

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

LINDA ALVARADO INTERVIEW  
*MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA*  
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

**Linda Alvarado**  
**Businesswoman**  
**June 24, 2011**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Total Running Time: 1 hour 31 minutes and 46 seconds**

START TC: 00:00:00:00

INTERVIEWER:

Do we have the slate? Yes. Are you ready? Ok, good.

**Linda Alvarado**  
**Businesswoman**

INTERVIEWER:

Why don't we start off with you just telling me where you grew up, what your family was like, that kind of stuff.

00:00:14:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Well, I was born in New Mexico. And I kind of split my childhood growing up in New Mexico and Southern California. I am Hispanic. And both my parents are Hispanic as well. And so we grew up, kind of culturally, family was very, very important. I come from a very small Hispanic family. There were only six of us. But I had five brothers and no sisters, which was kind of a challenge. My parents were from very modest backgrounds and means, as we were, but

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they enabled us not to use anything as an excuse for what it is we could not accomplish. And even though we were Hispanic, and we lived in a small adobe house, and my mother would bring water from the ditch to wash clothes. Now plumbing had been invented, I'm not that old. We just didn't have it. It was a way of us coming together and understanding that it wasn't just about living together, it was really about working together. And family was very important, not just our immediate family, but our extended family.

INTERVIEWER:

You're the only girl of five brothers. How did that impact you?

00:01:29:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

My brothers and I had this great relationship. It was pushing, pulling, tugging, wrestling, but it was also about joking. It was also about not just criticizing, but enabling each other to get better at what we were doing. So whether it was a sport or spelling or math, the good news is they sometimes treated me like a girl, when they wanted to make fun of me. But the better news is that they enabled me to be part of that ability to see myself as a member of a team. Now, did they let me always play pitcher or first base? No. But on the other hand, I found that being able to play the sport, get better at what I was doing, enabled me to have a broader picture of what I would be seeing someday in my own career. Even though young girls really, for the most part, didn't have career plans or visions in those days.

00:02:25:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I was the only girl, with five brothers, and you can imagine that that was a little challenging. Looking back though, even though I did survive, I'm a survivor, it really kind of prepared me, in a strange sort of way, for my future career. And to my parents' credit, they didn't discourage me from playing basketball and softball and you name it. If it had a ball, we played it. And when you have six kids, you have a team. And I think one of the outcomes of that was learning about competitive environments. Even if you're a great batter, you still need a team to win. It's playing by the rules, but not just playing. It's playing to win and knowing that you have to continue to get better. And so whether it was any particular sport, it really was one of those lessons in life. On the other hand, I would go to my mother and I would go, and she said, "What's wrong, Linda? You're just upset."

00:03:31:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I said, "Mm." She said, "You're probably upset because you're not the oldest." And I would go, "Yes." And she'd say, "You're probably just upset because you're not the baby." And I would go, "Yes." "You're probably upset because you're the only girl." And I would go, "Yes." And while I wasn't looking for sympathy, she wouldn't let me use that as a reason. And she would tell me, "Linda, one day when you grow up, somebody's going to be taller. Somebody might have gone to a better school. Somebody may be better looking. And maybe someday someone might remind you that you're Hispanic and you're a girl." And she would tell me, "Live and learn." The reality is, as she would say, life is not like the brochure. But you get into the game, you get better at what you do. And don't find excuses, find reasons to succeed.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado & Her Parents

INTERVIEWER:

What was your parents' vision of a woman's place in the world? And was that typical for your time period and for being an American Hispanic growing up in that time period?

00:04:37:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Both of my parents were children of ministers, or missionaries. And even though we were Hispanic, they were Protestant. And it involved a lot of moving, a lot of traveling, meeting new people. Culturally, for Hispanic girls, it was pretty traditional, for the time, that Hispanic women stayed home. They raised children. They did household work. They might have brought in laundry or other things, but stayed home. My parents had a slightly different view. They did not perceive me differently than they perceived my brothers. Yes, I was a girl. But they didn't discourage me from getting involved, playing games, doing things that my neighbors did not allow their children to do.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

Because of their religious background, girls, of course, were pretty much in a deferral position to men very often. And more than that, were kind of in a support position rather than a lead position. But my parents, I think, were ahead of their time. And I'm blessed in many ways because of the time that I grew up in, even though I was surrounded by all these boys, girls just didn't think about doing these kinds of things. They were encouraged to focus on

cooking, focus on healthcare, focus on perhaps teaching, but not really. There was no programs for sports. Women were not encouraged to play baseball, which of course I love now. It was a very different time.

INTERVIEWER:

Which parent did you more closely identify with and why?

00:06:17:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

You know, both of my parents were great. But I more closely, interestingly enough, identified with my mother, even though she didn't come from a background where women did these kinds of crazy things she allowed me to do. Her mother passed away before she was five years old, and there were nine kids in the family. And while she did not grow up with a mother as a role model, she ended up being encouraged, not adopted literally, but empowered by some of her teachers in school, that encouraged her to read, to write, to get involved. And more than that, to reach out to help each other. My mother was an extrovert. I'm actually an introvert. But she would encourage us to get involved in helping other people. And she said, "Anybody can be a member. You need to assume leadership positions in order to demonstrate your commitment."

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LINDA ALVARADO:

She also wanted to make sure we understood that it was not just about getting, it was about giving back. Even though we lived from week to week. So she encouraged us to help others. So my younger brother and I put together a little business, and we would go door to door and knock on the door, and

offer to rake leaves and sweep the yard and so forth for the neighbors. And the idea was to raise money. But as my mother would say, "It's an investment in your character, not in your bank account." And the money we raised to help other people, which we did. My mother was very, very focused on excellence. That you could get involved, get in the game, do some things, but anybody could do that. And so spelling was mandatory every day when you came home. You could pass, but you really needed to work to excel, to demonstrate that you had the ability, at least, to try. When I was in sixth grade, at the end of the year, they had what they called field day, which is you get together, and the kids celebrate, and you play a lot of sports and so forth.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

I came home from school one day and my mother said, "How are you doing? Are you ready to do spelling?" And I said, "Not today." She said, "What's wrong?" I said, "Well, I tried to sign up for the high jumping for field day, and they told me I couldn't." And she said, "They told you, you couldn't?" And I said, "No, they told me boys do that." She said, "Hmm, let's go." I said, "Where are we going?" She said, "We're going to see the principal." I said, "What?" So we jumped over the fence. We didn't have a car. We walked to the principal's office. And she knocked on the door and asked the principal if she could meet with him. And he said yes. And she said to Mr. White, who was about 6'8, she was about 4'11, "Mr. White, Linda really would like to do the high jumping." And he said, "Well, Mrs. Martinez. That's what boys do. Girls can do volleyball. They can do tether ball. We have lots of snacks. It's lots of fun." "But," she said, "why can't girls do this?" And he said, "Well, that's the tradition." And my

mother politely said, "But where does it say that?" He says, "I'm not sure, but that's our tradition." She said, "Think about it."

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LINDA ALVARADO:

So we went back home and she gave me a snack, and told me, "Linda, you have to raise your hand sometimes and ask." Well, two weeks later, I come home. She says, "Well, how's it going? Are you ready for the high jumping?" And I said, "No, I can't participate." She said, "Let's go." I said, "Let's go?" So we went back to the principal's office again, and she said, "Mr. White, would you consider, this is not about Linda. What if other girls want to do this?" So he finally said, "Okay, okay." Well, all the boys were the competitors but I won the high jump. And it taught me a lesson that it really was not just about me. It was about doing things and trying things that maybe young girls had never done, but also opening doors for other young women as well.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado, Her Parents & Brother

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember thinking it was a good thing or a bad thing being a girl?

00:10:25:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I was young, I was debating whether it was a good thing to be a girl. Maybe it would've been easier to be a boy. I'm not confused about who I am, but I also felt that I had to compete a little bit harder, with my brothers or in school. Because quite frankly, their focus was on team sports, on teamwork,

on achievement that could be measured by wins and losses. As opposed to individual sports, which many girls did. At one time, I thought it would be a lot easier if I didn't have to comb my hair every day, you know, worry about what I was wearing. But I think that I was comfortable in many ways, even though my brothers went to college on wrestling scholarships. They didn't offer them for women. But I can put my clients in a headlock, which I find very useful for negotiations. But I do think that women can feel comfortable in different environments. And had I not gone through that experience, I probably wouldn't have considered pursuing some of my careers. Am I happy I'm a girl? Yes. Do I wish I didn't have to comb my hair? Yes. But on the other hand, as I tell my brothers, at least I have some.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it common for girls in that era, and especially coming from your background, to go away to college?

00:11:48:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I graduated from high school, it was not common for girls to go to a university or a college outside their hometown or their home state. It wasn't that we didn't have the ability. Quite frankly, in many cases there was not opportunity. Scholarships may or may not have been available for women. Sticking close to home was not tradition, that was culture. And Hispanic girls, in particular, very often you graduated from high school, you got married immediately, you had children, and you stayed very close to the home. Fortunately, my parents enabled me or encouraged me to do this. And even though they were living week to week, wanted to make sure they didn't cause

me not to have an opportunity, given the fact they believe education would be so important, no matter if you're a male or a female. But in particular, if you were Hispanic.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you ever daunted by the expectations of your parents or by what they were? I mean, I'm just imagining you at that time, and here you are filling out these applications and financial aid forms, and what was all that like? Because you had a lot of expectations on your shoulders.

00:13:04:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Well, my parents graduated from high school, but for Hispanics, but particularly Hispanic girls to fill out applications for universities, that was not common. It doesn't mean women were not going to universities, but particularly Hispanic women, that was very different. Understanding references, being able to write an essay, being able to acknowledge that you didn't come from means. That, you know, your family, while they were Americans, we were Hispanic Americans. And in many ways, breaking the stereotype is part of that application. There were no programs, affirmative action programs, or other things to encourage. It was clearly about academics. In that case, I have to say my older brothers enabled me as well. And so while they went to college on wrestling scholarships, and I did not, it really was the motivation I think my parents had to at least give us the ability to try. And through the course of history, whether you're male or certainly female, those people who are educated have been more likely to succeed.

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INTERVIEWER:

So was there ever a moment in your childhood where you just thought, "Ugh, can I just be like everybody else? Why do I have to do this?"

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LINDA ALVARADO:

Well, there certainly were moments in my childhood when I thought, "Why can't I just buy... like every other girl? Every other kid. Go out on weekends and dance, drink, have a good time." And it wasn't just because of our religious background. It really was my parents wanting to make sure that we were focused on things that were positive. We were realists. And even though I'm an optimist, realistically, we did not have a lot of means. But I remember my mother telling us that, if in fact we wanted to succeed, could we really do it alone? And of course we said, "Yes, of course." And then she said, "Well, how would you do it alone?" And we thought about it, and we'd always played as a team. And she would come back and say, "Look, the opportunity that you have, you have to create. You have ability. You may have aptitude, but without an education and without a sense of direction, you float."

00:15:25:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

And she said, "You won't drown, but neither will you make progress. And you need to swim. You need to get into the game, get into the race. Not to win at this point in your life, but to make sure that someday when you have the chance, you're ready to go to the Olympics." And the analogy was really less about sports, more about looking at how you succeed, and how are you going to be able to do that if in fact you didn't find a point of differentiation.

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INTERVIEWER:

Did you work during college?

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LINDA ALVARADO:

I was the first in my family to go away to college. And we were first generation college. But for a girl of any background to go to college was a big deal. My parents lived week to week, but made sacrifices to enable us to make sure that at least we had the opportunity. But we knew also that we would have to work as well. So I went to college, a freshman, I needed a job, and they posted the jobs on the bulletin board. Today they're on the internet, on the web. And you could either do food service, you could do library, or you could do grounds keeping. Well, I was spending way too much time in the library. I didn't want to do food service. My mother said, your job is to study, not to cook. So I went to apply for the grounds keeping job on the campus. And the manager came out and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I really need a job. It's my first year in school." And he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I need a job. And they posted it and I have this referral form." He says, "Do you not understand girls do food service, boys do grounds keeping." And he sent me to my college advisor for counseling.

00:17:11:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

A couple weeks later, I show up and he said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I really need a job. Please let me try." And he said, "Do you not understand, you're not going to be able to wear those shoes. You can't wear these clothes. You're going to be doing all this heavy lifting. You're going to be out in the sun. And you're going to be working with all those guys." And I told

myself, "Let me get this right. I get to wear Levi's to work every day. I will get a tan. I don't have to go to the gym. And you actually pay me to work with all these single guys?" And in the context of having a sense of direction, but really a sense of humor, I was trying to convince myself that I really did want to do this. And finally he said, "Okay." And I really think he thought I would quit or they would make me quit.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

The following summer, I had an opportunity to work on a construction site, clearly as a kind of a contract administrator to help process applications for payments and billings and percentage of completion and so forth. And it was really for a development company, but it was actually on a construction site. And I was just blown away. I thought I was very creative, starting from an idea of a concept, to drawings and blueprints, starting with a foundation, and then actually building a project as it came out the ground. I had built forts in the backyard with my brothers, but certainly not of this magnitude. Clearly a construction site. I was not kidding myself. Women just were not there. And if they were, they tended to be in a secretarial position, and tended to maybe be a little bit older. But here I show up. I'm in my twenties, um, single.

00:09:10:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Obviously, I look a little bit different than everybody else on the project. And I applied for the job. And the guy kind of looked like it... looked like what are you doing here? And again, kind of what I had gone through in my previous experience in college. What they did, though, was they hired me because they couldn't find anybody else at that point in time to fill the position. I thought it

was very creative. I was enamored with the process of what was going on, the blueprints, the scheduling, all kinds of things. What I was not prepared for, even though I grew up with all brothers, and was certainly comfortable around men, was having to go to the bathroom. And when you went to the outdoor Sani-Lets, there were pictures of me in various stages of undress, with things written about me, either descriptions or invitations to do certain things. And it was discouraging. Because I felt I could do the job, but could I really do it in a way that enabled me to feel positive about what I was doing? Could be given a chance to demonstrate what I was doing? And more than that, be able to overcome the question marks of what was I doing there?

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LINDA ALVARADO:

Did I have something to prove? Was I the girlfriend? Was I the mistress? Was I the daughter? But interestingly enough, as discouraging as it was, I tried to tell myself I need to keep focused on the things that I want to do. And I was really, I mean, I really looked forward to the opportunity. That's hard to do. So a sense of direction and sense of purpose, but also a sense of humor, even though sexual harassment is not funny, enabled, at least, for me to keep focused for that period of time on my goals.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

This was not just the glass ceiling, which women were looking through saying, I want to go to law school or be a doctor. This was the glass ceiling to say, do I have a career here in construction? But in reality, it was the concrete ceiling because you couldn't see through this and how I was going to do it. The interesting thing over time is some of these guys who actually drew

pictures of me later came to work for me. It is about people and about change, and it's not adapting for adaptation. It's finding ways and getting involved and knowing that in order to succeed, whether it was in nursing or in construction, I had to get better skilled at what I was doing. I had to be able to not fit in to be a man, but at least enabled me to get the skill sets to be accepted.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

America was changing and certainly women were changing in terms of entering the workforce, pursuing, not just college degrees and not just wanting a job, but a career. The world was changing and business was changing and traditional ways of doing business were not relevant, even in construction in order to be competitive. So, I took a class in this new thing called computerized scheduling, and it was subnet scheduling. So as opposed to going to the breakfast bar in the morning and doing a lineal schedule and then to the alcohol bar in the evening after work to update it, computerized schedule enabled construction to be not only more effective of what we were doing with better quality in schedule and more productivity, it enabled us to have a competitive edge with competitors in order to get more work. Taking that class enabled me to develop a niche which many men did not have. And while it was just a niche, it was an opening of a door that enabled me to contribute in a way that, regardless of whether I was a male or a female, they didn't have the skill set. And it really enabled me to at least get that start, my foot in the door.

INTERVIEWER:

How important has it been for you to earn money as a woman?

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LINDA ALVARADO:

It was not just having a job and working and being there as part of this construction project that I really liked. It was being able to make money, to be able to support myself and maybe someday support a family. Making sure that if I was doing the work that a counterpart was doing, like a man, that I would be paid equally. And even though I was not an engineer, I was a project engineer. And I remember a man telling me on the construction site, "Well, we can't call you that because we'd have to pay you what this guy is making." And it was equity that you were looking for, and at that point in time, I was trying to get the education, but clearly there was a gap between, not only the risk of being there, but also the reward. Over time, of course you want to be paid for what you're worth, in order to get there, you have to achieve.

00:24:18:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The difficulty that women were having, particularly in construction, was number one, being accepted as having the ability. Number two, were you going to be there for very long or it was just an interim? Number three, I got pregnant. And the guy leaned over and said, "Does your mother know you're doing this?" And I didn't know if he was talking about being pregnant or construction. So the stereotypical thing that maybe you didn't have a long-term career was also an impediment, I think, for women being able to get paid equally, not just the perception that in construction, that you had to be big and burly, that we were as capable as men.

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INTERVIEWER:

In the early 1970s, you decided to start your own firm at a very young age.  
Tell me about going to the banks for your first loan.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado  
With Company Truck

00:25:12:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Well, as I continued to become more interested and enamored with design and construction, I was processing applications for payments, and I was looking at how much margin and profit the subcontractors and the suppliers were making. And I was walking to determine percentage of completion with the architect and he put his arm around me and he looked at me and he said, "So what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" And I didn't know if it was a pickup line or he was questioning if I was crazy, but I thought about it that night and it was kind of like, "What am I doing here?" And then I said, "What am I doing here? Maybe I can be a contractor? Maybe I could someday grow up and build a 7-Eleven or a duplex?" Slightly smaller than the high rise.

00:26:13:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

And in a strange sort of way, while it was a depressing comment, it said to me, "Maybe I can do this." And I got this idea and I would go on the small little kitchen table I had there in the apartment and I started to write a business plan. And had learned how to write a business plan, had been on the project long enough that I'd seen project proposals being done and said, "I think I can

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do this, but maybe I should start... ", as my mother would say to me, "Linda, you can do everything but start small and think big." So I decided, well, maybe I could do curb, gutter and sidewalk as a start. And my dad enabled me and allowed me to help him pour concrete in our backyard, we could put our feet and our hands in it. And I thought, "Well, maybe I can do that." So, I decided to start a small curb, gutter and sidewalk company. Kind of under the radar screen and it would require not a whole lot of capital. And started very, very small. And because the economy was booming, I was able to at least get some work and got some crazy guys to come work with me. And of course, if I had delivered the proposal, it wouldn't have been accepted. They would deliver the proposal and I would sign it with my initials, L.G and we started to pick up work.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So you go to the bank. Tell me about getting your first loan.

00:27:43:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

In order to grow any business, you need capital, not just people, but the ability to grow and that really means money. And in order to do that, -

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Constructing Plaza de Santa Fe

Denver, CO, 1984

LINDA ALVARADO:

-I needed a loan. So I went to the bank and I made an appointment. I did apply under my initials and I sat down and the loan officer said, "Hi.", and let me go through it and then immediately told me they weren't making any loans. So, I went to five different banks, showing up and I was denied. And maybe quite frankly, in their portfolio, I looked like a huge risk. Probably did. You can imagine. Okay, let me get this right. She's about 20 something. She is Hispanic, probably has never owned a company. Little bit high risk. And do you think really she's able to do this?

00:28:39:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Well, my parents heard about this and even though they never had a bank account and we had a very small adobe home, they went to a lending agency, not a bank because they didn't have a bank account and they mortgaged their small adobe home for \$2,500 at double digit interest rates. And while they enabled me to get the loan and I did pay them back, I will never be able to repay them for their belief in me. Part of it was knowing that if I didn't succeed, they'd lose their home. But more than that, as a Hispanic girl, access to capital and for women in general, access to capital was critical. Later I tried to pledge my children and they told me those were not assets, they were liabilities. And several thousands of dollars later, I kind of understand that. But the ability to sell, not just the service. What I found out early on, even though I thought I was selling construction services, I had to sell credibility.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

People had never met one. A Hispanic woman contractor? And I started doing little small speaking things at Chambers and got involved with nonprofits and

community organizations. And I was invited to speak because they'd never met one. But I found it as a way of being able to communicate with business people, with people in the community to let them meet me in an environment where I didn't look like, "Who's that girl out there trying to do this?", and that really helped me. Later on, because the banks did turn me down, I was able to go to the small business administration and get a 90% guaranteed loan for \$60,000 and I paid it off early. What was I thinking? But it was building that track record, opening doors, not just for my company, but changing the mindset in traditional financial institutions, educational institutions, procurement agencies to say, "Well, maybe this girl might be able to do the work." And that's what I was looking for, not a guarantee but an opportunity.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Alvarado Construction Office

INTERVIEWER:

What was it though that was behind all that that made you think, "I'm doing it now and this is the way we're going to do it and I'm going to take this risk."?

00:31:05:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I first started, "Well, maybe I could do concrete and maybe a 7-Eleven or a duplex." And while that was a vision and almost a dream, in fact I began to think about it to say that curb and gutter is great, but it is the foundation that you put in place for the structure. And so, in order to move to the next level, I said, "I've got to do something." So I applied to get a general contractor's license, which didn't enable me to build high rises, but enabled

me to at least have the ability to try, to bid on small work. And ultimately, I bid on these little bus shelters that people stand in on the corner to stay out of the rain waiting for the bus. And I could only do 10 at a time because I didn't have the cash flow.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

But while the bus shelter was only 10 feet wide and 15 feet tall, I had an adrenaline rush, because it said to me, "I built it." And what was I thinking? I never cashed the check because I couldn't believe it. I ended up doing about 350 of these. And the good news was I could pour all the concrete, they were very easy to assemble, there wasn't a lot of cash flow. And I would communicate with the supplier and also the owner that in fact, if the owner bought the concrete directly, I wouldn't mark it up by 10% and they would save money, which sounded like a good deal. Well, if they hadn't done that, I couldn't afford the concrete. But it was finding creative ways to do things to enable me to begin to develop a small workforce that would enable me to take that, even though it was small, to begin to build and envision by reinvesting, not just money in the company, which I did, everybody was making more money than I did, but also reinvesting in people.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you benefit at all from affirmative action programs and how important were they to you?

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LINDA ALVARADO:

When I first started business... Well, when I first started my career, there were no affirmative action programs. There were no considerations, really, for women to get into universities. It was probably not part of the culture and certainly not the law. It really was more this period of time where women now were looking at not just the ability to vote, not just the ability to participate and get a job, but really moving in their careers through education, through economic empowerment and enabling us to one day own our own business. But there were none when I first started. And because they weren't there made it harder. On the other hand, at least opening the door for women to have an opportunity is really what I think was important.

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LINDA ALVARADO:

Over time, even if there were programs, my obstacle was, I never looked the part. I was not muscular, I wasn't six-foot-six, I was five-foot-five. But it's not about brawn, even though certain things you have to do in construction do require muscles, it really was about brains and demonstrating that. So, building a team was helpful. Affirmative action, of course, opening the door. But getting in the door is one thing, women still had to deliver.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there any point later on that it helped you grow your business or did help you kind of jump from one step to the other? Did it have any impact at all?

00:34:46:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

As America began to change, the Civil Rights movement in the sixties, not only enabling Blacks and Hispanics and other ethnicities to become part of, women were also beginning to enter the workforce, educational opportunities and business. Quite frankly, I probably benefited more from being Hispanic than being woman. And even if there was women, tended to be that women of color were sometimes not as easily accessible in terms of at least having that opportunity. Over time, I think it was important. I do think though, developing that track record, that credibility, that integrity, enabled women to begin to open doors, not just for themselves but for others. And in doing that, I think business began to understand the value of an underutilized resource.

00:35:51:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

As there was advocacy for people to have greater opportunity, equal opportunity in this country, not just be based on their ethnicity, but also their gender, there were opportunities, began to arise in the government, for sure. The Small Business Administration started a program, but it basically was focused on minorities, not necessarily minority women. But as a Hispanic woman, it enabled me at least to get my foot into the door, be able to develop that track record of not just smaller projects and bus shelters, but work for the army, the Air Force, the Department of Energy, still having to perform, but enabling me to develop that track record in order to get more capital, increased lines of credits and most importantly, bonding. And bonding is no different than the banks. It's based on credibility, track record, capability and credibility.

00:36:57:00

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LINDA ALVARADO:

And that separates the men from the boys or the girls from the men in construction. And that was extraordinarily helpful in terms of that. Later on, Fortune 500 companies and other initiatives began to take place simply because advocacy of women, of saying, "Not only do we want a job, we want the opportunity." It was apparent that, while women were leading the charge, many men embraced the initiative as well.

INTERVIEWER:

Is there any way that you could have gone from bus shelters to the things that you're building, like the airports and the stadiums without affirmative action?

00:37:37:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I think any woman would've had difficulty in breaking through whatever the ceiling they were dealing with. You could see the vision, but getting there, affirmative action was critical. It was not a guarantee for success, but it was a window that could be opened for that opportunity.

INTERVIEWER:

How did it impact you specifically?

00:38:01:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Affirmative action enabled me to at least get to the table to meet with individuals, whether they were in government agencies, in corporations, or in academia or government, to be able to at least have an opportunity to submit a resume, to submit a company history, to be able to at least communicate in

ways that, quite frankly, we didn't have the opportunity. Well, people called it the good old boy system, whether it was the good old boys or the good young boys, women did not have that opportunity. That I think changed not just the destiny for women, it changed the destiny for America, this talent pool, an underutilized resource. And more than that, demonstrating that women had the ability, didn't not have the determination or the aptitude, they were only missing the opportunity and we could pick and choose.

00:39:01:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The difference is my grandmother and my mother didn't have the choices, and at least now I had a choice. One of the most important choices women could make was having a job, pursuing a career, owning a business, but also still take pride in not just what was on our business card, but that we could also stay home and take care of children. So we did not measure ourselves simply because of our title or how much money we made, it was full circle. Women were viewed as the consumers, not the producers, as the employees, not the owner of the company, as the cheerleaders instead of the captain of the team, as the bread makers instead of the breadwinners, and the homemakers instead of the home builders. In reality, what was happening, and women were advocating and championing for, is the ability to pick and choose. In reality, we're all of those.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Bus Shelter

First Built by Alvarado Construction

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

INTERVIEWER:

So you have since gone from doing bus shelters, curbsides, and flat projects to doing much larger construction.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado

Coors Field, Denver, CO

INTERVIEWER:

Can you talk about getting from one to the other and what kind of things you're more known for these days?

00:40:12:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

In the late eighties and early nineties, that's when not only the momentum of the company grew, we were able to attract people who wouldn't have thought of coming to work for this Hispanic woman-owned firm previously. And more than that, we had the track record, the ability to bond the project and could manage it in a way that it really didn't matter who owned the company. That, I think, enabled us to move forward. In Denver, they were going to build a convention center, and it was the largest project that was ever being undertaken in the whole state. It was during a recession and nothing had been undertaken to this magnitude and this cost. I had done concrete work for some large generals, but they didn't live in the city, and my company was based in Denver. There was no requirement to partner with me, but local firms were being looked at to participate because they wanted to generate job and economic growth in the city.

00:41:19:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

And so I partnered with the company. It was a \$100 million project, but not just my name, but our ability to partner together to demonstrate again that we were responsible for schedule, for the quality of the work, for getting it done on time, and in budget, and to the satisfaction of it. What it did was not just elevate my profile, it enabled me to bring on other woman-owned firms, smaller Hispanic and African American vendors to begin to change that stereotypical idea, but more so with women in business in very, very non-traditional areas. That's when my profile kind of elevated. They were surprised when they met me, that I wasn't taller or stronger. But in reality, I think it was back to my upbringing of my parents saying, "You can't just be a participant. If you want to win, you've got to play to win, but do it in a way that demonstrates not only your ability, but reaches back into the community by employing and helping others."

INTERVIEWER:

So were there any sleepless nights around that when you were doing that? Talk to me a little bit about that.

00:42:33:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The schedule on this project was very aggressive, in terms of trying to get it done because conventions had been booked. Much like baseball, when you have a schedule in place, you can't delay the schedule, so making sure we could do it on time. More than that, the ability to get enough people to come to work for me, because there was a lot of self work, we thought was a

challenge. In reality, unlike previous generations of me and growing my company, people were worried about coming to work, we did not find that. It enabled us, not just on that one project, to attract not just men, but also women who now were going through engineering schools and at one time were afraid to come to work for me also because they thought they had a better career path in a male dominated business. And so, while it was important to me, it was the beginning of enabling me to understand that growing my business was important, but it was also about partnering with other people.

00:43:38:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I started to get involved in community organizations as well, which is part of my family's DNA, getting involved and helping others. Interestingly enough, that enabled me also not just to help but to meet people. I was asked to be on the Boy Scout board, I was never a Girl Scout, but because they wanted to focus on inner city and Hispanic youth. On that board, I met the chairman of United Banks of Colorado, and I was asked to be on a bank board at 27. I like to say I must have looked really old at 27. But it was enabling women to get involved, not just as the people who wrote the letter, licked the stamps, and mailed the envelope, but to sit at the table and began to be viewed as partners, and again, not as secondary, but as primary. That enabled me, over time, to help me break the stereotype, not just about me, but about all women and what they were trying to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Now, did that become common, and how quickly?

00:44:40:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Women, even becoming members of nonprofit boards, and I'm not talking about the women's auxiliary, I'm talking about school boards, I'm talking about hospital boards, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts enabled women to at least begin to have a seat at the table. That was the evolution, I believe, of women eventually being identified as their career path expanded, not only in Corporate America, but also as entrepreneurs and civic and community volunteers to begin to be looked at as directors of public companies and large businesses. That was a dramatic change because at that time... I remember reading a statistic when I went on my first public board, it said that 89% of the CEOs of public companies had been Eagle Scouts and Boy Scouts.

00:45:39:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Learning from a very young age to get involved, to get involved in community, how to not just hunt and fish, but to build teams and how to manage stuff. I think the pattern there began to change, not just the livelihood of Boy Scouts, it enabled women to understand that. But not having been a Boy Scout, how would you ever think you'd get to a CEO? I think not only did women have greater visions of where they were going and what they wanted to try and do, I think men were changing as well, looking less at women as being secondary or assistants and really more partners. Part of that was going to school and college and not taking Home Ec one person, and the other person taking art, science, and chemistry, but really the educational system enabling us to have common career paths.

00:46:38:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I do think that the Civil Rights Movement, but more than that, the proactivity of women, women's organizations, the Committee of 200 for example, our goal there was to raise the profile of women to get women on corporate boards, not just for the sake of being a woman there, but to enable them to better represent their shareholders and have more talent at the table in a way that all companies could benefit. That advocacy was important, but the reality was it was just the beginning. In order for it to work, it wasn't just one or two women being successful, in order to succeed, women began to recognize we needed success in mass.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you feel like you were breaking barriers, and was it a goal of yours to be a trailblazer?

00:47:34:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I call my career one of those great unplanned careers. When you're in school, your college and your high school advisor would say, "You got to focus on this, you have to take that road, you need to take this course and don't deviate." In reality, I think one of the best things that I did was, similar to Robert Frost's poem, I took the road least traveled by and that made all the difference. I wasn't doing it to make a feminist statement per se. On the other hand, it was that window of opportunity where I could read about other women becoming astronauts, read about Muriel Siebert being the first woman to have a chair on Wall Street. It was motivational, it was inspirational, but it was also perspirational, it was hard work.

00:48:28:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I wasn't trying to make a name for myself, I just wanted to pursue what I like to do. That part of it I think enabled me to become a trailblazer, if you will, a pioneer in that regard. But knowing that if I was fortunate to become the first woman or the only woman on a board or on a—receiving award, that was important. What I didn't want to do is believe that if I remain the first and the only, that was not success, my job was to open doors and bring others along.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvaradi

Coors Field Pitcher's mound

INTERVIEWER:

I am going to skip to the baseball now, tell me what happens. You have this day, you get a phone call, how does it all happen? Bring me back to that moment too, and your reaction.

00:49:18:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I received a phone call one morning at my office from the governor of Colorado. When my assistant told me who it was, I thought about it for a minute, because whenever you get a call from an elected official, generally you have to write a check. I got on the phone, he wanted to have breakfast, and I went to breakfast and what he told me was something I already knew, Colorado had been trying to get a Major League baseball team for decades. There was no other baseball team between Kansas City and Los Angeles. It's

not a democracy, you're in competition because baseball's not governed by antitrust, you can't just start your own baseball team, and because of revenue sharing, and there would be five cities in competition. They hadn't done any expansion since 1976, so this was a big deal.

00:50:06:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Driving home that afternoon, I thought, "Wow," there was no requirement for women. On the other hand, maybe he thought since I was a business person and they were trying to get a small group of people together, maybe that's why he reached out. But I thought about it, I thought of my dad. When I was younger, he played recreational baseball and he was a catcher, and of course I later became a catcher, but he would allow me to, between innings, to go in and wipe off the plate with the brush. I thought about it, "Well, maybe this would be cool." I went home and I told my husband not only the idea, the dollar amount, and he said, "You're going to do what?" I said, "Well, this is an opportunity. Look at the number of Hispanics that excel in this sport." He said, "Well, you know this is high risk." I said, "I know, because in Major League baseball, you put on a deposit for the team, but if you don't get the team, you don't get your deposit back."

00:51:09:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

He said, "Are you sure you really want to do this?" He says, "I know you love baseball, you're the head of the girls sports club." I said, "Well, I either want to do this or I want to invest money to have my own cooking show on cable." He thought about it and he thought, "Well, maybe this was a better risk." It was high risk. People didn't give us a chance in the world, five partners and me,

the story of my life, five guys and a girl. We had to not only raise \$100 million up front, we also had to pass a referendum to build a new stadium before they would even talk to us because we did not have a Major League park. We were able to do that, and we were selected. The funny thing about this is, just like I never thought I would ever be a contractor, I would've never envisioned me being an owner of a Major League baseball team. First of all, Hispanic woman, first Hispanic owner. And it was the first time that a woman was actually involved as an entrepreneur, independent in a bid for a Major League baseball team. While people used to call me to understand why is she a contractor, now they didn't want to talk about construction, they just wanted to talk about baseball.

INTERVIEWER:

So you went from reading the business pages to reading the sports pages?

00:52:26:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Baseball changed my life. I used to read the *Wall Street Journal* first in the business section, no more, I go to the sports page. In my career, I think sports is an important analogy as well. While women were entering new careers, I like to say that it's like going to a foreign country when you're the first woman there or just starting to take first steps in women's careers, you have to learn to speak the language. The universal language among men is sports. While you may know the price of gas and oil futures and what's going to happen to the stock market, in reality what you need to know is the box scores, who's in the standings, who's going to be kicking off at the next day to enable that communication and dialogue to occur. Interestingly enough, that's

about building relationships. Over time, while baseball is a sport, it enabled me to have the opportunity to use it for business development.

00:53:30:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

It's important what's going on in the field, but I could bring my clients from Chicago, from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Atlanta and put them on the front row of their dugout, they could never get better seats in their own stadium. It enabled women to be in positions now to open doors and do marketing in ways that we didn't have the ability, the capacity to do. The second thing about baseball that enamored me was the success of Latino players, and certainly as a Latina, I paid attention. But, it really is important when you look at how baseball changed. Jackie Robinson, of course, then the Brooklyn Dodgers, bringing Jackie Robinson changed the game. But the myth is that it was only negro players in negro leagues, there were many Hispanic players, because of the color of our skin, we were not allowed in the Major Leagues.

00:54:33:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The other striking thing about baseball, as it affects women for example, is that when the rules are the same, and what we have been advocating for is that equal playing field where we've not always had equal access to capital, equal access to careers, equal access to education. Equal access is the level playing field that we have championed and has made the difference in careers. It is the opportunity, not the guarantee, the opportunity to succeed, knowing that you're going to have to take some risks, but it's getting into the

game, having some fun, and knowing that you're never going to get to second base if you keep your foot safely on first.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Denver Broncos' Mile High Stadium

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have any guarantee that you would get to build the stadium?

00:55:23:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

At the beginning of this venture, of course knowing that we had to pass a referendum to build a new baseball stadium as a requirement, of course. I had the thought that maybe Alvarado could build a stadium. We had built Invesco Field, the Broncos' new football stadium. While it was tempting and we wanted to do that, because of the potential for people thinking there may be a conflict of interest, we did not do that. But we went on the stadium tour and toured every stadium looking for how we would find a design that would not only be competitive, but would enhance not only the visibility of what was going downtown, enable us to really make Denver part of the big leagues.

00:56:13:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

More than just the success story of being an owner of a Major League baseball team and what happens on the field is the opportunity I have to bring young students, in particularly young girls, to the stadium, not just to watch a game, but to go up in the broadcast booth and talk about careers in journalism and in broadcast, to go down in our training areas and talk about

careers in sports medicine, to meet our VP of marketing, who's a woman, to talk about career paths of what they have the ability to do. And yes, we go down on the field, we meet the players. And I have a look at the seats and they said, "Wow! This is great." And I said, "Well, who do you think sits on the first and second row?" And they say, "Well, maybe the mayor, maybe somebody really rich and successful." And I tell them, "It's you." They sit there. And yes, we have peanuts, popcorn and Cracker Jacks, but it's about motivating them to know that they have the ability and capacity to do it, even though this appears to be a male-dominated game. At the end of the game, I tell them, "What you really want to do is own the team."

00:57:23:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I was in high school, –

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Girls Sports Club

Sandia High School

LINDA ALVARADO:

– I was the president of the girls' sports club. And we had basketball teams and baseball teams and hockey teams and all kinds of things. But not every school had girls' sports teams. And so in certain cases, we had to play universities, or had a very limited group of people. The change has been, is that since then, it's not just because of Title IX, women are involved in competitive sports. So when I bring young girls to the field, they say, "Wow! This is great. And you can be an owner." But they also say, "Maybe someday I

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can be a Major League Baseball player." That's not a dream. That can become a reality. The idea here is not to just them be inspired by being there, to inspire each other that they can achieve their dreams.

INTERVIEWER:

Now we're going to move into your family and marriage.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado Fishing With Her Family

INTERVIEWER:

Were you brought up to think that marriage was a given?

00:58:20:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Tradition, not just in the United States, but all over the world, women got married. They got married not only because culturally that's what we did. Economically, that's what we did. We had children and we were the primary nurturers. For the most part, we did not work outside of the home, which doesn't mean we didn't work in the home, we did. That was invaluable and certainly taking care of children, but it was pretty much the norm. Women graduated from high school for the most part, but not proportionately many of them went on to college, but the doors were opening. Women were pursuing careers. So whether it was in education as teachers, whether it was doctors or business people, that was changing. But for the most part, you went to college, you met a guy, you got married, you had a child.

00:59:17:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

That is not a bad model, but the model was changing. That, I think, had significant implications, not just on women, but also on men and how were we going to be able to balance all these things and still have children and do the kinds of things that our mothers had done traditionally. That was a new model. Birth control, that was one thing. It was controversial. Not all women agreed upon it, and certainly not all men, but at least it gave women choices. Women were now being inspired by not just reading about people. The media focusing now on success stories of women in this country and not in just this country, but in the world becoming prime ministers and other things, and dreaming one day that they had the ability to become the president, the CEO of a company, a senator, and maybe one day the president of the United States. The dream and the vision was changing. The difference is that women have always had hopes and dreams. The difference is that instead of just dreaming, we were taking action on those dreams and it changed the course of not just our lives, that of our husbands and our children.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me how you met him and I also want to know how did this all go down.

01:00:42:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I met this guy who eventually became my husband, at a wedding. It was a Catholic wedding. He was in college and he had been in law school and he talked a lot, I thought. But after a few drinks, he began to look better to me. He invited me to go to a baseball game, a Dodger game in LA, not Brooklyn, I'm not that old, but in LA. I decided I wanted to go and he thought that I went

because I was madly in love with him. No, I went because I had never been to a major league baseball game. And I thought it was really great. He told me about six weeks later that he had fallen in love with me that night and decided to marry me. And I said, "Sure, right."

01:01:32:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Then I thought about it and I said, "Well maybe. My looks, my charm, my personality?" Then he said, "No, none of that." I said, "None of that?" He said, "No, you were the only girl I have ever taken to the baseball game, I bought a Dodger dog for, and you put onions on your hot dog." He thought it was a sign from God. I told him, "Are you kidding? I was putting onions on those hot dogs because I had absolutely, positively no intention of kissing you." So we had an interesting start. Ironic now that I can get him on the front row, better seats than he could get me. But it was a period of time where Hispanics, which we both were, and women were now pursuing careers in ways that we didn't have opportunities, perhaps, before and were being encouraged to do so. You can imagine as I pursued the construction career, that it was a little difficult to explain to people he met that he was married to a contractor and my mother to explain to people that her daughter was a contractor.

01:02:48:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

In reality my husband was ahead of his time. Robert was not threatened, did not have to have the ability to say that he was the one, but partnered in a way that not many men did and certainly many Hispanic men did not. So to his credit, he did that. As we had children, I started building across the country and very often I could not be there because I have to go where the projects

are. It was Mother's Day and they had the mother-daughter brownie banquet. I couldn't go. I had to be in San Francisco and I said, "I can't go." And my daughter's going. And my husband said, "I'll go." Okay, this is 25 years ago. I said, "You'll go?" And he said, "Yeah, I'll go." So he went and you know what, they had the best time together. Their favorite picture together is this little heart she had sewn and it was supposed to be a picture of me and her in there, and it was a picture of the two of them together. The opportunity loss for me was an opportunity gained. I was available the next year. They didn't want me to go.

01:04:03:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

But men, I think, understood, not all men but many men, that they weren't secondary and I was primary or vice versa. It was a partnership. And for that, I sit here today comfortable with the fact that I'm introduced first a lot of times, but in reality this is a team and a partnership and my kids were blessed to have been raised by both of us. My husband is highly accomplished. He owns restaurants and he knows how to cook. I do not. On the other hand, I told him when we were dating both of my grandfathers were ministers and I had to stay away from four letter words, and he said he understood it, but I don't think he understood it was cook, iron, dust, wash. But he was terrific and is terrific. I grew up with all brothers, he grew up with six sisters. He knows how to shop for clothes. I do not. He buys all my clothes.

01:05:03:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

On the other hand, I build all his restaurants. It's not a different arrangement, but it was atypical for what was happening. Not everybody was comfortable

with it, but he was and I was. The beauty of this is he says I stay married to him just so I can build his restaurants. I assure him, no. I stay with him because not only is he my partner, the father of my children, he is a champion for women and not just for me and my daughters, but for women, and many men are that. I think he's a great role model.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado, Her Husband & Son  
Broncos Game

INTERVIEWER:

Men were facing backlash because of these role changes, but here's your husband who in the team that you guys have formed is taking on different roles.

01:05:50:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

My husband is comfortable in his own skin. He's highly talented, has a wonderful, great business. But he went through some difficult situations, challenges. We went to a non-profit black tie event and this was highly visible. And they introduced couples as they entered, and everybody was introduced as Mr. X and Ms. Y. We were introduced as Linda and Robert Alvarado. Some men in the corner smiled and said ... Robert was ahead of his time. But as I was facing challenges for doing what I was doing, people were diminishing men for supporting women in roles. The interesting thing about that is men were not threatened, but the tradition and the conventional wisdom that I was faced with, he was going through the same thing and wanting to make

sure that people knew that he was as accomplished and capable, but also was willing to do what he was doing. Not only was that unusual for men, culturally, for many men, that was a sign of a weakness, a sign of inability, and more than that being dominated by a woman. To his credit, he did not.

01:07:18:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Women were beginning to pursue careers and my children were in preschool and elementary school and they were explaining to people what their dad did, what their mother did. My kids were telling people their mother was a contractor and they're looking at my kids saying, "Your mother is a what?" They would say, "You know a contractor builds things." It was difficult for them to understand, but books started to be published for younger kids. I remember buying them one that was called *Mothers Can Do Anything*. And it was changing the stereotypes of, not that it was negative to be a stay-at-home mom, but mothers had the ability to be a police officer, a pilot, in the courtroom as a judge, but also on the court as a tennis player, and more importantly as a contractor. While it was different and unusual, it began to change not only their perspective of being okay with the fact that their mom was a contractor even though none of the other mothers were. But it also helped my younger son understand that it was okay.

01:08:31:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

His mom was the contractor, not his dad, which he had to try to explain in preschool. I was invited to my son's kindergarten class and it was like career day, only it's more like, what do you want to do when you grow up? Two parents were invited, me and another parent who was a nurse. The

contractor was a mother, the father was a nurse. I thought, "Wow, that is cool." So I took my hard hat, I had my level, I had my computer, we had Legos to try to understand how projects were built. The other parent also spoke. He and I had liquid beverages together and compared career paths. It's very interesting what I was experiencing, at the same time he was, as men, not just women, were pursuing other things.

01:09:32:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

So at the end of the program, the kindergarten teacher asked my son, "Rob, when you grow up, would you like to be a contractor like your mother?" He thought about it and he said no. She said, "Well don't you want to build high rises and schools and sports facilities?" And he said, "No, that's women's work." Myths and stereotypes die slowly. We're making progress. Has it gone as quickly as women would've liked to? No, but the good news is we have more in common than we have differences. The reality is we are making progress. I think not just women, but also men can choose to fulfill their hopes and dreams.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado & Her Daughters

INTERVIEWER:

How hard has it been to balance work and family life and what, if anything, have you had to sacrifice?

01:10:32:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The difference between a woman having a job and having a career are quite different. It's not working nine to five, sometimes it's many more hours than that and very often travel is involved. When you have children of any age, it makes it a little bit more challenging. In many cases, women are not just in marriages, but as single parents. How do you balance that? How do you provide for childcare, support systems? For me it was particularly challenging because I can't do work all in one location and so I live on United Airlines. But finding ways to still stay connected with people, but more than that with your kids is a challenge. How do you balance the mother-daughter event or the soccer event that you need to go through? I think everybody goes through that, but technology in a strange sort of way has helped.

01:11:30:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

So faxing homework back and forth to edit, email, drawing a picture and scanning it and telling them I love you, does not make up for not being there but I think women still know that that's our role. No different than men had done. The difference is that we travel and we have careers in ways that we haven't been able to do. I think in my case, you go through parental guilt to some degree, but it's also enabling them to understand that they too one day will have that career. But it also says to me, some things I won't go to. A business opportunity is secondary to family. I think that's a balance that many people are doing. Women didn't have that challenge many times before, but I think it works both ways. It's not business over family or family over business. It's very hard to achieve that balance.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

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Linda Alvarado & Her Son  
Elementary School Career Day

INTERVIEWER:

Here you are, this woman who's breaking down all these stereotypes, who's blazing this new path, whether she intended to or not, and here's her son saying, "Oh, that's women's work."

LINDA ALVARADO:

Women's work.

INTERVIEWER:

So he's still categorizing stuff. I mean, was that something that, were you shocked by that?

01:12:47:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I heard my son's comment, I smiled and then I laughed. But the more I thought about it, I thought, wow, in less than 25 years we have a young boy saying construction is women's work. Whether it was women's work or men's work, the reality was we were changing the mindset that people had the opportunity to choose. Just as I chose to be a contractor and the other parent was a nurse, I think that's progress not for us individually, but America as a whole to make sure that we have opportunity. Our country is based on that, equality, diversity, and enabling people to get into the game and contribute. To me, that's the American dream.

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado & Gloria Steinem

With Other Female Leaders

INTERVIEWER:

Did you consider yourself part of the women's movement? Was that something you were really conscious of in the seventies as you were breaking all these barriers?

01:13:46:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

One can advocate and say, "This is what I believe in." But more so getting involved to meet with stakeholders, to meet with city and government officials, to meet with corporations, raising the question of "Where are women? Yes, they're employed, but exactly what are the opportunities?" Those were not bad questions. I felt in many ways what I was doing was quite frankly one of the most radical, but it was no different than women were facing everywhere. So I did get involved. Supporting each other I think has made the difference. While we may have individual success stories, if women are to accomplish what they would like to choose to do, we need to work together. And encouraging not just women, but also getting engaged with men who also have become strong champions of the women's movement.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you find in your career that women were more helpful or men?

01:14:47:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I started my career, clearly I was a loner, so to speak. Not many women advocates because there weren't many in the construction site, not just on the construction side, fewer architects and engineers. There were some but not many. What surprised me a little bit was, while I knew I wasn't welcomed by a lot of men, what surprised me the most is many women questioned what I was doing there. "What was I trying to prove? Is she okay? Is she confused? She's not qualified." In reality, there were questions. More than that. The safer route for women was to, even if they were following a career path, go into the more traditional female roles. Taking the risk and doing what I was doing was not only a reflection on me if I failed, in many ways, it would've reflected on other women.

01:15:46:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

And so part of that concern was, "Do I take a risk? Do I do this?" I would never wear pink, by the way. Not because I'm anti pink. It would indicate that I was trying to make a statement one way or the other. It's not denying who we are. I think it was trying to find the place we wanted to be. I'm not sure all women agreed on where we wanted to go. The good news is we didn't agree on everything. The better news is since we didn't, we went all different directions and that's made all the difference.

INTERVIEWER:

How was it different being a minority woman in that time period?

01:16:23:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

In the late sixties, seventies, eighties, and to a great degree the nineties and today, while it was challenging for all women to break through and do the kinds of things we had not had the opportunity to do, it was even more challenging for Hispanics, for Asians, and for African American women. Not only did we have the women, we had the hyphen. When you talked about minorities, basically it was men. When you talked about women to a great degree, it was not minority women. Many women said we were the last to the table. Quite frankly, that may have been true, and it still may be true, but the issue here is as the world has changed, we have to change the world. You and I can't use that as a reason or excuse, but the reality was that was the case. Fortunately, women have come together. We are crossing not only geographic lines, we are crossing color lines and gender lines to know that in order to succeed, we have to win together.

INTERVIEWER:

Before we move on, tell me about the rings you have on your fingers.

01:17:39:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The two rings. The left and the right. Well, this one clearly is my wedding ring, I will treasure it always. This one is very special as well. This was for the World Series, the Colorado Rockies first Major League National League Championship. You can see it says Rocktober on the side. It's diamond and amethyst, and it has a girl's name on the side, Alvarado. This one I can replace. This one, I can ensure, but I cannot. It, in many ways, demonstrates not just the ability of the players, but that women are in the big leagues. While I wear it with pride, I thank myself every day to say that these are

really both sides of me. The ability for women to not only pursue whatever their desires might be, but also understanding when push comes to shove, it really is about family.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado

Attending A Business Meeting

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think younger women understand the way it used to be for women trying to break into a male dominated world?

01:18:53:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I'm not certain that younger women really understand what has occurred and what has evolved. And I don't mean just in the last four decades. I mean since the beginning of time. Part of it's culture, part of it's education, part of it's opportunity. In many ways, I think American girls, to some extent, believe that it was always this way, that believe they will have the ability to pick and choose, and that's a good thing. On the other hand, we should not assume that simply because we've made this progress, it will always be this way. And while the number of women now in college that are graduating, the number of women now not just in entry level but in management and in C-Suites is there, you can make progress but you can also plateau. Encouraging and championing younger women but more so enabling them to understand I think will be important not just to me and to them but to the future of their children but most importantly for the economic future of America.

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado

Construction Site

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think there's a difference in the way that men lead a company or a country or whatever it is and the way that women lead?

01:20:11:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I'm not certain that there's a difference between how men lead a company or a country versus how women lead a country or a company. I think leadership is not just a trait, it's a requirement in that regard. It's not a gender based initiative. It is enabling one to listen, to analyze, to communicate, to be able to build alliances, to set goals, to measure your progress and make a difference. I'm not certain it's easier for men to make those decisions than women. On the other hand, the difference is women are not afraid to make these decisions whereas early in our careers to make those kinds of decisions would've been very risky. But ultimately, you look at the number now of women CEOs of their own companies and Fortune 500 companies, they don't come to work saying, "I'm going to make a decision based on the fact that I'm a woman or a man." They make the decision based on the fact that they have a duty, a responsibility but also a fiduciary obligation to do it in the right way with the right values and principles.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think the biggest challenge facing the next generation of women entrepreneurs is?

01:21:35:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Women have made progress in terms of entrepreneurial opportunity whether it's a small business, a medium sized business, a big business, or even a public company. The world has changed. And since we've started talking today, it has changed dramatically. Technology. Rather than just being a domestic economy we're looking at a worldwide economy. And more than that, the traditional model of business in America has changed. What are we going to be when we grow up? I think the focus now will be what is the product? What is the service? Will I have an educated workforce? Can I be competitive not in my own town, in my own state, my own country but internationally?

01:22:21:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

It will also require women entrepreneurs to come together, to merge, to develop larger plans even than we've done in the past and to make certain as we do that, that it will involve taking risks. But more than that, doing nothing is not what we can do. We're not just women. We're American women. And our footprint and our leadership shadow affects the ability of women in other countries to not just learn by what we're doing but to emulate and also succeed.

INTERVIEWER:

You have two daughters and a son. Do your daughters work? And can you tell me a little bit about the sort of legacy you've passed onto them?

01:23:06:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

I think my children's growing up was also non-traditional. Just as I was doing different things. They were trying to say, "This is what my mother does, this is what my dad does." But it also enabled them to look at what they may want to do. Education was always a very important focus, as was church and family. Good grades were encouraged, but more than that, trying to have a vision of not just passing the next test but kind of what did you want to do? Being able to study abroad in Mexico, my two daughters, to understand better, even as Hispanics in this country, how other people live, how do families operate. My oldest daughter went to NYU and got her degree in film and television, and then she got her master's at Oxford and she runs now a creative art school. Very artistic but it's also about helping kids through grief and through illness to use art as a way of expressing themselves.

01:24:14:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Jennifer went to Pepperdine and she majored in public relations and she worked for a public relations company. Rob, he didn't become a contractor. He went to Cornell. Food and restaurant business... You can see he went to the dark side with my husband. But I did encourage him. He got his JD/MBA They are focused on not just themselves but getting involved in community. They're serving on nonprofit boards, they're finding ways to get kids involved in scholarships and I Have a Dream, the Urban League. And I think that's the legacy if one could pass. I do have pictures of my girls when they were little

and they're holding their Wonder Woman swimming suits up to say that it's not the superhero necessarily they want to be, but on the other hand, they weren't wearing princess outfits waiting for Prince Charming. They are wonderful, beautiful children. And the best that I can say is it's not what I gave to them, it's the blessing they are to me.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you at all influenced by feminine works like *Ms. Magazine* or the *Feminine Mystique*?

01:25:30:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Media as well as print publications regarding women and I don't mean home and garden, food and wellness. I mean *Ms. Magazine*, *Working Women* magazine. Women now publishing books, some of which were fiction, many of which were their experiences not just in life but in business. Being able to watch on television, not only profiles of famous people, profiles of successful women and what they were doing and how they were doing it. Getting involved in not just the business side of it but enabling younger women to see what their opportunity might be. I became a member of the Committee of 200. The Committee of 200 was women entrepreneurs from very, very different walks of life, corporations as well as entrepreneurial. And the idea here was not just to elevate the profile of the success of women, but to get women identified to go on corporate boards. I began with two other Hispanic women going across the country, predominantly in the southwestern part of the United States with what we call *Adelante Mujer* which means onward women, to encourage not just women but Hispanic women in particular.

01:26:53:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Adelante meaning forward. Women con orgullo, with pride. Not that we were different, but we were also at the table not serving the food but being able to be there making a difference, not just in our community, and to raise our hand, to get involved and to demonstrate that not just women, Hispanic women could also succeed.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Linda Alvarado

Coors Field, Denver, CO

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think modern women are reluctant to take on leadership or they avoid power? Or why aren't we seeing more? Why don't we have a female president yet?

01:27:29:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

Women are making progress and there are so many success stories that we can name from different parts of the country, different parts of the world and different occupations and different pursuits. While we've made progress, it doesn't always come as quickly as we would like. The difference, I think, where we are now is that women are free to express themselves. We have different opinions. We're not monolithic. On the other hand, we do understand that supporting each other does make the difference not just because we're women but because women are capable and have the ability.

01:28:08:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

We've made progress in the corporate suite. We are making progress in the Senate and in Congress. We do not have a woman president yet. But I want to see one in my lifetime. I used to dream about building a Seven-11 and then one day a high rise. My dream today is that I will read in the newspaper that the Chief Justice Sonia Sotomayor will announce the enlargement of the women's restroom at the Supreme Court to accommodate the sixth woman Justice. And to me, that would be the construction project of a lifetime. In every case, before the reality must first come the dream. And while that may not be me or look like me, that is you and me.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think was the most meaningful or useful piece of advice that you ever received?

01:29:06:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

The most useful advice, and I'm not sure I always understood it when I was younger, was from my mother who would say to me, "Linda, start small but think big." And I'm reminded today, now that all big businesses were once small businesses. They start with an idea, a concept, or a dream. And she was right. Start small but think big.

INTERVIEWER:

I'd also love you to give advice to young women.

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

LINDA ALVARADO:

I think it's important for young girls to understand and to be very careful that other people's lack of vision does not become their blind spots. In my opinion, because it's never been done means it's possible to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Go through life work balance, relationships.

LINDA ALVARADO:

I came from very modest means not realizing what I did not have. And today I look in the mirror and say, "How did I get here?" I remind myself that it wasn't just about me. It's about other women and other men who opened the doors for me. I want to succeed. I play to win, but I don't want to win at anybody's expense. I would rather be short of cash than short of character.

INTERVIEWER:

And then these, I'm going to ask you for just one word answers.

INTERVIEWER:

When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

01:30:25:00

LINDA ALVARADO:

An anthropologist.

INTERVIEWER:

What was your first paying job?

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

LINDA ALVARADO:

My brothers and my small company picking up trash.

INTERVIEWER:

Which three adjectives best describe you?

LINDA ALVARADO:

Inspirational, determined, passionate.

INTERVIEWER:

What person that you've never met has had the biggest influence on your life and why?

LINDA ALVARADO:

When I was in fifth grade, I was in a book club and I read a story. I read a biography of Amelia Earhart. And I was inspired and said, "I need to develop wings like her so I can fly." Or something stupid. It was Amelia Earhart. This was a woman who looked like a woman not like an airline pilot, similar to me, don't look like a contractor but I am a contractor, who not only broke boundaries, she broke stereotypes and broke records. But more than that, she touched people's hearts and inspired not just women but also men.

INTERVIEWER:

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

01:31:31:00

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LINDA ALVARADO:

One of the things I take pride in is that I think where I am and what I'm doing today would make my mother very proud.

END TC: 01:31:46