-in-law got married when they were young. She's been married I want to say, like at least thirty years. I have two older nephews, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful boys, my eldest nephew, I'm so bad with ages, he's going to, he, he works full time at the builder developer, he also works part-time at Ronald McDonald House. He, gosh, he always, I always tell him, I was like, "You're going to burn out," because he works several jobs all the time, he also goes to school, you know, so, but he is the most thoughtful person I've ever known. And I mean, really, like he, he remembers birthdays, like if you need something like he will change his plans to be there for you. That's one of the traits I was talking about as far as my father, because I've heard that with my father. Almost to a disadvantage where, not so nice people might take advantage you know? But yeah, he's, always been that person that okay, if you need something last-minute you can call him and you know, he'll be there.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>He's a good guy.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Very, very much so. My other nephew is in L.A. He works with FDIC [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.] My two nephews are very different because of school. My eldest nephew unfortunately didn't have great teachers, so he didn't like school from the beginning, unfortunately. And I went, we always talk about, teachers make such a difference. You know, they can really—so he didn't particularly like school. He's gone back, you know, thank goodness. And then my other nephew had wonderful, wonderful teachers who still keep in touch with him today.</p>
LS:	<p>Wow, that's wonderful.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Yeah, and so like he loved school from the beginning, so that, it, it made a difference, he was, I'm really proud of him, he was a—what's</p>

	the highest thing you can get in college?
LS:	Valedictorian?
Mildred Rivera:	No, no.
LS:	Or like the cum, cum laude, or-?
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. Mm-hm. Summa cum laude [with highest honor], he was that in college, out of only a few applicants, or after, after a few thousand applicants.
LS:	Oh my gosh.
Mildred Rivera:	For FDIC, he was like, one of the two hundred I think that was really looked into and he got one of the positions, so he's in LA for that, but apparently they have an Arlington office, their main office or something, so he comes here all the time to visit, but he loves it in LA, so I don't think he'll come back. [general laughter] And then, I have two nephews and a, finally a niece, in San Diego, but they're, they're still little.
Yolie Carrasco:	From her brother.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, from my brother, Mannie is ten, Tony is seven? And Mira is two? Yeah, but yeah, after six grandsons my mom finally got a granddaughter. [general laughter] So you know how spoiled she is.
LS:	Oh, yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	By everybody.
Yolie Carrasco:	Exactly!
Mildred Rivera:	But, so ah, and then of course I have my boys. And I actually—.
LS:	Yeah, tell me about your boys and how old they are.
Mildred Rivera:	Well actually I, and Yolie and I talk about this all the time, you know, I don't know why but we were crazy, we wanted to have five kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	We both did. And I knew, I could have twins, my dad was a twin, a fraternal twin, and he has, he has twins on his side. So I knew we could have twins. I actually we tried for almost a year to get pregnant. I mean we actually, we really planned our life together, again we were together for thirty years, married twenty, but every time we planned on getting married and saved enough we would go on a nice vacation instead. So we probably went on—[general

	laughter].
Yolie Carrasco:	Priorities!
Mildred Rivera:	We went on three honeymoons before we— so when we finally got married everybody was like, finally! And, you know, it wasn't like a big surprise like finally. But, he, again he's the youngest of seven, so we wanted a pretty large family, um, I wanted five.
Yolie Carrasco:	We don't know why we picked five, for some strange reason. [general laughter] I think because I came from four, not five, I don't know, would be the number. It's so weird.
Mildred Rivera:	Me, neither, I don't know; there's only three of us, on my side, and not seven—.
LS:	Five sounded great though.
Mildred Rivera:	But, we tried for almost a year to get pregnant, I actually found out Mother's Day weekend that I was pregnant, but then like seven weeks later got into a car accident, a car hit me, on the driver's side. So, you know, I went to the doctor and went to get a sonogram. [swallows] Excuse me. And I remember, okay something was not right, because one person comes in, you know, does the test. And all of a sudden like five people come in, I'm like okay.
LS:	Oh, no.
Mildred Rivera:	So, you know—.
Yolie Carrasco:	What's happening?
<b>Christian and Brandon</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	In my mind I'm like freaking out, you know, and then they're like, “Well, they're both okay.” I'm like, “They?” You know, but then, apparently the complicated part was they shared a placenta, so, and I didn't really know medical terminology like, okay what does that mean, but apparently it's a little bit more risky because they shared a placenta. So, and because they shared a placenta I already knew that they were identical, because apparently most twins later on they take DNA to see if they're identical or not.  So after they were diagnosed officially at two I, my husband and I, after researching, after researching about autism I knew that, you know, they didn't know what caused it, there was no cure. And because of that reason I didn't think it was fair to have any more kids. I didn't think I would be emotionally ready to have any more and just in case they had autism, we didn't think financially we could



	<p>afford it, so only because of that, that we didn't have any more. Although my husband and I say that if we win the Mega-Millions or Powerball [lotteries] we would adopt. Several, actually, older kids. You know, but only because of that, I didn't think—I was scared that you know what if they had autism, I just didn't think I was mentally prepared for that.</p>
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**Marcos**

Yolie Carrasco:

And for us it was weird because like I wanted five, right, my fantasy, and Mike and I, we discussed how many kids we wanted, and he wanted two, and I said well, let's go for three. And I was real naive, right? 'Cause Marcos is my oldest, he's nineteen, so, you know, even after we knew he had autism, right, I still kept on, right? [laughs] Didn't think anything of it, you know, I just, well, we're just gonna have three, whatever comes, you know, whatever God gives us and stuff, and so we had our son Max, and then Glory, and it was just so bizarre, 'cause it just, it was gonna be three no matter what, I don't know what I was thinking. [laughter] I don't know what I was thinking.

But it just, you know, it was similar to Mildred's where around two, you know, I took Marcos to his pediatrician and she's like, "Why are you here, Mrs. Carrasco?" And I'm like, "Marcos is doing these things." I said, "I don't know what it is, but he's aligning cars in a row." And I said, "And then he's repeating stuff, and he has occasional muteness." I said, "I don't know what that's about; I thought maybe he, he had hearing loss or something?" And she said, "Sounds like he has autism." And I'm like, "Autism?" And I called my sister and I said, I said, "This quack!" You know I said 'cause I had called my sister and she, you know she had, I had told her the, the stuff that I would see with Marcos, and I had taken care of my sister's kids, so I was used to children, it's not like I had never taken care of kids before, and my older sister's kids too, so I said, "The doctor says Marcos might have autism." And you know at that time I had seen Rain Man ["Rain Man" is a 1988 film that features a character who is an autistic savant], not knowing that autism is a range, it's a spectrum so you know it's not just one specific way of acting, right? So, but then, my husband and I, we, like Mildred we researched and I well, he does this, this, and that, he doesn't do this, this and that, but he does this, this, and that, you know.

So I, it was just, it's what it is, you know, and like again with Mildred, you know we, we believe that they were born this way, you

	<p>know, it's genetics, that's what we think, and so, my son Max doesn't have autism and Glory doesn't have autism you know, but it, they, they do have a learning disabilities, Glory has a disability with math and Max has, it's just, ah, you know, I mean it is what it is, you know, but, yeah, and I mean I, as well five [kids], I don't know what I was thinking, I went with three, you know, and got my two boys and my girl.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>And see I think, I think it's that parental instinct, you know like, they weren't officially diagnosed until two, but like at a year and a half—.</p>
LS:	<p>Yeah, what were some of the signs?</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Actually even, even younger than that.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>You know I had my older nephews, and then I had nieces and nephews on my husband's side, you know, and then I started just asking family and friends, like, “Hey, you know, the boys aren't doing this yet.” And all of them, I mean all of them, family, friends, Oh, they'll do it when they're ready. You know, Oh, it's fine. And, Oh, boys are lazy. I heard that, you know. And um, so then, it's like you, you listen to them but you know your gut still tells you—.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>You know. And I remember speaking to the pediatrician, and you know there's milestones when you have kids that they're supposed to be doing at different ages, and my boys didn't meet any of them. I mean, none of them. And when they had five words, and then after a few months lost the five words that they did have, that's when my pediatrician was like, “Okay, you know, let's, let's look into this.” And I remember getting services from the PIE program, the Parent Infant Education program, so I had a speech therapist coming, we had an occupational therapist coming, and after a month, maybe two, I remember the speech therapist came with a supervisor. I'm like, “Huh!” Again, okay. [general laughter]</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>“Hi, nice to meet you!”</p>
LS:	<p>Yeah that same, same scenario.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Yeah. So, and I remember, they probably thought I was like the most unfeeling person, you know, mother in the world because they were talking to me and they're like, at the end they were, “Well, we think they have signs of autism.” And I'm like, “Okay. Thank you.” [laughs] And then they left. I remember, you know, going to the</p>

	computer and googling it, and I just, I like bawled, I broke down, ah, my mother happened to be coming that day, I don't remember why, and then, you know I told her, and even as a nurse, you know back then, like she wasn't for sure, you know, what it was. And then I remember calling my sister, my sister, I can hear, you know, on the—and then, I mean it was just, it was one of those things where you—it just, it didn't feel. it felt surreal.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, totally, like you're not in your body.
WR:	Yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	I went, with Marcos, Marcos did have all his milestones, like that wasn't the issue, the issue was the other stuff you know the, the repetitive stuff, the lining the cars in a row, I thought he was just so organized, right? But you know, ah, certain things, you know, With Marcos, with Mildred you know she had a car accident, and with Marcos—my first pregnancy, I had a miscarriage, and then, like, five months later or something I was pregnant with Marcos. But with Marcos, yeah, he did all the stuff he was supposed to do, it wasn't that, it was something else, right? Again, us not knowing at that point that it's a spectrum, it varies, right? So, but, boy is this an educational process, because—.
Mildred Rivera:	And we're still learning.
<b>Meeting in Preschool</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	Totally, I mean every day, like, our, our talks evolved because we met each other in preschool where her twin boys and my, my daughter Glory were in the same class—.
LS:	Okay.
Yolie Carrasco:	You know, so they were two years old in a preschool class, and we were just waiting for our kids, and she says, “Hi,” she says, “My name is Mildred, and my kids are in this.” And I said, “Well, I have my daughter,” and then she says, “You wanna go for coffee or something?” And we just started talking and Mildred said, she goes, “I think it's great that you have your daughter, your typical daughter, in with kids with special needs.” And I said, “Well my son Marcos has autism so you know, it's part of our family.” You know, she says, 'cause, you know, she, she had other situations where people had judged the boys or something, right? Right?
Mildred Rivera:	Judged the boys?
Yolie Carrasco:	Well, when you said to me, you said, “Thank you for having your

	daughter—.”
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, I thanked her for having like such an open mind, for having her typical daughter be a peer role model for my kids and other kids in the class with disabilities, and only because I’ve heard other families say that—[pause].
Yolie Carrasco:	No, just say it, just say it, it's the truth, it's what happened.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, they, they thought that their kids would be—[pause]
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, go ahead. Dumbed down the class.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	We're gonna be honest; we're gonna say it.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. I mean that's the things that we've heard.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, unfortunately, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	We don't want special ed [education] kids in our regular classrooms, you know-
Mildred Rivera:	Or we don't want our typical kids with your kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	Right.
Mildred Rivera:	Because they're gonna learn some of their behaviors, or—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Right.
Mildred Rivera:	Things like that, so it was, it was hurtful, and I didn't realize until later that her eldest son had autism, so I was like oh, okay well no wonder, you know you get it, you know. But, but although we did have you know one family I remember in particular, her son, um, her typical son was in the class, do you remember Ben?
Yolie Carrasco:	Um-hm.
Mildred Rivera:	And, he and his parents both, they were like, “Oh, no; we think this will make him well-rounded, and become empathetic and understand differences.” And they were great, you know, they were wonderful, but unfortunately more times than not it was the other way around. You know. But, like Yolie said, it's a spectrum, you know again my boys are identical twin boys and they're, they're the same in some ways, but I don't know if that's really the autism or just being twins—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Right.

Mildred Rivera:	And then they're very different, you know, like one is, one is more organized than the other, you know, too organized, probably OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] organized, you know. They're both very helpful, but one is—Christian is more, like you don't have to ask him. Like if he sees you doing something like he'll automatically help you, whereas Brandon it's like a chore. He'll, he'll do it, he'll help, but it's more—.
Yolie Carrasco:	“Must I?” The typical teenager.
Mildred Rivera:	Typical teenager, right. During their spring break, you know, I try to, everything is a teaching moment for our kids, you know, all the time.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, twenty-four seven. So during spring break, in between the fun times, you know, we would do errands and so I'd have them help, you know, with, like, groceries, you know, getting whatever on the shelf, or picking up whatever on the shelf, you know, scanning, you know, bagging, you know. And like Christian like, enjoys it, like he loves it, and Brandon it's like [imitates a sigh.] After doing a couple of things, he's like moving, like no, you're not done, you're doing everything.
Yolie Carrasco:	This is work, I don't want to do it.
Mildred Rivera:	But, ah, so it's funny, I mean they're, again they're the same as far as, you know, being helpful. They're very, they're funny. They're very affectionate. You know a lot of people think that kids with autism don't want to be touched.
Yolie Carrasco:	Touched, or—right.
Mildred Rivera:	Or they don't smile, you know, and my kids are both, you know, they don't care, I mean, they, you know, they love to be tickled, they love to be hugged, they're very affectionate. Unfortunately, in elementary school up to, I would say third grade, all the teachers and parents and everything, you know, and even the kids, they would be hugging on him and kissing him, and, you know, things like that, and all of a sudden at fourth grade, oh, you can't do that anymore. You know, like oh, we have to be appropriate now, and I'm like, “Oh, okay, you have to explain to him why.” 'Cause, you know, he's not gonna understand, you know, like—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, it's very hard, it's very hard for kids to understand. To go on and then off.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. Right.

Yolie Carrasco:	Like this is not appropriate anymore, you know, when—.
Mildred Rivera:	Right. Because you're older now.
<b>Marcos' Experiences Being a Teenager</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	Because they're, they're still little kids. Like Marcos is nineteen, right. So he lives in two worlds, kind of in a way, like he's in the middle. Like he's not a typical teenager, but he is in many ways, but then he's not—I don't know how to say it, you know, he's—We, we don't like to use the term high and low functioning, 'cause, I explained—.
Mildred Rivera:	Or normal.
Yolie Carrasco:	Or—we don't use normal. Normal is not a word that we use, ah, normal is a dryer setting. We just say, not typical, you know, typical or not typical. And, um, 'cause me personally, what's the opposite of normal? Abnormal. I don't see my son as abnormal, right? But with Marcos there's a lot of social stuff that he doesn't understand, you know? And in many ways he's like a little child, so like what Mildred was saying, you know, like, if someone would hug him, or if he would hug somebody, you know, at a certain age it's not okay anymore, you know?  Like just recently he asked me, “Mom, why aren't we friends with the kids in the neighborhood?” And I go, “Mijo, you're nineteen, and you can't really be playing with little kids; it would look strange to other people.” So you have to constantly look at the real world the way they would perceive him, because he is misjudged in so many ways, 'cause when you look at him, he just seems typical. But, you know, there's a lot of stuff that he has within himself that's high and low, you know what I mean so, I can't say well, Marcos is higher functioning than Christian and Brandon because Marcos still has a lot of deficits that are in there, so that's why we don't say high and low functioning.
<b>Talking to School Children about Autism</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	Well, we, we say that, too, in our talks, that, you know, our kids look like typical kids, you know, so in elementary school when we did our talks you know we say, you know, just by looking at them, you can't tell that they have a disability, you know they don't have three eyes and you know, four arms—.
Yolie Carrasco:	We make a joke, you know, we would try to—.
Mildred Rivera:	Age appropriate.

Yolie Carrasco:	Because they were just elementary school kids and we would tell them, you know, we would try to bring it back to what do we have in common? What do our children have in common to you guys? Like I would do the little scenario, you know when Marcos was little you know Marcos loved Sponge Bob [cartoon character], right? So how many of you guys love Sponge Bob? Oh, everyone raised their hand, and I said, "How many of you guys love pizza?" "Oh, we love pizza!" I said, "Marcos, even though Marcos has autism, he loves Sponge Bob and he eats pizza." You know, trying to bring the unity, not the separation of it, you know?
<b>How the Talks Got Started</b>	
LS:	Yeah, yeah. So how did your talks become—?
Yolie Carrasco:	We met—.
LS:	Yeah, you met when your kids were in preschool, tell me about what year that was and how it's, how it happened naturally and—.
Mildred Rivera:	As far as our talks?
LS:	Yeah, just your working together, kind of how that evolved.
Mildred Rivera:	Well we volunteered—.
LS:	Okay.
Mildred Rivera:	Um, together a lot.
Yolie Carrasco:	We would do—.
Mildred Rivera:	We were also—.
Yolie Carrasco:	In the library, book fair, RIF, you know.
Mildred Rivera:	We were also co-liaisons of RIF, Reading Is Fundamental.
LS:	Okay.
Mildred Rivera:	Um, for six years, at John Adams [Elementary School], so we, we knew each other, and important, most importantly I think, the staff and students knew us, 'cause they always saw us in the school. One of the former assistant principals at John Adams actually asked me to speak about my boys—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Kathy Keenoy [former Assistant Principle at John Adams Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia], Kathy, yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. Wonderful lady. And so of course I run to Yolie and say, "Oh, my gosh, she asked me and I can't do it!" She's like, "We have to."

	I'm like, "Only if you do it with me." [laughs] Again, because we hate public speaking.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	You know. And, I mean it was very—we, we couldn't believe that we were given that opportunity first of all, because we knew that the guidance counselors, the social workers were already doing these talks, but very general. Very general it was just, you know, let's all be kind to one another, and, you know, celebrate differences, but it wasn't like, specifically disabilities, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	And I remember we were in the office and we were sitting down on the couch and you came over, you said, "You know what, Miss Kathy Keenoy told me this, about doing this." And I'm like, [gasps] "Yeah, we're gonna do it. You don't understand, this is an opportunity for us to talk about our kids!" And she's like, "Oh, but I don't like it." And I'm like, "Neither do I, but we're gonna do it!" It was so funny. It was so literally, it was, it was, we were given a key to the door to come in. And we just, again, flying by the seat of our pants, you know, we—.
Mildred Rivera:	Oh, yeah. We, we started off going to each classroom. And first of all, borrowing materials from the special ed classrooms, we were like oh, they asked us to talk, can we borrow this, or that? So, we borrowed, you know, posters with kids with different disabilities, we borrowed you know props, things that kids with disabilities would use, you know, and, and so we started out going to every classroom.
Yolie Carrasco:	Every classroom, from kindergarten to fifth grade.
LS:	Wow.
Yolie Carrasco:	Every single classroom.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. And, you know—.
Yolie Carrasco:	In October.
Mildred Rivera:	Sometimes they would—.
Yolie Carrasco:	And in April.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, twice a year. And sometimes it would take us a week, sometimes two, just to get everybody, 'cause we don't—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	—want to miss anybody, and then, after a few years of that, and then we also, you know we made phone calls to just different therapy dog



	companies and just different people. Yolie met this man—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Oh, my god that was so weird!
Mildred Rivera:	A blind man, to ask him, if he wanted to talk, and—.
<b>Recruiting Help and Guest Speakers</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>This is what happened, okay? So I was at Giant, I was volunteering, right? And there was this man walking across the street, at that time there was a Giant there, now it's a, what is that called, a Global Market or something? So, you know, he was coming this way, I was walking and he had a dog and I saw he was sight impaired, and I go, I said, "Um, excuse me, I'm so sorry to bother you," and he turns around and I said—and I went like this to shake his hand, you know again, so dumb! And I said, "I'm sorry, I don't mean to bother you, but my name is Yolie Carrasco, and me and a fellow parent, my friend, Mildred, we do these talks, we talk, ah in October," and I was just rambling, right? So he says, "I would, I—" I said, "Would you be interested in speaking to the kids about, you know, we want to explain to the kids that people who do have disabilities do have jobs, they do have—they get married, they have children." I said, "You know, for them to see a person living with their disability." And he goes, "Of course!"</p> <p>So, then he, you know, he introduced us, connected us to the [National] Federation of the Blind [NFB], so we had all these speakers, you know, come in, take time from their jobs, come in on buses, cabs, you know. And, and we were so lucky. Because again, we don't do it by ourselves, you know we started off by ourselves, with our fellow moms who have kids with disabilities, they were just holding up the posters; they wouldn't speak 'cause they were nervous about talking.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, as we were speaking they would hold up posters, they would pass around different props.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then I don't know how we convinced them, but we, they finally started speaking about their kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	They felt comfortable.
Mildred Rivera:	And it was really—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Because it was just us talking to the kids.
Mildred Rivera:	Right.

Yolie Carrasco:	There was no—we felt the pressure because what we were saying was important because it's how, what we live, but it was just kids, you know, we were talking to the kids, reading to the kids, you know, and—.
Mildred Rivera:	Very age appropriately.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	Um, after, it was great that our, we call them our gang of moms, a child gave us that, that nickname. [laughs] Um, but it was great because our two mom friends who, who have been with us from the beginning, they have kids with different disabilities than autism. You know, one has a son with Down's Syndrome, the other has a son with Cerebral Palsy. So, it was good to talk about different disabilities.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then I'm sure Yolie told you that man we found out was, um— Was he the head?
Yolie Carrasco:	He was—.
Mildred Rivera:	He was like the head of [local chapter of] the National Federation of the Blind.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah! We were so lucky!
Mildred Rivera:	So then, he was like—.
Yolie Carrasco:	“I got people! I got people!”
Mildred Rivera:	He was like, “If I can't do it, I can put it out in our chapter and so anybody who's available can come.” And we've met so many great people, we met a couple who were both sight impaired. The husband, Corb, had a white cane, and, Riley had Wrangler, a German shepherd guide dog. We had, oh my gosh so many people from the National Federation of the Blind.
Yolie Carrasco:	So many, Miss Wanda [Taylor from the NFB], again, we were very lucky.
Mildred Rivera:	Oh, yes.
Yolie Carrasco:	People took time of their day, of their job to come in. You know, it's just us moms; we don't have money to pay people, they do it, and they're not, they're not getting paid, you know.
Mildred Rivera:	Right.
Yolie Carrasco:	And it's just amazing the support that we've gotten from other

	people.
Mildred Rivera:	I remember calling at least half a dozen therapy dog companies.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And some had fees you know, if you want us to speak it's this much an hour, we were like my gosh, we don't, you know, we're just moms, we're not—.
Yolie Carrasco:	We don't have money-
Mildred Rivera:	We were part of the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] but it wasn't like a PTA sponsored kind of thing. So, I remember making phone calls and leaving messages and one, Kathy, Kathy Benner from the Heeling House, H-e-e-l, Heeling House called, and I explained to her listen, you know, other companies have called me, they said they charge this per hour, I said listen, this is what we do, we're just moms and not, you know we don't have any money to give you.
Yolie Carrasco:	We volunteer, it's not, you know—.
Mildred Rivera:	The first, the first year they came both days, all day long. And several, three of them—she's the founder of Heeling House, and then she had two other trainers, and two dogs, right?
Yolie Carrasco:	Um-hm.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, two dogs.
LS:	And why those two months of the year, is that just the—?
Mildred Rivera:	October is disability awareness.
LS:	Okay.
Mildred Rivera:	And April is autism awareness.
LS:	Great.
Mildred Rivera:	But, yeah, we've had wonderful, we've had vets [veterans], we've had vets come, um, it's all word of mouth, you know, our first veteran was the John Adams PE teacher's friend, so it's all, you know, people who hear talks, and it's if you know anybody, and you know. I remember, going to a Starbucks near John Adams, and I saw a young man crossing with, you know, a prosthetic leg, and I remember like—[laughs]—chasing him, but you know, just like Yolie with, you know, with Bob. But I mean it's just you know, I mean, for me it's, it's, you won't know unless you ask.
LS:	Right.

Mildred Rivera:	You know. And then we had a teacher's son.
Yolie Carrasco:	And what's the worst thing they can do is say no.
Mildred Rivera:	Say no, right, right. And then a teacher's son—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, here at Hammond.
Mildred Rivera:	Who has dyslexia. And, and even, a former music teacher who has dyslexia.
Yolie Carrasco:	That's right, Vaughn Ambrose [former Francis C. Hammond Middle School Band Director, Alexandria, Virginia], yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then, and then a science? Science teacher—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	—who has multiple sclerosis.
LS:	Great.
<b>Teaching the Teachers</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	And even at John Adams when we first started in the classrooms, you know, unfortunately most teachers were like, “So how long are you going to be here?” And we would tell them, like, “Okay, I'll be back.” Or they'd get on the computer. But then after, what? I would say our third year?
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	—that they started kinda like putting their stuff away, and like listening, and then sharing stories, you know about their family members, or friends or neighbors, and then, I would say—.
Yolie Carrasco:	They realized it was a teachable moment of how to, how to help a child be kind.
Mildred Rivera:	Accepting. Empathetic.
Yolie Carrasco:	And accepting, and empathetic and have empathy and, you know we started in the classrooms, and then we were lucky enough to get to be in the music room and then we would have like all third grade, or all second grade.
LS:	Wow.
Yolie Carrasco:	We would have—.
Mildred Rivera:	Each grade level on one day.
LS:	Wow.

<b>Support of Dr. Crawley</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	And that was awesome because it helped us so much you know, and we were lucky again to be allowed to do it here, you know. Dr. Crawley, when he was the interim, the superintendent of Alexandria [City Public Schools], he was interim at that time, and I, I don't know how it happened. He came, we talked to him at a coffee.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	Mildred spoke with him, and then I talked to him at a coffee. And, um—.
Mildred Rivera:	He observed one of our talks.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes.
Mildred Rivera:	At John Adams, and then I remember we're like you know, “Do you want us to introduce you?” And he was like, “No, no; it's not about me, it's about your talks.” And I thought it was so—[pause]—I can't even think of the word, but he just kind of blended with the kids. Sat on the stairs with the kids, and no, entourage, you know, just by himself sat and- like you, if you wouldn't have noticed him you wouldn't have, you know, like realized.
Yolie Carrasco:	Right.
Mildred Rivera:	He blended with the kids and you know, quiet, and you know, and then—.
Yolie Carrasco:	When we finished he was so responsive and, and encouraging and said oh, my god, you guys should get it, hit it on the road.
Mildred Rivera:	Well, and then he must have spoken—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Take it on the road.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, and then he must have spoken to, I don't remember the titles but the, the, somebody in the department of equity, ACPS equity, because another gentleman—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes.
Mildred Rivera:	Mr. Martin came and observed our talks as well, at John Adams. And then I want to say our fourth and fifth year at John Adams, students actually advocated for themselves.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, they stood up amongst their peers, you know, said I have this disability, and I have this.

LS:	Wow.
Mildred Rivera:	And I thought it was wonderful.
Yolie Carrasco:	I have a brother, I have a brother.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, we thought that was wonderful, because ultimately that's what we want our kids to do.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	You know we don't want to be talking forever, we want them to start talking.
Yolie Carrasco:	Talk, yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then when our kids came to middle school I remember going to a workshop about middle school and kids with disabilities. And, um, Dr. Crawley, you know, was the superintendent, and he, I remember him speaking about, he came from Arlington. I remember him speaking about, oh, we have kids with disabilities advocating for themselves, you know, they're doing this and that, and I was like wow, that's wonderful, but I was like, "What about the kids who can't?"
Yolie Carrasco:	Right.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, and he's like, "We're going to work on that." And I was like, "Well, that's what we've done." And then it was a long meeting, so I was okay, it's getting late, I'm leaving, and he actually made it a point to stop me before I left, and he was like, "So why is this only in this school?" And I'm like, "Because of administration." I was like, "We were allowed to." I was like, "We've had other parents in other schools in ACPS willing to."
Yolie Carrasco:	That's right.
Mildred Rivera:	And for one reason or another their child's school administration just wouldn't let them, or would let them only in the class that their child was in, as if that child was not going anywhere else in the school. [laughs]
Yolie Carrasco:	Right, right, right.
Mildred Rivera:	So it was difficult, you know, so we had a new teacher from Texas, right? New principal, sorry, from Texas come sixth grade, and we were afraid that, okay she's new, she's not going to let us, so we asked Dr. Crawley can you come meet with us, so we can talk about having the talks? And then we thought, okay, who's gonna be crazy

	<p>enough to say no if he is on board? [laughs] So of course she said yes. And then we had a new principal, again, seventh grade, who's our current principal now, and you know she heard about our talks and we didn't need Dr. Crawley to come and you know she was all for it, and now—.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>She's been very supportive. Again, you know, we've been allowed to do it, 'cause you have to be allowed, you can't just go into a school you know and talk to kids. So, we've been very lucky, people that have, um, like Miss Kathy Keenoy, you know, the one she, where she first started us off.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Started everything.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>You know, it's important what we're doing. it's important for the kids and you know, like, we were talking about it when we first had our kids in preschool and we knew in preschool that it was important for typical kids to be with special ed kids, 'cause they, at that time they used to have buddies, book buddies, they used to have kids from TC [Williams High School] that would come to the classrooms, you know, just typical kids come into the classrooms and, and do activities with the kids, you know, special ed kids, typical kids in the classroom. And we know that it's important for typical kids to see kids with special needs 'cause I think the typical kids get more out of it, because it teaches them to be empathetic; to have, um, concerns, to have a moral compass, you know, and it's important for everyone, that's what I think.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Well, and, and for us, you know we've always been like open and honest, like nothing is off-limits.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Like we always tell them you can ask us anything and everything. And I remember one little boy, you know he was like, “Were they born like this?” And he's, you know, and we're like, “No, honey.” I mean we don't get mad at them, we're like, “No, honey, they were born probably just like you were.” And that's it.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>'Cause we say it at the beginning, we say we're going to have an open and honest conversation. I mean what's the point of having the conversation if you're not going to be open and honest about it? So, you know, we tell them our lives, you know we say this is what happened, you know, again we talk about it, you know it's not the end of the world, it's not a disease, it's a disability or a disorder, and we explain what a disability is in October. We say there's disabilities</p>

	that you can see, and there's disabilities that you can't see, which is autism, you know has to do with the way the brain is wired.
Mildred Rivera:	Well, and then we also tie in bullying prevention.
Yolie Carrasco:	Totally.
Mildred Rivera:	<p>October is National Bullying Prevention month. But, you know, we still, we mention it in April as well, but you know, but—and again, you know, age appropriately. In elementary school we believe our kids were born with it, you know, they had no choice. So, you know we kind of put it in that aspect as far as you know, well, you know, you had no choice that you were born that color, or with those color eyes, or you know, straight hair versus—and then I always try to make it, you know, I know, you know, you can get darker, you know, sitting out in the sun, you know you can perm your hair to make it curly, you know, straighten it to make it straight, you know, put in colored eye, you know, contacts, but you know, we always say, but that's temporary. Our kids can't even do that, you know, temporarily not have autism.</p> <p>So, we, we've had a really good group of kids. I mean they really understand it, and elementary school we did go from, you know we ask questions, we always have a Q and A at the end of our assemblies. You know, questions that aren't really questions, you know, Oh, my friend, my dog, I'm like yeah. [laughs] But then, middle school came, and we're like, wow! You know, these kids are asking really good questions.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	I mean, I remember like in fifth grade, you know, we, we had very thoughtful questions, you know, very—. And again you know we, we—.
Mildred Rivera:	The older kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	The older kids, you know we, we do try to have an open and honest conversation, and we try, and we ask them, you know, ask us whatever you want. We're not going to get offended, you're not going to get in trouble, we're not gonna get mad, 'cause that's the whole point. That's the whole point of our talks is to try to break myths and misconceptions of people living with disabilities. They'll ask our sight-impaired friends, you know, they'll ask them well, how do you take a shower in the morning? How do you, ah, eat in the morning, do you make yourself breakfast? How do you get to work, you know, and they answer all of these questions, 'cause again people think well, you can't be an athlete because you can't see, or you, you can't



	have a job, you can't get married, you know what I mean? Things like that, that typical kids would see their parents or whatever, well, they can't do that, yes, they can. They're living lives, they're having families, they're doing jobs, they have careers, you know? And, and we had this amazing man, um, I don't remember, fourth of fifth grade, and—.
<b>Paralympian and Veteran Guest Speakers</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	Oh, the Paralympian?
Yolie Carrasco:	Yes! Again, we were very lucky, you know, he was, amazing.
Mildred Rivera:	Part of the National Federation—[of the Blind]
Yolie Carrasco:	He had an eye disorder, of course, you know, he was sight impaired, but he was an athlete, and he was this tall—[gesturing].
Mildred Rivera:	Paralympian.
Yolie Carrasco:	Tall, guy, amazing guy.
Mildred Rivera:	What is it called, with the tandem, tandem bike.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, the bike, and you know, he was speaking about how he has his life, and the kids were just amazed, like how can this man be sight impaired and be an athlete, how is that possible? And he explained it all, you know, and—go ahead.
Mildred Rivera:	And then even our veteran, he came in wearing long pants and nobody knew—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then all of a sudden he lifts them up and everybody was like oohing and aahing, and he actually brought one of his prosthetics that he, you know, let the kids you know hold and touch and I mean they were all oohing and aahing and of course you know the younger kids were like, Oh, I wish I had one, and I'm like—[laughs]. But I mean that's how they think, you know, Ooh, this is neat, I wish I had one, it's like well, not really. But he was very open and honest, you know, and he explained the differences of his prosthetics, you know for like running and swimming and you know whatever else and you know they thought it was cool. I remember he talked about his bionic one that cost like twenty-five thousand dollars, and the kids were like, Oh, my gosh, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	He drives, and they asked him, “You can drive?” “Yes, of course I can drive.” You know it's those myths that people, even grown-ups, grown-ups have a lot of misconceptions about people with

	disabilities, especially autism. And like Mildred said you know, we were lucky that at first the teachers weren't paying attention.
LS:	Right.
<b>The School Disability Talks</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	They weren't, you know, they were busy, they have to do their stuff, their job and stuff. But then they started participating and saying, "Well my cousin has this and my grandmother—" Whatever and you know, and, and they understood that was a teachable moment. I can engage with my class with these women and talk about something personal to make it real to the kids. 'Cause that's what we try to do, to make it real, you know? We're not, we can speak about our kids, you know, we're not staff members that are not allowed because you know, confidential.
LS:	Right, right.
Yolie Carrasco:	They can't talk about kids; we can. We can say this is how my child is, this is how my child acts, this is what he likes, this is what he doesn't like, and make it real, you know?
Mildred Rivera:	And again, you know, we went from elementary school to, you know, some questions, and, to middle school where, you know, some questions we didn't even know the answers to. We're like, "You know what, look that up and let us know." But, and also very—questions not just about our kids but like, our lives. They're like, Is it hard? And we're like—[laughs]. "Yes it is." You know, but I mean very—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Thoughtful.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. And, you know, we've had many kids also who have either, in elementary school stood up and said, well my brother has this, and, or, I have this, and you know, here at the elementary school, I mean at the middle school we have—line up the kids, you know, they line up.
Mildred Rivera:	In Q and A.
Yolie Carrasco:	We have two microphones, and they'll ask us questions and they'll say, you know what, I have ADHD and thank you for talking about it.
LS:	Wow.
Yolie Carrasco:	You know, and—'cause you know, they're not comfortable talking

	about it in front of the whole people, of all the kids but they feel, and this is what I think is that they feel someone is talking about it, someone is talking about my disability, you know.
Mildred Rivera:	I mean there's been a few who have stood up amongst their peers to say.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And the ones who weren't comfortable yet would come up to us afterwards.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Yeah.
LS:	Great.
Mildred Rivera:	And tell us, you know, I have this disability, and I have, you know. But, again, they don't feel alone.
LS:	Um-hm.
Mildred Rivera:	You know, and we always say listen, you know it's okay to be different, we're all different you know but you're not less, you know and, and I think they, they feel good that, like, Okay, I can talk to somebody about it, you know. And again, because we all volunteer here a lot, it's like if you have any other questions, you know, because the bell rang, it's time to go, just ask us. You know, ask us while you see us in the hallway, and they have, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	And I think what we're trying to do is to break the stigma of having a disability, because you know, people don't want to talk about it, you know, and to us it's not—why shouldn't we talk about it? It's a natural thing for us because our kids have autism and it's not something that's bad or dirty or let's keep it hidden in a closet, you know.
<b>Autism and Parenting Autistic Kids</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	Although some parents are in denial.
Yolie Carrasco:	And again, it's trying to understand the disabilities or whatever.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah, they're in that point in their journey then.
Yolie Carrasco:	And which is fine, but we aren't there.
Mildred Rivera:	We've never been.
Yolie Carrasco:	No, no, we were there for a second and then we moved on, you know, but the thing is that, you know, if you don't talk about it, if there isn't awareness—this is how I feel because Marcos is nineteen.

	If there isn't awareness, how can Marcos be accepted? You know, 'cause like Mildred, we've done the walks and you know for us it's extremely personal 'cause this is what we live, right? This, ah, this is our life twenty-four seven, it's not just in April that our kids have autism and stuff. But you know, it's just trying to bring awareness to people, you know it, um, it's not something that's gonna go away.
LS:	Um-hm.
Yolie Carrasco:	You know? It's becoming more and more frequently diagnosed, you know. When Marcos was born it was like a one in a hundred and—I can't remember the t-shirt I had, it said the facts. Do you remember?
Mildred Rivera:	When the boys, when the boys were born—.
Yolie Carrasco:	It's a hundred and eight.
Mildred Rivera:	It was one in one [hundred and] sixty-six.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And now it's one in sixty-eight.
LS:	Wow.
Yolie Carrasco:	So, again you know, fast forward years that they were diagnosed and stuff, Marcos is nineteen, so it's, it's something that's not gonna go away, it's something that's happening, it's not, it's something that's—. What I say, it's one of the newbies, I call it newbies but it's not; it's been around for a really, really long time, autism [depending on the historical research, autism was discovered as early as 1908], but people are more and more aware of it, you know people talk about it more, you know, there's characters on TV that have autism, you know, they're aspies [“Aspies” is a slang term for people with Asperger's Syndrome, which is also known as Asperger's Disorder.] There's a movie, The Accountant that was made [made in 2016 it features a character with autism], Rain Man was made you know in, I don't know, '80s, I can't remember when, you know. But it's these things that again, trying to break the myth, the stigma, the—it's dirty, it's a dirty secret, oh, no, we don't wanna talk about it, we're ashamed. We're not ashamed of our kids, we love our kids, you know. Every little thing that they do might be well, just commonplace for another parent but for us it's a big deal.
Mildred Rivera:	What most, what most parents of typical kids might take for granted.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	It's like you always notice, you know. I remember the first time, and

	again my husband's the youngest of seven, they're, I can't even, I lost track how many grandchildren there are. But there's a lot. And I remember when the boys were little and everybody was saying, you know, goodbye to the grandparents and everything, I remember the boys, you know, actually waved and said goodbye, and my husband and I were like did you see that, did you hear that? And everybody else was like oblivious to it. You know, everybody- it's like, little, little things like that, like other parents like just take for granted, you know?
Yolie Carrasco:	'Cause you know for our kids, some of our kids, things are delayed, you know, like they don't, they don't say words, they don't say sentences, they don't say bye, they don't eat with a spoon, they don't, you know, they don't go to the restroom, you know they, it's a lot of, it ranges, of course, right? So, for whatever they do, whatever milestone or whatever, you know, we're, we're amazed by it, and we're very grateful for it, and you know, like Mildred said, other parents just say, oh, well, big deal, you know, they waved bye. You don't understand; they didn't wave bye before.
Mildred Rivera:	For all these years.
Yolie Carrasco:	All of this before that, you know? Yeah. Yeah.
<b>The Rivera Boys at the Dentist</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	And a lot of things, too, for example like the dentist, you know, we have a wonderful, wonderful dentist, you know that we've been going to for a few years. Um, we thought we would have to sedate them to get their first x-rays, you know, 'cause she was like you know, they would have to keep still and you know not move, and they're gonna have to be by themselves, and like oh, gosh, you know. So, I'm thinking, okay, you know, I'm getting ready for it. Kept putting it off, putting it off. And then finally during one cleaning where Brandon—this was, I want to say three years ago, one cleaning where Brandon finally sat by himself, because I, I used to sit on the chair, and they used to sit on top of me, I was okay they're getting too big and heavy, let's try sitting them by themselves and so Brandon was the first to do it, he sat by himself. And then she was like, "To get ready for the x-ray, why don't we kinda show him what we're doing?" I'm like, "Okay." You know, so they brought in the camera, they brought in the thing that they put in the mouth, they actually put it in, and they went, okay, this is for a picture, and, you know, my son, as soon as he heard picture, he was like, "Cheese!" [laughs] But, um, so they put it in, and she's like, "You know he's

	sitting still, he's cooperating, shall we do it now?" And I'm like, "Do it!" [general laughter] And, I mean, so—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Don't delay, do it now!
Mildred Rivera:	I was like, "Push the button." But, he did wonderfully, you know, and I was telling my husband, I, we were saying this, just this past week during spring break, it's like, it's like they, they like to keep us on our toes, it's like you think something's not gonna go right, and it turns out wonderfully.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then you think everything's going to be okay, and then all heck breaks loose.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. [general laughter]
<b>The Rivera Boys at the Trampoline Park</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	So okay, they, they're doing this on purpose, you know. But, and the same thing with my, you know, his brother Christian, I think it was a year later, he had his x-rays done, and the same thing, perfect, I'm like—[laughs]. It's like okay, you know, worried over nothing.  And spring break, you know we went to a trampoline park. And the first time, because they don't, neither one of them ever liked bouncy houses, and I thought okay, I don't know if they're gonna like to jump, but you know what, this might be different 'cause it's not enclosed. So let's try it, you know, and I was so nervous, I mean, it's so funny because I—.  But even, like awards assemblies. Like I'm there, you know, and I have butterflies in my stomach and Brandon's like fine, you know, he's like—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Goes up the stage, gets it and then sits down.
Mildred Rivera:	But, I think it's always us that, you know, gets the butterflies in our stomach, and gets knots and, you know, we're just so nervous for them.  You know, but Brandon had fun; he enjoyed it. I took pictures, I took videos so I could show his brother who didn't have as long a spring break as ACPS did, so I made sure to, like, keep showing him, look at your brother, look, you know. So, I took both of them together, and then the first time I had some other mom friends and their kids, you know, but typical and with disabilities with me, so I jumped in with Brandon, you know, just to show him, okay, see, it's not scary.

	<p>You know, they gave me permission, the Flight Park people, and the second time I was supposed to have other mom friends with me and their kids, but then things happened and they cancelled so I was by myself I'm like, Oh my god. [general laughter] You know, and then I asked, you know, the attendant. I'm like, "Can I jump in with him this first time so he knows that it's okay?" And she was like, "Sure." I'm like, "Okay, can you watch my son?" She was like, "I can't; I have too many kids." And I'm like, "Okay, can they jump in together?" And she was like, "Sure." So, I'm, like, showing the video again, you know, and then they jump in together and it was like wonderful. Like the one part, I don't know what it's called, the airbag thing, you know like when stunt people jump? And, that ended up being their favorite thing. I've lost count, you know, track of how many times they jumped together. And then of course it was like, "Okay, Christian, jump in by yourself, try it by yourself." And he would like halfway run, and then look back for his brother, wait for his brother, like you go ahead. But I mean it was wonderful. You know, so it's like—I think sometimes I don't give them credit enough that they'll be fine, like I'm always so nervous, you know so anxious, and it's like oh, they're resilient, they're fine, it's just me. [laughs]</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	It's just us, you know, the parents.
<b>Marcos' Bloodwork</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>With Marcos, Marcos doesn't like to get shots or blood work done. So, we hadn't been able to collect his blood in years, right? Like the dentist, we weren't able to take Marcos to the dentist after, I don't know, ten, 'cause we couldn't hold him. But we needed blood work, 'cause he's taking medication. He's been taking medication for two years, three years, just recently, 'cause he wouldn't take any pills. So, we had to take him, and Mildred knew of this place that would, had done blood work on the boys, so—.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	And they're wonderful, very patient.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Like for me, like if you have a doctor or provider that, works well with your kids and your kids are fine with them, it's like I don't care where you are, I'll drive to you.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	'Cause it's so hard.

<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah. And it was far, so, my husband and I, we were so nervous. We were like really anxious and, and, the psychiatrist had given Marcos a couple of anxiety pills so I gave him one and I thought, “Okay, he should be calm, he should be calm.” And the staff used a baby needle, and he sat there, did it, he was fine. I was like shaking and everything 'cause I was so nervous and I'm like oh my god, and Mike looks at me 'cause he was still filling out paperwork, they were talking to him about—and it was in and out, right? And he goes, “What happened?” And I'm like, “We're done!” You know, it was just, but we were like so relieved! We were so nervous 'cause he doesn't, you know—.</p> <p>You have to understand, most of Marcos' life he didn't like to get any shots or anything, so you can imagine all the vaccines, all the immunization shots was horrible; we had to hold him down, you know, ten, twelve years old, you know which is, became so much. He would get sick, he wouldn't take any medicine, we'd have to take him to the ER, there would be several people holding him down to give him medicine, whatever.</p> <p>So, we thought, 'cause he's nineteen, and he's bigger, and stronger, and I said I don't know what we're gonna do, right? And all the little, all the little ladies from the blood, they're all little, they're like Mildred, real petite, right? I'm like, oh, no, what's gonna happen? Thank God Mike came with me, right? So, but it was in and out, it was so fast, and I'm like, I just, and I told Marcos, I'm like, “You did awesome, Dude, you just did awesome.” [Marcos said] “Can we go have breakfast now?” I'm like, “Yeah, we're gonna go have breakfast.”</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>And to them that's like, What's the big deal?</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah, like, okay, it's over with, but like it, it's nerve wracking, you know. Do you have kids?</p>
<p>LS:</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Okay, well—.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>Just wait.</p>
<p><b>Eating and Taking Medication</b></p>	
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah, just wait. I mean, with any child you're nervous, you know, but yeah, it's those little things that make it, they're obstacles you know for us, at times, you know. There's a lot of wonderful thigs about our kids, but there's a lot of struggles too for them as well you</p>



	know, and, um—.
Mildred Rivera:	Um, she mentioned that Marcos only started taking medication two or three years ago.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And luckily my boys—we went to see a nutritionist, gosh, how old were they? They were three. And I remember it was like a four or five hour appointment and I remember her first thing was well, “What do they eat?” Because a lot of kids with autism are, have very, you know, limited diets.
Yolie Carrasco:	That's Marcos.
Mildred Rivera:	And, and she was like, “Start alphabetically with A”, and I think I was like on C and she was like, “Okay, you're good.”
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	<p>She was like, “That's wonderful that, this is rare.” She was like, “You're good.” And I remember you know, we had to do blood work and hair samples, and you, if you've seen my, you have to see my sons, but they have like buzz [hair] cuts, like short with a buzzer. And so I had to let their hair grow and they did not like it at all. They started getting, as soon as they could pull it they're like, I need a haircut, please. [Yolie laughs] So I had to let it grow enough so that I could do a hair sample.</p> <p>And after that, you know, she, recommended different supplements, so they've actually been taking supplements since 2006, so they're very used to it. They started taking medication from the neurologist I would say two, maybe three years ago. But like, they're so used to it, they take it, they take medicine and vitamin supplements like five times a day. But they're so used to it that if I'm busy making dinner or just busy doing whatever, like Christian, the organized one, will, you know, remind me, “Vitamins”, and I'm like, “Oh, yeah, you're right.” And although they don't know how many pills or capsules or tablets from each bottle, like, they know which bottles to put out, you know, and it's a lot. I mean, I've lost track, you know. But, but they're used to it, they'll be, they've never given me problems, like, I always call them in our talks a trooper, because I hate taking medicine and vitamins. I don't like the taste of liquid, I don't like the, the, pills 'cause they, I feel like they're gonna get stuck in my throat—like, one little thing, I'm drinking a whole bottle of water, but, so I call them troopers 'cause they don't give me problems, you know, whatsoever.</p>

	<p>The only thing I had problems with them was with eye drops. But I was telling Yolie just this morning that just the past year, I think they've realized that it helps them during allergy season, that now they ask for it, and, like, they don't give me problems. I'm like, you know, they're better than me; I still hate eye drops, like my eyes are like so, you know, stinky right now but it's like I won't do it. [laughs]</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>And the boys are, the boys are amazing because like Mildred said you know they have very good appetites, like they eat all different types of food.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>That's one thing, I don't have problems with food and appetite with my boys.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah yeah. And you know, they've been able to take their supplements, you know, since they were very little. With Marcos it was totally opposite; Marcos would only eat like five things, and I would tell the kids, you know, Marcos only eats baloney, it has to be Oscar Meyer, that's his Lunchable. He can only have chicken nuggets, he'll have McDonald's french fries, he'll have, oh, it has to be Papa John's pizza. You know very rigid in what he eats, he doesn't eat ice cream and cakes but he doesn't eat vegetable, he then, you know, apples or orange, any of that. So he's—.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>But he's gotten better.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>He's gotten better, yeah, but I think it's 'cause of the medication, yeah. So, it was a struggle to get him to take pills; he wouldn't take pills, he wouldn't take liquid, nothing, nothing. And, um, Marcos has really, really bad allergies, and I think he was, was he in ninth grade, tenth grade? It was very, very bad, you know, he was putting water, you know like rags with water on his eyes, and he did it so much that it became raw around the eyes. And the next year I tried to, I said, "Look Marcos, this is an allergy pill." And it was little, and so he started taking the pill. I'm like, I thought he would never take a pill.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Did he swallow it? I'm sorry.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>He did. Because they were little, right? So he started taking, that's how he started taking pills, because of his allergy, but again—.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>But that's so good that he, without, after not taking it for a long time just took it and swallowed it. Because my boys still don't know how to swallow, like I have to crush things and put it in applesauce. I have to open up the capsules, I have to split open the, you know, softgel and squeeze it, you know, yeah, they still don't know how to.</p>

Yolie Carrasco:	For years, up to a couple of years ago, “Marcos, Mijo, this'll make you feel better, take this, it'll make you feel better.” [Marcos said] “No, Ma, I don't want it, I don't want it.” But then finally you know, he was just so desperate for relief, you know. Eye drops too, I mean they're not, they're not, it's not easy, but he'll do it 'cause he knows, My God, my eyes are killing me.
LS:	Right.
Mildred Rivera:	He finally realized.
Yolie Carrasco:	Right now, right now everybody's allergies are really, really bad, so you can imagine, you know, somebody like our, our kids who have really bad allergies. So. it dawned on him, I, I guess, that he said, Okay I'll do it 'cause I'm so desperate, you know?
Mildred Rivera:	And then like Yolie said like with my boys, the eating has never been a problem. You know that's one thing I've never had problems with. And I mean my mother- in-law kids around because's like, you know, she tells my husband, she's like, “The boys are better than you.” You know, they're eating vegetables.
Yolie Carrasco:	Totally.
Mildred Rivera:	But, I mean, we've always, like, Christian's favorite is Indian food, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	But all around food, it's not just, like with Marcos it's not just the chicken nuggets, right? It's all around food, like, and she'll tell me, “Oh, they had this and this and that.” I say, “That's amazing!” 'Cause it's amazing, she never, they never had an issue with the food situation, right? You know, it's—go ahead.
Mildred Rivera:	Well I mean, for example my mom made this eggplant dish, and so they loved it. But my mother-in-law made an eggplant dish, like something different, and they were like, ugh, you know. But like for me, I always, always, from the, from the beginning, like would force them to try it, like one, one spoonful, if you don't like it, you don't have to eat it.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	And then, most times than not they would like it and ask for more and I'm like, “See, I told you!”
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Marcos—.
Mildred Rivera:	And then, although if they didn't want it, then it's, “Okay, you don't have to eat it. But at least you tried it.”

Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, with Marcos, Marcos wasn't a tryer. Like it was so funny, my sister, she asked me once when we visited, "Does he eat peanut butter?" And I told her, "No, he doesn't." This is so funny. So my sister got a spoon and she goes, "Here, Marcos, have peanut butter." And he tried it. [Mildred laughs] We were both shocked! And she says, "There you go!" She looked at me, you know, and I'm like, "Oh, come and live with me!" Right, 'cause she's in El Paso, right? So I'm like, oh my god, 'cause he wouldn't try. Like, "Mijo try it, you might like it." No, he didn't wanna try it. Just looked at it. No, thanks. You know, like, No, thank you. You know, like—.
Mildred Rivera:	Just a different person offering.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, totally like, "Here you go." "Okay!" You know. But I remember he, he wouldn't eat pizza. I think he started eating pizza maybe in kindergarten? Because the other kids were eating pizza, so then he started trying? But he tried it again you know and that, that's one of the amazing things that, uh Christian and Brandon do is they try, you know, they try it. If they don't like it they won't eat it but at least they try, you know? I'm like, "How're you gonna know if you don't try?" I tell Marcos, you know.
Mildred Rivera:	I mean Easter, there was a, somebody made a sweet potato pie and I was like, "Try it, here, Brandon." He was like, "No, thank you." I was like, "No, try it." I was like, "You know our rule." And then he, he was making faces, like, "Okay, spit it out."
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	You don't like it, no, so—.
Yolie Carrasco:	It's orange mush, what is that? [laughs]
<b>Parenting Autistic Kids</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	<p>"Okay, good job, good job, for trying it, but you don't like it, okay, more for me." [laughs]</p> <p>But, there's, again that's, that's the only thing I don't have problems with, but like, everything else. I remember when we finally, finally officially diagnosed the boys when they were two, we went to a developmental pediatrician, and you know, I still didn't know what I should have known about autism, you know, I was still researching it, still kind of like, surreal, you know. And I remember asking her, I said, "Okay, this is what I saw about autism, this is, they're doing some things now, does that mean, yeah, does that mean as they get older they're gonna do everything?" You know like, I was like,</p>

	<p>“Okay, are they gonna do these at some point?” Or, you know, like, I didn't understand that okay at some point are they gonna do some of this or not necessarily, or, like, I wanted, you know.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>And she couldn't tell me for sure, she was like, “They might.” I'm like—.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>You know. It was so—[pause]—it was so confusing.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>It's 'cause you know you, you think if you prepare. 'Cause you know, our kids, one of the things that, you know, kids like is they, they, they want everything the same. They like knowing what they're gonna do. It's, it's that moment where something goes different that might discombobulate them, you know? And it could be something simple, it could be something you don't know. What the heck happened, like what happened, like we always have to ask what happened before, the middle, and the end, what happened?</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>And sometimes you can guess, and other times it's like, What in the world?</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Right. You know, and it, it's trying to prepare. You know but we can't prepare, you know? It is like I tell Marcos, you know, I say “Mijo, you can't always know.”</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Know what's gonna happen.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>“These things happen.” [Marcos says] “Well, so-and-so didn't come to work.” And I always, 'cause Marcos has an assistant at the house, and a behavioral person, so I ask, “Can you please tell me if you're not coming?” 'Cause, you know, that'll change Marcos' plan of what he's gonna do, right? So, sometimes okay, he's fine but then sometimes he gets upset, right? And you know, with our kids they do have behavioral issues, they do have meltdowns, just like the other kids, right? So, if something doesn't go right, if something doesn't go like he plans it in his mind, you know.</p> <p>Something so funny, like he likes cook books, and he likes cupcake books and cake books and he loves how pretty they look, right? So we'll try to do something and I said “Okay, just so you know right now, it's not gonna look like that.” I say, “We're here at home, this is a professional photographer that styled it this way. This is what magazines and books are doing.” I said, “This is not home grown, you and I, you know, trying to do it.” So sometimes he'll get upset,</p>

	<p>[and say] “Well, how come it doesn't look like that?” I say, again, “I'm trying to explain it to you; it's just you and I doing it, it's not a professional.”</p> <p>You know. It's that kind of stuff that's kind of hard to help him through it, you know, 'cause again he has an idea in his head. You know we're doing something he goes, “But I wanted it to be this way.” And I'm like, “Mijo, it's not that way. This is the way it is, this is how we have to do it. This is real life.” And I, I tell him, “This is real life, this is how you're supposed to do it.” I said, “This is how it is in the real world. This is how it is out there, this is how it is for people, you know, you can't, again you know you can't have, try to be friends with a little kid, 'cause you're a nineteen year old man.”</p> <p>And it's not their intention, it's how people think their intention is. Like how a lot of times Marcos is very confused, 'cause a lot of times he doesn't know what he did wrong. He doesn't understand, this is how it is, and it's not your intent but this is how it's perceived, and it's a grown-up's idea of what a child is thinking, you know? He's had a lot of issues in school, a lot of behavioral stuff, a lot of stuff that, you know, he was, um, a lot of miscommunication, a lot of people not understanding the disability. It really goes down to that, you know. But I don't understand, you know, I explained it to him, and he said yes, so I thought he understood.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	They think it's so simple.
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Right! They think like, Oh, yeah, he nodded his head and he said yes, that he understood. You know, Marcos when you ask him something he'll be quiet and I say, “Mijo, did you understand?” and he goes, “Yeah”, like, he has like a—he's thinking about it, and then he'll respond to you, right? So, people think because again he seems typical, that he understands what you're saying. Or he understands expectations, because again, going to kindergarten he doesn't have three eyes and five arms, do you know? It, it—and we've said it and Mildred has said it, you know, people with a disability that you can see are, are granted more empathy. And more understanding of having a disability.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	We've seen it.
<b>Being Judged as Parents</b>	
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>We've seen it, you know? And of course, it's not the same, our kids can walk, our kids can talk, of course it's not the same as a person in a wheelchair. But again, if they perceive a child who seems typical,</p>

	you know we, we have gotten looks. We have gotten, um, people—.
Mildred Rivera:	Comments.
Yolie Carrasco:	Comments, you know, people they believe that they know how to parent our children. The thing is they don't understand our child, so they can't really give us their two cents, you know, and we've had strangers. People on the street, people in the park, people at Walt Disney World, you know, people at church, you know, judging these children. And that's why again it goes back to awareness. If you can't have people understand or be aware of what is this disability, what is autism, what, what do you mean, like how do they act, why do they act that way, why do they, you know, why do they stim, why do they, why is he talking back, why is he robotic, why is he this, why is he that? If they don't understand that, then they can never accept a child with a disability, you know?
Mildred Rivera:	And I know we talk about this all the time, but Yolie doesn't really like conflict, you know so when she gets judgements or stares she doesn't particularly say anything. Whereas I do.
Yolie Carrasco:	I don't like to get into an argument with a stranger with my kids.
Mildred Rivera:	But it doesn't have to be an argument.
Yolie Carrasco:	No, no, it's not but when I try to engage, and try to educate people, you know, there is the push-back about it, and I'm like you know what? You have your opinion, I have my reality. And I think that—I'm not sure what it is, I think, I think any parent gets other people they judge them. We can only speak for ourselves that we have a kid with special needs. But it, it's like I'm not sure. Again, it goes back to ignorance, right? You know, where that person has lived, what kind of life that person has had. You know, their life must be extremely perfect, and no problems, no issues, no conflicts of anything that they think that they can push upon their lifestyle or their, their judgement of us; they don't know us, they don't know what we've done. They don't know, um—you know we love our children unconditionally, and—.
Mildred Rivera:	And it's not all.
Yolie Carrasco:	No, no, it's a couple, it's not a lot, no, there's a lot of people who try to understand. You know, you know we try to say, well, our kids have autism. Oh, I'm so sorry. No, there's nothing to be sorry about, it's not, it's not—.
Mildred Rivera:	And I actually used to say, if, if for example, you know, we're in the

	<p>line at Starbucks, you know. I usually have one of my sons with me, um, after I drop Brandon off here, we have time before I drop him off at school so I go to Starbucks, and, so usually he doesn't like to wait in line, you know he's very impatient, so sometimes he's kind of, not aggressively but kind of like pushing the next person in line, okay, hurry up, you know.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Ready to go, ready [word unclear] in line.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>And I find myself purposely speaking louder to him than I would normally, so people can hear. You know, I'm like, "Christian, remember we have to wait in line, we have to wait our turn, you know be patient." And then some people, some people, you know, will turn back and kind of give us a dirty look, and I'll say, "Sorry that he pushed you." You know. I used to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, he has autism", and then I thought, um, you know, Why, why am I saying that? So now, now I'm like, "Sorry he pushed you; he's just impatient." And then you have other, others where, you know they hear me, and then I remember one gentleman was like, "I don't like waiting in line either, buddy", he goes like, "Here, you guys go in front of me." And I was like, "No, no, it's okay. He was like, "No, it's okay; go ahead." So it's not, you know, it's not all, but—</p> <p>And Yolie had mentioned church, where I remember we went one day and a child who had a broken leg, so temporary, you know, but in a wheelchair, and everybody was like, going out of their way, Oh, here, sit here, you know, sit here, you know. And I remember my kids were having a great day in church. They were just being loud, but you know, they weren't upset, they were just excited, and we were trying to shush them and everything and we were getting the you know, continuous look back. And then at one point I remember ordering a sticker that the boys wore at church that said, "Please be understanding, I'm not misbehaving, I have autism." But then I'm like okay, it's so small, they're gonna have to be close to them to actually see it. So then we would just, you know, if people continued to look back I would get up out of my chair and say, [whispers] "They have autism." And they would say okay, you know, and then, that was that. And then luckily, we've been going to the church for over twenty years. My husband and I got married there, they got, my boys got baptized there. So, and we sit in a particular area in the church. We don't sit like in the main church, we sit like on the chapel on the side, kind of like an easy in and out, in case.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah. Exactly.</p>



**Meltdowns and Associated Challenges**

Mildred Rivera:

And so the same people are always sitting there, so now they kind of know, they've seen our boys grow up, you know. So, like, the people who know our family, who know the boys, like if somebody else is staring that, you know, is kind of far away from us, I've heard people, I've seen people like, go up to them and say, oh they have autism. You know like other people will say it, you know, so thanks, you know. And Palm Sunday I remember they're like, doing the, you know, blessing in palms in one area, okay, you know, boys are kinda, a little whiney this morning, let's just wait to get it later, and another family like brought us some, you know, and so it's not all people, you know, but I mean we've had the bad experiences too.

I remember a couple years ago at Disney we had, where, you know, Christian and was, just having a meltdown and crouching, not wanting to walk, my husband and I were on either side of him, like physically, and still trying to get Brandon not lost in the crowd like, you know, "Hold my belt buckle", you know. And I remember a guy was like, you know, "Just let him drop. Drop to the floor and let him get hurt, he'll get up." He was like, "That's what I did to my son." And we're like, "Does your son have autism?" "Oh, ah, ah, uhh—." They don't know what to say, you know. And come to find out later, you know, when we got back to the resort, he had a blister on his foot. But he can't tell us that. You know, that's why he didn't want to walk, that's why, you know, so I'm like, ah, you know.

So, it's very frustrating because sometimes they can't tell us, you know, what's wrong. You know, what they need, or that they're not feeling—we say this in our talks, like put yourself in their shoes. What if you were in class and not feeling well, but you couldn't say you weren't feeling well? You couldn't say, you wanted to go to the nurse. You couldn't say, you know, you had a tummy-ache. You couldn't say you had a headache. You know, like, put yourself in their shoes, wouldn't you get frustrated? They're like, Yeah. You know, it's like, yeah.

And, was it last year? During our talks, during one assembly, Brandon was the volunteer for one of the therapy dogs. And he did, you know, he did wonderful, he did great, he loved the dog. And then he wanted to come back to another assembly because one of the teacher's sons who plays guitar he loves him. He calls him the guitar man. He was gonna come in, so I asked his teacher can he come back so he can hear him play the guitar, and so she allowed him to, and he

	<p>loved you know hearing the guitar, and then, it was another therapy dog portion and they wanted a volunteer, and he like started to go up. I'm like, "No, no, Brandon," I was like, "let somebody else do it." And that's my guess anyway. You know he sat back down, and then another child came up to volunteer, and I could hear his vocalizations. I could tell, he's verbal. Not conversational, but verbal. But I could hear like his sounds were, it's like whiney, like getting ready to—I'm like, uh-oh, here it comes, and sure enough, you know, had a meltdown, he was on the first row. Flailing on the floor, you know, taking off his shoes, you know. And then, I remember I had to help his para-professional you know, get him out. And then later on I realized because he volunteered before I betcha he thought he was gonna do it again.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>Like some, sometimes we can kinda guess, you know, and other times it's like, you know, what in the world? But, and I remember everybody got kinda quiet. The people in the back row, they were kinda like, you know, standing up, like, looking and listening. And I thought, okay, you know, during Q and A—it got me upset. During Q and A, you know, right at the end, before the bell was gonna ring, I was like, "You know what, if you don't mind, can I tell you what that was?" I was like, "That was a meltdown that we just spoke about before." I was like "I think this is what happened." You know, "I'm not positive, I think this is what happened. You saw what happens; what he does, how he sounds like when he has a meltdown." You know, and I tell them, as hard as it is for us, as parents, and then you know for the teachers and parents when this happens, it's ten times harder for them.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Exactly.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>Because he can't say why he was upset. And I thought- The bell rang, in between my explanation, and I thought, oh, great, you know, people are gonna get up, they're gonna go, you know, they're not gonna hear anything, It was, I was so pleasantly surprised.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>They were quiet.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>Everybody was quiet. Teachers, students were quiet, they sat still, like, they listened. I was like, Oh my god. I, I was so—it, it really got to me because they, like, sat and listened. It wasn't like okay, the bell rang, let's go. You know, whatever. I thought that was really, you know, I thought that was really great. I mean, like I said we do have a really good group of kids, you know.</p>

Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
<b>What People Should Know About Autism</b>	
Mildred Rivera:	I just wish we could speak to more adults, teachers? The way it works now with our assemblies it's either the PE Teachers or the Elective teachers that come. So those are the only group of people we can talk to. But like, you know I really wish we could speak to the adults, because again, most of my issues come from adults, not kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Yeah.
LS:	Well, if that, that's a great, kind of probably, question to wrap it up is, if you could speak, speaking to adults, anybody that your children have interacted with, just things you want, wish they knew, what would you say, if you had a roomful of adults from all different walks of life and backgrounds?
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>I mean, I think it's what we tell the kids, you know—[pause]. We would just want, like I, I say, almost at the end of our talks, you know, “We're standing here not asking for pity or sympathy, we're asking for a little bit of empathy. A little bit of understanding of the lives of our kids with disabilities.” You know, we, again we try to say, you know, our kids are more the same than different from typical kids, you know.</p> <p>You can't judge, and it goes back to you can't judge a book by its cover. Like, people perceive Marcos as, well, he understands, he gets it. There's a lot of stuff that he doesn't understand and he doesn't comprehend. And we're hoping that the kids we do reach and we do touch, that they grow up to be really good individuals, and caring and kind and compassionate to everyone, you know. 'Cause again, you know, our kids, we believe were born with autism. They didn't, they didn't say, Hey, can you give me autism? It's, autism isn't a tragedy, you know, ignorance is the tragedy. You know, I think, like Marcos, you know he, he is who he is; he will always have autism and, and you know, I love him the way he is.</p> <p>And I think people need to understand that our kids are living and breathing human beings. They have, they have good things about them and they have difficulties about them and, they're not something that should be afraid, afraid of our kids with disabilities, you know. You can be friends with them, that's what we asked for when they were in elementary school. You know, be kind to them, be understanding of them. And we were talking to little kids, you</p>

	<p>know, but it, everything that I'm just saying, it's ditto for the adults. You know, 'cause adults have already this misconception of kids with autism? 'Cause again it's not a physical disability, you know, they see them and they act a certain way, and—.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Well, we've been allowed, after our talks and assemblies, to speak, you know, with the PTA or the principal's coffee about what we do. And then, you know, we used to send out handouts, or do newsletters, and so parents are reading the newsletters from the school they see what we've done. They see the guest speakers and you know what they talked about. But, you know, we tell the parents, and the adults, the staff who are there with them that, you know, we just want the same thing that others want for their kids, you know, just for them to, you know, grow up as independently as they can.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>You know, be, be caring, you know, individuals, you know. It is life-changing. You know, but it's not, you know—.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>It's not a tragedy.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Yeah. It is life-changing for them as well as for the whole entire family.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>But you know what, don't get the idea that autism isn't for the weak. You know what I mean? Like, you know. All of my friend moms, our gang of moms, you know they're amazing, amazing strong women. And, again we have other friends who have different, their children have different disabilities, you know. It's not a picnic, you know, but it's not a tragedy, you know. And again it's, it's a disability, it's a disorder, it's not a disease, you know, you can't catch it, you know, if you're friends with—.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Which we do say.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>Totally. Totally.</p>
Mildred Rivera:	<p>Which we do say to the kids, because, um, and then you know, kids have asked us after our talks, you know, So, why do people bully kids, bully, you know, kids with disabilities? And we're like, That's the question, why? You know. And so they, I think they get it, you know, I truly think they get it. They know that, they know that, again, like Yolie said, it wasn't their choice, so, you know, why would you bully somebody because of something they have no control over? You know.</p>
Yolie Carrasco:	<p>'Cause with Marcos it happened. Mildred she, she talks about, you</p>

	<p>know, she's been very lucky; the boys have never been bullied. And Marcos was bullied. So, I, in October we talk about, you know, Bullying Prevention Month, and I say, you know, this is what happened to Marcos, and I even broke down in one of our disabilities 'cause I was talking about a cafeteria incident, and I said, you know, these things matter. You know, they matter to them and they matter to us.</p> <p>So, I think, you know, it's that connection, that piece of like, this is a mom. She's talking about her son, who's similar to me, different, yes, but similar, you know. I, I think I have a little bit of understanding, I think is what they say. By the, the questions, you know that they ask us, you know if they see us in the hallway they'll talk to us. Oh, I saw, how's Marcos doing? You know a kid who, who, we've been talking for eight years, so a lot of the kids that are here at John Adams, from John Adams, they, they know our kids.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>They've heard it for eight years.</p>
<p>Yolie Carrasco:</p>	<p>Yeah, they've heard it for eight years, you know. How is Marcos doing? I say, "Well he's nineteen, and he's this and that." Oh, that's great, you know, and teachers and assistants at John Adams, you know, they'll come up to me. How's Marcos doing? And I show them a picture. You know, Christian and Brandon, how are they doing? Oh, my god, they're fourteen. Oh, my god they're fourteen! You know. So it's—we're hoping it matters. We're hoping what we're doing matters.</p>
<p>Mildred Rivera:</p>	<p>My sons, my family have been blessed to have wonderful, wonderful teachers, and, you know, teams. I remember when Brandon was graduating. Christian left public school in third grade, started going to a private school in fourth grade. But Brandon, when he graduated, the week before he graduated fifth grade, his para-professionals and teachers were crying before I was, because they'd watched him grow up since he was two, you know, but like you said, you know, when we still volunteer there, you know, they'll ask how they are and I'll show them pictures. They're like, oh, my god, you know, they're taller than me and, even, even here, Christian's never been at Hammond, you know, and the days when we're running late and I have to, you know, take them inside with me, you know, kids will be like, oh my gosh, is that Brandon's brother? Like, oh, hi, Christian! You know, and, I mean, the kids are really—you know there's, there's always a few, you know. Like adults, you know there's always a few. But they've been really great, like they remember our stories, that we've told years ago.</p>

Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	It's, it's fun, it's like oh my gosh, they're actually listening, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah.
Mildred Rivera:	But, yeah, it's—it's a challenge, you know like for us, you know, like I said it's life-changing, you know not just for them, but for the whole family. You know we always have like a plan B, you know, whenever we go out.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. Mm-hm.
Mildred Rivera:	My boys are—my boys are both sound sensitive, but Christian in particular, crowd and noise sensitive, so, you know, we'll make it a point to go out to the mall, or different places when it opens. So that way, you know, halfway around the mall, stop at the food court, eat, do the other half, and by then it's getting crowded but it's time to leave, so it's like, you know. But we always have a plan B, you know, we, we go out to eat thinking, Okay, something might happen, we might have to leave, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	If, if something happens.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah. That's what we do, yeah.
Yolie Carrasco:	We have—and you know, that's what we—.
Mildred Rivera:	And it's hard.
Yolie Carrasco:	Um-hm?
Mildred Rivera:	You know, Marcos has two typical siblings. You know, but my boys have each other, but it's still kind of the same as in where, you know, Christian's having a meltdown. Sorry Brandon, we have to go even though you're fine. So it's hard on the kids, the siblings, you know.
Yolie Carrasco:	And I've been very lucky, my daughter started talking about her brother having, and there's that perspective too, that Marcos has a brother and a sister, and the sister's talking about that relationship, and this is how he—I mean, she even stood up last year, oh, lord. She, she got a little bit upset, and she said—.
Mildred Rivera:	At the kids.
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah. I think it was the eighth graders, and she said, you know, we had, we had finished and we said, Okay, we're gonna take questions and she goes, she was sitting on, on the—.
Mildred Rivera:	Stage.

Yolie Carrasco:	On the stage, and she goes, “I have one thing to say.” And I’m like, Oh, lord! So I try not to talk to her about what she’s gonna say, ‘cause I think it should be just—we speak organically. We don’t look and look and write down; we do it organically ‘cause that’s how we work, right? So, I wanted her to just, whatever she’s gonna say, she’s gonna say it, so she did it, she stood there and she said, “A lot of you are looking on your phones, and you’re not paying attention, and it’s important to, I know that you’re not gonna be friends with someone with a disability, but some of you, this is important, and these people matter.” Oh, lord, you know, all the moms were like—I was shocked, I didn’t know she was gonna do any of that. You know, and I didn’t want her to get in trouble, ‘cause Mr. [name unclear] was there, you know, so I’m like, “Okay, that’s good, good job.” But yeah, she let them have it, and we have two other girls that are probably gonna speak next year about their brothers with disabilities, and they’re very passionate and protective of their brother.
Mildred Rivera:	And these are younger, these are younger siblings that are very protective.
Yolie Carrasco:	Oh, yeah, totally, ‘cause again, you know, the kids are older and the girls are younger. So yeah, so we, we just want people to have some understanding, and some empathy, you know, for kids with disabilities. No judgement, you know? Try not to judge. You don’t know, you don’t understand, you know.
Mildred Rivera:	The kids or the parents. [laughs]
Yolie Carrasco:	Yeah, both. Both.
Mildred Rivera:	Yeah.
LS:	Well, thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate—.
Yolie Carrasco:	Sorry we talked so much.
LS:	No, this has been—.
Mildred Rivera:	This is the way we are. This means you made us feel so comfortable.
LS:	—So great! I really appreciate it. (general laughter)
Yolie Carrasco:	Wouldn’t stop yapping!
[end of interview]	