

Interview with Charlotte Lerchenmuller

Transcript

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Jasmin: [00:00:01] My name is Jasmin Temblador. I'm the interviewer and I'm here with Charlotte Lerchenmuller who is a narrator. Today we're meeting at Charlotte's home in Silver Lake, and the date is Saturday, March twenty third, two thousand nineteen. Just a brief scope of the interview, so I'll be asking you about your experience in relation to the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference and talking about topics of leadership, culture, and traditions, and the legacy in the conference. And the interviews being conducted as part of the Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability from Goucher college for this capstone project. So, Jasmin, myself the interviewer, and Charlotte have known each other for about four and a half years through the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. So, now I'm just going to ask you Charlotte to the recording, to state for the recording that you are aware of and consent to being recorded.

Charlotte: [00:01:05] I am aware of, and I do consent to the recording of this interview.

Jasmin: [00:01:11] Great. So, first I just want to thank you for meeting today. And I really appreciate your time, and I'm really excited to learn more about your story and your experience in relation to CYLC.

Charlotte: [00:01:25] Well, I'm, I'm honored to be able to continue the legacy of Sal Castro and the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference and the importance that it has played, it plays, and will continue to play.

Jasmin: [00:01:40] Great, so let's get into it.

Charlotte: [00:01:41] Go for it.

Jasmin: [00:01:42] So, let's start off with just a little bit more about you. So, if you can tell me more about where you grew up, your family, your experience.

Charlotte: [00:01:53] I'm born in Los Angeles. My parents were both born in Germany. My brother I had, had, a past tense one, older brother 11 years older. I grew up in what is now called Montecito heights, it's actually Lincoln Heights. I went to public school a Los Angeles Unified, La Tona Avenue, Luther Burbank Junior, and Franklin High School. I went to, I started at L.A. State. I continued at California State College at Los Angeles. I graduated from California State University at Los Angeles. I've got a B.A. in social science, history option, a minor in physical education so I could get a job. I wanted to be a teacher from the 5th grade on, and I started everything with the focus of being a teacher. I taught at El Sereno junior high. I taught girls P.E. because I could get a job. I couldn't get a job as a social science history teacher. I have been a counselor, grade level counselor for Los Angeles Unified, three different types of assistant principal and I retired as a middle school principal. I have a master's in Counselor Education, and I've got three different types of credential teaching, counseling, and administrative. And, I work for LAUSD (Los Angeles Unified School District) for 38 years. So, I've been on the public dole since the age of four and a half.

Jasmin: [00:03:47] Wow, that's an extensive experience you have there.

Charlotte: [00:03:51] Yeah, I guess so. I've been at, Jesus, I've taught on the Eastside, I've taught in South Central and I've worked on the west side. So, the only although I did work in the valley when I was working youth services. So, I guess I've covered almost all of east of Los Angeles Unified. Right now, I am retired but I work as a consultant for the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles which is the administrator's union.

Jasmin: [00:04:26] Amazing. So, what is your relationship to the Chicano Youth Leadership conference.

Charlotte: [00:04:32] I hung out with a man named Sal Castro. And it was through him that I became involved with the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. I was on the outs. I was, I was on the periphery. I was not as involved during Sal's lifetime as I am now that he is, well he's dead. I'm not going to say passed on, he's dead. And I would be the person, when he was still alive and it was still going strong, I would be the person that would, "I need such and such" so I would go get it and make sure he had whatever it was he needed to help put on the conference. I had no involvement whatsoever with the actual putting on of the conference, that was Sal, and that was the board, that was all of the volunteers. They did all the heavy lifting. I was the one that if you needed to have something run off, I ran it off. If we needed this, I went and got that. So, it wasn't until after Sal died that I really, really got involved. We started about probably, maybe nine months after he died. We started the process of developing the Sal Castro foundation and it was very, it was a very deliberate process. We had a facilitator who worked with Robin Avellar La Salle, Myrna Brutti and Paula Crisostomo. The four of us were the core, and a woman named Marty Maya was our facilitator who walked us through the steps. And we, it, and we have four areas, one is legacy. The major focus of the foundation is the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference, another aspect is fund raising and then the fourth aspect is communication. Each one of us, Robin, Paula, Myrna and myself were in charge of those, one of those four areas and we had a sub-committee made up and everything is very specific in the bylaws, in the focus, in the what we're going to do. And it was from there that we were then able to go and. Well I guess it was probably October, October. Well let's go let's go September, August of 2014 where we got funding. My belief is people were feeling a little guilty because Sal was dead and so was the conference. And it's a shame that his death is what spurred people to get back for the conference, and then we had the first conference in October of 2014. It had been dark from about Spring of 2009, and then we've, then I've become much more involved with it, and that's a long answer for a short question.

Jasmin: [00:08:11] And you're also the President of the Foundation.

Charlotte: [00:08:12] I'm also the, you know widow Castro gets to be the President. Paula is the Treasurer, Myrna is the Secretary, and Robin is the I guess we're going to say the Vice Chairperson of it so, it's all. We were in charge of four different things and now we're the, and the Board of, Directors consists of the four of us, Armando Duron and then Sal's two sons Gil Castro, Jim Castro.

Jasmin: [00:08:51] Wow, so what was the experience like starting the conference back up in 2014.

Charlotte: [00:08:56] Well, the, we were very fortunate in the fact that there were people who had still, who were around who knew what to do and we didn't change one form, one bit. The format, this has had been successful for when Sal was running it, so we stayed with the same format. The, the faces may change a little bit but what is done on each day of the conference continued. And... the decision from the board of directors was that keep it the way it is and will con- if it needs to be tweaked, we'll tweak it. But, and the first conference in October of 2014 was a little squeaky and a little bumpy because there was a tremendous amount of grief associated with that conference. Hey this was the first one that was being done without him (Sal). And WHOA, a that was a little tough, a lot tough for folks. And it was bumpy, but the strength of what we were doing and the strength and the belief in what we were doing got us through it. And we came out on the other end much better and, start you know. Well we're not going to, with some of the bumps well we're not going, we're going to smooth this out, we're going to smooth that out and it's now a very well-oiled machine.

Jasmin: [00:10:39] I think you all did a really great job.

Charlotte: [00:10:42] Well it's you know; it was one of these things that if it ain't broke don't fix it. And Sal had, Sal had really, really put it into good order. And so, I think that's a, I'm going to, I want to use the word complement. Yeah, I'll use the word complement, to his belief in keeping it and doing it the way he felt it should be done. And so were, were. Plus, I don't want to listen to him if we change anything and come back and haunt.

Jasmin: [00:11:24] So, you talked a little bit about there is a structure there's a format to the conference. Can you tell me a little bit more about what that looks like?

Charlotte: [00:11:30] Well, Friday is you know, icebreaker, kids don't want to be there, "what the heck did I get into?" So, it's, it's sort of easing them into. And, so Friday is just sort of more general about what. And there's a little cultural, there's a little historical, but it's easing into the, the conference itself. Saturday is devoted specifically, the whole, the, the theme of the conference is, don't be, you know "*No sean mensos, go to college and graduate.*" So, the focus is truly, truly, truly college. We've got five strands. We've got a cultural strand, we've got a historical strand, we've got a networking strand, we've got a coll-, a college strand. And for the life of me, I cannot remember the fifth strand, it will come to me. But, and each thing, everything we do falls under one of those strands. And, so the, but the real, real push is to go to school and to graduate and the other thing is, by the time you hit a kid in the in the 12th grade it's too late. The 11th grade is, in the Principal's Exchange Report says it's, the right time, with the right push, with the right emphasis, with the right presentations to hook kids into. So, 11th grade is, they're smelling graduation. They're not there yet in, and this gets, this plants the seed so that college and doing what you need to do, and it's not too late to change if you need to change what you're doing in school and become more committed with a much better focus. So, that's, that's the format at, on Saturday and then there's always cultural there's always fun stuff. There's reflection and that's why the facilitators are so very important. That they are able to bring the kids into and hold on to discussions. And then, Sunday is sort of culmination and summing up of what went

on. And those kids that didn't want to you know (growling noise) are growling "why am I here," are crying, "I don't want to go." So, it's, we call it the Miracle of Malibu, and it truly is. And we're only doing it in two and a half days, not even a full two and a half days. We don't spend a week, some of these conferences go on for a week. We're, we're doing it in two and a half days. And it's in and out real fast, real concentrated and a barrage, a total barrage from all angles, all angles. And don't let kids be in the same groups that went to, that are at the same school, break them up so they can start that networking, so they can find out who else is around, and what they're going to be embarking on is not easy. Life ain't easy. It's a contact sport.

Jasmin: [00:15:23] Sounds like there's a lot of trust that happens in that short amount of time.

Charlotte: [00:15:27] I think so. I think so. And it's, it's see; well we refer to it as they're drinking the Kool-Aid. It happens each conference, it happens earlier and earlier and sooner. Sometimes, the first couple conferences it took them until Saturday to start drinking the Kool-Aid. But the last few conferences it's almost as if they've started drinking the Kool-Aid as they're walking into the conference because they're ready to go and they're, they're onboard, they're onboard. And, it's like you know, "show me more, show me more."

Jasmin: [00:16:17] So in thinking about traditions of the conference some things that have continued. What do you think are the traditions that have continued and are still being continued today in the conference?

Charlotte: [00:16:28] Well, the focus of going to school. That's proven with the Principal Exchange Report where 84 percent of the kids, and we're talking to 11th graders, that go to the conference, go to, and, more importantly, graduate from college, eighty four percent. That's a big deal. That is a real, real big deal. The cultural of being proud of who you are, and being taught who folks are, and names that they may not know, but by the time they leave, they know. The fact that they're, they're in a historic spot with California history and with United States history, so that. There's the historical concept, there are the, the, the music the, the, and I talk about, in that UCLA things. 1968 kids wouldn't be caught dead speaking Spanish. Now, it's back in for, it is a truly bilingual bi-cultural. Kids are comfortable and they are more comfortable in their skin when they leave. And OK, here's the fifth strand, community responsibility, that's the fifth strand. Yes, it's fun to go and be around people, but you have a responsibility to come back to your community to make your community a better spot, and there is a responsibility. It's just not, your, it's, there's no free lunch when you go to the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference.

Jasmin: [00:18:29] So, why has it been important to celebrate or have workshops around identity and culture?

Charlotte: [00:18:34] Because they don't get it in school. There used to be Chicano studies or Mexican-American studies in high school, Black Studies. And then they went, it went by the wayside. Now, it's called ethnic studies coming back. It will be very watered down. It will, I guarantee you it will be very watered down. United States history is not taught with all of the of the different strands the different streams that come into making it. My good God. You know fighting Naziism in Orange County, people thought that was over. Oh no it ain't, the racism that is so prevalent especially now. You, you can't like other people unle- until you like yourself and

when you like yourself then you can like and be open to other people. So that's, that's one of the important aspects of what we do. So, we're not we're not we're not we're not speaking to only you, but what we're saying is open up and be aware and be accepting of others as once you have accepted who you are.

Jasmin: [00:20:14] It seems to be something that is also shared early on. Do you think that that contributes to students today drinking the Kool-Aid sooner?

Charlotte: [00:20:25] You know, I think it's because they're thirsty and they're hungry, because they don't have it. And we're, we're fulfilling a need that the school district hasn't recognized and we're giving kids an avenue to be able to be proud of who they are and walk in to it with heads high and walk out of it with heads even held higher.

Jasmin: [00:21:05] That's wonderful.

Charlotte: [00:21:07] I think so too, it's when you listen at the end to what, when they're, when their nations are reflecting on what it had meant, what it meant to them, they'll say, "I didn't know this," and "I didn't know that. Now I do, and I'm very proud of who I am." And you know, "Viva a La Raza! Chicano power!" The hills in Camp Hess Kramer echo with it. The Jewish camp is contributing to Chicano power and Viva La Raza. So, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's a, it's a heartwarming mind-boggling experience to listen to the kids talk. And they leave out like I said they leave out of there, better about who they are and what they are and how they can become contributing members of society. And I going to, one other thing Rita Ledesma in her Sunday morning, as part of the reflection, talks about the seventh generation. That when you're doing something, yes, it's now, but you have to think in the Native American thinking pattern is that what you're doing now is im- but you're also doing something for the seventh generation. It's just not now it's further on down. And I would say we're probably in the fifth generation from when the conference started in 1963 and it's the granddaddy of all conferences. There are others around but this one, got is the original, and so probably in the fifth generation. So now we're, we're almost to the seventh generation.

Jasmin: [00:23:18] And more planning to go.

Charlotte: [00:23:19] Oh God yeah. Oh God yeah. And that's the cool part of it. The sustainability that there are people who still come, are still coming in, and it's not a hard sell. I don't have when I'm getting people to come for the. Here, here's a tweak that we did the career fair. We talk about on Saturday college, financial aid, filling out an application, where do you want to go? But more importantly is what do you want to be when you grow up? And so that was, that was a tweak that I added with the career fair. I don't have problems getting people to come. I don't have problems to get the people to speak there. They're in. The adults are in. And I think that's communicated to the kids when they're, when the adults are talking to the, that that the that the kids can see that these are people, and I'm talking about both speakers and career fair presenters. These are people that look most importantly, look like the kids who have got, and the kids can see that these people went through. And so, I've got some folks that are my, well, images that I can identify with and they can identify with me which is really a thumbs up really a thumbs up.

Jasmin: [00:24:59] So the, the career fair is an addition to the conference?

Charlotte: [00:25:02] Yeah. Yeah. That that's, that's. It's probably about three years old.

Jasmin: [00:25:07] Wow.

Charlotte: [00:25:07] Yeah. So yeah.

Jasmin: [00:25:09] So what was the thinking behind bringing the career fair into the conference?

Charlotte: [00:25:13] Well again its, we talk we tell you about college but now you need to know what you can do with mayb-. Maybe you never thought, you know doctor, lawyer, Indian chief, those are real common. But when you have somebody who is a screenwriter, when you have somebody who comes in and is a dentist, and looks like you, and a screenwriter that looks like you and he's got a last name similar to yours that opens up and gives you other avenues to think about. So that you could, piquing their interest and again their 11th graders things aren't in cement yet, things are in sand, fluid.

Jasmin: [00:26:09] So, everyone in the conference is a volunteer.

Charlotte: [00:26:12] Absolutely.

Jasmin: [00:26:13] So, it's been sustained on the backs of volunteers for over fifty years.

Charlotte: [00:26:16] Yes. Since the very beginning.

Jasmin: [00:26:19] Why hasn't been an important for it to be an all-volunteer based conference?

Charlotte: [00:26:24] Because if you're paying somebody, they're doing it for money. And there's a big difference between doing something for money and doing something because you're committed, and you believe in it. And besides there's no budget. But no that's the commitment, and the belief. I of, of doing it. And, and it's that's, that's what really, really makes it phenomenal.

Jasmin: [00:27:02] And I, I know that the students also know that everyone is there voluntarily.

Charlotte: [00:27:07] Because their, they want to be there. They're not there because you have to be there. They're there because they want to be there. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:27:15] Such an important thing to have volunteers who are committed and want to be there for the students and I'm sure everyone gains in some way shape or form.

Charlotte: [00:27:24] Well you know we get; we probably get more out of it than the kids do. Just for the fact that we can see, when we, we can see the light go on and we can see the spirit that and the fire in the belly that's lit. That is really, really, really satisfying and, keeps you going keeps, sustaining, keeps you going.

Jasmin: [00:27:55] So it seems that there are so many great things that have been happening since the conference started back up again in 2014. Have there been any. Has the conference ever faced any challenges over time that you know of?

Charlotte: [00:28:10] The challenges have always been, is there going to be a conference? And the, the monetary support, that's been, that's been the big challenge. You know, I've only been doing this now for four years five years and, sometimes it's very, very frustrating. Sal did this for 50 years plus. And butt your head up against the wall every so often, and the bel-. The, that's that is what, really, really, is indelible in my mind about his total commitment to this. And in it in adversity the stick to itness that he had, because he knew he was right. And he believed in it. And you just did it. And we've, we've run into some problems, but you know. We have no problem. We have no problem getting kids to go to the conference. We have an abundance. There were conferences when he (Sal) used to have to call, "Don't you have a Mexican that you can send?" You know, I'm sure my girl, my, I have a friend, a girlfriend who was a principal at Franklin, and she says, "I got a phone call from Sal Castro, and he says, and he said," "Oh Sheridan come on, in Highland Park you can't find me two Mexicans?".

Jasmin: [00:29:56] So interesting.

Charlotte: [00:29:56] And no, and but sometimes there were as, as few as 70 kids. We have no problem getting a. We have to sort of cut it off because we have hit a nerve. And that nerve says we're needed.

Jasmin: [00:30:15] Why do you think it was so difficult to get more students back then?

Charlotte: [00:30:18] Well at. At one time it was it wasn't cool. And, Sal is now an accepted person. We laugh when we did a thing on the walkouts. He was referred to as legendary teacher Sal Castro. Legendary teacher Sal Castro wasn't always viewed as legendary teacher Sal Castro. Rabble Roussel, troublemaker, Sal Castro was more of the view at, at one time and, so that might have been part of it. But you know, God knows, God knows stupidity has no explanation.

Jasmin: [00:31:12] Now you have so many students who are applying for the conference. There's about, what 100 students coming?

Charlotte: [00:31:18] We go, one hundred and 100 to 110 is an ideal number. One hundred and twenty were pushing it. It's just. And you wonder what's the difference of ten more kids? The difference is ten more kids. And so, but it's kids and the decision as who can go and who can't go, and the other thing is where we're drawing kids from all over the school district which is excellent. Whereas at the beginning it was sort of like just an East Side thing. So now it's a, it's total Los Ang-. We've got kids from the Valley, we've got kids from the harbor, we've got Eastside, we've got central city we've got Northeast. So yeah, we're, we're able to pull, west side also. So yeah.

Jasmin: [00:32:21] In our pre interview you mentioned that the conference is like a mom and pop.

Charlotte: [00:32:27] Yeah, mon and pop. Because we're, everybody's free. Other than the cost of camp Hess Kramer. Other than the cost of the. Now we've got flash drives. Other than the cost of buses, other than the cost of the people who are working beyond the bell or on Beyond the Bell salary when they're doing it. So, it. We don't have an office. We're doing things. In addition to what we're normally doing in life. So, it's not it's not, 'OK now I'm, I'm going to go to work for Chicano Youth Leadership Conference,' it's filling it in. And so that that's the mom and pop aspect of it. If we were corporate, meaning that there was a paid director that there was a paid staff. I don't know if it would change, but and then you would have to be beholden to whoever was paying. So, you would, you would lose control of what you do and how you do it. And when you do it. Makes sense?

Jasmin: [00:33:53] Definitely makes sense. Yes. It's provides more understanding on why Castro didn't want to go corporate.

Charlotte: [00:34:01] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:34:04] So I'm thinking now about Sal's vision for the conference. Has a conference, would you say it remain true to Sal's vision?

Charlotte: [00:34:12] Oh absolutely, absolutely. I think that when you looked at the various agendas, programs. The set. We're doing what got probably instituted in the late 90s and, it's got his fingerprints all over it.

Jasmin: [00:34:36] I noticed that at different times of the conference. Sal sat on different committees.

Charlotte: [00:34:44] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:34:45] As it, as he kept being involved.

Charlotte: [00:34:49] Yeah, he would. He started as a facilitator back in 1963 and he was always a part of it. Always a part of it. And it was important. It was very, very important to him. And yes, he's, yes, the walkouts were, important. I'm not going to, but CYLC was more important to him because of the Seventh-Generation aspect of, of the of the change within the kids who went there. Walkouts were important. There were tremendous changes and it took 50 years for some of those changes. But you've got it, you've got kids that are going to college. That change is much more immediate.

Jasmin: [00:35:51] So how would you describe the vision in your own words.

Charlotte: [00:35:56] My word. OK. Let's see. It's, well number one legacy of Sal Castro CYLC is his baby his legacy. But the awakening in kids of who they are and what they can become and carrying what they can become by maintaining and respecting who they are. Does that make sense?

Jasmin: [00:36:30] Yes, it's beautiful.

Charlotte: [00:36:37] And a little bit of Sal is in all of them.

Jasmin: [00:36:45] In all the students or all the conferences?

Charlotte: [00:36:46] No. In all the students, because what they come out with is because of what he did, and is, and was.

Jasmin: [00:36:58] I have definitely heard students share they, they feel like they've got to know Mr. Castro. They feel like they got to know more about the students in 1968.

Charlotte: [00:37:12] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:37:12] They feel a grander connection and gratitude for learning that.

Charlotte: [00:37:17] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Because, stuff that everybody takes for granted now didn't exist and it was through. Sal talks about the kids if 1968 that they were not doing it for themselves. They were doing it for future. And again, I'm going to cut tie it back to that seventh generation that there was a focus and a belief in the future and hey it didn't happen overnight. You know things that happen overnight usually don't last. The slow incremental change is the lasting change. Is this sustainable change.

Jasmin: [00:38:06] So why Camp Hess Kramer? What contributes to the power of this place?

Charlotte: [00:38:15] Well it's my understanding that, well the first conference happened on Palm Sunday. And, the joint was open and they, they were there and then it just continued. And I think I, it, it, the, the roots of the conference started in Camp Hess Kramer and continued. The one year that they didn't go there, and that was in the 90s sometime Paula will know more. But I do remember SOCA University and it's off of Malibu Canyon Road. It's to the left. It just wasn't the same. And Sal said Our spirit is at. So, we, you know the belief, and this is where we started and our roots are here, so that's why a Camp Hess Kramer and the importance of it. And so, and it's a mutual admiration society of the folks at Hess Kramer that we were dealing with, easy peasy, back and forth. They knew what we were doing and what had been done and it just continues it just continues. And that's also a good thing because, the folks up there, Patty who run ran the cafeteria. John Bard who ran the camp, Marie Brewer they all had worked with Sal and so it was just you know keep on stepping and just it wasn't anything that had to be reinvented. It just continued. So, there's, there's, there's something, something about tradition and ritual and it's rather traditional and rather ritualistic. And so, but it's, it's not all in cement, changes can happen. And an ebb and flow, I guess is the best way.

Jasmin: [00:40:31] It sounds like there's a really great relationship that's been built over time with the camp staff.

Charlotte: [00:40:36] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And, Sal, Sal was a real people person and a very, very personable and. But if things didn't go right you knew it. But he never, he never accepted half assedness. It always had to be the very best and top drawer. Class act.

Jasmin: [00:41:01] Do you think that translate it over to everyone who is working at the conference as well?

Charlotte: [00:41:06] Of course. But if he wasn't pleased, he didn't berate publicly it was behind the scenes. Never, never chewed anybody up publicly, if they needed to be chewed out. But were spoken to and. Changed.

Jasmin: [00:41:28] So how has your participation in the conference changed over time? I know in the in the early days you we talked about you creating power points for some of the presentations.

Charlotte: [00:41:40] Yeah, the well technology. Here, here, I'll show you how. This is one of the things, music was always very important and Sal's life and there are tapes, tape decks, and real to real stuff over the over time. And there was music always music, music of if it was nineteen ninety-four there would be nineteen ninety-four music along with traditional music. So that was one of the first things he would do. And it went from real-to-real, to cassette, to CD, and now everything is off of somebody's phone.

Jasmin: [00:42:25] Digital.

Charlotte: [00:42:27] Yeah, so that's one change. They used to drive around on. I mean the, the, the, the, the A.V. stuff. There's this huge old television in storage that I'm going to have to ask somebody to throw away in some dump. Just, just the those, those notebooks that they were bent over carrying, now everything's on a flash drive. Those are those are real obvious. The, the, the belief system, the why we're doing it, what we're doing, has been consistent all the way through. How we're doing it is how is what's changed. And that's through technology and that's through coming into the 21st century.

Jasmin: [00:43:24] It's much needed. Small changes.

Charlotte: [00:43:26] Yeah, yeah. And nobody gets pissed off over that. Nobody gets pissed off over that. Because it makes the delivery much. But there's also the something else it doesn't change is the, the touching, the human relationships, the and I'll use the relationship building. Those are aspects that have continued from the very, very beginning. There is one of the, there's a guy named Armando Duron, who is, he went there, he went to the conference in 1972. He went to Garfield High School, and he'll tell you, "this changed, was life changing for me". And he is a commissioner in the Superior Court. And of folks a, folks will tell you it was like a truly life changing, truly life changing.

Jasmin: [00:44:36] What would you say are the ingredients that are essential to longevity of the conference.

Charlotte: [00:44:46] A belief, knowing who you are, a commitment and use the word trust. Oh and no egos. No egos because egos can't. If somebody's ego gets involved, and relationships. That, I think is what keeps it going. And, people like each other. You can't cut, you can, you, you can't beat that with a stick.

Jasmin: [00:45:37] There seems to be a real sense of connection.

Charlotte: [00:45:40] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:45:41] Of everyone who's working. It's just synchronized.

Charlotte: [00:45:42] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And just in and out, in and out. It's, I can't do such and such, but you can. You can't do so and so, but I can. So, you do such and such, and I do so and so, and we get it done.

Jasmin: [00:46:00] And everyone's happy.

Charlotte: [00:46:03] Yeah, I think so. I think so. And everybody I believe feels comfortable to be able to express opinions and beliefs. And, like I said I don't think everything is in cement. Now, there are some things that are in cement that we're, we're we do this because, and if, if you don't have the belief and if you don't have the trust if you don't have the commitment, have a nice time, go someplace else. But they're, they're, wait we didn't think such and such. We didn't think this worked so well. How can we tweak it? Let's figure it out. And if it can't be tweaked then why are we bothering? And what we do, is proven its successful and it's proven.

Jasmin: [00:46:57] You see it on the student's faces.

Charlotte: [00:46:58] Oh goodness. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Jasmin: [00:47:02] Are there any memorable stories that you can share from your time with CYLC, or any favorite stories that you have?

Charlotte: [00:47:13] Well jeez, favorite stories. I, you know, I get, I guess, I guess the favorite thing is the fact that I'm. I wish I wasn't doing it. Let's just be very obvious. I wish I wasn't doing this. And the reason I am doing it is because Sal's dead. If I wouldn't be doing this. If he were still alive. So, I wish I didn't have to but I, and it's truly I have to because I owe it. It's my responsibility. And I would prefer if I weren't, but I'm doing it and I'm loving doing it. So that's the personal side of it. And, I, I enjoy being around people who are like minded and that's another thing that is so cool is that we're like minded. We're, we're, we're, if we're talking it's like we're talking to the choir. Preaching to the choir, and the choir doesn't need to be preached to because they're believers.

Jasmin: [00:48:45] So it sounds like every conference is a memorable fun conference.

Charlotte: [00:48:48] Every, every conference is, every conference. Like I said it's a well-oiled machine now. And you want to be there because you want to see something that works. And the

beauty of it. Now, we got to, we've got to figure out what we're going to do in fall and that's something that we will. We're looking we're working and will make it we'll make it happen. And we may not have it at Hess Kramer, but wherever we have it will be as good as we can get it, without being it Hess Kramer. And, we'll figure that one out. And it, it always seems to, it will it will happen because it has in the past and it will continue. But we can't take anything for granted.

Jasmin: [00:49:58] What was it like to be back at Camp Hess Kramer after the fire? What was it like to walk through?

Charlotte: [00:50:05] Very sad very, very sad. And the sadness was knowing that what we were doing couldn't be done. That's, that was the sadness. That was the sadness, but also knowing that we weren't dead. We just, we were on pause. We were on pause. We will start again. The pause button was pushed and not because of anything that was done purposefully it was pushed because of circumstance.

Jasmin: [00:50:49] But it shall continue.

Charlotte: [00:50:51] Yeah well absolutely. Phoenix from the ashes.

Jasmin: [00:50:56] So the students go through so many different workshops and a lot of relationship building with each other. And you mentioned you know its people start to get it sooner and sooner.

Charlotte: [00:51:08] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:51:10] When do you think from what you've seen is, is that moment that aha moment where the students get it?

Charlotte: [00:51:16] Probably when they see the movie walkout.

Jasmin: [00:51:18] What do you see in their faces?

Charlotte: [00:51:23] I don't watch the movie. I can't stand the movie.

Jasmin: [00:51:27] And why do you think it's after the movie?

Charlotte: [00:51:29] Because they can see kids who are like them who have done something. And that the realization that kid power is powerful.

Jasmin: [00:51:48] And their voices are important. That does make a lot of sense because for some of the students it might be the first time that they're hearing about this part of history.

Charlotte: [00:51:58] Oh, oh maybe is. I was talking to a woman who works as a field rep for Sheila Kewl the supervisor, and the woman's name is Benita Trujillo and she had seen something on PBS. And she said, "You know I never knew this happened" and this woman is 59 years old.

Jasmin: [00:52:33] Wow.

Charlotte: [00:52:33] And she says, "Now I want to know more." Okay. Guess what? Came to the right place. Came to the right place. Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:52:42] Will we be seeing her involved in the conference?

Charlotte: [00:52:44] You know you will. You know you will.

Jasmin: [00:52:48] So, what has the conference meant to you?

Charlotte: [00:52:54] Well I'm keeping Sal alive. His legacy alive and doing what he once wanted to be done. Doing what he wanted to be done and continuing what he wanted to be done.

Jasmin: [00:53:12] When you're observing the conference and attending some of the workshops or even presenting, because you present at the conference. What are you observing, what do you see happening?

Charlotte: [00:53:24] I've seen some, as you refer to it lights going on, kids being more comfortable about being who they are. Learning about who they're, who they are. And knowing that we're doing God's work.

Jasmin: [00:53:44] So what's the key. What above all else defines the conference? What makes it special?

Charlotte: [00:53:53] The spirit and the people. The spirit that is in the people that the common link is the belief in what we're doing is important but more importantly worthwhile.

Jasmin: [00:54:15] What would you say leadership is in your own words?

Charlotte: [00:54:21] Leadership is not being afraid to do something that may not be totally accepted but you know it's right and you do it. And also, leadership is knowing that something isn't working. And trying to fix it. Or this isn't what we want so we're not going to do it.

Jasmin: [00:54:59] It takes a lot of, a lot of.

Charlotte: [00:55:03] And not being afraid to continue to do what it is you're doing. Because sometimes it takes a while for whatever the idea is to take root and to spark.

Jasmin: [00:55:21] So why has leadership, it's the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. Why has leadership building been an important part of the conference?

Charlotte: [00:55:30] Because, there is a void of brown faces in decision making. And we need brown faces to be decision makers, and to be proud of being a brown face.

Jasmin: [00:55:52] There's a lot of inspiration and a lot of, well the students.

Charlotte: [00:55:57] Yeah.

Jasmin: [00:55:57] Become inspired. They're seeing brown faces at the conference.

Charlotte: [00:56:03] Exactly.

Jasmin: [00:56:03] They're seeing people in high positions sitting there at the career fair with them. So, they're, they're seeing that representation.

Charlotte: [00:56:13] They're able to see people that. Wait a minute, Rudy Monterosa, when he's there will say you know, "I'm able to, I was able to see people whose last names ended in a vowel." And, that they're to add, add to the number of brown faces and brown faces who believe in what of who they are and why they are and that they count.

Jasmin: [00:56:49] How do you feel when you start to see people return to the conference as volunteers?

Charlotte: [00:56:55] Oh that was the best thing in the world. That's the best thing in the. This past time we had Savannah Pierce, nurse Pierce's daughter. She was kicking and screaming when she came as an as a student as an 11th grader. Oh, and now she's back. Oh, my goodness. That is so. And to have the have the, we had three or four kids from four years ago come back. Oh my God. They drank the lemonade. They drank the Kool-Aid and now they want to pass it out, couldn't it. That's. That's the best. That is absolutely the best.

Jasmin: [00:57:44] I have noticed you add all the names on your presentation.

Charlotte: [00:57:46] Oh absolutely. So, they can see that your name can be here. Absolutely. Absolutely. Because that speaks that's volumes that that speaks volumes.

Jasmin: [00:57:59] And you know that those students went to college and graduated and came back.

Charlotte: [00:58:02] Oh absolutely. And here we are, "and I was a facilitator. I still may be in college but I'm going to college." OK. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jasmin: [00:58:14] So now thinking about today what's happening now. What are some of the issues that you've noticed, or that you've heard you know the students talk about that are impacting them today?

Charlotte: [00:58:27] Well, the fact that they're that the president of the United States considers them rapists and murderers and drug dealers and have no worth whatsoever. And it's being lapped up by all of these, white supremacists. And you don't have to be a white supremacist, it's being lapped up by as an easy out as to why I don't need to do something. After Rita did her presentation, in this the, the, oh God I guess it was the spring conference. No, the October, the October two thousand eighteen conference. Right after she was done, I went up to her and Robin

went up to her and said, "I'm afraid, I haven't been afraid in I don't know how long. And I'm afraid." And I'm the last person in the world who needs to be afraid, and I'm afraid. Because, now it's, it's a scary, scary world a very scary world. And these young folks, are probably innocent enough not to know to be afraid. But oh, my goodness. This is not, this is, these are not good times. These are not good times.

Jasmin: [01:00:15] It sounds like it's been a great opportunity, even during these times for the students who have come to the conference in the last couple of years.

Charlotte: [01:00:21] Yeah, oh again because they're, they're getting an inner strength of knowing who they are and being proud of who they're, who they are. So, they don't have to question themselves. They can utilize that strength to overcome. You're not going to overcome, but to help get through, that to get through.

Jasmin: [01:00:51] Especially in these times.

Charlotte: [01:00:52] Yeah. Yeah.

Jasmin: [01:00:54] They're able to network with other students.

Charlotte: [01:00:55] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There's strength in numbers. There's strength in numbers.

Jasmin: [01:01:03] What do you believe is the reason why an event that happened half a century ago still has a continuing resonance today?

Charlotte: [01:01:14] Because there's a void. And it fills a void and it helps, guide, and it helps motivate. And just because it's 50 years old doesn't mean that, well it's more than 50 years old. Sixty-three. What are we talking about? I can't do that math. So, it's close to 60 years. Let's just use that, it's more than 50. It it's a it's a continuity and it, it also it's a motivator, it's a motivator.

Jasmin: [01:02:10] Thinking about sustainability is really been coming up in our conversation a lot. When you think about the future, how do you see the legacy continuing through CYLC?

Charlotte: [01:02:25] People like you, because I ain't gonna be around.

Jasmin: [01:02:29] People continuing to stay involved.

Charlotte: [01:02:30] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Hear, the oh the buzzwords capacity building, ok? Sal, I remember, people were, he, he would get phone calls. Can you come and speak? Can you do this? Can you do that? And he would say, 'I think it's more important that you do it because I'm going to come and I'm going to leave you're gonna be there.' And, so that was his way. He wasn't shirking it. He was listening he was giving ideas but building capacity so that you know there was only one of him. But, and, and that's the other thing. One of him. And you know building other people to do, and to continue. So yeah capacity building and, that's what you guys are with

the facilitators and the staff. That, that's our lifeblood. Because I'm aint gonna be around. And it's gonna be. The need is going to be with those folks who have the same vision and belief system.

Jasmin: [01:03:57] And why is sustainability of CYLC important for the future generations?

Charlotte: [01:04:03] So that the mistakes of the past aren't made, and we're seeing many of those mistakes from what we've got in the White House right now. And they're not mistakes. These he's not he's, he's not doing it. These are not mistakes. These are carefully thought out and I sound like a conspiracy theorist. But no these are earmarked to breed discontent and to just turn something good like a democracy and a constitution into something bad. And CYLC needs to continue to counter act evil and that's its evil. I'm sorry. I sound, now I sound.

Jasmin: [01:05:00] So it's clear to me that the conference has been a source of empowerment, motivation, connecting people to their identity, culture, and also for educational opportunities. What is your view on that?

Charlotte: [01:05:18] Say that again I didn't hear that. What is my what?

Jasmin: [01:05:21] What is your view on that?

Charlotte: [01:05:24] The fact that, all right. I'm just gonna be real, real materialistic. Somebody who's got a college education makes more money than somebody who doesn't have a college education. Just like, a high school diploma is, is something that you want to have. But it's only a ticket to get into something else. And when you have the, a democracy is dependent upon an educated electorate. And if you keep people dumb and you keep people poor then you're never going to be anything. You'll, you'll be the downtrodden and you'll be the service industry. But if you've got a college education, you will be able to have more money to contribute to the betterment of yourself, of your family, and society. So, it's, it's Moni-, and you can't take knowledge away from people. That's something, once you've learned something it's yours. And you can't it just, it's something that keeps you ridge. I talked about Mother Nature with the green, knowledge keeps regenerating and keeps you alive and keeps you regenerating and keeps you contributing. You know, lifelong learners all that stuff. Yes, it's absolutely true. The more you know the more you want to know and the more you are able to contribute to it around you. And so that's why the education is so important but also the networking. Also, the community involvement also the cultural also the hister-, historical not hysterical, historical. All of that is what keeps and makes C.Y.L.C. so important. And so, there's a constant rebirth. There's a constant rebirth.

Jasmin: [01:07:48] It always comes back.

Charlotte: [01:07:49] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jasmin: [01:07:53] Well we've reached the end of our interview today and I just want to again thank you. Thank you so much for your time today. Before we click the record button off. I just want to ask for your permission to use the interview today to be able to write the reflection piece.

Charlotte: [01:08:20] Certainly.

Jasmin: [01:08:21] Thank you so much Charlotte. I'll go ahead and turn it off.