

Nicole Cruz

Interviewed by Anastasia Cruz
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Interview conducted over Zoom

Transcribed by Anastasia Cruz

[Anastasia Cruz]: My name is Anastasia Cruz. I am here with Nicole Cruz. It is September 25, 2022. We're doing this oral history over Zoom. Nicole is in Mission, Texas, and I am in Corpus Christi, Texas. And this, the topic is over banned books. Do I have permission to record?

[Nicole Cruz]: Yes, you do.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Hi Nicole Cruz. So, we're just going to start off with some basic questions about like your background, so where did you grow up?

[Nicole Cruz]: Yes, I was born and raised in South Dakota. I lived for a short time in Iowa. My dad was a schoolteacher and then a school administrator serving as a high school principal and superintendent in Iowa. And then my family returned to South Dakota to, my parents were managing a retail business and I grew up in a small town in southcentral South Dakota on the Nebraska border by the name of Winter, South Dakota. That's where I graduated from high school from Winter High School and from there, I went to the Dakota Wesleyan University, which is in Mitchel, South Dakota, Home of the World's Only Corn House. I attended Dakota Wesleyan University from 1988 to 1992 and I earned a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in English and Journalism and a minor in Secondary Education.

[Anastasia Cruz]: How was it like growing up in South Dakota?

[Nicole Cruz]: It was a very good childhood and very happy adolescent years. It, growing up in a small town, in a small high school, my graduating class had 69 students and that included our three foreign exchange students. One from Australia, one from Japan and one from Mexico. Um, in a small school everybody is active and involved and so I did many activities while I was in high school. I was the editor of my yearbook. I worked—I was in theater productions. I was in student council. I wrote for the school newspaper. I was in band and choir. And also, I played varsity basketball, ran track. Just I did a lot of things. I was also on the dance team with the drill, drill dance team so that was a good childhood.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Did you, I know you mentioned a lot of school activities but in your free time did you read when you were younger or what were some of the books you read?

[Nicole Cruz]: I always was a reader and that I had tribute to my mother. She is a gracious reader. She can read three or four novels a week probably even up to five or six. Um, I grew up when I was little always going to the summer reading programs at my public library and um

when I was in late elementary going into junior high, I really like mystery, uh, detective stories like Nancy Drew, Tracy, Melvin, all those types of series um but yeah, I've always been a reader and have enjoyed that as a pastime.

[Anastasia Cruz]: You mentioned how uh your dad, uh, worked as a principal and there was, uh, any other uh positions that he worked as?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well, when I, uh, we moved from South Dakota Iowa because in South Dakota teacher pay was a lot less than to Moving to Iowa we earn more. I remember growing up in the summers we would go to the University of Wyoming at Mary*. He worked on his master's in education so he could be a school administrator. I remember spending those summers on the college campus. I was involved in a lot of gifted and talented programs um but yes, he, he was a school educator, and my grandmother was actually a teacher in a one room schoolhouse in um South Dakota before um looking back, I have a lot of educators in my family.

[Anastasia Cruz]: And did you ever work, oh, what jobs did you work when you were younger?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well from the summer- from my eighth-grade year into my, uh, year as a freshman in high school I started working in a family business which was a grocery store. It was called the Super-Duper Market. It was one of a chain of retail grocery stores that my grandfather owned and my, uh, dad managed his store that was in Winter, South Dakota and so working in the family business every summer from all summers during when I was in high school through the summers I was in college to help put myself through school, and also just help support the family business, so I worked as a cashier and worked as a stocker. I worked in the produce department and the meat department. Wherever I was needed, a lot of times in the summers people would take vacation. One summer I worked in the bake-off bakery. So let me say when they say you got to get up pretty early to make the donuts, I can attest to that.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Did you ever have any trouble with any customers at the grocery store?

[Nicole Cruz]: I think I learned a lot of people skills when I was working those summers at the grocery store. I learned how to be courteous. I learned how to be patient. I learned a lot of communication skills, as any public service, you know customer service operated family business. We're always going to have some times when a customer may not be happy, and you have to remember that you want that customer to return and so we do whatever you can to make sure that the customer feels valued and also listened to. One of the ways to solve a lot of problems, I believe is to make sure that you're a good listener.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Now I know you mentioned where you went to high school um where did you go to college and what was your major and why did you pick it?

[Nicole Cruz]: I attended Dakota Wesleyan University. It was a private Methodist, four-year liberal arts college located in central South Dakota, Mitchell South Dakota. And I majored I had a double major I had English and journalism were my double majors and I had a secondary

education minor. I always um, I guess going back to my childhood and loving to read I also enjoyed writing I loved all of my literature courses both in high school and college. Um my original plan was to become a reporter either for media or newspaper I did spend a summer working in Washington DC, and I really enjoyed that and once I graduated from college, I worked in the state office of a state senator from South Dakota.

[Anastasia Cruz]: What was one of the highlights of working in Washington DC, what's one thing that you, like your number one thing that you remember from there?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well I had a, I had a, a set I had background clearance, government clearance which I had a security pass and I worked for this one of the senators from South Dakota so I worked in the Senate part building but I lived in Alexandria VA and I remember walking about six blocks to get the express bus and catch the express bus that would take me into the Pentagon then I would get on the metro or the subway at the Pentagon and go onto DC and I would get out at Union Station and walk up the hill to the Senate and Capitol Hill. I just remembering meeting a lot of famous people. I uh was in the same room with more Morris Galton, uh, President Bush, the first President Bush was in office at the time so Vice President Quayle would see a lot of the senators, I remember meeting Clarence Thomas when he was out for, uh, approval to become a Supreme Court Justice; just I guess you know living in Washington DC that's where everything happens in our capital and our democracy, and, um, it's very exciting, very, very, very fast-paced.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Um and what, what made you want to be a librarian?

[Nicole Cruz]: I don't think I ever really had that as a goal in mind but after working in the state office in Rapid City for the senator that I was serving. I decided pretty quickly it was not the same appeal that working in Washington DC was and there were no openings in the DC area around the time, so I was out of college no I was unattached so to say and I decided to move to Texas to become a teacher. I did not know anyone in Texas, and not only did I move to Texas, but I move to the very tip of Texas on the Mexico border and I just, you know, I love teaching. I quickly learned that if I was going to be teaching for the rest of my life, I may not have any children myself because I would always see dedicating all my time that raising other children just beyond teaching, I was a cheer coach. I was a basketball coach, a track coach, UIL One Act Play, UIL prose poetry, UIL duet and solo acting. I mean I was very involved, uh, as a dedicated teacher. I also wanted to stay in education so I wanted a job that I could still use my English skills with but that's when I decided well, I can impact more students if I'm in the library so that's when I made my decision to go and get my master's in library science from Sam Houston State University.

[Anastasia Cruz]: How long have you been teaching and how long have you been a librarian?

[Nicole Cruz]: This is my thirty first years as an educator and my twenty fourth year as a school librarian. I had served elementary, middle, and high school as a librarian and I served as a middle school teacher for seven years

[Anastasia Cruz]: Wow, and obviously I have to ask, what is your favorite genre?

[Nicole Cruz]: I think growing up I really like mystery. Um, one of my favorite books growing up was *The Outsiders*, I love the characters in that story I love the poetry the literary elements that the author uses of course it didn't hurt that all of the teen heart throbs at the time came out of the movie. Back in the day every young girl had posters of them in her bedroom, um, but nowadays I try to read a diverse, diverse genres and so and I try to get my students to read outside of their comfort level lot of my students like manga, anime they like fantasy they like science fiction so I try to encourage them to make biographies and nonfiction and things that maybe they wouldn't normally choose for themselves just to be well read.

[Anastasia Cruz]: There are sometimes stereotypical things said about librarians about how they always be shushing everyone or how they're just always behind the counter waiting. Can you tell me how a normal day I work for you is like? I'm

[Nicole Cruz]: I think that's what I enjoy about my job the most every day brings, brings new challenges and interactions with students so as a high school librarian I'm responsible for engaging teachers and students and inviting those classes to the library and once they're at the library making sure that the time is well spent. So, we're in our sixth week of school right now where I work, and I have invited all of my—I worked actually as a librarian in two high schools: Sharyland High School and Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy which is our only college high school for the district and then I also serve as district librarian. So last week was Banned Book Week and so we bought a series of announcements that people the students but previous to that when I was bringing classes in for orientation, I would talk to the students about how they get to choose what they wanna read but so does everybody else. So, what I say is a librarian is there's a book in the library for everyone but not every book in the library is for every student. So what I like to read will be different than what my students like to read, or my other teachers, and faculty like to read so I have to have a diverse collection that means a lot of different perspectives, backgrounds so that everybody can find what they want to read at the library but what I tell students is, if there's a book that you don't want to read that's fine, but don't, um, engage in rhetoric that will keep other people from reading the book or don't you know think that you have the right to say to someone well I don't want to read that, so you shouldn't want to read it either. And I think that's what's really happening in our nation right now. We've seen more challenges and, and attempts to remove books from school libraries, than ever before.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Besides the Banned, um, Books Week where you went to go talk to students, what other interactions do you have with your students or what other events have happened at your library that you have put on?

[Nicole Cruz]: So last year we had a virtual author visit last year was the first year we returned from having remote instruction with open and so I'm friends with lots of authors and social media since I have been a school librarian for such a long time and I do attend conferences

regularly where I need we had an author by the name of Chris Fletcher and he came in and well virtually right like through zoom and we ask a previous to that meeting what I thought would be a good topic and at that time and still not today relevant with mental because during COVID and during remote instruction a lot of our students were separate from isolation and depression and loneliness, and so a lot of Chris Fletcher's books are based on those topics, and they're for young adults so that worked really well. We've had a lot of family consumer science classes that came in, as well as our book club and our Battle of the Books teams. This past week I had a huge celebration at the library for students from both of my campuses and faculty. Last year we wanted to come together, and we wrote a book, and the title of that book is *Navigating Life in the Pandemic*, things we worked around. So, we had a very special celebration called a book unveil. We had a program with the master of ceremonies uh we invited special guests from the community, we invited our Education Foundation which actually helped us to get the book published with a grant that was written and submitted and approved and so like the sky is the limit. I, I do a weekly programming for my students and that's something new that I started this year. It's called Tuesday Things so every Tuesday I have a 20-minute session in the morning before school starts and a 20-minute session after school and just a wide variety of topics so some of the topics I've covered this school year already are E-mail 101, um, Google Drive tips on how to organize and put things easily found in your Google Drive. Um, every month we have a social emotional learning quality or trait so I did a lesson on empathy, and I believe that people who are readers develop that skill because by reading stories of other people we kind of understand what it is to walk in that person's shoes and we can see them, we can hear them, and we can understand them so just the sky is the limit. I'd like to invite speakers to come in. I've written Texas Commission of the Arts grants and gotten professional storytellers, authors, and, um. writers as well.

[Anastasia Cruz]: You mentioned Battle of the Books, can you explain what that is?

[Nicole Cruz]: Battle of the Books is a competition. We have a local competition within our district. There are three high schools and there are two junior highs. Since I'm the librarian, I'm kind of the person who spearheads that competition for us locally. At that competition a first-place winner for high school, middle school, and elementary is um named after the competition results and then those three schools advanced to regionals. From what it is, it's basically at the regional level they determine four books that we're going to read, and each level has different books so high school, middle school and elementary they all have books that pertain to their age appropriateness and the coaches and these teams will read those books together and then they'll discuss them and they'll quiz over them and the competition is kind of like a quiz for all the books. Um and so um I have two teams I coach I have Sharyland High School and Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy. We have practices every Wednesday after school.

[Anastasia Cruz]: How fun and how cool to bring that to light. Um, librarians and of course libraries are huge resources to schools, so who is a resource to you?

[Nicole Cruz]: Great question and I have a very easy answer right now because I learned from my peers so even though I serve as a resource for all of the libraries in our district and all the

librarians I'm always open minded. I'm very excited this year that I have two new librarians from the district. One is coming with experience, quite a bit of experience. The other one is coming with the little bit of experience and um I get to mentor them, but I love having fresh ideas and people who are open minded and bringing you know outside perspectives in. I also have a region one library coordinator who I invited to the book unveiling ceremony last week when she came, her name is Leah Garcia. So, I also have other peers that are in similar positions in districts around or districts across the state of Texas and even in other states. I am very active and involved with professional organizations such as Texas Library Association, Texas Association of School Librarians, Texas Association of School Library Administrators and also the um American Library Association so through my personal learning networks I met other um passionate and dedicated school librarians and I can learn from just about anyone just like you as a college student have learned from Twitter and Instagram, Tik Tok. You know social media can do a lot for us.

[Anastasia Cruz]: I have read articles where librarians/teachers have gotten fired due to not removing books off their syllabus or off the shelves, how does that make you feel?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well now like I said it's a time that I've never experienced in all of my thirty years of education as a Texas educator. I moved from South Dakota to Texas because at the time Texas was leading the nation, was very innovative, um, I wish I could say that we were leading the nation in a positive way. Unfortunately, Texas and Louisiana are at the very bottom of uh retirement for teachers and educators in terms of pensions. Um, Texas is a right to work state which effectively says that teachers do not have the right to strike like you've probably seen on the media, there's teachers in other states that when they cannot get their needs met will be able to strike to get the unions to help support those needs and then they come to consensus um there's a lot of bargaining power that goes with that and unfortunately Texas we don't have that now. What I do is always encourage my librarians that are serving together with me on our team, always have your professional organization dues paid. I'm also a member of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association because in my district, a teacher is a librarian is labeled as a teacher. Um, we do work additional days, um, outside of the teacher contract, but we have the same responsibilities as classroom teachers except without you know the grades and lesson plans, but, um, so I just of course I feel my heart goes out to people who are standing up against censorship. Um, I wish that there were some better outcomes right now and I am hopeful well because there's a lot of leaders in the movement to educate and build awareness about the dangers of censorship. If you've never read *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury that would be a book, I would recommend for everyone. Um in the book just to give you a quick synopsis there are firemen now normally when we hear the term firemen, we think of someone that goes and puts out a fire. But in this case, the firemen are wants to go and start fires and what do they burn? Books. That's a very dangerous thing you know because once uh democracy starts to censor anything it's a slippery slope and so when I look at the challenges that school libraries are facing and public libraries are facing and really looking at a bigger picture and that bigger picture is called democracy.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Um I know earlier that you mentioned about a grant, how many grants have you received for your library?

[Nicole Cruz]: (Laughs.) I don't have the exact number off the top of my head, but I know our foundation, our Education Foundation has been in existence I would say twenty years because I've been at the high school since 2009 but I have written grants and applied for grants since I was in an elementary library in this district and that was back to 2004, 2003. Um, every year, I have submitted grants and we used to be able to submit them twice a year so as I was looking back, um, a couple years ago, I think I added it up and it was \$80,000 just from our Education Foundation grants that I've written and been approved for but outside of that I've written so many other grants for um Texas Commission of the Arts, um, American Library Association. I wrote a program that I actually started with a grant from our Education Foundation was recognized two years ago as the innovative upstart program of the year from the from the Texas Library Association as a result of that I got an additional \$1000 to spend on items that would sustain the grant or apply to something that I would like to start so I would say I would say this time with all those like outside grants as well as Education Foundation grants it's been well over \$100,000.

[Anastasia Cruz]: That is a lot of money. Um, do you have, I already know that you talked about a lot of events earlier, but is there, um, do you have any more memorable moments or favorite stories about being an librarian and helping kids?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well, I have a lot of former students who are now educators themselves and I have, just in the district that I'm currently, um, employed by I had students that started out with me as pre-K and kinder students and then I saw them in junior high and then I saw them at high school, graduate high school, and now they've graduated from college so that's very rewarding. Um, my husband is also a teacher and has been a coach for many years, and so being involved in the school community, I guess a lot of the fun memories are just really connecting with students whether it's homecoming week or prom. Um, my husband and I always went to a lot of the school activities, football games, um, making yourself, uh, visible like movies and that parents can build rapport with you. About two weeks ago, I was able to present to parents across our district at a parental engagement institute and it was standing room only and there was a lot of the positive comments after the session and follow up with her. So, I think those are times that I would say are very memorable within serving at the state level and had a lot of honors and recognition, um, as the I've been on the council for the Texas Library Association. I have served as chairman of the Tejas Star Book Committee. I have served on the Texas, uh, Media Awards which is now the Texas New Creator Awards, and a lot of my former students and now current students have won state recognition with, um, projects like multimedia presentations, book trailers, video recordings, graphic designs, websites. Getting students to hone in on talents that are outside of what normally we expect them, um, was really fun for me to have my own daughter be one of my students and see her mature and grow in their professional and personal skills.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Is there any event that you do for college students that are for kids that are seniors that they go into college or might be feeling nervous about that?

[Nicole Cruz]: Well the program that we actually won the Innovative Project of the Year for Upstart was the alumni snapshot campaign and that was started as an Education Foundation grant then there was just something about keeping connection with our graduates because I feel like once we have those students we turn them out into society whether they want college or professional school or into the military or straight into the workplace I want them to know that they're always valued and that as a long why they have a lot of opportunities that they can give back to the community so that particular project was to ask our students to take the picture of themselves in their college campus and then we blew up the picture like 16" by 20" poster size and framed it and we started hanging those around the campus and the, the purpose behind that was we wanted our current students to see students that they knew maybe they knew they need those students from marching band or they knew those students from basketball, football or they were former cheerleaders, or they were former theater students, and so if they see students they had just gone to school with and they're now in college we want that idea of well they can do it so can I and so we did that to begin with and then we expanded on that we had started inviting students to participate in an alumni battle profession that we would bring those students to campus when they were typically on their long Christmas break no winter break and they would sit on stage and yeah panel and he would invite us to come in and that students could just ask any final number or the panel in general specific questions about how they're successful at college might have been choosing college they did and they start to struggle academically what's available to them how do they overcome homesickness what do they do to budget and be financially responsible as a college student just any questions they might have.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Thank you for that and then, um, some questions I wanted to ask more talking about the topic of banning books. Have you ever dealt with any conservative activists or angry parents who wanted you to ban a book?

[Nicole Cruz]: Yes, I have. I dealt—I've had that experience first-hand as a school librarian and I've had to mentor and guide a fellow librarian through the experience and my own experience it was when I was in a middle school and we had you know middle school, you have students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grade typically, um, in this particular situation a parent came across the book because her, uh, child had checked it out from the library and I was—I believe the title was *Jurassic Park*, and she was very offended that the, the words, the language, the vocabulary in that book were somewhat offensive, um, and I explained to her well look at the content they're running for their lives from a huge Tyrannosaurus Rex or other dinosaur it's, um, well, uh, it's obvious that they're not going to say, "Oh my goodness a dinosaur is chasing me." We also had books by, um, Walter Dean Myers and, um, his topic was, um, about veterans serving during the Vietnam conflict and what their vocabulary might be. So, I had to explain to the parent that even though there might be some harsh language inputs it's, it's based on the relativity of the character, or the situation they're in, and the context of the story.

[Anastasia Cruz]: What books have you had to not put on display, or do you know any other librarians who have had to remove books?

[Nicole Cruz]: Um, I use a lot of criteria when it comes to selection of library materials and of course some of those criteria include, um, relevance to curriculum, age appropriateness, um, reflective of a broad community of learners, uh, I want to make sure that the collection I have is diverse so that all students can see themselves reflected in books and also have the opportunity to learn about other people who went—who have a different background, religion, ethnicity because I think it’s important in a democracy and society in general to have the ability to connect with others and to accept and be tolerant of people who are different from us. Now your question was “Have I ever had to remove books?” No, I have been fortunate to be able to work alongside with parents and the situation that I was talking about earlier I explained to the mom you know that there were times there are stories that would not convey the meaning of the setting, of the time period, of the historical relevance without sometimes using language that we ourselves would not wish our children to use, but that makes the story more realistic and the parent wasn’t originally happy with that decision. She wanted me to label all the books that had offensive language, which I’d tried to explain to her, you know, like I’m glad that you think I can read every book that comes into the library, but I rely heavily on peer reviews, on reviews by reviewing sources like *Book List*, like *School Library Journal*, um *The Horn Book*. I - there’s no possible way that any school librarian or public librarian could read every book that was in their collection, nor would any school librarian or public librarian wish to purchase only materials that appeal to them and an example of that would be guns, myself even growing up in a rural area in South Dakota there was a lot of hunting, fishing, a lot of people owned guns, and I never owned a gun, I’ve never fired a gun, I’ve never gone hunting, but that doesn’t mean that my students who I serve aren’t interested in that topic: gun control, gun safety, hunting, and so I need to have those types of books on the shelf for students not only to read for enjoyment but also to read for information.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Have you ever felt offended by a book?

[Nicole Cruz]: I think that I try to tell my students that life is too short to suffer through a book that doesn’t appeal to you. I tell the students that if you’re starting to read a book and you’ve given the book a chance and you read the first chapter you, you know read it to the book several pages but it doesn’t appeal to you, then bring the book back by all means and find a book that does appeal to you, that you do like, that you do connect with the writing, the writer, the characters and setting, the topic. I feel that life is too short to read bad books and when I say bad books I don’t really actually mean “bad” books, I’m just meaning books that I—am lacking interest to me, um, I’ve read books that have strong content and controversial topics, but we do not live in a perfect society and an example of a book that was difficult for me to read as an adult is the book, *A Child Called It*. *A Child Called It* is one of the most gut-wrenching, heart-stopping account of child abuse that’s probably been written but it’s a necessary book, it’s necessary for students and parents, and educators to read because we live in a society where child abuse exists and by reading this book we may be better able to determine warning signs, detect situations where children are not safe, and then we know what we need to do as

adults and professionals who work with children in educational settings is we have forty-eight hours to report it to Child Protective Services, and that is our responsibility, and so yeah, there's books on a lot of topics that are hard for me to read as a parent sometimes upsetting to, to read as a citizen of the United States, um, I've read books I don't know if you're familiar with the Matthew, Matthew Shepherd story. Matthew Shepherd was a college student in Wyoming who was severely beaten and tied crucified style to a fence in a pasture and left, left for dead basically, and he suffered and he died and he, he was subjected to that torture and that cruel death on the premise that he was gay and so I read his story, that's a hard story for anyone to read, but it's a necessary story because we do have hate crimes in this country and we need as citizens to be aware and to raise awareness that bad things do happen in the world. If we shelter our children, then we're not doing them any real justice. We need to educate children to be aware and to know that the world is not always a safe place. It's not always a friendly place. As, as adults, as citizens of a democracy, it is our responsibility to introduce topics that are not always perfect.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Thank you. Um, *Tango Makes Three*, is a children's book about two dad penguins with their baby penguin and it has been on the banned books list because of the homosexual, um, relationship and also because it is since it's the younger children's book, um, parents have believed that it wasn't right for younger kids to be reading. Do you believe it is beneficial and easier for kids to start reading about same-sex relationships at an early age?

[Nicole Cruz]: I believe that as a young child I don't think that we have to necessarily point out that story and, and label it as you know a homosexual couple. I think that we can show children that book and read it and talk about how loving the daddy penguins are to the baby penguin, how we may have classmates that have two mommies or daddies and that all families are different but as long as there's love and there's safety and there's acceptance in a family, that's what makes a family great. Is it realistic to think that every child in an elementary school is being raised by a mother and a father living together? Absolutely not. We have blended families where mom and dad had married and had children and now, they're married to each other and have children from the previous marriages. We have families of divorce. We have single parent families. We have families where maybe a child was adopted. We have families where maybe, um, one parent is away in serving in the military while the other parent you know is getting support by other family members to take care of the children. There's just so many types of families in our society, and to say that one type of family is the correct or only or best way, I think that's such a selfish notion because I think that families are beautiful whether they're blended, whether they're single parent, whether they're you know lesbian or gay parents, I mean a loving family, in my opinion is far better than having a child be in foster care, ultimately never really having a family to call their own. Although that's the reality for many, many children these days too. Many children are brought up in foster care system because that was the safest placement for that child and not to be in the abusive, mental home. So, I think the importance here of that story as a librarian and elementary school, what I would point out is look at this baby this baby is love this baby is being taken care of, you know all families are beautiful. How is your family like someone else's or how is it different? But does this different mean bad? No, it's just different.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Um, most books like I just mentioned, um, some books are banned because either they have explicit language, or you know they might show, um, or talk about nudity some most books still have the gotten band about sexuality and racism. Have you ever experienced inappropriate remarks or racism, or do you know others who have?

[Nicole Cruz]: Um, I would say I, I, I absolutely would know other people who have experienced uh, racist situations in their life. My husband grew up in the early '60s in South Texas, um, his parents were both bilingual their first language was Spanish, and they did not teach their children Spanish for fear that their children would be punished in school for speaking Spanish. Um, my husband has shared several situations, um, where he has been faced with racism, and I have seen situations where maybe we were on a trip and we went to get, um, a hotel room and he was turned away because the desk clerk said there were no more rooms. When we—when I would go into that hotel room or that lobby and ask about a room, now all of a sudden there was room and so I've seen that second hand. I have also been I guess in some sense reverse discriminated. My last name, my surname is a Hispanic surname so when people do not meet me face to face or they meet you through correspondence like emails or chats or social media they may assume that I'm Hispanic or Latina and I am Caucasian. Uh, and so I don't always feel like it's my responsibility to put that on the table, and as a result of that I've had some situations where people were offended, uh, maybe they started sharing moments with me that later reflecting on now they're kind of embarrassed, maybe thinking that I would take offense to something that was said, so does it exist in our society? Absolutely, and at the end we have hate crimes because of that and we have hate crime legislation and so I know some of the books that have recently been challenged even something like as simple as, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. You know Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, um, *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds, um, things about police brutality like, *The Hate You Give*. So definitely there is a trend, um, I feel like the reason for that is because there is a particular group who that their children would feel uncomfortable studying those topics but I think it's much easier to also say well a lot of things in history are uncomfortable but that's why we study history. We study history to learn from it and hopefully to move forward and do better, so that future societies have better living conditions, have better acceptance and opportunities, whereas people in the past did not.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Thank you so much, uh, for talking with me today. Before we end this interview, do you have anything else that you would like to add?

[Nicole Cruz]: No, I just, I commend you on choosing the topic of censorship and banning books from libraries. I would like to share with your listeners, that it is every citizen's duty to protect the rights that our nation was founded on, and first amendments rights of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, um, once a society goes down that path (cellphone rings). Sorry, once a society goes down that path, it's very, very difficult to right the ship. It's not impossible, but if you look at societies that are not democratic, that's where you see the, the lowest amount of censorship and so we have a very big responsibility to future generations and your current generation to keep fighting for diversity in our library collections and stories that history no matter how uncomfortable that picture may be, because with telling of that history we hope

that our future is much better, and I just want to thank your listeners and encourage people to support libraries, being lifelong learners. Whether you're in a college setting or you're in the workplace, uh, like I said one of my earliest memories was it as a young child was going to summer reading programs that I've covered libraries and I don't think I'd be the person I am today without reading stories and then sharing those stories with others so I really thank you for the topic and I encourage all of your listeners to do what they can to inform themselves and raise awareness.