

Nina Baltierra

I was born in California's San Joaquin Valley in January 1985 to a Mexican immigrant who taught me optimism and a blue-eyed blonde with a green thumb and what would become my exact face.

When I was little, I was convinced I was going to be a star. First Broadway, then Saturday Night Live.

Broadway: I took ballet and jazz before I got too cool for them and then took up hip-hop. When my mom learned my troupe was dancing to Salt N Pepa's *Shoop*, she pulled me from the studio and put me back on the wholesome jazz-and-tap track, taught by a former Rockette. I danced competitively—and professionally one summer—until I went to college.

SNL: I loved creating characters. My favorite and most famous among family was Dave Contrary (emphasis: Contráry). Dave was a 40-something (it seemed old at the time) loser who wore the same ugly blazer all the time. He had a bad temper and violent disposition, and always got into some shenanigans. Each episode was about a kooky adventure of Dave's:

- Dave Contrary Has No Pants
- Dave Contrary Goes to Jail
- Dave Contrary Gets Fat
- Dave Contrary Gets Abducted
- Dave Contrary Gets Rich



Dave during a monologue



With my brother, July 2016

My brother was the cameraman and played every role aside from Dave. He was and continues to be a big part of my life. He lives in Phoenix with his new bride, a dog, a cat, and a baby on the way.

When I came to terms with the fact that I was not going to be a star—in the performing sense of the word—I realized that my other love was public health (really). I took *Sociology for Living* in summer school in between middle and high school. In that class, we learned about sex, gender, consent, reproductive freedom, eating disorders, and so much more. When a guest from Planned Parenthood came and taught us about HIV, other STDs, and put a condom on her arm and stretched it to her elbow, I was enthralled. I'd found my dream job.

After some years of school, various non-public health jobs, and volunteer opportunities at AIDS service organizations, I landed that job as a health educator for Planned Parenthood of Delaware. I also did some time in the clinic, where I sometimes put my not so great Spanish skills (my dad didn't teach me Spanish growing up) to the test by translating for patients. One time, I told a patient she was going to take two "pasteles" (pastries) instead of "pastillas" (pills).

I eventually made my way to Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where I continued in their education department. It was some of the most challenging, most rewarding work I've ever done.

Philadelphia is a special place to me. It was where I decided to get an MPH (though I didn't actually do it for several years, and not in Philly). It was also where I met my husband, Richie, who happened to be getting his MPH at Drexel. He proved to be an intelligent, driven partner who challenged and motivated me and continues to do so. Here we are eloping in 2010:



A few years after we got married, the New York Times called to interview me for a piece on elopements. The Las Vegas Sun did, too. Maybe I'm a star after all!

ANYWAY, as I worked in health education, nonprofit development, and eventually an internet-based health intervention for individuals, I realized that while public health work on the individual level is incredibly important, I wanted to make an impact at the population level. When I first heard the term "place-based public health," I had another *Sociology for Living* moment: I knew that's what I had to do.

Counter Tools' commitment to healthier places is something that keeps me motivated, even when I've had a terrible night of sleep thanks to my senile cat, Percy, and just want to keep spooning with my dog, Lucy.

