

Transcription: Rubi Andazola

CT: Today is March 10, 2022. This is an interview for the Custodians and Janitors in Colorado Oral History Project, funded by an Archie Green Fellowship from the Library of Congress. As a part of the project, we are interviewing people employed in the janitorial and custodial fields to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge, and better understand their important roles in our communities. The recording and transcript will become a permanent part of the collection at the Library of Congress. My name is Cynthia Torres. We are recording in Colorado. The time is approximately 6:00 PM. For the record, do you give us permission to record your story?

RA: Yes

CT: Can you tell us your name and the year you were born?

RA: Rubi Andazola. 1971

CT: What is your current job title?

RA: Lead--well, actually, Interim Supervisor

CT: How long have you been working as a custodian or in the custodial field?

RA: At a young age, I started - what was it? - maybe 16 years old, I started at a community college as a temp, part time, and then I moved on to college. But now I'm at CU Boulder and I have been here six years as custodial.

CT: Tell me a little bit about your early life and family, like where you were born and how did you end up in Colorado?

RA: I was born in Mexico and we moved to Texas. My father got stationed out in Colorado Springs, so we moved to Colorado in the early 80s. My mother didn't like Colorado Springs, so we moved to a small, tiny town, and I've been here since 1983, somewhere around there.

CT: Tell me a little bit about your family and early life.

2:17

[Crosstalk]

RA: I went to school in a tiny town east of here, called Fort Morgan. Nothing there. Nothing to see. It was awesome as a child. Once I turned 16, I moved out and I moved to Greeley and started my classes at the community college. I took CNC machining and that's what I did for most of my life till 2010.

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CT: That's when you moved into the custodial field?

RA: Yes, that's when I opened my business. I opened my business in 2010. 2008, I started it, but actual business, I started in 2010.

CT: That was the cleaning business?

RA: That was the cleaning business, and I did houses, apartments, a bank and some stores. In 2013, we had that flood, I lost all my equipment, my house, and so my business slowed down quite a bit. I had to let go of a lot of houses, apartments...but it's good. I'm here now. I'm custodial now.

CT: What made you decide to be a custodian, or go into the cleaning or custodial fields?

RA: I think I came--actually when I first came to CU Boulder, it was only going to be for awhile. And it just grew on me. I just liked all the customers and the people here. I met a lot of people from different countries, different places. I'm still here. I enjoy it. I enjoy my job.

CT: You work with a lot of--or when you talked about meeting a lot of people--folks that you work with in the custodial field or is it the professors?

RA: Both, a little bit of everything. So there's customers that come in for tours, and they ask questions, like, "Hey, can you show me where this is?" or "Can you give me directions to here?" And I'm always willing to help everybody. And that's what I really like. The best part I like is helping, being able to help.

CT: Tell me a story from your early experience working as a custodian. What was it like when you first started - anything that was startling or...?

4:52

RA: When I first started, I was really young. It wasn't here at CU Boulder, it was at a community college. They didn't treat us very good. They kind of wanted to hide us and we'd always get blamed for things, you know, that were happening. And it was kind of a bad experience for me. Getting blamed for something that you don't do. Things end up missing from closets or offices. And later on they'd find the thing or the missing object, and we never got "I'm sorry" or "I apologize" or anything like that. So that was a really bad experience for me.

CT: I'm sorry you went through that. Tell me a story about one of your most challenging or memorable days working as a custodian. I know there have been a lot of--

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RA: I think my most memorable day was when I got promoted to Lead. It was...it was kind of like--it felt good. It felt like I was moving up, like I was being noticed. I'm still here. I want to keep moving up.

CT: Your hard work and customer service--you think that was being noticed?

RA: Yes, especially customer service. Safety is one of my biggest issues. I really like safety. I'm always walking around the buildings making sure everything is safe.

CT: What kind of environment do you work in? What kind of hazards do you come across throughout the day?

RA: You know, I actually come across--sometimes--depending on the building, sometimes they work with chemicals, sometimes they work with different things.. You know, I'm always telling my crew, make sure you don't stick your hands in the trash cans. Make sure you wear your gloves, wear your goggles, your glasses. But we haven't had any safety issues. I don't know if it's because I'm constantly walking around, making sure everybody has their safety glasses or gloves.

CT: Making sure your people have what they need.

RA: Yes!

7:24

CT: What about COVID has been the most challenging for you and how has it impacted you and your family, your work environment, your team?

RA: When COVID first hit, it was--I think we were all nervous. We were all scared. But I am really super proud of my team for sticking together. Helping each other. Making sure everybody has their mask on. Not complaining about helping out in other buildings. I'm really proud of my team and everybody here in CU. Everybody wore their mask. Made sure everybody was safe and healthy.

CT: Did it change the way you did your job, I mean, the things you were responsible for?

RA: Well, the job got done. It was a little harder maybe because of the mask--the running up and down the stairs, or, but we all got through it. We went outside for a breather. Came back in, put our mask on--you know--we went at it again.

CT: As an essential employee, were you here when it first came out? I know, working at the university, a lot of us got sent home, a lot of people got sent home. What was that like just being here?

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RA: I think it depends what position you have. You know, I know that we're essential services. And we have to be here snowing, rainy, COVID, and I know a lot of people got frustrated, but it was ok. I mean the buildings were empty, like completely empty. They looked like a ghost building. And we got things done. You know, we got extra stuff done. We did extra disinfecting. We did, we put up signs. It was okay. We got through it.

CT: Was your family nervous about you being...?

RA: Yes, at first we were. So I usually take my shoes off in the doorway. My jacket and everything went straight into the dryer. Because we didn't know anything about COVID. It was out, but we didn't know how to treat it. So, yes, we were super...and then we had an elder at home, so yes. As soon as I started sneezing, coughing, everybody said, "Oh, you better go get the mask on." But we're all good now. I think everybody is.

CT: Well, that's good. I'm very thankful that--

What do you like to do when you're not working?

10:18

RA: I like to relax. I do lots of volunteering at the food bank, and with elderlies. I go shovel their snow. In the summertime, I go do their grass, leaves, grocery shopping for them. So, I'm busy. I go visit my mom. There for a while I was going almost everyday. She's [got] cancer, so everyday, daily, I'd go see her. Make sure she goes to therapies or chemo,

CT: Sorry about that

RA: Thank you

CT: It sounds like you have a lot, you do a lot of service work and you care about your community, your family, your team. What about, or what aspect of your work and your life, let's do your work right now, are you most proud of? Like the work you do here on campus. What are you most proud of?

RA: My customer service. I'm really proud of my customer service and being able to help, you know, the staff or even my team. I'm always--we're short-staffed and I'm always out there helping them. They tell me, "No, it's okay, we got it." And I say, "No it's okay, I'm going to help you; we're a team and that's what teamwork is about."

CT: Very nice. You're an example of the way you want your team to work.

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RA: Yes. I try to be equal with everybody and give them an equal share of the work. So that nobody has more load than somebody else.

11:55

CT: I know you mentioned a little bit earlier about that being equal. You talked about sharing in the workload and everything like that, but you also recognized that people are different.

RA: Yes, I don't treat everybody the same. Because everybody is different. They have--we all have different personalities. And you have to go--I can't treat so-and-so - and say "Hey, so and so does it this way." Because this other person has his own thoughts and I always look at it, just as long as the job gets done and you're doing it in a safely manner, that's all that counts.

12:36

CT: You have a lot of people from different backgrounds working for you?

RA: On my team? Yes, we have from India, Nepal, Laos, Mexico and America. So, we have a little bit from everywhere.

CT: So it's important to have the philosophy that you have?

RA: Yes, and I try to learn - maybe not their language completely, but I know a few words here and there, like "good job" in Nepali and it's just awesome. I just love to learn. I enjoy it completely and I ask, "Well, how do you say this or how do you say that?" And they tell me. . . Sometimes it's hard. I say, okay, then I try it, but sometimes I can't say it, you know, as good as they do.

CT: What is the biggest challenge of your job?

RA: The biggest challenge for my job is probably keeping everybody happy. You know, that's the biggest challenge. It's nothing that I can't do, because there's always ways around things, without breaking rules, of course. But yes, I think it's making everybody happy.

CT: How do you do that? Like one example?

RA: Maybe an example of when we rotate. Some people don't like certain buildings. And you know, we have to keep everybody happy, because everybody has to rotate because some buildings are easier than others. And it wouldn't be--I don't want to use the word fair--you know, you have to be equal. I want to be equal with everybody. And I think that's one of the biggest challenges.

CT: That's tough.

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RA: Yeah

CT: Could you tell us a little bit about the people you've worked with over the years? I know that you said that you have a really diverse crew right now. Has it always been that way? And what are some of those challenges?

14:42

RA: It's mostly--for the most part, it's been different people from different countries, different places and different personalities. Everybody thinks different. You know, we don't all think the same. I don't think I've really had any challenges with that. This is just the rotation part, the getting along; we all have to try to work together and leave our issues at home. Unless there's a huge, uh, what's the word I want to use? Situation. If they have a situation here at work and they need to come to me, or the supervisor. If I need help with that, then I go higher. We all have to try to work together. We all are adults. At least try.

CT: Did you have a lot of-- just off topic a little bit--did you have a lot of siblings, or how did you learn? Or where did you learn how to work with a lot of different people?

RA: Actually, my mother has--I have a brother and a sister and my mom raised my aunt and my uncle. But I think I've just, I don't know where I picked it up at, that's how I think. Because I don't want to be treated the way they treat you or the way they treat my neighbor. We all want to be treated as for me. And I worked for very many years at McDonalds as a manager, and you'd be surprised how many different people go through there. I worked with teenagers, I worked with kids with disabilities, where we'd give them a chance to work. And it's challenging. You know, working with somebody that has a disability, you have to have lots of patience. You can't--there's things that you can't do as a manager or working with someone with a disability. And I think I just learned over the years that you have to treat everybody with respect and equal. There are some people who don't like black coffee, there's people that love it. It's just little things that you have to look at.

17:09

CT: Makes the world a better place.

RA: Yes, yes.

CT: What is the biggest challenge that you've overcome in your life? And this could be professionally or personally.

RA: I think the biggest challenge in my life was maybe getting my--I shouldn't say degree --well, I guess you could call it a degree--in my machining. It was hard for me to do, my machining. I was working, I was going to school, and I was still helping at home. My father passed away, Mom was by herself so we had to help. So that was super hard for me, but I finally got through

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it. I did machining for a good ten year, so I came here. I opened my own business and then I came here.

CT: What kept you going? Was it an internal thing, or what was the motivation to continue through it all?

RA: To continue, uh, seeing my mom. My mom always told us that when she was young that she didn't have what we have now. So that motivated me to prove to her that we could do it. And help her and to this day, I still help her with what I can.

CT: She's grateful to have you.

RA: Yes.

CT: Tell me about a time when you needed to have courage. It sounds like with your life and everything that there might have been a lot of times. What was one particular time?

19:05

RA: All my aunts have had cancer, starting with my grandmother. My mom just got cancer free, but they're still checking her every three months. My aunt just passed away on December 9th. And that was hard for me to see her like that, and I didn't want to see her like that, and I didn't want to go to the hospital or to her house to see her the way she was. And she asked me to go-- that she needed to see me one last time. I just didn't want to see her like that. And I had to have the courage to go do it. To go talk to her, to see her, so that she knew I was there for her. Even though I knew she was leaving. That was really hard for me. But you know, I did it and I stayed there for a little while and I just kind of told her I'd be back and I left and she passed away. But she saw me and I saw her, so it was good.

CT: I'm glad that you were able to see her that last time.

Is there one person or people who inspires you or have inspired you to be your very best, the very best person you can be?

RA: I can say my mother and I can say my grandfather, my step-grandfather, but he's like my blood. He's my grandfather since I was--we've been here since I was two, so I was about four years old. He always told me, "Pumpkin, when you walk, you walk with your head high and you smile at everything that comes at you, no matter what it is." And that's what I do. And he taught me good and he taught me bad sometimes (laughing), but mostly good. So, yes, my grandfather. And my mom always kind of like talked to us and say, "Well, you need to work for what you want and if you don't work, you don't get it. You know, sometimes you have to suffer to get to where you want." And I'm pretty much where I want to be. I'm here and--yes.

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CT: Very nice. Good advice. What are you most proud of related to what you've created in your life?

21:36

RA: I'm, I could say that I paid my mom's house off. That's what I'm most proud of. And that I'm here, alive, I guess (laughs). After COVID, after all, after everything that I've been through, you know, my family's been through, we're still here. But the most, most thing I'm proud of is that my mom has no cancer and she has her little house.

CT: A house: a lot of people underestimate, but it provides stability, safety...

What advice would you give somebody starting out in the custodial field?

22:22

RA: I always say teamwork. Teamwork is what gets you through all of it. You don't want to be--I know some people like to be a loner, but teamwork does it all. And I always tell my team, make sure you guys help each other and have each other's backs. Someday you're going to need help and, "You help me and I help you." I think teamwork is one of the most important things in the team, helping each other. It's not just team, it's the teamwork.

CT: Working with folks, like you said here, with people coming from a lot of different backgrounds, do people have different ideas about teamwork and what it means to be a good worker?

RA: They do. Some people, I have one person on my team that is always willing to help. Moves here, moves there, you know, fast-paced. And I have another person that's a little bit slower. But that person that's fast, motivates the person that is slower. And I see them sometimes walk by and before that, the person that was the motivated person came--the other person was like slow--now I see that person has changed. And they walk and I go "Hey, that looks good. You know your hallways look awesome." You have to look at things and not just say when there are things that are bad. You have to also look at the good things. "Hey, your building or area looks good. Thank you."

CT: It sounds like building that team environment really helps. People become their best selves.

RA: Yes. It's always good to help each other, I mean, you get done faster, safe, instead of breaking your back and running around. I won't say how my grandma would say, but "Running around like a chicken without a head." People here don't like that. (Laughing)

CT: Is there any advice, kind of along the same lines, any advice in general that you would give to young people starting out in life with similar experiences as you? Sounds like you moved around a little bit when you were younger--coming into the country..

25:01

RA: Yes, I didn't like the moving. So when we first moved to the United States, we were homeless, as a child. Not very long. But we didn't have a home. My mom never kind of begged for money, I should say. She always asked, you know. "I could clean your house or I could do this or clean your car." I didn't like the moving around part. But I did enjoy when we did get a house there in Texas and then we moved here to Colorado. But the state to state I didn't like. You know, I didn't like the making new friends, learning the area again. It was hard for me. It was hard for me to leave the little friends that I had, to make new friends. But then I look back now and I thought, oh, wait a minute now, I met more people. And that's what I enjoy, is meeting people from all over the place. I'm a talker. But I get nervous, but I'm still a talker.

26:21

CT: So, if someone came in and said, "I'm having a difficult time, just came from another country and moving around," that's difficult, not having a permanent place and everything like that, you know, what you talked about. Like you know, look at the positive part of it, could you build on that just a little bit more? What would you tell that person?

RA: You know, I met a visitor in the streets. (I call visitors homeless people.) I met a visitor--it's strange that you would say that because I met her and I stopped at Safeway and got some, bread, baloney, stuff like that, and I went over and I took it to her, took her a jacket, it was going to be cold the next day. And she mentioned that she was moving from state to state, and that she didn't have a home. She was moving from state to state, and I told her that it could be worse, you know. It could be worse. I always look at--I'm healthy, I can work, I have food. Right now, it doesn't really matter where I'm at. I think my health is more important than a house. I'm sure we need a house to stay. I did help her. I helped her with some money for a motel. I told her, "Here's a couple hundred bucks for a couple of nights at a hotel; I don't know how much they charge now, but..." She cried and I cried and she said thank you so much and she said my name is Cin, Cindy, I told her my name is Rubi. She said, "You know, you're the first person--the first person in a very long time that's helped me. People look at me like I'm dirty, like I don't deserve to be here, but they don't know my story."

"I know, I told her, I know, I have been there." I kind of talked to her a little bit about my situation when I was a kid. I don't usually talk about when I was a kid, about the homeless thing. But, yeah, it's scary. Nobody knows their situation, so we shouldn't judge. My grandfather always told me, "You never judge, because you never know when you could be there." For me, it's easy to talk to people. Sometimes I stop and give them gloves and give them beanies and a little bit helps. Even a smile sometimes. Right?

29:06

CT: It could make somebody's day.

What are your hopes for the future, for yourself, for your team, for your family?

RA: My hopes: I just want to stay healthy. I want everybody to be healthy. I don't ask for much. I want to continue to grow here at CU Boulder, for sure. I really enjoy what I do. I'm a people's person. I just walk around making sure everybody's good. Ask them if everything's okay. I like to mentor and I also like coaching. And I also like to listen to ideas, different ways we can do things. There's always--maybe somebody else knows an easier way than my way. Just as long as it's safe, it's okay.

30:04

CT: Well, very good. How much longer do you have, or do you plan on staying here for a long time?

RA: Yes, I've only been here like six years. It was like nine months as a temp. And then I moved on to trainee--I think it was a year or something like that. And then Custodian I and now I'm a lead. And right now I'm in the interim supervisor--hoping to get interviewed for the supervisor, hoping they, you know, notice my application and my resume and my good work and my good customer service.

CT: And your leadership.

RA: Yes. And like I told my boss, I told her I'm wanting to stay here and grow as much as I can and learn as much as I can. I know that we always learn something new. There's always new things.

CT: Well, that's wonderful.

RA: Not everybody knows everything right?

CT: Nobody does, even if they think they do (laughs).

RA: Sometimes I think I do...I know I don't. I always ask my crew, "Hey guys, what do you think of this? Or how about this?" And they talk, "No, we could do it this way." I go, "Okay, let's try it your way. If it doesn't work, then we'll do it my way." "Okay." I want my team to be closer. I want my team to be a team. Not just the name "team," I want everybody to be on the same team.

31:40

CT: How do you bring on, is there a way like it you have somebody new coming in on your team, is there a way to orient, or a way that you orient them, that particular person, to your ideas about team?

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RA: Yes, actually I have a new person. Just started Monday. I kind of trained her starting Monday and we talked about teamwork. And right now, she's still learning the building, so it's a little bit hard, because everybody else knows the building and they get frustrated. And I tell them, "Hey guys, remember when you first came, you didn't know the building. Let's help out, that's part of teamwork." So, everybody, "Oh yeah, okay, I'm sorry."

We're all on the same page. If she needs help, she should call somebody. If she doesn't, call me." And things looks good. I mean, she's learned really fast. So I don't know if it's the trainer or her. Or both (laughs).

CT: It's the environment a lot of times, it's the environment.

RA: Yes. I want her to feel comfortable to a point, right? We all know what we come here for. You and me. I have things to do on the computer; I still make time to go help my team, because I'm part of that team.

CT: It sounds like you've created a much different environment than the one that you talked about where it was not being treated so well.

RA: Yes, I didn't like that. It ade me feel unwanted, like unnoticed. And here, even here, in this building, everybody knows me. "Hey Rubi, hey Rubi, hey, here comes Rubi."

CT: Very good. Well, I'm so grateful for you sharing your story. And we're done with our questions. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

33:34

RA: No, just that I just enjoy my job. I enjoy what I do, I really do. You know, some people think that maybe I exaggerate. I enjoy coming to work. And there's jobs that, you know, you say, "Oh, I'm going to go to work." And then you have a long face. I don't have a long face. I want to come to work. There's days that it's hard. Then there are days that's it's easy. But in the long run, we get things done. It's good.

CT: Well, I wish you and your team and your family the best, best of luck with everything you set out to do. And good luck on your supervisor position.

RA: Thank you. I'm so nervous. I know the job and I know some of the answers that I would -- I'm not sure what questions they would ask. For the most part I know kind of--I've been practicing by myself in my office. I record myself. But it's okay. I'm hoping they notice me and hope they notice the good work that I've been doing for them. I always want to think positive. I can't say, "Oh, *if* I get hired." I can say *when* I get hired. Even if I don't. But when I'm going to--I hope.

CT: I hope you do. I really think they would be smart to hire you for that position to carry on what you've already created here.

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RA: And it's good. I mean, my team; they look up to me, and they call me, and they don't--you know. Sometimes they say, "Oh, we don't have to do that." I go, "Come on, guys, we're short-staffed, come on, I will go help you." "Okay, okay." So we all try to be on the same page. You always have one or two that are kind of (gestures). But at the end, they come back, they give in, because they know that they're going to be in that position maybe tomorrow or the next day. That they're going to need that help. So yes, it's awesome. CU Boulder's good. I like it here. And I want to keep growing.

CT: Well, they should be very grateful that you're here doing this for them.

I think we're done and I'm going to go shut off the recorder unless you have anything.

RA: No, that's it. Thank you so much.