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Interview with Lily Benavides

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Interview with Lily Benavides

December 9, 2022

NS: [00:00:04] Okay. Okay. So the first question is where are you from and where did you grow up?

Lily Benavides: [00:00:14] Uh, way that that light bothered you, I think. Hold on. I have to turn this light. Oh, I'm sorry. I know you're recording. Okay. Oh, that's too dark. Okay. Um, I am from Colombia. And what else do you ask?

NS: [00:00:34] Where did you grow up?

Lily Benavides: [00:00:37] Oh, in Colombia.

NS: [00:00:39] Okay. So the next question is what was family life like? Can you share a story?

Lily Benavides: [00:00:49] Can I share a story? Um. Okay. Um. We are a large family. Um, on my mother's side, which are the ones that I'm mostly, that we mostly interact with my siblings and I. Um. I had six uncles and two aunts. In hundreds of courses. Um. And my mother and my father, they had. Oh, they had, they had, um, I think ten kids, but some were, some passed away when they, some died when they were born, some died when they were little. So at the end we were six. And then when I was 13, my older brother was killed. So we are we are five for women and one man. Wow. And here I have my oldest sister. I am the second to the last. In three in Colombia, one in Spain.

NS: [00:02:17] Which part of Colombia.

Lily Benavides: [00:02:20] We are from a small town called Cartago. Which is in the state of El Valle del Cauca, which the capital is Cali.

NS: [00:02:37] So what were things like in the country where you were growing up? Do you have any memorable political experiences from when you were living in?

Lily Benavides: [00:02:49] Wait. What is it again? I'm sorry.

Speaker3: [00:02:52] It's okay.

NS: [00:02:53] It's. What were things like in the country when you were growing up? Do you have any memories, political experience from when you were living in.

Lily Benavides: [00:03:05] Uh, not really. Never? No, I never. I would never, ever. Well, interested in politics, they are. And plus, I came here when I was 24.

Speaker3: [00:03:19] Wow.

Lily Benavides: [00:03:21] Um, so my family and my grandfather, they were conservatives, so, you know, basically Republicans. And there was only one time that I wore it in Colombia when I just turned 18. And, uh, it's a it's a it was a patriarca family. So basically, you know, we basically were told what to do.

NS: [00:03:56] You had a strict family? Yeah.

Speaker3: [00:04:00] Okay. Yeah.

NS: [00:04:07] Okay, Lily, the next question is. Can you tell me about how you came to live in the US?

Lily Benavides: [00:04:17] Right. Um. When my oldest brother when I know when I was 5 or 6 years old, my oldest brother came to New York. And he stayed there for a couple of years. I. I saw him. I always saw him as a hero for me, he was. Um, there was a big gap in age, so he could have been my father.

Speaker3: [00:04:54] Right.

Lily Benavides: [00:04:56] And he was always very supportive of us, especially me. And so I got interested in this country. Uh, he came back a couple years later and he wrote. Things from here that usually you wouldn't find them there at that time. We're talking about. Wow. 50 years ago.

Speaker3: [00:05:27] Wow.

Lily Benavides: [00:05:28] So, um, he wrote magazines. Like those from sewing that has the... sketches to do the books and stuff.

Speaker3: [00:05:45] Oh, yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:05:49] So I. I got obsessed with those. Those? Not the magazine itself, but the wall.

NS: [00:06:01] Wow. So he drew.

Lily Benavides: [00:06:04] Trying to learn what it said in there and obviously didn't know. But I kept copying the words and I just got obsessed. I wish I had my notebooks from that time because I was in. That's when I started kind of getting obsessed about learning English. Yeah. So I always had in my mind since that time that I was moving here.

NS: [00:06:35] Wow. And what age was this?

Lily Benavides: [00:06:38] I was seven.

NS: [00:06:40] Seven?

Speaker3: [00:06:41] Yeah. Wow.

Lily Benavides: [00:06:43] And then. And then when? When, um. When I went to fifth grade, they started, um, I started having English classes. So from fifth grade to the time I graduated from high school, um, that was my favorite class and I was the best one in the school.

Speaker3: [00:07:03] Wow. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:07:07] So when I came here, I knew a lot. You know, it was you already.

NS: [00:07:11] Learned back in Colombia. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:07:14] It wasn't easy to. To hear, right. When. When they were talking too fast. But I got it right away, you know? And then I kept. I kept learning at home. I kept learning English at home. I was reading. I was asking questions all the time. I, um. I had friends that were here that were teaching me. Then when my kids went to school, I became friends with the teacher, with the ESL teacher, so she would send me homework. In everything. Everything that they send for the kids I was doing with them.

NS: [00:07:56] So you were teaching yourself, basically.

Lily Benavides: [00:07:59] And then I, um. I volunteered at the library in the school, and the librarian was teaching me more stuff. So at the end, I went to, um, to Union County College and I took the test and I ended up on the last level in their six levels of English. Wow. Yeah. And I'm still learning every day.

Speaker3: [00:08:24] Yeah.

NS: [00:08:26] It's good, though. It's good that you're English, so.

Lily Benavides: [00:08:30] Um. Yeah. I was always obsessed with coming here, and I couldn't get a visa. I tried several times, and I couldn't get a visa. I don't know why. Because I had the. The ways, you know, to get a visa. You know, they were looking for people that that had some, um, financial means, right? I did, or my family did, but I was always denied. So I came through the border. And I went back two years later and tried to get a visa for my two daughters, but I couldn't. So I came again through the border with them. They were five and six years old.

NS: [00:09:16] Through the border like. You would. That sounds like in my head I'm just like. You guys had to cross actual water.

Lily Benavides: [00:09:28] Um. Okay. The first time I'm trying to remember myself. The first time we walk somewhere in Arizona through the desert.

NS: [00:09:42] Wow. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:09:45] I mean, before Arizona to end up in Arizona, right.

NS: [00:09:48] With your two daughters?

Lily Benavides: [00:09:50] No, that was the first time coming with a bunch of people. And the second time we went through to Tijuana. Um, there's a little not that's not a river. It was like a, I guess like a creek.

Lily Benavides: [00:10:09] Um, we crossed that with my two daughters, and we ended up in San Diego.

NS: [00:10:21] Okay. Lily, so the next question is, can you explain your journey here? How did it feel? What obstacles did you face? Is there anything you would change about coming if you could?

Lily Benavides: [00:10:38] Good questions and difficult. Okay. Um, the first one. Obstacles. Wow. Many. Okay. Even though I spoke English, it wasn't easy at the beginning, right? And like, like any immigrant, I guess, um, um, I was working in whatever I could, right. Any job

NS: [00:11:10] Had to survive, yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:11:15] And, um. But I don't think I was getting paid as bad as people get paid today. You know.

NS: [00:11:25] Really?

Lily Benavides: [00:11:27] Yeah, because I think about a job that I had later on, not at that time, but later on. And I was getting paid \$10 and that was like 20 years ago. And then I see people now getting 7 or \$8 an hour.

NS: [00:11:44] Yeah, you're right. That was pretty good. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:11:48] So yeah, I had many different jobs. Um, I ended up in New York the first time, and, um. I was working. There were some, um. How you call that? A horse races right and they would do bets but that's illegal.

NS: [00:12:16] And they would do bets?

Lily Benavides: [00:12:17] Yeah unless you go to to the place to the actual place where they do the horse racing. Right. So this was in, um. In bodegas in Brooklyn. Wow. Small room on the back. And you take the clients there and they pay the bed. The beds. Right. To the horse racing. Um, and I didn't work that long there because I had two friends. When I came to New York, I came with two friends, and they, um, they were doing that also because that's the first thing that we were offered when we just got here. And we needed the money. And they they sometimes police would come by. Not to me, but my friends were the places that are the places where they were working and they would take them to jail for the weekend. So I didn't work there for that long.

Lily Benavides: [00:13:25] And then when my kids' father came, he came, like, two months later after me. Uh, we moved to New Jersey.

NS: [00:13:35] So he came from Colombia, too.

Lily Benavides: [00:13:42] So that's how we ended up in New Jersey. And the second question was.

NS: [00:13:49] What obstacles?

Speaker3: [00:13:51] No, that was the first.

NS: [00:13:54] Okay. So is there anything you would change about coming in? Because what and how if.

Lily Benavides: [00:14:07] If you know, you do things and you can start be thinking that you regret something that is already done, you can go back, right? But if I had the chance, I don't think I would ever have. I would never have come here knowing the things that I know now. Yeah. Not I'm not. I'm not pretending to be ungrateful. My family's here and my kids are here and my grandkids. And we can say that we have a bad life. We struggle with many things, but. I know we are better off than many people in Colombia. But you leave your family, you leave your country, you leave all your things, you know, And with the years, with times, that becomes hard. And. Especially when, you know, all the things that this country has done.

Speaker3: [00:15:18] Mhm. Right.

Lily Benavides: [00:15:20] Um, to. To other countries, including ours. Right. And the consequences that we can see now about everything that's happening in Latin America that the United States is responsible for.

NS: [00:15:42] That was a good answer. Arriving and integrating how we you imagining your life will be in the US when.

Lily Benavides: [00:15:59] I had no idea.

NS: [00:16:00] Can you imagine life in the US?

Lily Benavides: [00:16:03] Oh, you mean now or when I came? Yeah.

NS: [00:16:07] No, I think when you came.

Lily Benavides: [00:16:09] When I came, I had no idea what was going to go into, you know? Nah. Uh, it was so hard for the. For the first two years. I think I cried every single day. Not just because everything was so strange and it's like it's like going to another planet, you know? Not now, but the time when I came, even though there were Latinos, we were not living in a place where there were many Latinos. Um, in in, in. I guess that

was harder than, you know, living in a place where Latino communities live. Right. Um, it was hard. It was very hard. And, um. It was hard to. To try to make a life to to work to. Everything. Everything was hard. The food, you know, everything was so different. I mean, like, wow. Yeah. It was just. Totally different. Yeah.

NS: [00:17:33] So what are some of your memorable experiences after you arrived in the US?

Lily Benavides: [00:17:41] What are some of my memories? You said.

NS: [00:17:46] That you can remember when you got to the US.

Lily Benavides: [00:17:54] Well, one thing that that impacted me was the first winter, the snow, definitely. Because at that time, the first the first winter here, by December, I think was one of the. Worst storms ever, that we had snow up to the knees. You know, like, wow.

NS: [00:18:24] In New York.

Lily Benavides: [00:18:25] The whole winter. That was 1990. I came in 89. No, that was 1989. At the end of the year, there was so much snow.

NS: [00:18:41] And you didn't know what snow was. Huh? You didn't know what snow was.

Lily Benavides: [00:18:50] No. It was the first time. I mean, I knew what it was, but it was the first time seeing that in so much as I was crazy.

NS: [00:18:58] Yeah. Um. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:19:05] So many things. I mean, it's, uh. I don't know what to say. Uh. Everything, you know, I mean, have I have good memories, obviously. You know, I had two more kids here born here. And and when when my two little ones were little and we would go downtown and I would walk with them and go to the ice. Ice cream place. And and and I took them to school and I got when I got friends that were from here.

Right. Um, I got some good friends that were from here that, um. That helped me with with things that I needed, you know, and that they wanted to be friends with me so that I, I, I think that made a difference on the first year here. Yeah.

NS: [00:20:06] Okay. Um, the next question is what are some important life events that shaped and affected your life? In the US.

Lily Benavides: [00:20:20] I think that with time I started noticing the racism that is. Very subtle, right? Maybe it's not anymore, but it was at that time and the places where I used to live. Right. Um, and it wasn't that noticeable as it is right now. Um, but then I started noticing all that and, um, in, um. In. And I started getting upset, you know, and more upset and more upset and. I guess that's what it shaped my life to what I am right now.

NS: [00:21:12] Mhm.

Lily Benavides: [00:21:14] And that made me fight. Against many injustices.

Speaker3: [00:21:23] Yeah. Wow.

NS: [00:21:28] Can you tell me where have you found Community? How did they become your community?

Speaker3: [00:21:34] Wait. What?

NS: [00:21:37] Can you tell me where have you found, like an area where it felt like a community for you?

Speaker3: [00:21:45] Okay.

Lily Benavides: [00:21:46] Where you said where, Right?

Speaker3: [00:21:50] Yes.

Lily Benavides: [00:21:51] Okay. Um hm. That's a good question.

Lily Benavides: [00:22:02] Think I, um. I fell. I think for the first time I felt that I was in a community, that I belonged belonging to a community when I was in New Hampshire. In because I got involved with many community organizations and started working with the people in that community. Right. And then when the pandemic. When when the pandemic started, that was part of a mutual of a mutual aid group. And it was just not, um, bringing groceries or whatever they needed. But I really got into a relationship with most of the people that I was bringing the stuff to. And got to know many of the people in the community and in their issues. Right. That was here in Morris County, but most close to home in Parsippany.

NS: [00:23:27] So the places you feel like you don't.

Lily Benavides: [00:23:33] I couldn't hear.

NS: [00:23:36] So where are places where you feel like you belong and where are the places you feel like you don't belong?

Lily Benavides: [00:23:50] I used to live in Madison. For many years when my kids were little. I don't think I can live there. I don't feel that I belong on that community.

Lily Benavides: [00:24:08] And I get, I get closer to the people here in Parsippany, but I'm talking about the Latino community. I'm not really in any way close to the other communities. For some reason, they're just not that open. And I have tried. So I'm doing other projects and I. Basically go to the next town over Boonton. Because it's a very open community to anyone. So I know many people there and um, I'm doing some things there and it's a good place.

NS: [00:24:56] What is your family life like now?

Lily Benavides: [00:25:00] Family life.

NS: [00:25:02] Yes. Now.

Lily Benavides: [00:25:04] Okay. Um, I have four children, right? And I have eight grandchildren.

Speaker3: [00:25:12] Wow.

Lily Benavides: [00:25:16] So most of the time my oldest grandson is 17. And so we have 17, 16, 15, 12, and then there's a gap. And we have twins three and a half years old and then a boy who's two, and then a little one that is three months. The little ones, I don't see them as often because my daughter moved far away in, but it's like almost three hours from here. The older ones are close here and we see we see each other all the time.

Speaker3: [00:25:59] Um.

Lily Benavides: [00:26:00] We meet for every birthday, father's mother's Christmas, everything, you know. Um, in I live with my oldest daughter, my husband and my granddaughter. We live in the same house. Um. I have always had help taking care of my grandkids since they were basically born. I've always been close to them. Very close to them. And, um. And what.

Speaker3: [00:26:35] Else?

Lily Benavides: [00:26:36] Yeah, we are. We are very, very close. We are always close and doing things together and.

NS: [00:26:43] Yeah. Lily, you remind me so much of my grandmother. It's crazy.

NS: [00:26:52] Thank you. Okay. So. How does New Jersey make life? Does New Jersey make life easy or hard for immigrants?

Lily Benavides: [00:27:07] New Jersey is one of the states that are more expensive. Yeah, and I question that myself for many years. And then to my kids, why are we still in New Jersey? I have always wanted to move to another state, and I did for four years. But everybody came back here in and I came back in because I didn't want to be that alone. And and they don't want to leave. I tried and I'm like, if they follow me, but they want.

Lily Benavides: [00:27:45] That's why I'm here by New Jersey.

Lily Benavides: [00:27:50] They take advantage of the immigrants big time. All these rich white towns. They have businesses and restaurants. They have all these people that are undocumented and they pay them five, six, maybe \$7, and they work like crazy.

NS: [00:28:20] You know, take advantage and then they slave them.

Lily Benavides: [00:28:24] Yes. And then on top of that, like, for instance, in this town, they work on the business and then they rent their apartments because it's basically the same group that owned the business in the in the buildings. So they rent and rent them the apartments. And they don't care how they live or which conditions the place is. They don't care. So they exploit them in every way possible. And then the schools are awful.

Lily Benavides: [00:29:00] Awful. The schools are awful. They are racist. Discriminatory against Latinos kids. They don't. They don't they don't give they don't give them or they don't use all the resources that they have available for them or for the parents.

NS: [00:29:26] I agree. 100%.

NS: [00:29:32] So, you know, we obviously talked about discrimination. So this question kind of sums up what you just said. Walk me through a time where you felt or saw unfair treatment, but other people saw it as normal.

Lily Benavides: [00:29:56] Okay. I was. I was in this committee. I ended up in this committee. I didn't last long because I couldn't. I mean, I was nominated for that committee. I'm like, No, I can't do this. Um, there was one woman that came, you know, it was a traffic advisory committee. The police there and people from the town and blah, blah, blah. And they, um, they hear from people if they're complaints about traffic, about changes that we could suggest to the major, to the councilmen. Right. So one day, and I think it was my first day at that committee. People could come before the starting of the meeting and let us know what the issue is. So this woman came and she was complaining, complaining, ranting about, um, some neighbors in other places, also not just next to her, that they have houses that rent. To a bunch of different people and she

was trying to find out if it was an Airbnb, if they could get an ordinance to stop that. But she knew what she what she was talking about. And then after she left, they started talking amongst themselves. They were talking about undocumented that rents rooms. So they were saying that some had cars with different plates that were parked on the street and that there was houses with eight, ten people and God knows who they were if they were dangerous, dangerous, all kinds of all kinds of stuff. In was boiling. It was God, you know. But I couldn't say anything because it was a no end, no ending argument. There wasn't going to take me anywhere because. There was no one there to support what I was going to say. So, you know, I went to a couple meetings and then I decided I just resigned from that.

Lily Benavides: [00:32:32] And obviously, as it always happens, they don't take the time to find out how they live in which conditions they live. Why they are here, you know, none of that.

NS: [00:32:46] This ignorant, you know.

NS: [00:32:52] Okay. So the next question is what things do you hope to accomplish with your immigrants rights work? What motivated you to get involved in immigrant rights? Work, right? Work. What continues to motivate you?

Lily Benavides: [00:33:15] I got involved because I knew there were many things wrong, but I don't think I had the courage at that time. Right before and in when I moved to New Hampshire, there was this situation that I had my my driver's license and I had to transfer it. Mhm. And they gave me so much trouble at the DMV. In at the end after fighting. I don't know for how long. They gave me a little piece of paper. Not even with a picture. When my name and number of the license zone that I was supposed to carry that.

Lily Benavides: [00:34:04] And I don't know how long the license took. And I ended up going to this group that many people was having the same issue. And not just that, but. Legal residents, not citizens, were having their licenses marked with a blue line. So after, you know, I ended up in that group and we started doing rallies and collecting signatures and testimonies and, um. ACLU ended up suing DMV. Wow. And they had to change what they were doing, right?

NS: [00:34:51] Like the policies.

NS: [00:34:54] For immigration. For immigrants? Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:34:58] Yeah, because it was only for people of color. Now they were doing that. And because of that, I. I ended up, you know, getting to know a lot of people that were involved in different things and many organizations. And I got some I got. I became friends with some very, very awesome people and I ended up doing all kinds of stuff. Yeah, well, that's when I realized that I wasn't the only one that was having problems, you know, Because sometimes when you. When you don't know about these things, you think it's only you. Yeah.

NS: [00:35:46] You feel alone.

Lily Benavides: [00:35:47] Until you realize that many others are going through the same thing.

NS: [00:35:56] Yeah, that's true. So what what did being part of that organization mean to you? Did it mean you had a voice like, you know.

Lily Benavides: [00:36:08] Yes, definitely. I did. I found my voice. Yeah.

NS: [00:36:16] So can you describe the first public action you took part in? How did it go and how did it make you feel?

Lily Benavides: [00:36:25] So the first action is that we collected thousands of signatures and we went to the DMV.

Lily Benavides: [00:36:42] I ended up giving that package of letters to the person in charge of the DMV. Obviously, I was follow up a bunch of people, but that was the first thing ever that I did something like that. Yeah, that was amazing for me. I was like, Wow, I can't believe I'm doing this.

NS: [00:37:05] And it worked.

Lily Benavides: [00:37:07] Yes. Yeah.

NS: [00:37:11] Okay. And did you join any campaigns or events?

Lily Benavides: [00:37:19] I was always in favor of doing rallies for anything. I was like, Oh, this is happening. I'm like, Yeah, let's do a rally, you know? Yeah. Um. Oh, many, many, many campaigns for different things. Yeah. And mostly for immigrant rights. Um, there was this situation that two police chiefs for two different towns that all, all of that was in New Hampshire. Okay.

NS: [00:37:46] Mhm.

Lily Benavides: [00:37:46] Two police chiefs from two different towns were stopping people on the road. And again, people of color. Right. And, um. And. So we, um. We started campaigning, you know, collecting signatures and doing all these things. And meanwhile, like, ten people were, um, were arrested on trespassing charges.

Speaker3: [00:38:21] Which was stupid.

Lily Benavides: [00:38:23] Yeah, that became a national event because these chiefs were supported by a congressman in Colorado. Tancredo.

Lily Benavides: [00:39:03] Okay, so, um. So we were. We were, um.

Lily Benavides: [00:39:12] We did a huge rally, and there were newspapers from everywhere. And, um, Tancredo said that, uh, that we were wrong and that we should be in jail, and I don't know what. And they were taken to court. The people that were detained and it was a small, tiny town like a court like this, you know, And there were so many people that they had to close the door and not let anyone else in. The judge was like, wow, I never seen anything like this in my life. And lucky for us or for the people detained that the judge was laughing at these chiefs like, you're so ridiculous. There's no charges on trespassing if you are on the road. You're so wrong, you know. And he let them go.

NS: [00:40:09] And they were all people of color.

Lily Benavides: [00:40:13] That's it. They were. They were mostly Latinos. Yeah.

NS: [00:40:23] So how did others react to your participation with the organization?

Lily Benavides: [00:40:33] I think. I don't want to say that.

Lily Benavides: [00:40:41] Mm. I forgot the word. You know, I don't want to look like. Oh, yeah, I'm a big thing, you know, But some of them were seeing me like, Oh, wow. Yeah. Finally we got a Latina that's putting face out there, you know. Yeah. So they, they, they, they still believe in me, You know many people that I know. Yeah.

NS: [00:41:08] Well, that's nice. So how do goals change within your group? At your organization?

NS: [00:41:20] So how do goals change within your group? At the organization.

Lily Benavides: [00:41:27] How did that change?

NS: [00:41:28] How does goals change?

Lily Benavides: [00:41:38] I was invited to participate in so many things and many organizations that I was crazy. Like everybody wanted me to be part of something. And and I tried. I try really hard to be like in three places at the same time, but obviously it didn't work like that. But I was busy. Very busy. Yeah. And, um. And I wanted to do many things right for myself. But at some point I got very, very sick. And that's why when that's when I had to leave everything and I ended up coming back to New Jersey because I didn't have any family there.

NS: [00:42:27] Yeah. So you were. You were well respected.

Lily Benavides: [00:42:31] Yeah.

NS: [00:42:34] Okay. So what do you hope to be different in the future and what kind of help policy systems would? Make adjusting to a new culture run smoother.

Lily Benavides: [00:42:52] Um. What would I hope to be different? Everything.

Lily Benavides: [00:43:08] Yeah. Might say things that are a little extreme, but. I wish there were open borders. I don't believe in borders. I don't think that works for anybody. I think we will have less problems if we if we didn't have any borders.

Lily Benavides: [00:43:38] I. I think that should they should have there should be an enforcement of the minimum wage.

NS: [00:43:51] Because.

Lily Benavides: [00:43:53] I see it everywhere. But in this case, here in this town, I see it with all the people that I know. And they, um. There's a lot of people that I know here that work probably under \$7 an hour. And I told them that there's a minimum wage and it doesn't matter if you don't have documents, but here's the situation. They are. They are working in these places and living in town. And if they even if they do something together. They probably going to end up being fired and being vacated from the apartment because each business people here. Business person here knows know each other, you know, so they're not going to hire them in any of these places. They probably have to move in the town.

NS: [00:44:52] And they're scared. They're scared of being deported, too.

Lily Benavides: [00:44:57] Yes. In in in. And they have kids going to school and all that, you know, So that's very difficult that that's another thing. Right. Um. I wish there would be more diversity in the schools. Like, you know, that's a that's a I think that's an urgency in the schools. In. In at the state level. Obviously, I don't think there's enough diversity at the state level.

NS: [00:45:32] Okay, Lily, we're almost done. This is our second to last question. And it says if you could create a policy or program to implement on campus to better assist students, similar to your experience, what would you do?

Speaker3: [00:45:50] Mm. Um.

Lily Benavides: [00:45:54] I wish there were free tuition.

NS: [00:45:58] Everybody wants that. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:46:02] Imagine that.

Speaker3: [00:46:04] Yeah. Imagine. Yeah. And, um.

Lily Benavides: [00:46:10] And. Um, violence against women. Women, students. Right. Yeah.

NS: [00:46:21] Yeah. So is there a moment that is essential to understanding you as a political person that we have not yet touched on? Can you tell me about it?

Lily Benavides: [00:46:33] Yes. Um. After all the activism that I did in New Hampshire, you know, and people were looking at me a different way. So, um, I was proposed to run for office as assemblywoman, and I did. And there were some mistakes on that. Um. I did it with an idea of mine that my friends had. Right. Because that's why they wanted me to be there. Right? But. For me to do that, I had to take a side. And I was with the Democrats, which was the first mistake.

Speaker3: [00:47:22] Um, they wanted.

Lily Benavides: [00:47:23] Me to be there, but I think they were using me as a token. So they could say that they had a Latino woman running for office. Right. But they never expected me to win.

Lily Benavides: [00:47:43] And they didn't know what to do with me. Because I was fighting against everything, you know, And they didn't like that. They didn't support me at all in anything. I was the only woman Latina in there. There were two Latino guys. One was a Democrat, and the other one was a Republican. And I think the Republican was a better person than the Democrat.

Lily Benavides: [00:48:15] And.

Lily Benavides: [00:48:18] I had a really hard time there. It was a very hard time. I was, um. Um, so discriminated against, you know. They did my life misery.

NS: [00:48:38] Yeah. Wow. How long were you working on?

Lily Benavides: [00:48:40] Especially after they knew my intentions. I following my friend's advice. We wanted to. To create a law that would prohibit the police for stopping people and asking for immigration documents because it's not their job. And that was the first time ever that they hear something like that and they thought it was crazy. That's when Tancredo came and said and then had support for it from a senator that we were working with her also. And so it was the two of us. And that's when Tancredo said that we should go to jail for that. And everybody hated me after that. It was never approved. Right. But that's what opened the conversation. Recusal was a subject that nobody was really talking about in New Hampshire.

NS: [00:49:50] And so it was probably a lot of racism anyway. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:49:59] Yeah. So they hate me hating me after that. Oh, yeah. I was there for a year. Because the second year is for two years. In New Hampshire. They have the one of the one. No, not one. The biggest.

Lily Benavides: [00:50:20] Representatives. The most representatives in the United States. There are 400.

NS: [00:50:28] Wow.

Lily Benavides: [00:50:29] And like, for every corner of the state, you know, and, um. Um. We didn't get paid. They don't get paid. Um, they pay you by mileage every time you go to a state house or meetings or whatever, you go right to do the work. Um, you get invited to breakfast, lunches, dinners, parties, uh, events, meetings, whatever, you know, everywhere and trips, you know.

Lily Benavides: [00:51:03] And most people do it because they really want to do the work.

Lily Benavides: [00:51:10] But at the point that when I went there, I was one of the youngest person in there. I was 37, I think. I don't remember. Um, and then after me, some young people started coming in like 22 years old. 25 years old.

NS: [00:51:29] Wow. Yeah.

Lily Benavides: [00:51:32] And, um. But that was amazing that I had that experience. I really wish I could have that experience now because I have a lot of knowledge now and a thicker skin.

NS: [00:51:51] Well, Lily, you accomplished a lot, so I'm going to give you credit for that.

Lily Benavides: [00:51:57] Thank you.

NS: [00:52:00] And that sums up the interview. Lily, thank you so much.