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parenting advice.

At 35, Madrigal is the youngest person to become county chair. She's also the first Latina.

"If you look at political participation for the Latino community, to see someone in that position is an amazing legacy to leave," says Daniel Ledezma, who chairs the board of directors for the Latino Network and recently took a position with the Governor's office to focus on education and equity.

Marissa Dominique Madrigal was born in Los Angeles (L.A.) in 1978. At age 3, her father, a banker, was transferred, moving the family to Mexico City. Madrigal says the smells, sounds and language of the country are of her first memories. She didn't know anyone when she moved there.

Her family moved back to L.A. before she started first grade.

Madrigal says she didn't feel completely Mexican, nor completely American, and emerged from the experience as a more resilient person. She had to make new friends in new places, which she says made her more open to different people early in life.

She describes her childhood as "pretty great." She attended Catholic school. She took piano lessons, tennis and gymnastics. She has an older sister, and a younger brother, with whom she fought with like cats and dogs. They're now close. When she was 14, her family moved to Ridgefield, Washington.

As a child, Madrigal remembers her father bringing home *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. She would become upset after reading in the papers about bear poaching or some other wrong. After reading about a boy working in a shoe factory in Mexico, her father got in touch with the reporter who wrote the story, and Madrigal helped raise money for the boy.

"She was a very globally empathetic child, which I think was very unusual," says her mother, Elizabeth Madrigal. "But not in a wimpy way. She was a crusader."

Elizabeth Madrigal describes her daughter as inquisitive and observant, and expected her to grow up to be a doctor or scientist. She recalls her daughter once saying to her, "That person is not a nice person. I don't know why you're friends with her." Elizabeth Madrigal remembers thinking her daughter had a point.

"I think people describe her as a 'non-politician' because she's the politician that we all want. She's going to get stuff done and not take credit for it."

— FELISA HAGINS

SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION 49

"I don't know if it was my family or upbringing, but I've always had a sense of fair and unfair, a sense that people and things and living things need to be protected from bad things," says Marissa Madrigal.

Worried that she wasn't being challenged enough in high school, her family enrolled her in a program that allowed her to begin college early. At age 16, she began attending Clark College in Vancouver.

Madrigal entered the University of Washington at age 18 and graduated two years later in 1998 with a degree in zoology. After spending a year in Seattle, she moved to Vancouver with no clear idea of where her life was headed. She worked at an office job, partied on the weekends and published a quarterly magazine called the "Radioactive Pickle" that included poetry and reviews of hardworking bands that got little attention in other periodicals.

"I was a fun person, but I guess it wasn't a meaningful existence the way I feel like my life is now," she says.

Madrigal says two events brought more focus to her life. The first was the birth of



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS

Marissa Madrigal talks with the director of the Oregon Opportunity Network, John Miller, at the annual Homelessness Day of Awareness.

her daughter in 2003.

"Just the fact that I was a mom made it more difficult for me to get respect from people — an unwed mother, even though I was with the father," she recalls. "Oh my gosh. People objected so strongly to it."

Her family was priced out of their neighborhood in Southeast Portland and

struggled financially. They ended up moving to a large apartment complex in Northeast Portland that was home to many immigrants. It had "giant, nasty centipedes," and the landlord began raising the rent and evicting tenants.

Many tenants, says Madrigal, didn't speak English, and she remembers hearing from one of her neighbors about a Vietnamese family that was put out on the street along with all their belongings.

Around the same time, Madrigal had another experience that put her on her current path: her first immersion in a political campaign. Working on a campaign helped her understand politics as a force that could improve the condition of marginalized people.

"I really began to feel that the people don't have to put up with this," she says. "We can do something about it. We can vote for better people. We can raise a ruckus."

In 2004, Madrigal worked for Betty Sue Morris, a former Washington state legislator who was making a bid for one more term as Clark County commissioner. Morris was looking for a campaign manager and asked

her friend Elizabeth Madrigal if her daughter knew anyone. Elizabeth Madrigal suggested her daughter.

After meeting for coffee, Morris, seeing that she was eager to learn and had good political instincts, hired Madrigal. Madrigal says she showed up for work at Morris' basement and compensated for her lack of experience by simply doing what she was told. She did bookkeeping. She helped get a campaign float in a local parade. She got a helium tank and blew up balloons. She went to house parties. She recruited volunteers. On election day, Morris narrowly kept her seat.

Morris says that politics can be an emotional roller coaster, but Madrigal was steady throughout the campaign.

"Marissa's got a really good sense of equilibrium; she doesn't go off the deep end," says Morris.

Madrigal worked on two more campaigns before she was referred to Jeff Cogen, who was running for a seat on the Multnomah County Commission. With Cogen, she latched on to a rising star that would take her to the top floor of the county's offices.

The county level of government has a sometimes unnoticed, yet important role, providing services to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people living in the area through its clinics, mental health services and other functions. As the region still struggles with the aftermath of the Great Recession, it has its work cut out for it.

At times, it's suffered from an image problem. Nearly a decade ago, the county was mired in the "Mean Girls" era, a dysfunctional period that was marked by an ongoing and very public spat with commissioners and then-County Chair Dianne Linn.

In 2006, Cogen was elected to a seat on the County Commission along with Ted Wheeler, who ousted Linn as chair. Their election was seen as setting a new

tone and direction for the county. Four years later, Cogen was appointed county chair after Wheeler resigned to become state treasurer. Later that year, Cogen was elected in a landslide to a full term.

Cogen used his time at the county to help open a one-stop center for survivors of domestic violence, a mental health crisis treatment center, secure funding for the county library, as well as other accomplishments. Affable and well-liked, Cogen enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the Multnomah County Commission and seemed destined for higher office until news broke last summer that he had an affair with a health policy adviser, forcing his resignation.

Austin, the county's spokesperson, says that the scandal was demoralizing for county employees who worried that their work was being overshadowed.

"When that scandal gets mentioned, people see the county logo; they see us," he says.

Described by people close to her as smart, knowledgeable, collegial and trustworthy, Madrigal helped restore calm and confidence to the county. Before taking over for her old boss, Madrigal had been a quiet, yet sterling, presence.

"A lot of her accomplishments will go unsung because she's that type of problem solver," says Ledezma, who has worked with Madrigal on issues overlapping both the county and city governments.

Felisa Hagins, political director at Service Employees International Union 49, says that Madrigal has been particularly attentive to the needs of immigrants and low-income workers. Hagins recalls telling Madrigal about a check-cashing scam that was ripping off immigrants. She recalls Madrigal reacting rapidly, reaching out to immigrant groups and the sheriff's office to stop the scam.

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