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COPS/Metro Alliance-StMU Oral Histories with Rose Araujo-Iracheta

Barbara Ortiz

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COPS/Metro Alliance-StMU Oral Histories

Narrator: Rose Araujo-Iracheta

Date: 03/26/2024

Location: San Antonio, Texas

Interviewer: Barbara Ortiz

Transcribed By: Barbara Ortiz

Narrator's Biographical Information:

Rose Araujo-Iracheta has called San Antonio home all her life. She worked for the city as a 911-operator, and was very active in educating and informing her fellow co-workers of their rights. She credits her mother with instilling the values of social justice in her that have led her to tackle the difficult issues that COPS/Metro continues to fight for San Antonio's underserved communities.

Summary of Interview:

Rose Araujo-Iracheta shared some of her experiences with COPS/Metro advocating for community needs, focusing on persistence, collaboration and resilience. She emphasized the role that social justice plays in her motivation to assist co-workers, neighbors, school districts and all communities of San Antonio.

Interview Key Terms:

COPS, COPS/Metro, social justice, Fr. Mike Degerolami, St. Philip's of Jesus, school district, wages, affordable housing, owner-occupied

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Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

Rose Araujo-Iracheta Interview Index

Time Stamp	Theme or Topic
1:22	Began COPS/Metro involvement
7:51	Committee for affordable housing and owner-occupies program
10:32	Chapter 313 and impact on school districts

Rose Araujo-Iracheta Interview

Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

Barbara Ortiz 0:05

So this is COPS Oral History Interview. I'm Barbara Ortiz, and I'm interviewing Rose on March 26 2024, at the National Archives of the Marianist Province of the United States, at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us tonight. And allowing us the opportunity to interview you. Just again, please state your name and your role within COPS/Metro.

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 0:30

My name is Rose Araujo-Iracheta and I am COPS/Metro leader and my parish is St. Philip's of Jesus.

Barbara Ortiz 0:37

Okay. Has that been your neighborhood for life?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 0:43

Yes for life.

Barbara Ortiz 0:45

What inspired or motivated you to join COPS/Metro? Was there a specific event or moment that sparked your interest in the mission?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 0:55

The invite came from Father Mike DeGerolami, who was the social justice priest working with COPS/Metro and also with the Archdiocese

Barbara Ortiz 1:09

About what time, year, time frame?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 1:13

2007-2008

Barbara Ortiz 1:15

Okay. So what about him inspired you to join?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 1:22

Well, we had, like, it's kind of like, had kind of like a verbal relationship. He knew my mom, knew my family. And he was trying to build community with COPS/Metro and he had reached out to me and talked to me about certain issues and we discussed them. And then he later invited me to come to a session with COPS/Metro he said that he thought that it would fit in with my social justice, I guess desires or thoughts or interests.

Barbara Ortiz 2:10

Did you have a background in any of that, education, anything?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 2:13

Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

Really actually it was through work. I'd say my mom was the one who really initiated the social justice in the family, always you know doing for others, no matter who they were trying to help them always trying to, you know, place yourself at the same place that they are at. And she just kind of created that kind of mentality attitude in us or other people. And so, when I started working, I worked for the City of San Antonio for 30 years as a 911-operator. As soon as I started working in that call center, it became very clear to me that the women, because there's a large majority, women didn't have a voice. And we were governed by uniform, most of our bosses that we really have to answer were uniformed.

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 3:16

Most of the women in there just did what they were told, and they didn't know their rights. They didn't know their roles in the department as far as you know, requesting time off or if you were, if there was a complaint what were the guidelines. That didn't seem like there was any of that in that office. And it was kind of like an eye opener to me, because I wasn't brought up that way.

Barbara Ortiz 3:51

What other values or beliefs besides the ones you talked about ones your mom kind of brought you up with that aligned and really drove your involvement with COPS?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 4:03

Just that there was a need in the community. At that time, it was Father, he was working on, they were trying to change the rating of the neighborhood, the zones. {Okay}. At that time there was a lot of people that if the zones changed, people were not going to be able to if they wanted to build an addition housing like in a little apartment or something on the back of their homes and they know me and father were on the different track on that and we're gonna kind of voiced my opinion about you know what I thought it wasn't a good thing at that time. Just for me, and then the wage, of course I work with the city, started at \$6 an hour. And of course wages and health care, you know health care was really horrible to the point where people basically waited till they were dying to go to the doctor because deductibles and copays were so high. And being divorced most of the time and had children to raise, it became an issue to fight for me.

Barbara Ortiz 5:33

Can you share a memorable experience or moment that really stands out in your time in COPS?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 5:43

God, there have been so many. I think...I guess the most recent one would be the referendum that was passed...I think two years ago funding for parks, art, drainage, infrastructure, that was able to, I was asked to be on one of the committees and I was on the drainage and infrastructure I believe. And it was a very, very good experience and eye opener. And the [Sandler?] people were able, from the different districts to work together to make sure that one area of town was not left so behind in that... in that need. So that was a really good feeling to see that.

Barbara Ortiz 6:43

Was that one of the first times that you actually cross neighborhoods maybe as far as working?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 6:49

Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

No, not really, because my time when as soon as I told you, when I first started working with the city, I saw that, you know, the department really didn't respect the rights of employees. So I right away joined a Union. And there in that union, of course, because it was about reaching out to politicians, about our needs and the needs of other workers. I was able to go out in the neighborhood. Talk about, you know, issues that concerned us, which politicians were supporting of that. So prior to my time with COPS/Metro, I had already done a lot of that. Within my area and other areas, other cities have the opportunity to go to other cities and do the same thing. So

Barbara Ortiz 7:45

So you said that was one memorable moment, you have a couple others?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 7:51

Recent was that. We worked on, the other one was also was part of the committee for the housing, affordable housing for owner-occupied, getting the city to work with us and making sure that the program actually assisted people. In the past, the program was set up to the point where, you know, somebody qualified for those monies for owner-occupied to rehab their home, and they would go to their home, and they would look at it and they would say, No, we can't because your roof's not good. No, we can't because your foundation. No, we can't because electrical? No, we can't because you know, you don't have good paneling, foundation. And so they were helping less and less people based on like the people in district five. Those were their houses. So they were not qualified. So we fought and fought, in order to change that process to where if someone did qualify, and they had electrical or plumbing, foundation or roofing that the city would help them, find those contractors then provide the monies. Maybe a little bit this year, and then maybe more next year. So it was very exciting to see that change, like right there happen. And then we were able to again, when the referendum increased the monies put into that project for owner-occupied and also for funding on putting some money down on new homes. So it was yeah, that was a big one also that I was involved with. It's very satisfying. I mean, still needs a lot of help.

Barbara Ortiz 9:56

No work is ever really done.

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 9:57

No, no, we have to keep them accountable to what they've promised. If not, they just do whatever they can.

Barbara Ortiz 10:13

What have been some of the challenges or obstacles that you've seen COPS/Metro face, you know, and either not really gone the way they wanted it to go? How did they bounce back from that? How did they resolve some of those?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 10:32

Just res, what do you call it, resiliency? {Yep.} And the ability to understand that, you know, there's other people, other things that we can do in order to bring attention to those issues, too.

Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

How do you say to, reach out to people, different people, in order to make sure that when we, because, like I can, I can think about like, the problem with the chapter 313. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that. That's where school districts where businesses talk school districts into allowing them to take some of their funding out of the school fund, to give to them to build their companies. And they promise money, a lot of money up front, it's kind of like what Toyota did, but Toyota has been really good at it and helping the school district, right, they continue to give them money better all these years. But some of these companies, what happens is that they give them money up front, and then stops. And then the school districts have less money for their funding budgets. And they're at a loss, so then they have to increase taxes or cut jobs or cut programs. And so when the COPS/Metro through their larger sister, the IFA, have got a group together. But people to try to apply that to stop that. And we were able to stop that two years ago. But the politicians in Austin came up with another program or a different name, different, same thing. And we had a really difficult time getting representatives to support killing the bill, or just even making some changes to it that would protect the schools. And so what they have done in this process is they have tried to educate the school districts, the school boards about what they're doing. And long term infeasibility of it in their funding. And some school districts well they're poor, and they kind of get lost in it, because they're offering a lot of money up front. And that's one of the ones where it had been a challenge. And so they just continue to come back then reach out to more and more different people that are that can help that are interested. And just they just keep on trying to create the language that's more feasible that we can get more other representatives to support. That's one of an example of one of the ways COPS/Metro works

Barbara Ortiz 13:57

Is there a, maybe a single or two most meaningful, like points of your involvement? Like, you know, this day, this time, that really meant the pinnacle of your time, or is that yet to come?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 14:14

I think in some ways that's yet to come. What I find that keeps me interested in going is that ability to talk to so many different people to try to come to an understanding of an issue like you know, we all come to the table with our different ideas and issues. And COPS/Metro was able to kind of like get us all to look at the bigger picture and work on this issue but at the same time work smarter to bring everyone together. I think that's the one thing that I enjoy the most is that ability to work with each other, meeting other people in the community and other churches and other organizations, sharing ideas, learning new things.

Barbara Ortiz 15:20

So then how do you envision the future of COPS/Metro and its ongoing legacy? What is the impact you see in the years to come?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 15:29

Well my hope is that, you know, we can continue, you know, beyond me to be the voice of the people who have no voice, I mean right now one of the biggest issues is immigration, you know, and education. You know, again, children's health care, you know, so all these things are just a constant theme, a constant reminder that, you know, we still need a lot of work to do. And so I'm hoping that we can continue to bring people in, continue to educate them. And let them know

Rose Araujo-Iracheta by Barbara Ortiz

that they have a voice. And they can make change. I can try to make change all by myself, but I won't make that much change but as a group, as numbers, we can make a lot of good change we have over the years, there's so many things that they've done from small things to very large, large things.

Barbara Ortiz 16:34

Do you see the youth coming and attaching themselves to the movement? Or is it harder to bring them in?

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 16:41

We've seen a lot of younger people coming in. Again, with the younger group, of course, it's difficult because they have so much stuff going on in their lives, you know, and people sometimes find it hard to get involved in things that make a difference in their lives when they're so busy. So that for us is [a] continual thing trying to bring new people in but I have seen in the gatherings that we have had to bring in more new younger people. And that's a good thing. Because they can stick around for a lot longer.

Barbara Ortiz 17:25

Thank you for sharing your time and your experience with us tonight, your stories. I appreciate your time. I hope if you have more stories to tell, please make sure you do but I understand. Just want to thank you again for sharing.

Rose Araujo-Iracheta 17:42

Thank you for doing this. This is pretty cool.

Transcription Notes: This interview was lightly edited as needed for readability which may include inserting paragraph breaks, removing redundant words, or adding clarifying words. Added words or words difficult to decipher typically appear inside brackets []. Simple responses from the interviewer may appear in { } as to not affect the stream of narration.