

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Briana Martinez:

Cuban Roots Pave Way for Las Vegas Attorney

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

Born and raised in Las Vegas, Briana Martinez holds a deep connection to her Cuban roots. Her family emigrated from Cuba in the 1960s and 70s. The decision to move to the U.S. came after both of her grandfathers were released from being political prisoners.

Moving to Las Vegas was a natural choice for both families because they had family already living in the valley. Another natural fit was the gaming aspect of southern Nevada. In the 1950s, Cuba was buzzing with nightlife and casinos. Briana's maternal grandfather, Rudy Valdes, had been a roulette dealer in Cuba. His experience helped him secure a job quickly once he was in the U.S. And while her family arrived with nothing, her paternal great-grandfather opened the first Hispanic grocery store in Las Vegas, called "El Relampago Cubano," meaning "Cuban Lightning." In true start-up fashion, the family ran the market out of their home. Once profitable, they were able to secure commercial space and set up shop. For 50-plus years, the store was in business and a mainstay in the Hispanic community.

In Las Vegas, the Cuban community is small, and everyone in it is considered family. Her parents met through this community and had Martinez at the ages of 19 and 20. Her mother, Nora Montoya, spent most of her career in accounting and her father, Juan A. Martinez

Jr., opened a real estate brokerage, and he was eventually featured alongside U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto as one of the most influential Hispanics in Las Vegas.

During high school, Martinez balanced being a serious scholar along with also being a social butterfly. She had friends in every social circle thanks to her uncanny ability to make friends with anyone. Aside from studies, she also participated in the National Honor Society and attended school sports and social events. Since her parents worked during the day, her grandparents stepped in as primary caregivers. Her closeness to her family was apparent to everyone, including her friends. They were very familiar with her grandfather who they called "Abuelo," as he shuttled her to meet with her friends, making her laugh, and teaching her to drive.

"My grandparents were one of the most influential set of people in my life. I owe them everything," Martinez said. "They helped instill my Cuban roots, my sense of self, and my closeness to family. I wouldn't be who I am without them."

To gain work experience and earn some money, Martinez worked at her father's real estate brokerage. Initially, she started out assisting with administrative duties. Always one to expect more of herself, she wanted to have a better understanding of the business and asked for more responsibilities. She worked as a receptionist and then quickly moved into other positions throughout the administrative team. She eventually learned how to manage rental properties, manage the brokerage's accounting department, and assist with human resource functions.

Because family was her priority, she decided to attend the University of Nevada, Las Vegas after graduating high



school, eventually becoming the first person in her family to graduate college. During college, she interned for U.S. Senator Harry Reid and worked with the Foreclosure Mediation Program. During her internship, she observed several office members studying for the LSAT and exploring law school. She utilized the opportunity to explore law school for herself, and she knew a career in law was next. She joined Phi Alpha Delta (PAD), UNLV's pre-law society, and started studying for the LSAT.

At UNLV, she was introduced to the Huellas program, a nationally recognized mentorship program that pairs a local J.D. holder, a William S. Boyd Law School student, an undergraduate student, and a high school student for the purpose of mentoring and support. Her first mentor was Alex De Castroverde. The connection seemed fated. The De Castroverde and Martinez families have ties dating back many decades. De Castroverde's father, Waldo, a pillar in the Cuban community, was close acquaintances with Martinez's grandfather.

"Huellas is the foundation of my professional success. Without people like Alex, Marisa Rodriguez, and Claudia Aguayo, I wouldn't be where I am today. Moving forward, my goal with Huellas is to try to give back in the same life altering way I received," Martinez said.

Impressed by her drive and work ethic, Reid agreed to write her a letter of recommendation for law school. Months later, she was accepted to Boyd with a full-ride scholarship. At Boyd, Martinez engaged with the community through several organizations. Notably, she was on the board of PAD and was treasurer, then president, of La Voz. While serving as president, she started a "Rebel Raiser" with Leonardo Benavides for La Voz for scholarships. Years later, the La Voz's Rebel Raiser is still going strong. She was also the business law editor for the *Nevada Journal*, interned for Judge Adriana Escobar and Judge Gloria Navarro, and worked for the Attorney General's office. After graduating law school, she clerked for Judge Joe Hardy.

Martinez is a busy associate at Kaempfer Crowell with a broad transactional practice, focused on business transactions, real estate, and regulatory work. Her work schedule has not slowed down her community efforts.



Briana Martinez poses with her grandparents – Nora Valdes (left), Rudy Valdes, Gladis Martinez, and Juan A. Martinez Sr. – after graduating from the William S. Boyd School of Law.

She is the president of the Nevada Latino Bar Association (LBA). In her role with the LBA, she mentors younger students and, this year alone, has organized and hosted several large events including the LBA's annual Inspira awards, honoring former Governor Brian Sandoval, and the fifth annual ¡Andale! 5k Run/Walk. The three-year leadership position is a labor of love, and her commitment has not gone unrecognized.

"Briana is a great leader in so many ways. She has vision, passion, and an unparalleled work ethic. Whatever she sets out to do, she gets it done, and done well," previous president Claudia Aguayo said.

Martinez is also a mentor with Huellas, is chair of her firm's Diversity & Inclusion committee, and a member of the Events committee. She has also been recognized as Nevada Legal Elite, a Best Up and Coming Attorney, and a Top Rank Attorney by *Nevada Business Magazine*.

In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, close-knit group of best friends, and her LBA family.



Briana Martinez poses with her family – mom, Nora Montoya (left), sister Alexia Martinez, and father, Juan A. Martinez Jr. – after graduating from the William S. Boyd School of Law.



Briana Martinez, Elsie Lucero, Judge Cristina Silva, Marisa Rodriguez, and Claudia Aguayo attend the 2022 Inspira Awards ceremony.



Judge Joe Hardy administers the oath of office to Latino Bar Association board members Judge Cristina Silva (from left), Steve Jimenez, Jorge "Coco" Padilla, Kristina Escamilla-Gilmore, Sophie Salcedo, Melissa Corral, Elsie Lucero, and Briana Martinez.



Relampago Cubano was the store that was owned by Briana Martinez's family. The store was located on Eastern Avenue and Bonanza Road.