

# EL ESPEJO

## MAGAZINE

ISSUE IX  
SPRING 2023

**HOW  
TOUGH  
ARE YA?**

by Dylan  
Villalon



**The Student Fun Magazine**  
**At** Texas A&M University-San  
Antonio

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Photo: Miranda Rodriguez

## COVER

The cover of the issue was shot to illustrate a story written by Dylan Villalon. Shot at Huskin Photo, LLC.

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### FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

Serenity Hernandez  
Bogert and Miranda  
Rodriguez

# EL ESPEJO MAGAZINE

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#### CO-EDITOR/COPY

SERENITY HERNANDEZ BOGERT

#### CO-EDITOR/VISUALS

MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ

#### SOCIAL MEDIA/WRITER

ELIZABETH LOPEZ

#### WRITER

CARLOS MACIAS

#### WRITER

MELANIE REYES

#### WRITER

DYLAN VILLALON

#### WRITER

MARLEY WALKER

#### DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MEDIA

JENNY MOORE

#### ADVISER

DONNA PAZDERA

#### DESIGN CONSULTANT

RICHARD FISHER



# FROM THE EDITORS



**HANK YOU FOR PICKING UP THIS ISSUE AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR INSPIRING AND CONTINUED SUPPORT OF WHAT WE DO HERE AT EL ESPEJO MAGAZINE.**

Last semester's magazine issue took us to places we didn't expect. We traveled to D.C., won a Pacemaker, one of the highest honors in college journalism; won Best Magazine at the SPJ Region 8 conference and our staff; won several other first-place awards at the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association conference.

We are endlessly grateful to those who have given us both positive and constructive feedback about the hard work we put into the magazine every semester. Although we don't do this for the awards, we appreciate the fact that other people care about these stories the way we do.

Last semester's issue especially was very important to us. We covered the Uvalde mass shooting, how it affected our local communities and what's been done about it since then. Although this tragic event felt too close to home, this is not just a local issue – it's a national issue that requires care and attention because it affects us all as Americans. These are stories that can not go ignored, and we feel it is our responsibility to the families and residents of these communities – and ourselves – to tell these stories.

After a tumultuous 2022, this semester we decided to focus on some more lighthearted (but still important) local stories. Furthermore, several of the features spotlight some kickass women in our community, and we are excited to share these stories with you. Thank you for engaging with local student-led news.

Discover more about El Espejo and its staff via our podcast, Mirror Mirror, where we discuss news, conduct interviews, talk about what we're up to and more – now available on all podcast-streaming platforms.

Keep on keeping on.

Thank you,  
Miranda & Serenity



SERENITY HERNANDEZ BOGERT



MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ



ELIZABETH LOPEZ



MELANIE REYES



MARLEY WALKER



CARLOS MACIAS

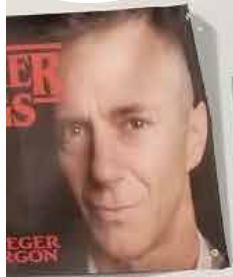


DYLAN VILLALON

**Mirror Mirror:**



# Culture



↑  
LEILANI SHIU  
Charlie's Comic Con  
2023

\*

IN A GALAXY

07

In a galaxy far, far away – ahem... California – actress Leilani Shiu can be seen across all three “Star Wars” television series.

\*

LET'S CHARREADA, SAN ANTONIO

12

The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo. If you are from anywhere in Texas, odds are you have seen or heard of it.

# In A Galaxy

BY MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ



## **I**N A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY – AHM...

California – actress Lelani Shui can be seen across all three “Star Wars” television series. Though, you may have a hard time recognizing her, as she is

often on screen dressed as a Jawa.

In both “The Mandalorian” and “The Book of Boba Fett,” Shiu plays Jawas. While in “Obi-Wan Kenobi,” she is Teeka – the first Jawa to be given a name and a speaking role.

Prior to becoming an actress, Shiu was a radio promotions consultant; she was in charge of getting music played on the radio. She actually got the “Star Wars” casting call when she was on tour with Janet Jackson. This led to her daughter, Ariel Shiu, filling in for some scenes.

As a member of Central Casting, a leading background acting casting agency, Shiu was chosen – rather than called – to audition for the “Star Wars” series.

“Whenever [casting directors] cast little people, they select some of us for auditions or they just choose us,” Shiu said.

When she was cast, she had no idea what she would be doing. Shiu said she got a call from someone at the agency asking her to meet at some random place for a fitting and was then instructed to wait for further details.

“On my first day, I didn’t even know I was a Jawa. I’m in the tent with my friends, who are all little people; we are all covered and are being referred to by our code name, which is, like, Spaghetti or something,” she laughs.

“Star Wars” and Disney are famously known for large productions



“Whenever [casting directors] cast little people, they select some of us for auditions or they just choose us.”



→  
LEILANI AND  
ARIEL SHIU

Photo Co



Photo Courtesy: Leilani Shiu



Photo Courtesy: Leilani Shiu



Shui takes aim at a Stormtrooper at Charlie's Comic Con.

Photo Courtesy: Leilani Shiu

with very strict nondisclosure policies.

As a Jawa, her eyes are often covered with a mask, and she is unaware of what is going on.

She laughs, remembering how ridiculous she probably looked.

"They are helping us on set and as soon as they start filming, I hear someone say, 'OK, bring the baby out!'" said Shiu.

"They let us take a mask break and I'm looking for this 'baby.' It's in a cradle and I looked at it and was like... Is that Yoda? That looks like Yoda but, like, a small version. I look to my left and there are droids there. Then, I realize, 'Oh my God, I'm on 'Star Wars,'" Shiu said with a snicker.

Shiu was inspired to become an actress after appearing in several shorts produced by actor and activist Billy Bartly, the founder of the non-profit organization Little People of America.

"The mentor for little people is Billy Bartly. He is the most famous little person. He got us little people really interested as kids," said Shiu.

For Shiu, the best part of being an actress is bringing a character to life. Even though the face of a Jawa is covered, the actors are able to bring a personality to these Tatooine scavengers.

Over the past few years, media has been more diverse than ever, and Shiu's involvement in large-scale Disney productions is just one way of opening the doors for an even more inclusive media industry.

Our mutual friend and actor, Charlie Schlatter, says "everyone has a place at the table."

Shiu wanted to leave an important message to all of those who dream of going into the film and television industry.

"Follow your dreams. Take acting classes. You can always start by being a background actor, like me. There's no cost – don't get any gimmick classes or people who charge you money," Shiu said. "Work your way up, get those credits and you never know. Something might happen."

As for what's next for Shiu, you all are going to have to wait and see.

"Stay tuned," she laughs.

Season three of "The Mandalorian" is out now, and keep an eye out for the "Off-World Jawas."

# OLDIES BUT GOODIES

BY MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ



**SOMETHING OLD,  
SOMETHING NEW,  
SOMETHING BORROWED  
OR SOMETHING BLUE ARE**

**ALL OBJECTS FOUND AT LA SEGUNDA**

**BARTIQUE & GALLERY.** An unsuspecting house located in the Southtown district is a treasure trove of nostalgia. Stepping foot into this house is like you have time traveled back to a time where records are being spun, the rugs are shagged, a picture of Jesus' Last Supper is hanging above the doorway and the top of the stairs and the clothes are just as vibrant as the personalities.

Local musician and Lighthouse Lounge partner Eduardo Hernandez is the owner of this well-loved "bartique" (part bar, part boutique.) A self-proclaimed "old soul," Hernandez opened the shop in October 2021.

"I wanted to see a place in San Antonio where people can shop and drink," said Hernandez.

This place feels like visiting your grandma and grandpa's house. It's warm and welcoming. The first time I visited La Segunda, I was immediately transported back to my childhood. I felt the childlike wonder begin to sprout within me. Being here felt like digging around grandma's storage



A glimpse of what La Segunda has to offer.

Photo: Miranda Rodriguez





The “bartique” at La Segunda.

Photo: Miranda Rodriguez

room, garage and the back of the closet. I needed to see and touch everything.

La Segunda is a vintage lover’s heaven. The things that can be found here are endless and timeless. Fair warning: You will probably leave with more things than you need or never knew you needed. I don’t even own an 8-track player, but I nearly walked out with a couple of 8-track tapes.

“I bring my granddaughter here, so she can see some of the things I grew up with,” said Diane Garza, a frequent patron and participant in the bartique’s pop-up markets.

Very few new objects will be found in this place. Everything down to the entertainment is, in a sense, vintage. Every Friday, Hernandez invites local bands and DJs to provide the soundtrack to the bustling start of the weekend.

“I only book vinyl DJs. There’s just something about the sound,” said Hernandez.

When Hernandez isn’t serving up drinks or running the checkout, he can be found upstairs spinning records as DJ Plata.

Just down the street from the First Friday hype train, La Segunda started hosting First Friday

“pulga-style” markets. People from all over the community are invited to set up on the front patio and parking lot to sell their goods.

La Segunda still feels like a secret hideaway, untouched by pretentious hipsters who buy vintage items because they look “cool” or rep a hefty price tag. This place is somewhere to reminisce and enjoy the things people have pre-loved. After all, “segunda” means second – and this place is where objects are given a second chance.

# LET'S CHARREADA, SAN ANTONIO!

BY DYLAN VILLALON

Photo: Dylan Villalon



## THE SAN ANTONIO STOCK SHOW AND RODEO.

If you are from anywhere in Texas, odds are you have seen or heard of it. If you are from the Countdown City, then chances are even more so that you have enjoyed a turkey leg or two around the grounds of the AT&T Center. This past February, the biggest Rodeo in Texas kicked off in San Antonio. But there is an event set apart from the rest, which often hides within the month-long festivities: Enter Charreada.

As a lifelong San Antonian who has not been to very many rodeos in his life, I set out in February see if the hype was real. Up until this point, my experience was limited to long and cold nights at the carnival with my parents and sister when she and I were kids. I

remember the smells of livestock and street food, along with the sting of the cold around my barely exposed face. As an adult, this time around I was more interested in the stockshow and the events that I never got to see as a child. This led me to attend opening night for the headlining rodeo competitions where I bore witness to a variety of roping and riding competitions. To be brief, it was intense – especially the riding competitions. I must admit that the energy in the AT&T Center during the eight seconds of riding is something that is difficult to duplicate elsewhere. But I also must admit it didn't light the spark of inspiration I was looking for.

After night one, I went home and looked at the slate of events taking place over the next few weeks and plotted out some dates to return. One event that caught my eye was taking place the day before the final day of the rodeo. Charreada

stood out amongst a long listing of modern American rodeo events that range from piglet races all the way to the multi-million dollar bull riding circuit. So of course, I had to learn more.

It turns out that the Charreada event derives from Spanish traditions that were brought over from Spain into Mexico. Haciendas in 16th-century Spain would have competitions between riders, or “charros,” who would perform difficult and disciplined tricks by maneuvering their horses and with ropes. These traditions prevailed in Mexico over the next few hundred years. When the Spainards came to Mexico they were under orders not to let any non-Spaniards ride their horses, but eventually Spain would find itself with a larger stock of horses than they knew what



to do with. So they got local Mexican cattlemen to help handle their livestock. Over time, these Mexican ranchers would develop new and playful techniques to handle livestock. These organized techniques and skills would eventually develop into the official sport of Mexico.

Charros and Escaramuzas are the stars of the show; they are the disciplined and skilled riders that perform tricks and compete against each other in scored events. These events range from skilled riding to roping other animals. Charreada is more than just a sports competition – in San Antonio and the south Texas region, it is a bastion of culture and regular connection to the generations of charros and escaramuzas that came before.

After doing my homework on Charreada, I was ready to see it for myself. I went out and bought some boot-cut jeans, threw on the cowboy boots that haven't been worn since my father gifted them to me in high school (paired with the obligatory "every man needs to own a pair of boots") and set out for the Freeman Coliseum.

Ah, the Freeman Coliseum. Whether it was the a local carnival my mom was taking my sister and I to on a Saturday afternoon, Cirque du Soleil performance, or my own high school graduation (Go Mavericks!), I have been coming to this old stadium my entire life. So when I arrived on a Saturday afternoon to cover Charreada, I was pleasantly surprised at the state of the original home of the San Antonio Spurs. To be frank, the Freeman feels like home... in a way that only a multi-million dollar complex can. Every piece of wall art or mural in the coliseum is grounded en la cultura española – never letting you forget where you are, and where we San Antonians came from. Of course, there is no shortage of Spurs greats along the walls. The likes of Tim Duncan, Manu Ginobili and David Robinson loom over you as you walk throughout the halls. If not literally, then figuratively.

I immediately noticed that the crowd was intriguing and diverse. With the event being so close to the rest of the rodeo, there was a potent mix of locals who have proudly been attending Charreada for years, and modern day cowboys who were wondering the grounds and may have gotten lost on the way to the Bud Light booth. And, of course, everything in between. About



Photo: Dylan Villalon

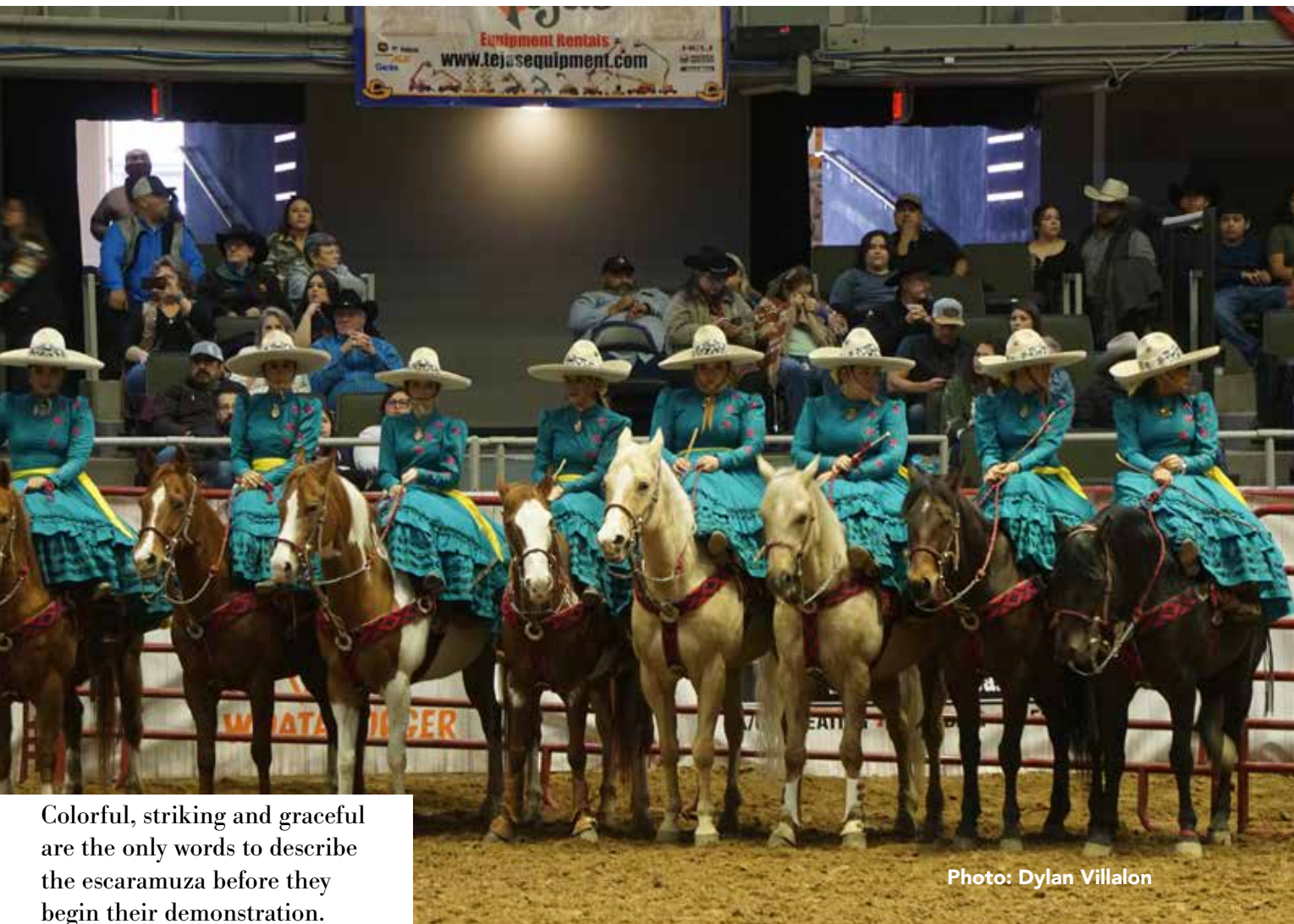
A young cowpoke dresses the part and waits with hands on hips to help wrangle the next bovine contestant.

20 minutes before the start of the show, announcements are made for folks to ask them to take their seats. It wasn't a full house, but the lower deck was packed and the crowd was ready.

The show began with a gorgeous rendition of the Mexican and American national anthems via trumpet. (It had been a while since I had attended an event that invoked the ol' hand over the heart song. I would be lying if I said that it felt incredible, even if the songs themselves were performed beautifully.) It is in moments like this that I am reminded of just how immensely important cultural

showcases such as Charreada at the San Antonio Rodeo exist. In Texas, in particular, there are too few spaces for people to experience Mexican and American cultures fully and simultaneously. Scratch that, there are too few spaces for Americans to experience other cultures in general. The national anthems playing back to back is a reminder of the cultural intersection that we find ourselves in here in San Antonio.

First up to perform were the Mexican dancers. The elegance and beauty of the dancers never ceases to soothe and impress me. Maybe it's the mesmerizing trance of the



Colorful, striking and graceful are the only words to describe the escaramuza before they begin their demonstration.

Photo: Dylan Villalon

dressess, or the way they seem to fleet and float across the grounds of dirt and mud. However, the most impactful moments I caught glimpses of were those in between the performances. Mothers and daughters rushing between venues, navigating the tight crowds while racing to wherever they needed to be at that exact moment. Groups of dancers scattered throughout the grounds, spending their free time exploring, or simply just trying to stay put together throughout the day until it is time to perform. I imagine the pressure, the whirlwind of it all. Some of my favorite photos were the ones that captured the gleaming expressions of the dancers while they performed. The entire of rollercoaster of a day shown in a single, shining smile. The rest of the performances they put on

throughout the night were just as stunning and beautiful.

After the dance performance, first up to showcase their riding skills were the Escaramuzas. The female riders of the Charreada event showed off their side-saddle skills and impressive control of their horses. The Escaramuzas also gave the crowd a taste of some of the skills that they use to compete around the state. My (probably naive) understanding is this: they spin the horse in a very specific and disciplined manner, and are judged and scored according to the quality of the spin. Seems simple right? Nope. I can barely get my dog to take her allergy pills in the morning. I quite literally cannot comprehend commanding such a massive and intelligent animal to do... Well,

anything. Let alone spin so elegantly.

Next up were the Charros, the male riders of the event. They are equally as graceful and focused as the Escaramuzas – without question. The Charros rode normally as opposed to the side saddle, and exhibited the same amount of control and precision as their counterparts. The men also showcased their abilities to maneuver the horses in whichever way they prefer. The more that I watched, I tried to determine who was really in control: the rider or the animal? Were these young men and women really imposing their will on this 1,000-pound beast, or were they hanging on for dear life trying to play the part? After spending the day watching the Charros and Escaramuzas practice and perform, it seems that it is



The twists and swirls of the beautiful Spanish dresses donned by the performers are mesmerizing.

Photo: Dylan Villalon



Photo: Dylan Villalon



Photo: Dylan Villalon



Photo: Dylan Villalon

perhaps both – a relationship. I am not sure such performances are possible without there being a middle ground at which rider and animal meet. While atop the horses, I think that it is in this middle ground where these riders live. Neither party is in full control, but working together to perform for the crowd.

Once the Charro and Escaramuzas showcases wrapped, up next were a series of competitions that the riders compete in year-round. These events consisted of various ways of roping up a

Photo: Dylan Villalon



cow or sheep; each event is meticulously scored for riding form, roping form and time.

Finally came the event that many came to see: the bull riding.

There are not any words that can fully encompass the intensity that is on display during the fabled 8-second ride. It truly is something you have to see for yourself to fully appreciate. That being said, it's kind of... sad. Is the energy of watching a bull ride unmatched? Yes. Is bull riding culturally significant in many parts of the world? Yes. Is it objectively sad to see an animal harnessed in such a way? Also yes. This is an impasse I have found myself in ever since I decided to cover the rodeo in February. I don't claim to be a medical expert, nor am I educated enough around animal psychology to have a true understanding of the matter, but if I am to be true to sharing my experience with you, I must say that there are conflicting feelings. Like the rodeo, the bull riding events are the last of the night.

The social and cultural importance of Charreada cannot be understated. San Antonio is the last metropolitan bastion of Mexican-American heritage in South Texas. (Sorry, Austin.) Showcases such as Charreada must continue, and we must create more opportunities for Texans to either get in touch with their own roots or learn about the culture that is inseparable from Texas history and identity.

# Food



**ALBERTO**  
Owner of Casa  
Amaya



AGAVE

18

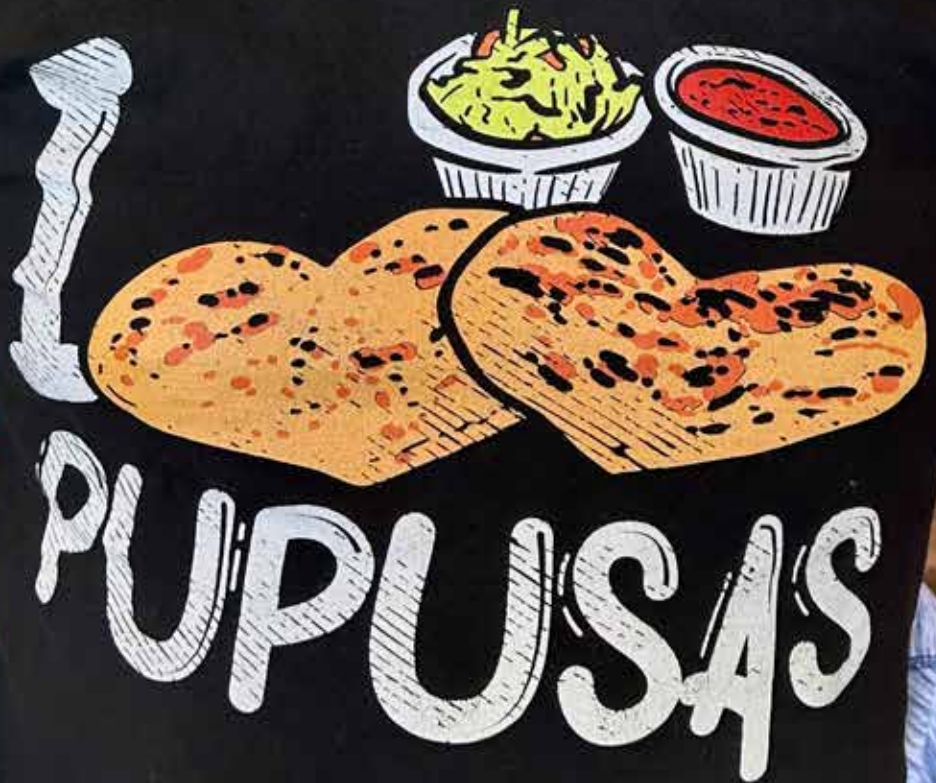
Often when I visit  
a restaurant, I find  
myself wondering what  
I am going to eat.



LOVE, PUPUSAS

20

There are five known  
love languages –  
but the sixth love  
language is food.



# VIVA AGAVE: 20 YEARS OF MOLCAJETE MASTERPIECES

BY CARLOS MACIAS



**OFTEN WHEN I VISIT A RESTAURANT, I FIND MYSELF WONDERING WHAT I AM GOING TO**

**EAT.** When in doubt, I always go with my tried-and-true type of restaurants – those that serve Mexican food.

A family-owned restaurant that has been open since 2003, Agave is a well-known establishment in South San Antonio. On the weekends, the restaurant is crowded with people of all ages who either want to eat, drink or enjoy the atmosphere. Music and friendly servers await anyone who wants to eat authentic Mexican meals or Tex-Mex reinterpretations of household classics.

Arturo Melendez Jr. is the current manager of the Agave who is happy to serve the people of San Antonio. From weddings to high school reunions, Melendez Jr. believes that catering and valuing customers is key for any business to succeed.

“What it comes down to is: What dishes are popular among our customers?” Melendez Jr. said.



Photo: Carlos Macias

The molcajete meal in its entirety, with a complimentary dish of rice, veggies, charro soup and molcajete sauce which can be combined into the molcajete. This is the serving size for one person.



Photo: Carlos Macias

The three meats: Chicken, beef and shrimp are found on this deluxe version of the molcajete. The Agave molcajete sauce and cheese are also present in this dish.

With additions like fried chicken being replaced because of lack of interest, the menu has changed. However, there is one Agave staple that will never be removed from the restaurant: the famous Agave Molcajete, a plate that Melendez Jr. recommends so that people can try the many ingredients found throughout the restaurant.

The meal is a remarkable sight. It is served on a stone tool known as the molcajete, a traditional Mexican version of the mortar and pestle. The meal consists of chicken or beef, or both in some cases, charro beans, rice, Pico de Gallo and cheese. Flour tortillas are also served with meals with corn tortillas as a substitution. The most important distinction found in this meal is the exclusive Molcajete sauce. The sauce is poured over the grilled meats and vegetables that are arranged outwards from the center of the molcajete, creating a sunflower flower-like shape where the meats and vegetables act as removable

petals. The center is filled with beans and rice and is topped off with a Pico de Gallo salsa that contains avocado.

For first timers, however, I would recommend any of the breakfast tacos or an order of carne asada tacos. That is because if you are looking for a quick bite and do not have enough money for the Molcajete, the tacos are sure to keep your stomach full. The prices for the tacos are under \$5 and plates usually under \$10 unless you order specialty meats like ribs. If you are looking for a non-meat option, the salad is the way to go and falls under the same price range as the plates. If you are an adventurous eater, then the Molcajete is the way to go with a price range starting at around \$14 and increases proportionally to the amount of people that are going to eat it.

Agave is a restaurant that embraces its Mexican roots to deliver delicious food at an affordable price. It is a haven for those who just simply want to eat Mexican dishes.

# LOVE, PUPUSAS

BY: ELIZABETH LOPEZ



**HERE ARE FIVE KNOWN LOVE LANGUAGES – BUT THE SIXTH LOVE LANGUAGE IS FOOD.** It is

a love language that people all over the world speak. It can be a bonding moment for some, or maybe just a creative outlet for others. Nonetheless, food preparation and cooking have always been a big trend because of their endless possibilities.

Even though today, the most popular concept is coming up with the next best bite, sometimes the best dishes have been around for decades.

I'm Eliz and my family is from El Salvador, a small but mighty country in Central America. Growing up in a Salvadoran home, we had all kinds of different foods, but my favorite was pupusas. This savory and traditional dish has many different ways of being made, but the comfort it always brings me is beyond compare.

Pupusas are a Salvadoran delicacy that can be made at any time of the year. The history of this dish goes back centuries.

Over 2,000 years ago, the Pipil tribe located in Joya de Cerén, a native village that was buried by the ashes from a volcano, created the pupusa. Before 1570, pupusas were known to be vegetarian. They went from being half-moon shaped and filled with veggies to being full-moon shaped and filled with meats like pork rind.



Photo: Elizabeth Lopez





The classic cheese pull on a pupusa. This was a pork, cheese and bean pupusa.



This is a typical breakfast plate in El Salvador. It comes with scrambled eggs, fried plantain and refried beans.

Photo: Elizabeth Lopez

This little piece of nostalgia and comfort can be made from cornmeal or a delicate rice flower. Some of the most common fillings are cheese, loroco (a vine flower bud), pork, beans, squash, jalapeños and sometimes even shrimp.

I recently visited Casa Amaya, a restaurant in Boerne, Texas. This place

reminded me so much of the love I have for the country my parents came from. When I saw the towels on the walls, I knew that I was in for something good. The towels display women cooking pupusas and many Salvadorans connect that with the authenticity and quality of the food.

I spoke to the owner, Alberto, an El



“ I used to own another restaurant down the street, but I attempted to retire – so I shut it down, and then it turned out that I really enjoy working and having a restaurant. So I opened this one and I couldn’t be happier. ”

Caption: They say if you see towels like this on the walls of a Salvadoran restaurant, you are in for a treat.

Photo: Elizabeth Lopez

Salvador native who was happy to share that this restaurant has only been open for a little over a year.

“I used to own another restaurant down the street, but I attempted to retire – so I shut it down, and then it turned out that I really enjoy working and having a restaurant. So I opened this one and I couldn’t be happier,” he said.

He went on to tell me that one of his requirements is the pupusas have to be made fresh when they are ordered. He even has a disclosure on his menu that states: “Pupusas take longer to prepare and cook.” If you ask anyone familiar with the dish, they would tell you that fresh pupusas are one of a kind.

I told Alberto that since I moved to San Antonio, it’s rare that I have a place where I feel at home. Don’t get me wrong: I love Mexican food and breakfast tacos, but sometimes I crave the food that taught me love and patience. It always came with a story from my parents, too, about how poor they used to be, and how they made food with the very few ingredients they had available.

My parents fleeing to the United States in the late ‘80s (during the 12-year Salvadoran Civil War) was not the plan, but establishing themselves here allowed them to work hard and make decent money so they could feed me all the pupusas I could eat. While the war ravaged my parents’ homeland, destroying entire villages and displacing thousands of people, my family persevered and made a life for themselves in Conroe, Texas.

No matter your family’s origin or where you live, food will always be a relatable love language that encourages people to join together and connect. Food brings people closer from all over the world – like a huge melting pot of mouthwatering cuisines. So go try the cheesy goodness of pupusas, and if you see towels on the walls that look like native paintings, be prepared for the flavor.





One of Casa Amaya's specials that comes with a little bit of everything. You have pupusas, fried plantain, a corn tamale with cheese, beans and cream on the side.

Photo: Elizabeth Lopez

# How Tough



# ARE YA?

by dYLAN  
vILLaLON



**IF** there is one thing I learned from roller skating, it's that humans were not made to have wheels for feet. However, this

fact of the universe seems to mean nothing to a growing group of San Antonio women.

Roller skating is an activity that most of us have tried at some point in our lives (to various degrees of success.) Think back to those first moments on wheels: slipping on those sphere-bottomed boots and feeling the uncertainty of those skates course through your unbalanced body, reaching for whatever or whoever is around you to regain any control possible and prevent yourself from plummeting onto the wooden or concrete floor beneath you.

It turns out that folks – mostly women – have been plummeting into that god-awful concrete or wooden floor for almost a century. However, it wasn't always a balance-necessitating pastime or physical contest. In its earliest organized form, roller derby was more like a cross-country endurance spectacle. On wheels. Leo Seltzer and David Runyon – two questionable film and print creatives who could be the center of their own articles – started the Transcontinental Roller Derby in 1936. Think of a simulated cross-country race that traveled throughout the actual country. On wheels! This event took place on a portable track that saw teams of two (male/female) race for over 3,000 miles per day. These races were popular because tickets were offered at a discount, so word grew quickly about the new and cheap

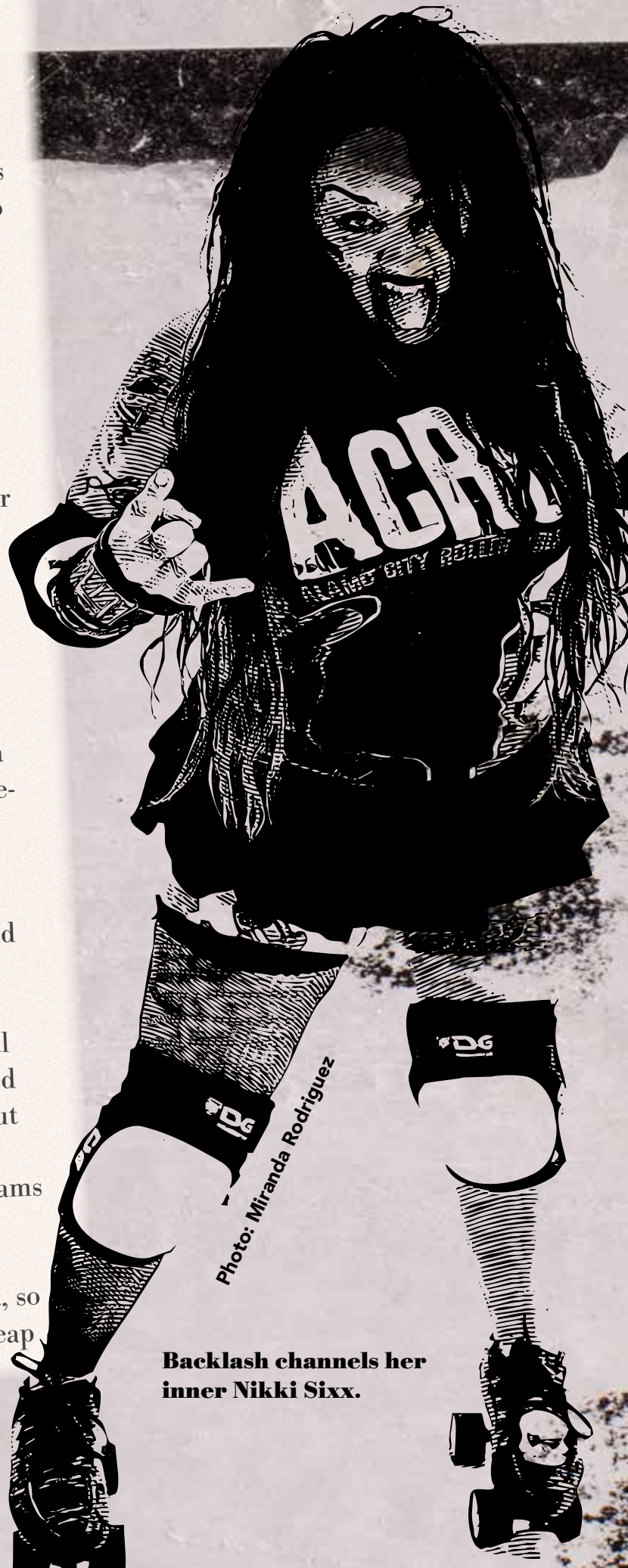


Photo: Miranda Rodriguez

**Backlash channels her inner Nikki Sixx.**

live entertainment popping up in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and Detroit.

Leo Seltzer had been the orchestrator of the operation. That was until David Runyon realized that there were moments during these derby matches and races where the intensity would peak – the crashes. So, naturally, Runyon encouraged Seltzer to lean into the physical aspect of the sport, and the fans loved it. Over the next 15 years, the sport would begin to be broadcast on radio and, eventually, in 1948, roller derby aired on television for the first time. The next 50 years saw the sport maintain varying levels of popularity, either via local leagues or the continued efforts of Leo Seltzer.

Now to the good stuff – and by good, I mean good ol' Texas. I should not have been surprised when I learned that organized women's roller derby got its start right up the road in Austin, Texas. A failed attempt in 2001 by an Austinite to recreate the wacky and circus-like environment of the roller derbies of old resulted in a group of women who were ready to roll – and from the figurative ashes rose the Bad Girl Good Woman Productions. Over the next few decades, the all-women club spawned

a wave of inclusive women-run clubs, not just across Texas, but across the globe.

The club that I had the privilege to hang out with this semester was a part of that first wave. Founded in 2005, the Alamo City Roller Girls were founded by Cate “Nita Spankin” Compton and Kat “Kitty Glitter” Feuerbacher. (By the way, I should mention that one of the coolest things about these clubs is that they have their own badass names that they prefer to be called, so I will be referring to the ladies in this article accordingly.)

The ACRG are a part of a larger coalition of derby clubs called the Women's Flat Track Derby Association.

Now that we have learned a bit about roller derby, let me tell you a little bit about the time I spent around the ladies of ACRG.

For context, I have played sports my whole life – 14 years of baseball and six years of football before college. I would like to think I have a decent understanding of athletics and what it takes to play. So, I hope you believe me when I tell you that there is nothing

out there like roller derby. The best way I can describe it is running a full contact race. On wheels.

Everyone has a plan until they are shoulder-checked while attached to roller skates moving 10 to 15 miles per hour.

The ages of the women in this league vary, to an extent that is as inspiring as it is surprising. One would imagine that a physical sport such as roller derby would demand sculpted bodies and even stronger minds. However, both high school graduates and veteran, tenured community members can share the rink together as if age is merely a number.

When I spoke with some of the athletes, one of the trends that I noticed was their enjoyment in being able to leave a lot of their outside lives at the door when they come to practice or have matches. In 2023, it will be increasingly difficult to find a space that is not affected by our values or the people or party we vote for. Sports is often an equalizer – not just between nations, but between neighbors. Because of this or perhaps in spite of it, there is a community need for a space where our baggage can be left outside. Does that space always involve such high speeds and physically demanding activity? No. But it is always needed, nonetheless.

Trouble Clef, 37, the ACRG team manager, has not lost sight of the importance of community on this team since joining in 2012.

“When I moved to San Antonio from Kerville, I literally went out and found a roller derby league before I found a place to live,” said Trouble.

She went on to talk about how she ended

up with ACRG.

“When I got to San Antonio in 2016, I immediately joined with ACRG,” she said. “I got in a really bad car wreck not too long after that and only got to do one bout with the team. After that I came onto the team as a non-skating official, and have been here ever since. I love the training. We love each other. I love them. This is my home.”

Something else that became apparent the more I spoke with the athletes is the sense of empowerment that this sport brings to these women. Specifically, there are two kinds of power: power as women bending gender norms and conventional sports norms in their respective communities, and generational power.

What is generational power? Generational power is the idea of how political, economic and cultural power are divided over time and throughout generations in a particular region. Consider San Antonio for a moment: What generations hold the most power in this city? Is it the baby boomers? Millennials? Gen-Xers? (Don’t answer, because we would be here all day.) Yet, examining generational power is as simple as asking these very questions about any community. That’s why there is an entire index dedicated to asking this question and getting real, measurable answers. It’s called the Generational Power Index (GPI) and was developed in 2021 to “truly understand the consequences of the generational power shift that is ripping throughout society,” according to GPI

founder and Editor-In-Chief Jeff Desjardins.

So what's this got to do with roller derby? The short answer is: culture. When I look at the River Rollers, I see the same thing I see when I am at a local soccer league or one of the mercado de pulgas in San Antonio; I see a community in its truest sense. Nobody forced these women to strap on their knee pads and helmets and subject themselves to weekly high-speed collisions and exhausting practices. Every single athlete here is here for her own reasons, and each one has her own story to tell about why she finds roller derby to be the best thing for her.

While observing their practice, I could not help but notice a few men hanging around the stands as well. I approached one, and that is where I met Mike. Mike (husband of Big Chonies, a member of the team) is what they

would call a "roller derby widow."

Don't worry, nobody had to pass away for Mike to earn such a designation. Rather, his partner simply found ACRG and roller derby has now become a central part of both of their lives. I would wager for the better.

"My wife was a Girl Scout leader 10 years ago. ACRG came to speak with the Girl Scouts and taught them how to skate. She fell in love with roller derby that day and the rest is history, here we are," said Mike.

I asked Mike why this sport is important to him and his family.

"I see that it is empowering for women. Women have all these expectations – depending on their age – whether it is to do a job, be a mother or be a student. Here we welcome all different age groups. This brings them together, and

**Ally Gory balances femininity and toughness in one image.**

Photo: Miranda Rodriguez



they look out for each other and everyone always helps each other out,” said Mike.

One of the biggest surprises I had while researching Texas roller derby was that there are tons of different leagues in the state. A few of them exist right here in San Antonio, as well as in San Marcos and Austin. It’s even spread across the continent, with Canada forming the first all-women’s Canadian league in 2005. While the leagues and teams of Texas are in different regions, there is definitely an effort to exist as one larger group

together. Athletes, coaches and referees will often meet for socials and drinks after practices, and will join together to scrimmage each other before the season starts. I think that such a cohesion across an absurdly large state – a state that is notoriously behind the curve on women’s rights and equality at the legislative level – is a glimpse of the best of us. It’s a representation of the best of humanity.

I will always cherish the moments I got to spend with these badass women as I imagine many often do. But, not because of the bumps or the scrapes. Not because of the sounds or the adrenaline or energy that overtakes whatever space these

Photo: Miranda Rodriguez



women exist in. It is because I see something here, I see something amongst the sweat and the mean mugs. I see a singular thing that we all desperately need but have had withheld from us. Even if it's fleeting. Even if for a moment, I see power. Real power. Not the thing our leaders cling to, or tell us we deserve. That's not power, that's popularity. Real power is derived from community and just like these women, cannot be stopped.

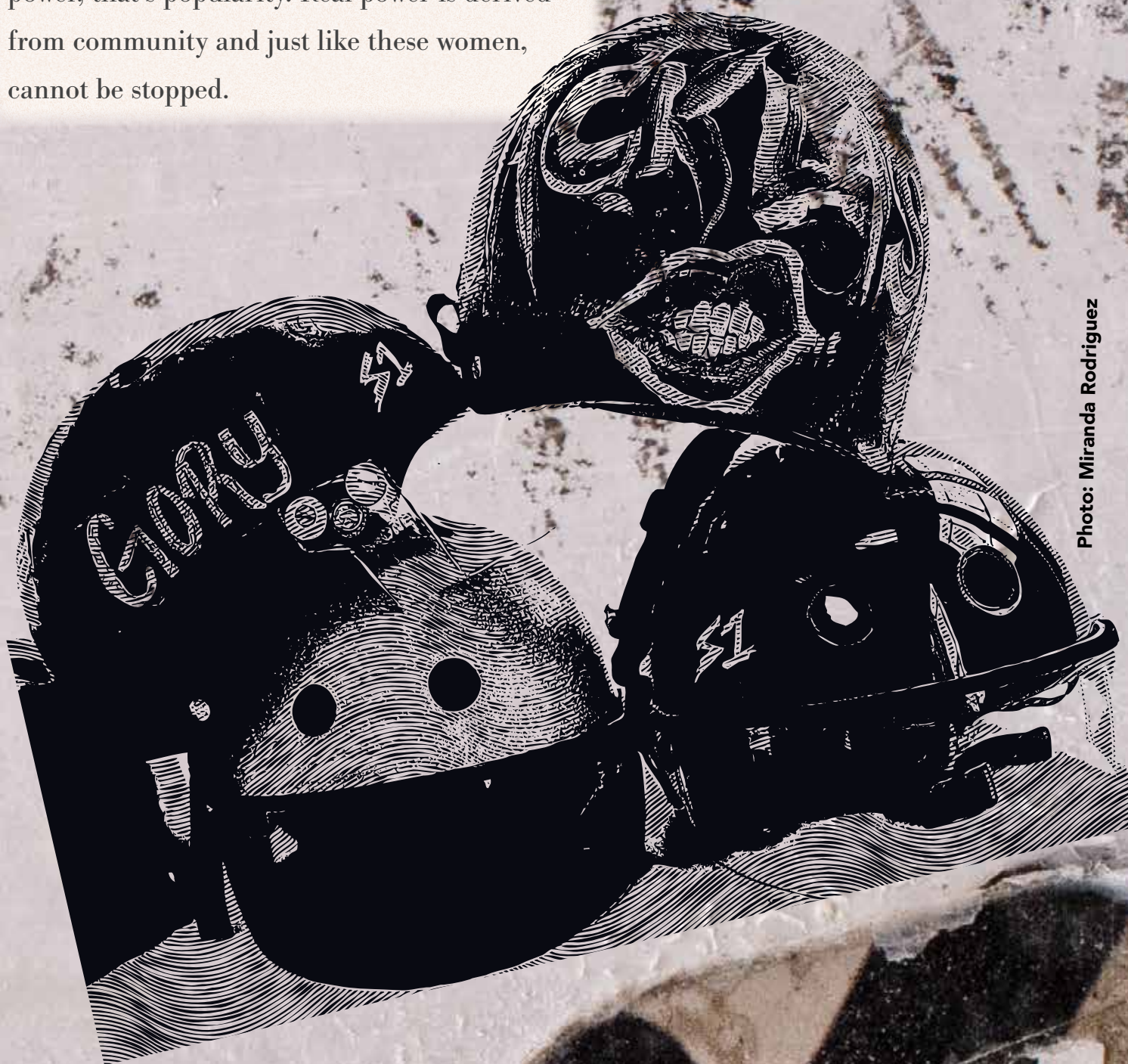


Photo: Miranda Rodriguez




# *The West Side Sound Story*

By Serenity  
Hernandez  
Bogert



**Chicana/o**

Someone  
who is a native of or  
descends from Mexico and who lives  
in the United States.



by

## *The Dreamliners*

Claire Peralta, Sylvia Wilburn  
and Cecilia Silva



Photo Courtesy: Numero Group

San Antonio's West Side is the oldest urban Mexican neighborhood in Texas. It's a historic hub of Chicano and Tex-Mex culture, a celebration of a proud and tenacious community. The heart of the city.

You feel that in its music: soulful, sometimes throat-ripped vocals, dancehall rhythms and a DIY attitude. San Antonio music – our music – represents a beautiful people of resilience, passion and spirit.

And that music is called the West Side Sound. Having found its footing in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, the West Side Sound is a Chicano soul movement defined by its origin of San Antonio, and the confluence of Mexican/American musical styles like Tejano, Motown pop/R&B and New Orleans rock 'n' roll. Few are aware of this culturally significant scene in which local teenagers crafted an eclectic, unapologetic and multicultural style that has fought with all its heart to survive over 60 years later.

Ultimately, the West Side Sound came to be more strictly defined in the mainstream by the accordion-inflected Texas Tornados (Flaco Jiménez, Augie Meyers, Doug Sahm and Freddy Fender.) The mixed supergroup's soulful, boot-stompin' "Tex-Mex" country-rock songs about love and heartbreak won its members a Grammy for Best Mexican-American Album in 1991, and its

members all maintained globally respected solo careers.

However, the soul/R&B recordings of late '50s and '60s groups are what define the West Side Sound's Golden Age. "Oldies" R&B fans might recognize groups like The Royal Jesters, who have been sampled by artists like Kanye West, or Sunny and the Sunliners, whose nationally-charting Billboard Top 20 single "Talk To Me" led them to become the first Chicano group to perform on the highly coveted Dick Clark's American Bandstand in 1963.

But over the years, many important local artists got lost in the dust of the larger national Chicano soul movement they helped shape. Now, these early architects of the West Side Sound and San Antonio culture are finally getting the same long-deserved recognition.

In 1965, Sylvia Wilburn Salas, a singer-songwriter in the '60s San Antonio Chicana group The Dreamliners, wrote and recorded her first song when she was just 15.

"At that time, we only really did [Motown] covers, but our manager and producers wanted us to write songs," Wilburn Salas said. "I had an unfinished song called 'Best Things in Life' that I had started writing when I was 12. I finished it in the car on the way to the recording session."

The Dreamliners soon became a popular live act in the San



The Dreamliners Claire Peralta, Sylvia Wilburn and Cecilia Silva in the early 1960s.

**Photo Courtesy: Numero Group**

Antonio area, lighting up dance halls like the West Side's VFW post and NCO clubs. They also performed at radio-sponsored events alongside pop and soul legends like The Monkees, The Zombies and Sam Cooke.

However, like many artists today, The Dreamliners never received much national attention or financial success from the records themselves.

"We lived at home... all we needed was a few bucks for hairspray. We needed a lot of that!" she laughs.

Like many artists in the early days of the music industry, Wilburn Salas wasn't too concerned with how much press she was getting or how much she was getting paid – she just loved songwriting and singing. She continued in the music business, even after The Dreamliners broke up in 1968. A more sizeable income wouldn't arrive until Wilburn Salas and her late husband began songwriting commercial jingles.

Then in 2022, "Best Things in Life" was featured prominently in an episode of the Breaking Bad television spinoff Better Call Saul. Dreamliners songs have even popped up in other places, like French McDonald's commercials, Amazon Prime's Hunters with Logan Lerman and Al Pacino and Gen Z-targeted shows like "You,"

"Riverdale" and "Euphoria."

"When I got the royalty checks, it was all so surreal," Wilburn Salas said.

"I have to ask myself, 'Is it OK to feel excited?' I'm just so thankful for the people who help get the music out and for all the people who like my songs," she said.

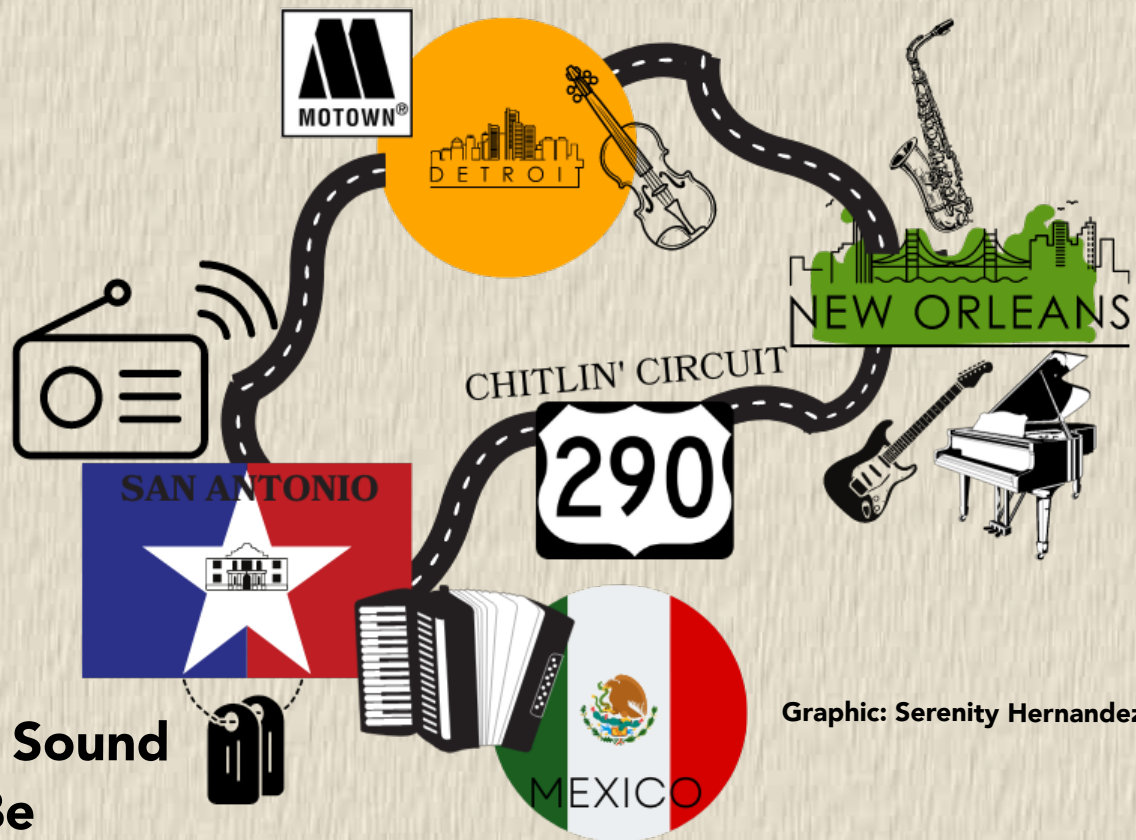
Wilburn Salas is far too humble. Her vibrant doo-wop-inspired melodies on "Best Things in Life" sing with a rare childlike innocence, and can hold their own alongside the shimmery, hook-laden hits of Motown and Stax.

Yet, NPR asserts that San Antonio Chicano soul and the West Side Sound are among the "least-known music scenes ever to thrive in America." It's hard to disagree. It wasn't until 2018 – over 50 years after "Best Things in Life" was released – that Numero Group, an archival record label, properly released The Dreamliners' music for the Digital Age. This process helped make these previously out-of-print records more accessible to potential fans and collectors. It also made their music more available to industry gatekeepers, such as music supervisors.

Music supervisors are integral to how both new and legacy artists get heard in a post-pandemic world. They are responsible

# BIENVENIDOS al Westside

Illustration: Matthew "Moose" Lopez



Graphic: Serenity Hernandez Bogert

## How The West Side Sound Came to Be

Although the term was coined by San Antonio-born musical prodigy Doug Sahm in 1983, The West Side Sound originally developed in the '60s and '70s as a confluence of music and culture from:

- **Tejano:** Mexican roots in accordion music known as conjunto. Tejano are considered some of the earliest forms of Chicano soul. This sound and the ethos it represented for Chicanos/as became influential during the '70s Chicano Movement thanks to the band and activists Little Joe Y La Familia, and in the '90s by the Texas Tornados.

- **Rock 'n' Roll/R&B:** The genre originated in the south in black artists such as Little Richard and the New Orleans-born Fats Domino, who were introduced to San Antonians in the '50s and '60s via the Chitlin' Circuit and Highway 290. During segregation, the Chitlin' Circuit was a string of venues across the southern and upper midwestern U.S. which provided performance spaces for black entertainers and fans. Much of Chicano music was influenced

by the soul and rock 'n' roll pioneers who frequented these routes. Because of San Antonio's largely mixed population, venues like the West Side's Keyhole Club (the city's first integrated nightclub) became a popular stop on this circuit.

- **Motown:** Hitsville, U.S.A.'s radio pop masterpieces and the example the record label set as a Person-Of-Color-owned business inspired Chicanos/as to create their own music independently. The success and crossover popularity of Motown (combined with the access provided by the Chitlin' Circuit) also played an important role in the fight for racial integration in 1960s America.

- **Military City, U.S.A.:** Ultimately, San Antonio, a city with a strong military presence for almost 300 years, has become home to people from all over the country who have brought their eclectic musical tastes to and from the fast-growing city. San Antonio being one of the westernmost towns in relation to other cities on the Chitlin' Circuit helped give popular San Antonio soul music the West Side Sound name.

for sync licensing, an entertainment industry practice that involves getting artists' music in films, television shows, commercials and other visual media; this means legacy artists with largely undiscovered catalogs can have their music re-introduced to a wider audience via streaming juggernauts like Netflix.

In the Age of Streaming, these lucrative opportunities have ultimately become a large purveyor of important cultural recordings.

Thanks to the Numero Group label and sync licensing, The Royal Jesters – 1960s West Side Sound nobility – were able to attain a feature on the film soundtrack for “Judas and the Black Messiah” (2021) starring Daniel Kaluuya (after being sampled on Ye’s 2018 song “Ghost Town,” no less.) In an America reeling from its history of racial injustice, this ignited a trend of Los Angeles music supervisors – like those on “Better Call Saul” – mining for slick ‘60s soul tracks by unknown artists of color.

“I thought the song was so corny,” Wilburn Salas said with a laugh. “I didn’t think anyone would like it. I was a young girl, and didn’t have much confidence in my songwriting,” she admitted.

In the larger American canon, women of color have been systematically excluded from the story. Wilburn Salas knows how it feels when the music is gone for good.

“I learned there was a fire at the studio where we recorded at least 10 songs. I’m assuming a lot of [unreleased Dreamliners] recordings got lost.”

The sweetly harmonious “doo doo-doo-doo”s of “Best Things in Life” have a graceful way of worming their way into your head – when they do, it’s difficult to think about the unfortunate circumstances of the other potential hit songs Wilburn Salas recorded.

But Wilburn Salas’ story is illustrative of the long-fought battle against Hispanic and Latino heritage erasure in the United States. In most instances, that erasure is not caused by accidental studio fires, but by a fiercely prejudiced American ecosystem and its pre-Internet gatekeepers. Without labels like Numero Group, these essential Chicano music makers might have gone largely unnoticed by their own communities for decades.

To avoid losing any more San Antonio culture, two women are working to document the West Side Sound story.

Dr. Sylvia Mendoza and Dr. Gloria Vásquez Gonzáles are professors at the University of Texas at San Antonio who want to archive the city’s Latin identity and community. The pair began work on the West Side Sound Oral History project in 2022, utilizing the momentum of local pride sparked by the Dreamliners’ and The Royal Jesters’ music

being featured in popular American television shows.

The West Side Sound Oral History Project involves a collection of recorded video interviews with as many “old school” West Side scenesters as possible. For the professors, there is a particular interest in the fans who were there, and musicians like Wilburn Salas.

“I think that it’s very important that we document this and for people to know that this was done in San Antonio by San Antonio and by Chicanos,” Vásquez Gonzáles told the Texas Standard.

Today, the West Side Sound can only be defined by the West Side Spirit. In its prosperous spaces like Janie’s Record Shop, Friends of Sound and bars like Jaime’s Place, West Side institutions aim to serve as gathering places for local musicians and fans “in the Barrio and Beyond.”

“[Owner Jaime Macias] has been doing a lot of great work, and collaborating with community folks to create a kind of space there that’s very much in line with the spaces that existed in the West Side Sound’s prime,” Mendoza said.

Currently, the professors plan to host the project’s culminating event and multimedia exhibits at Jaime’s Place. Vásquez Gonzáles also reports that the UTSA Library will be storing the project in its special collections archives. Eventually, Mendoza and Vásquez Gonzáles would like to make the West Side Sound Oral History Project interviews accessible to everyone at any time.

Despite the studio fire that most likely destroyed those Dreamliners recordings, Wilburn Salas continues to look up and appreciate what she has been able to accomplish with her music.

“I’m leaving a legacy for me and my family when I die. My music will still be living,” she said.

That’s the West Side Spirit.

To hear the West Side Sound, visit this playlist by the West Side Sound Oral History Project. To learn more about the project, visit <https://www.facebook.com/westsidesoundoralhistory>.



“ I’m leaving a legacy for me and my family when I die. My music will still be living. ”



**Photo: Serenity Hernandez Bogert**

Local DJ and soul connoisseur Rambo Salinas poses in front of Friends of Sound Records on 700 Fredericksburg Road. Friends Of Sound, Janie's Record Shop and live music bar Jaime's Place are some of San Antonio's bastions of local music, history and culture.



**Illustration: Matthew "Moose" Lopez**



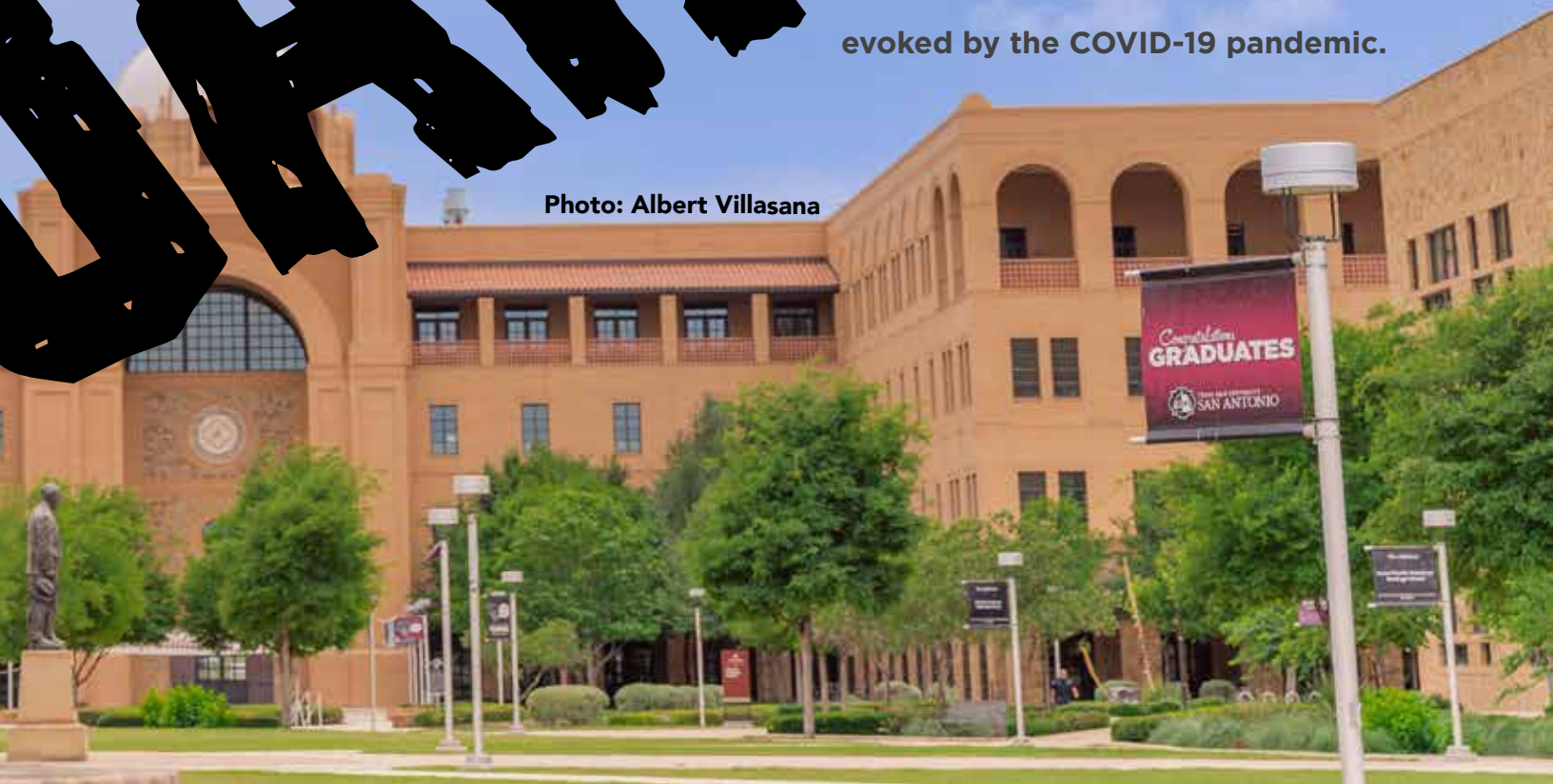
ME  
FOR

## Profiles of Women Entrepreneurs from Texas A&M University-San Antonio

By Marley  
Walker

There is a lot of pride in being a Jaguar. Female alumni from Texas A&M University-San Antonio are impacting communities both big and small across San Antonio. Three local business owners have shared their experiences growing and maintaining a business after facing challenges evoked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo: Albert Villasana



# MARY RIVERA

Mary Rivera, 48, became passionate about a career in counseling after attending therapy starting at 12 years old. Attending therapy sessions at a young age and continuing them as a professional has allowed her to maintain her mental health while guiding clients through similar treatment.

Rivera is an A&M-San Antonio alumna who graduated in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in psychology and completed a master's degree in counseling in 2015. Born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, Rivera immediately began attending the campus after graduating from Blessed Sacrament Academy Second Chance High School. Eager to finish high school after being removed from multiple districts, Rivera openly discusses the mental health challenges and bullying she faced throughout her teenage years, and how it led her to discover her passion for helping people.

As a professional supervisor and licensed chemical dependency counselor, Rivera became interested in the counseling field after battling her own mental health issues, mourning multiple suicides throughout her family and recognizing drug abuse in her close circle.

Rivera officially started her independent practice in 2017. She began offering at-home visits and video sessions to clients within the central area of San Antonio. Citing a "need in a small town" amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Rivera opened her current Devine location, Lucid Counseling and Wellness.

Similar to other businesses founded during the pandemic, with the frequency of appointments slowing down, Rivera faced challenges; however, the business remained in operation, allowing in-person sessions that followed COVID-19 guidelines.

The name of the business was decided by Rivera and her husband. When reviewing a quick definition search for the term "lucid," Rivera found that the word meant "expressed clearly, easy to understand; bright or luminous."

"That's what happens in lucid counseling...when you're talking to

[clients] you never give advice but you ask questions, and they're like, 'Oh, I never saw it that way!'" Rivera said.

Rivera offers a range of services using neurofeedback and biofeedback to treat issues such as depression, ADHD, autism and anxiety. She also treats clients who are referred by employers for chemical dependency-related matters. Rivera began offering couples

counseling, and after experiencing the positive effects of couples therapy in her own relationship, she looks to feature couples workshops in the near future. As the owner and only

counselor of the practice,

she manages her time to

accommodate senior

students during

the month of

February

with access

to career

counseling

as they

ride out

their

final

months of high

school.

In an effort to

make patients more

comfortable with

opening up, Rivera uses

a variety of strategies for

children and adults. When

one first enters Lucid Counseling

and Wellness, the first room

on the right opens into a cozy

yet nurturing space, usually

a talking area or discussion

room. In this room, Rivera may

use Q&A-related games and

art therapy to ensure children

feel more comfortable and convey their experiences in a clearer way.

These activities can also be done with adults, but typically the first appointment illuminates Rivera's process to treat the client and disclose information.

Jasmine Cardenas, 20, is a current patient of Lucid Counseling and Wellness and a former resident of Devine. She began receiving counseling in August 2022 and was very open about sharing her experience with me. As a San Antonio resident who recorded seeing





Photo: Albert Villasana

three to four therapists in the past, Cardenas said that “no one compared to Mary.”

“There are things you know most counselors won’t sit down and tell you. It takes time to basically just tell you, ‘OK, well if this isn’t working, we’re going to keep trying.’ – and she’ll keep trying.”

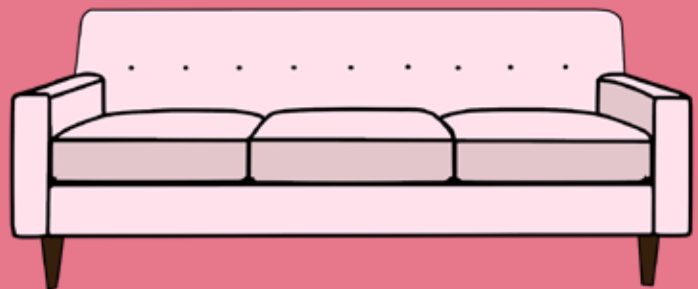
One of the methods recommended to her as a part of cognitive behavioral therapy – she said as she chuckled at its comparison to art therapy – is writing out the wants or needs from the relationships in her life. She reflected by writing what she wanted in a partner and what she wanted in a friend. “What you look for in a partner is what you look for in a friend,” Rivera said.

As Rivera continues to help people not just in this close, small community, but in huge cities such as Dallas and Houston via video, she still manages to find time to dedicate this year to self-care, attending peer groups and traveling. “The image I have in my mind is kneeling down and carrying the world on you,” Rivera said. “I want to help everybody, but there isn’t enough of me to help everyone.”

She adjusted my attention to the several sloth-related items within the building that stand as a symbol for her to “slow down” as a therapist and take a breath. To psychology majors and students aspiring to pursue a counseling career, Rivera emphasized the need for passion in order to maintain balance and progression within the field. Cardenas described Rivera as “very considerate of her patients and very caring,” as talking through her mental health professionally has allowed her to heal and become strong enough to share her experience.

“I think everybody deserves a Mary as their therapist,” Cardenas said.

“ I want to help everybody, but there isn’t enough of me to help everyone...”



# PATRICIA CRUZ

Patricia Cruz, 25, was born in Salvatierra, Guanajuato, Mexico, and came to the United States when she was 5 years old. Cruz now resides in the small town of Lytle, Texas, and continues to influence the community one lash at a time with Lovely Diva Lashes.

Starting her sophomore year at Somerset High School, Cruz said she started a program to become a licensed cosmetologist that required her to finish 1,000 hours and state exams upon graduation.

Cruz attended Palo Alto College in 2019 as a first-generation college student. She received an associate's degree in business management, and another in arts and science. While maintaining school obligations, she garnered beauty industry experience by working in a salon and lash studio. Soon, Cruz's passion for cosmetology quickly evolved into a career.

"I love the beauty industry and the fact that you get to meet so many people, so many women," Cruz said. "I love the fact that it was more like a one-on-one, and so I decided I wanted to keep on doing it."

While in college, Cruz first started her business using her at-home studio in January 2019, where she offered a range of beauty services and began building clientele.

After deciding to further her education, Cruz attended A&M-San Antonio and received a bachelor's degree in general business in 2020. Cruz said that she also opened her Lytle, Texas storefront in June 2020 because there was "no competition" in the small town, and "there [were] no other salons that did lash extensions."

As prior clientele became informed of the new location and Cruz continued to offer services from home, the COVID-19 pandemic put the storefront project on hold. Cruz was forced to stop operating due to the state mandate; however, time allowed her to start remodeling the space, which has slowly become more personalized.

Cruz stated that another challenge she faced while opening the new location was getting the correct permits and licenses needed to be a legal business. She emphasized the importance of A&M-San Antonio students "knowing their licenses" and other documents before pursuing the journey of starting their own businesses.

Now in full operation, the business offers services such as eyelash extensions, lifts and tints. Cruz also provides full-body waxing, eyebrow lamination and facials.

Partnering with an online beauty service known as Borboleta, Cruz sells lash-care products from the company both online and in-store that allow

clients to access new skincare essentials easily.

Recently, Cruz also described her experience becoming a lash educator, which has allowed her to train people interested in becoming lash technicians. She has trained both beginners and experienced individuals looking to learn more in order to enhance their careers, as well as newbies who simply want to learn an extra skill.

Cruz said that she teaches everything she knows in two-day classes, and allows participants to work on a live model as she guides them through the process.

The average application process can range from two to three hours long. Cruz highlighted her skills to also work as a "lash therapist."

"A lot of my clients love the fact that [having lash extensions] gives them more confidence," Cruz said. "You get to know [clients] and meet them and learn about their personal lives."

Cruz's work can be accessed via her business Instagram, where she updates her stories and posts daily – they feature various lash styles accompanied by smiling faces.

"Opening my storefront has been the biggest accomplishment," Cruz said. "I never thought that I would have my own salon."



# SARA BRISEÑO GERRISH



Sara Briseño Gerrish, 41, is a real estate broker associate at RE/MAX Unlimited, and partner of a Southside coffee bar known as Tandem. Gerrish engages and impacts the community in a number of ways as an alumna from A&M-San Antonio.

Gerrish graduated in 2010 with a master's of Business Administration after receiving a bachelor of Business Administration in marketing from St. Mary's University. Since graduating, Gerrish has celebrated her 10-year reunion in 2020 and has connected with alumni engagement on campus to attend various Big A events.

To get a further look into Gerrish's involvement on campus, I interviewed Dr. Mary Kay Cooper, Director of alumni Engagement at A&M-San Antonio. After the grand opening of Tandem in 2019 amid the start of the pandemic, Cooper said that Gerrish began hosting a happy hour for alumni engagement where the group would gather for coffee and beer.

She has also attended various college of business mixers, and celebrated downtown as Cooper said she purchased tickets for alumni to sit together at the river parade during Fiesta. Just a couple of days prior to the interview with Gerrish, she had attended the grand opening for the Vida Project as an agent reviewing the subdivisions' amenities and future outlook.

While managing her time to give back to the campus, Gerrish is also the chair of the San Antonio Board of Realtors and broker associate for RE/MAX Unlimited alongside her mother and sister. Gerrish's mother, Beatrice Briseño, principal broker of RE/MAX Unlimited, had the opportunity to purchase the real estate brokerage in 1995 located on Hot Wells Boulevard.

Gerrish described herself growing up in the industry where she eventually began working full-time at the firm in 2001. At a young age, real estate piqued her interest, and had quickly become her passion. Gerrish claimed that her mother "had a lot to do with it."

"The schedule didn't really seem to be that big of a deal when I saw the impact that she was having on people achieving the American dream," Gerrish said. "I think it

was fun to work with my mom, and once my sister got into it, it was just a fun thing for us to do together."

In 2006, as the family started to join the company, Briseño became the first Latina broker to own a real estate franchise in San Antonio.

The brokerage currently has 15 agents, and there are about 15,000 agents a part of the San Antonio Board of Realtors.

Briseño and her family have guided many buyers within the city through the tedious process of achieving home ownership while also setting expectations and explaining the market.

"I am someone who is always perpetually honing my real estate skills and learning what's going on in the community, and I have my client's best interest at heart," Gerrish said. "They're the ones that dictate what we're looking at, and I try to be 'the resource of the resource' to help them make those decisions."

In 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded the estimated population of San Antonio at 1.5 million residents. Therefore, accommodating the buyer's wants and needs is very important, especially with the market fluctuating and sometimes resulting in limited inventory.

Factors such as walkability, school districts, property taxes and being within proximity to work are all concerns of clients that can be fulfilled depending on various locations and opportunities across the entire city.

"You kind of start seeing the different trends in the real estate market and you adjust accordingly," Gerrish said, describing some of the challenges agents face when the market changes so often. "I was doing real estate during the recession, which was really tough as there were a lot of foreclosures."

Working daily and traveling for her career, Gerrish still finds time for her evening obligations and staying up-to-date within the community to bring up businesses from the Southside of San Antonio. Gerrish said that she relies on her calendar to balance her routine, highlighting that going out of town can quickly become the busiest time with client referrals.

Gerrish emphasizes the importance of taking advantage of the resources offered on campus at A&M-San Antonio. According to Gerrish, real estate is extremely "relationship-based."

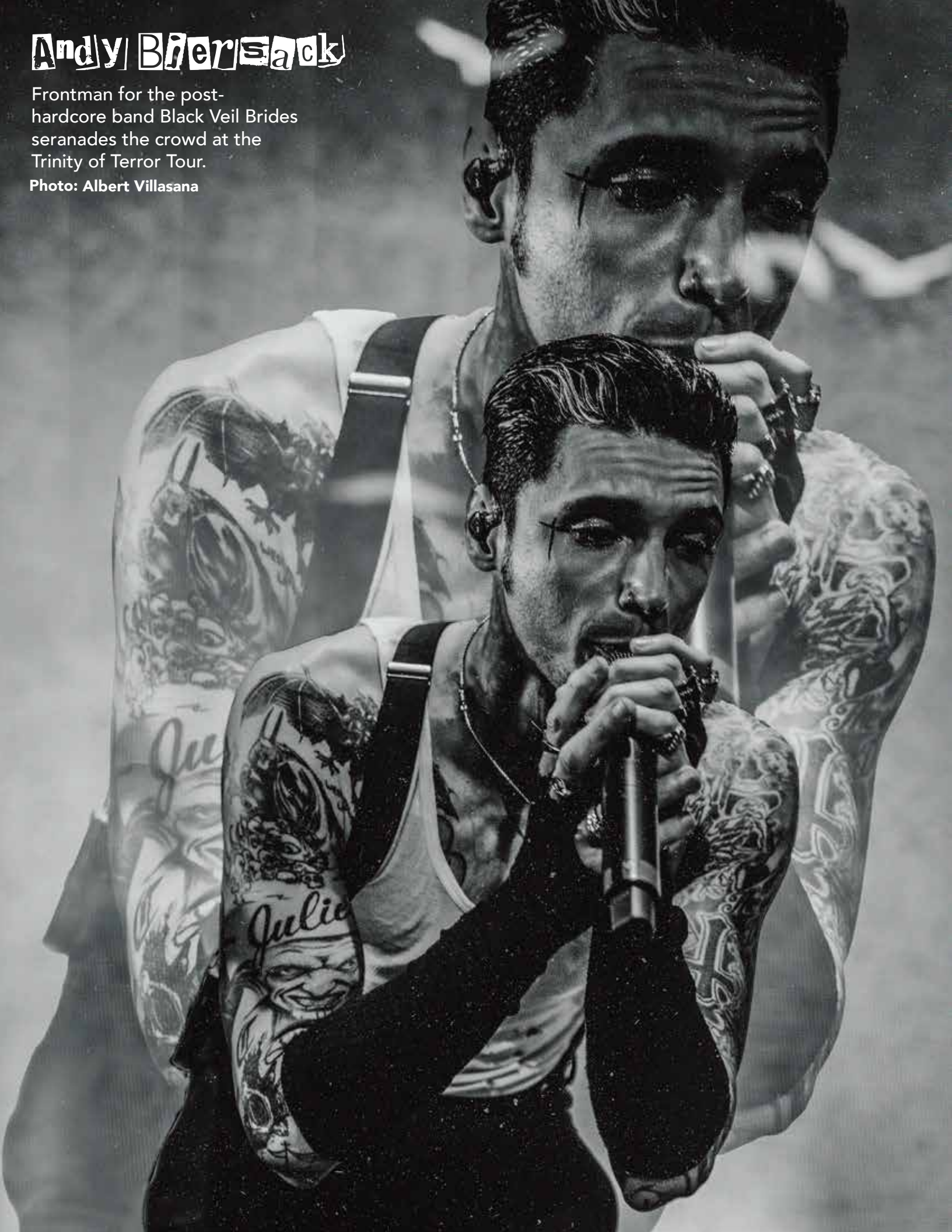
"You never know how a relationship with somebody can help you down the road," Gerrish said.



# Andy Biersack

Frontman for the post-hardcore band Black Veil Brides serenades the crowd at the Trinity of Terror Tour.

Photo: Albert Villasana



# Society



NIGHT SKY  
Mustang Island



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Two words changed the course of my life: Seek Discomfort.

# THE RISE & FALL OF THE AMERICAN MALL

BY MELANIE REYES AND  
SERENITY HERNANDEZ BOGERT



**THE AMERICAN MALL:  
A PHYSICALLY  
BROWSABLE SEARCH  
ENGINE.** In San Antonio and  
the rest of the U.S., malls have

hosted quintessential middle-class American culture for decades, with hangout areas like movie theaters, food courts, arcades and roller skating rinks; affordable family clothing stores like Sears, Macy's and JCPenney; and quirky stores for teens like Hot Topic and Claire's.

Although online shopping is preferable for most Gen Z, Millennial and Gen X customers now, San Antonio still boasts several well-visited malls, including North Star Mall, South Park Mall, The Shops at Rivercenter, The Shops at La Cantera and Ingram Park Mall, among others. When it comes to the Texas A&M University-San Antonio student body, a few students say they still find malls useful. Abigail Amiscosa, an 18-year-old cybersecurity sophomore, argues that although "impulse buying" is a risk even when shopping in-store, there's a reason she visits the mall.

"Seeing [products in-person] is a big game changer because you can see the quality, and



Photo: Miranda Rodriguez

being able to try it on is a big pro," Amiscosa said.

However, other students say they don't have any interest in the mall. Cub Chavez, a history sophomore, said they stopped going to the malls entirely when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020.

"Even now... it's not my first choice. I maybe go twice a year," Chavez said.

So what happened to the American mall? What happened to the adventurous shopping

spree or the thrill of finding something in your size in the clearance section? With the Internet as an institution, and COVID-19 having decreased the world's inclination to step back into crowded places, are malls obsolete?

In the online age, a mall has to sell experiences. Thus, the mall has tried to adapt to what that means when it comes to its place in the post-pandemic social media revolution.

In 2023, what is the mall's place here in San Antonio and in the U.S.? Is this the fall of the





Wonderland of the Americas: the mall that the '80s left behind.

mall?

The mall's position in American culture initially emerged as one of convenience and community. The first modern mall was Edina, Minnesota's Southdale Center, a fully enclosed and climate-controlled shopping facility that opened in 1956. Throughout the late 1950s and '60s, suburban community centers like malls and movie theaters became areas of refuge for those who could not afford air conditioning (a luxury that was uncommon in most American

households until 1970.) San Antonio's oldest malls, North Star Mall and Wonderland Shopping City (now Wonderland of the Americas), opened in 1960 and 1961 respectively. The malls' air-conditioned stores and centers served as a place of escape, especially during those notorious south Texas summers. By the 1970s, '80s and early '90s, as globalism and consumerism reached a peak, the American mall had solidified its status as a cultural hub for teenagers, young adults and their social circles.

With the Internet still somewhat in its infancy in the new millennium, malls were able to maintain some relevance. The classic 2004 film *Mean Girls* even likens the mall to a "water hole," a place where high school students go to observe, socialize and interact. That scene and the film accurately capture the average American teenager's social life prior to the

hyperconnectivity of social media in the 2010s – it is one that is reliant on an after-school and central meeting ground like the mall.

Today, the mall's largest target demographic – teenagers and young adults – connect and shop via social media platforms like Tik Tok. That adventurous shopping spree? In the last decade, as home computers, laptops and smart phones became more affordable, shoppers can now purchase any items they want in the matter of a few clicks. (And there's often a clearance section tab, too.)

When the pandemic arrived, many malls could not keep up with an even more rapidly changing world. More than 12,000 stores were announced for closures in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to CoStar Group, a data provider for the real estate industry. A decreased number of potential in-store shoppers opted

The Little Shops at Wonderland of the Americas. These shops are a more cost-effective option for a storefront.



Photo: Miranda Rodríguez



Photo: Miranda Rodriguez

to shop, ship or stream online out of the inability to visit malls and other public places. In 2023, online shopping reached an all-time high. According to a Digital Commerce 360

analysis of U.S. Department of Commerce figures, e-commerce sales in the U.S. reached \$1.04 trillion in 2022 – the first time e-commerce revenue reached the trillions.

The threat of the pandemic intensely affected the shopping choices of customers like Chavez. They admit that it wasn't until 2022 that they left the house as often as they did pre-pandemic.

"My family and I didn't want to be more at risk if we didn't have to be. We did everything online – from grocery shopping, ordering clothes and much more," Chavez said.

Since then, all brick-and-mortar stores have suffered. Today, in order for most mall department stores to survive, these businesses sell online and in brick-and-mortar stores. E-commerce (the online sale of products and services) is more convenient and efficient than shopping in-store. Potential customers now have the opportunity to research products, examine reviews, compare prices and make purchases at any time of the day or night. It saves most customers' most valuable resource other than money: time.

However, people still must be going to the mall, as South Park Mall and North Star Mall maintain their status as fairly central areas in the city. Students like Amiscosa said she goes to the mall, but she doesn't always go there to buy something.

"I wouldn't say I've stopped going to the mall because I enjoy walking through, but I normally don't try to spend money there since it's a lot more expensive than online," said Amiscosa. "I love online shopping. I'm able to compare prices more easily, take my time in my selection from the comfort of my home and get to see a wider variety of things that may not be offered in stores."

So, the American malls that have survived their 20th-century prime, the e-commerce boom and the reign of social media have adapted. Recently, malls have begun taking advantage of their hub status by hosting even larger entertainment experiences than before – in essence, they are offering more services rather than relying on physical product-centered stores.

Although movie theaters have been more common in San Antonio malls in the last 20 years, the pandemic led to many theaters suffering at the hands of streaming. Malls have since integrated mega-entertainment



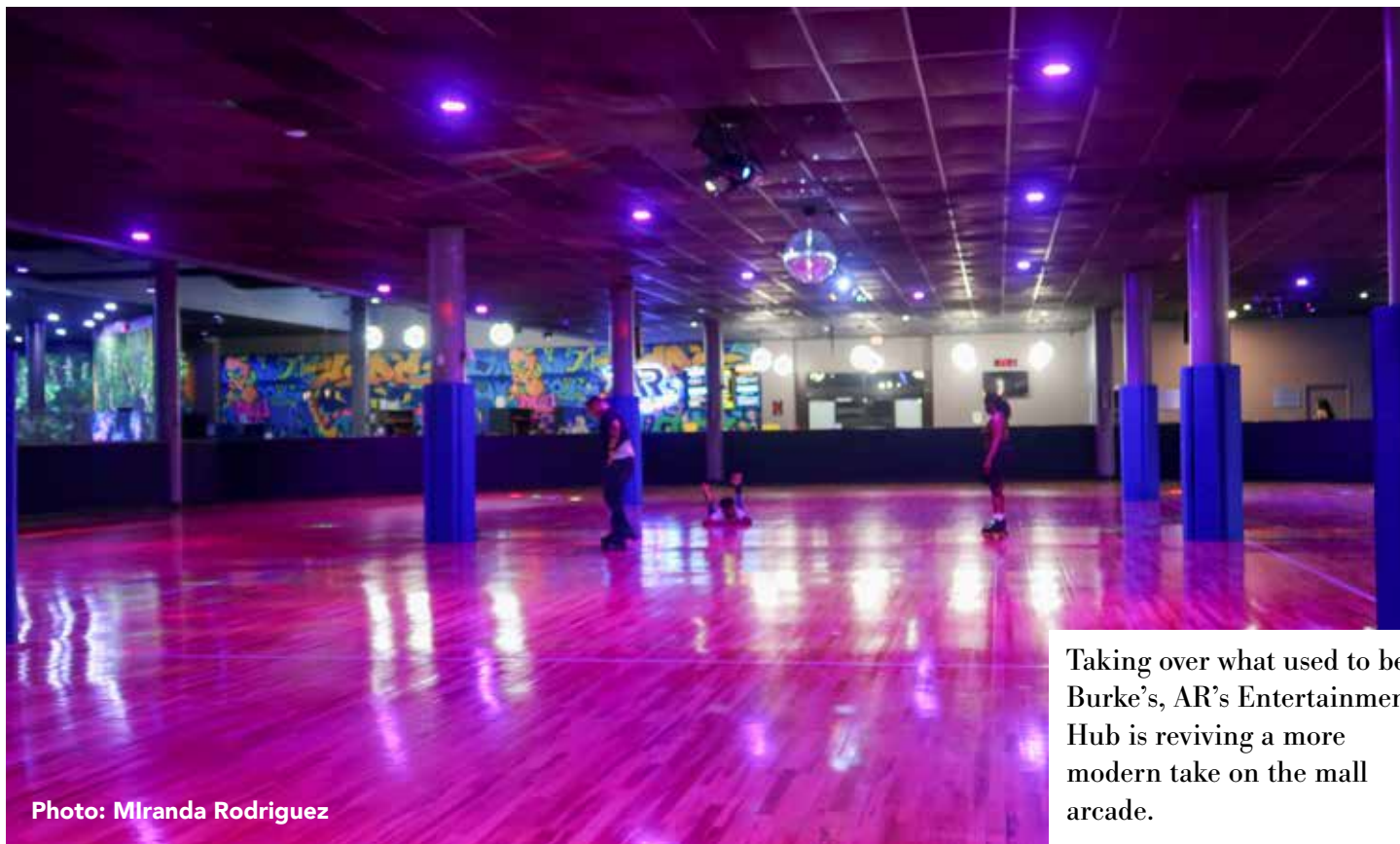


Photo: Mlranda Rodriguez

Taking over what used to be Burke's, AR's Entertainment Hub is reviving a more modern take on the mall arcade.



companies instead, like Rivercenter Mall's Dave & Buster's, into their spaces. According to MySanAntonio.com, EVO – a company that operates entertainment centers throughout Texas with movies, bowling alleys and arcades all under one roof – is expanding into San Antonio with its upcoming South Park Mall location. In 2022, low-cost gym company Fitness Connection opened its first San Antonio gym, a

73,000-square foot section of South Park. As the pandemic's effect on social outings have begun to wane, malls have learned what its communities are lacking and are using their spaces to shift into the marketplace of experiences.

By leaning into its history as an all-purpose utility center as well as an entertainment experience hub, the American mall may change its style but not its shape. Malls themselves will likely

never be gone for good – like the Internet, malls such as South Park have become community institutions. In its prime, the mall not only sold clothes, films and food. It sold and continues to sell two important ideas – belonging and community.

# SEEK DISCOMFORT

BY MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ



## TWO WORDS CHANGED THE COURSE OF MY

**LIFE:** Seek Discomfort. At the end of 2020, I stumbled across a YouTube channel called “Yes

Theory.” There are three main philosophies that it preaches:

**SEEK DISCOMFORT:** because life’s greatest moments exist outside of your comfort zone.

Say “yes” more often.

**LIVE THE DASH:** What does this mean? Think about a tombstone. It usually has a birth date, a dash mark and a death date. The dash is everything that you do in life between birth and death. Living the dash is living your life to the fullest according to your own rules.

In 2020, the world had shut down and I wasn’t happy with where my life had ended up. I was 24, unemployed and had a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice (something to make my dad proud.) I was miserable. Deep down, I knew that if I kept on that path, I wouldn’t have made it to 25. To make a long story short, let’s just say I found Yes Theory at the right time. I am now 27 and the happiest I have ever been. I owe a large

part of this to Yes Theory, as its creators inspired me to change my perspective on life and the impact of how simply saying “yes” can open so many opportunities.

The first episode that I watched is called “96 Hours Inside Afghanistan in 2020.” Thomas Brag, one of the lead storytellers at Yes Theory, opened the video by saying, “I’m interested

in people and the places that can defy our previous assumptions.” For some reason, this resonated with me. This was the catalyst for me to take charge of my own life, seek discomfort and say “yes.”

I had always wanted to be a journalist and a photographer, but I crumbled under the pressure of my family and “mentors,” who told



Photo Courtesy: Kalli WalkinHawk



WalkinHawk sets up her shot in South Lake Tahoe.



Photo Courtesy: Kalli WalkinHawk



Photo Courtesy: Johnny Muñoz

me I wasn't good enough or said, "There's no money in that." When I found Yes Theory, they showed me that being a storyteller is possible no matter your background or status.

Like many of us, Brag from Yes Theory was looking for direction in his life after graduation. Brag felt that his life became predictable.

"We fail to realize that life isn't just a series of goals to be achieved but rather a journey to be celebrated along the way," said Brag.

He challenged himself to embark on a journey where he would try 30 things he had always wanted to do in 30 days, all while documenting it via YouTube. This was

the beginning of Yes Theory, originally Project 30.

This idea of embracing the unknown and getting out of your comfort zone was created in Montreal, Canada by four strangers-turned-best friends, Brag, Matt Dajer, Ammar Kandil and Derin Emre.

That one month in 2015 would evolve into Yes Theory, which in turn would spark over 8 million people worldwide coming together, seeking discomfort and ultimately saying "yes." This collection of individuals is affectionately known as the Yes Fam.

Some members of the Yes Fam have embraced the Yes Theory philosophy and as a result, have changed their perspective on life and what it means to be alive. This story is one of resilience, conquering fears and being open. This is the story of the people who have decided to seek discomfort and say "yes."

Naturally, I approached this story in true Yes Theory fashion, I sent out messages to various Yes Fam groups on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In these groups, I shared a bit about my story and why I want to speak with people. Thankfully, I got responses. I struggle with being vulnerable and I'm naturally shy, so reaching out caused a bit of anxiety within me. I



Muñoz prepares to perform with Mariachi Los Broncos, Cal Poly Pomona's premier mariachi ensemble.

Photo Courtesy: Johnny Muñoz

chose to seek discomfort and ultimately made connections with several strangers.

The first person who responded to my message is a young man from California named Johnny Muñoz. Muñoz, a psychology student at Cal Poly Pomona, lost his eyesight as an infant due to a condition known as retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). He never let being blind limit him. As well as being a college student, he is a musician and DJ. He relishes in proving people wrong.

"I do everything you tell me I can't do,"

Muñoz said.

Muñoz seeks discomfort every day. He challenges people's perceptions and is carving his own path in the world.

"If it wasn't for Yes Theory, I wouldn't be getting my story put out," he said. "Yes Theory has helped me make friends wherever I'm at."

When Muñoz started following Yes Theory, he discovered that the Los Angeles Yes Fam was planning a trip to Six Flags Magic Mountain, so he joined them. He claims this was one of the best opportunities in his life. Trusting people he'd never met and letting them guide him around was something he embraced.

"It's easy to say 'yes,' but it's hard to trust," he said.

In one of Yes Theory's older videos, Brag said: "We are afraid. We fear these situations; we fear stepping off our autopilot; we fear we cannot predict."

This quote rings true because fear is meant to keep us safe. Self-preservation is an innate human instinct. Our bodies are naturally keeping us from harm. For some, seeking discomfort is putting trust in strangers, and for others, like Kalli WalkinHawk, it's overcoming fear.

WalkinHawk, a 27-year-old Native American from California, discovered Yes Theory three years ago after watching the video "WE HELICOPTER BUNCEE JUMPED WITH WILL SMITH (over Grand Canyon)." This video hit home for her because before then, she had never thought about conquering her fear of heights, open water and sharks.





## WalkinHawk takes a moment to breathe at Yosemite National Park.

Photo Courtesy: Kalli WalkinHawk

The Yes Theory mantra taught her that limits are just perceptions.

“Yes Theory has helped me overcome fear by allowing me to face my fears head-on,” said Walkinhawk.

In 2021, Walkinhawk began tackling those fears. First, she conquered her fear of heights by visiting Yosemite and going on an open-

door helicopter ride in Hawaii. Last year, she went snorkeling in open water. Her ultimate goal is to conquer his fear of sharks.

The unknown is scary and what is unpredictable is nerve-racking, but these seekers are willing to accept the challenge. Are you? I challenge everyone reading this, to be honest with yourself What are you most

scared of? What is stopping you? How can you overcome it?

To the people who read this: Say “Yes,” Live the Dash and Seek Discomfort.

# THE ONE MOMENT

BY MELANIE REYES



**SUNDAY, MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY AND SATURDAY:** Wednesday is in

between the seven days of the week. One, two, three, four and five: The median is three. Two things in common between them: Wednesday and three are both stuck in the middle.

Being the middle child in the family is an experience. I am the mediator between the adults and kids in the household. If the kids want to voice their concerns, I have to be the active voice that they can't provide themselves. If the adults want to comment or rant, they'll come to me if no one is willing to listen.

Noticing the way my family walks, talks, laughs and cries gives me comfort because I know that they are experiencing life. I grew up observing others, listening and understanding each person's story. But I haven't given myself the time of day to ask, "What do I want to do?" or, "Who am I?"

I never truly got to a point in my life where I stopped and explained to myself what my story is. Am I an undergraduate who always had a plan growing up, but now has no path in life? Or am I an 18-year-old, waiting for some random opportunity to appear right in front of me? Do I go with the flow, follow the rules or choose a risky path? The list of questions goes on and on, yet I don't have all the answers to them.

Chaos will form if no one takes the time to



Photo: Melanie Reyes

listen or talk in this house. It's a place full of love, but there are those moments where it seems that the line distinguishing the generational gap is visible. No one can see it but me.

Whenever this happens, I like to draw or create a song that relates to the feelings I feel from the person I'm listening to. It gives me space from all the chaos and a zone that puts me

at ease.

This caused a spark.

I want to be the voice and listener for others in a unique way. I want to become a writer and graphic designer. I want to create art that represents the person's story, while also writing about what they experienced.

This may seem very obvious, but it took a





A painting I made to remind myself that it's okay to take a break and look at things from a different angle.

while for me to decide what I want to do in the future. I disliked the idea that I had to follow an educational system so I could get a decent job and be content. I wanted to be happy, but I knew at a young age that you can't get everything you want. Every day on the news and at school, I witnessed adults undergoing hardships while pretending they were okay when, in reality,



Photo: Melanie Reyes

One of the many graduation photos at the Alamodome with my family.

obstacles were in their way.

I spectated others because I was always bored, and everyone was more interesting. Would they use cash or card? How are they going to dress today? Will I ever see them again after this moment? Hearing people talk about their stories and how they grew to be who they are today was fascinating to hear. It sounds creepy at first, but I got the courage to ask others what their stories are. Sad, happy, funny or serious, I loved it all. It could change the way they feel that day: letting out their thoughts, stories and so much more.

My life changed after listening and speaking to my own family about problems, rants or opinions. They helped me find my path and won't even find

out until this story is published. They are the moment that helped me change my life. My own house could fall apart over one misunderstanding if no one speaks up – imagine the whole world.

If no one takes the time to listen or advocate for others, how will this change anything?

I understand now that I am an 18-year-old undergraduate who wants to draw and write for others. Whether I follow a plan or not, it will work out. I may have multiple paths, but it all leads to one: my future.

I would have never known unless I had the one moment.

