

Race and Oral History Class, Spring 2019

Title: Ivette Lorona Interview

Narrator: Ivette Lorona

Interviewer: Prasadini Gross

Location: San Diego, California

Date: May 17, 2019

PG: My name is Prasadini Gross. I am here with Ivette Lorona. It is May 21, um, and it's Tuesday and it's about 4 'o clock.

PG: So, um, tell me a little bit about yourself.

IL: Well, my name is Ivette Lorona. I'm a second-year graduate student studying Public Health and Latin American Studies with a concentration in health promotion and behavioral science. My research interests are the U.S./ Mexico border, specifically studying the health outcomes in *trans-fronterizos* (cross-border) which are people who live in Tijuana but cross the border to do either work or come to go to school here in San Diego. It also includes some migrant and refugee communities that are mostly impacted here in the San Diego/Tijuana trans-border region. And I am the intern coordinator for Detainee Allies. I started in September of last year. And also, I am the graduate assistant that I work hands on with the Otay Mesa detainee letter... Er, Otay Mesa detention letter detainee [laughs]... Oh shoot! I forgot the name... With the collection of letters from Detainee Allies in the [San Diego State University] library. So, I work with... let me rephrase all that... And I also work in the library as a graduate student, directly with a collection of letters that we [Detainee Allies members] receive through the Detainee Allies. And I work specifically with special collection in the university archives.

PG: So how did you get involved with Detainee Allies? Well first, what is Detainee Allies and what do they do?

IL: What is Detainee Allies? Detainee Allies is a grassroots organization that is based mainly on volunteers. We are all faculty, students, and neighbors who all work collaboratively together, um, to be able to send letters. So what we pair up all volunteers from outside San Diego or anywhere, and we pair them up with the... I don't like the word detainee... with the migrant or refugee that is detained in Otay Mesa and they can exchange letters as well as be able to give them commissary funds, or, donation for the migrant or refugee to be able to receive or be able to buy food or a beverage, medicine, glasses, anything that the commissary offers. As well as be able to pay for their telephone funds and be able to call their families wherever they are at. What was the other question?

PG: How did you get involved?

IL: How did I get involved... Last year, it was around August or September, because I... one of my... one of the... sorry. Because I'm doing a masters in Latin American Studies, I'm very directly, I have direct contact with the center for Latin American Studies and they had posted on a bulletin board that they were looking for... Detainee, back then it was known as Otay Allies and that they were looking for interns to be able to help them out with reading and coding letters,

transcribing and translating them. And since I already had previous experience of translating documents from English to Spanish, and I was very interested to know a little more about detention centers, because back then I didn't know anything. I decided to contact Kate [Swanson, one of the leads for Detainee Allies], and next thing you know, I'm a volunteer for them. I joined Detainee Allies not knowing what a detention center was. I didn't know anything about the migrant and refugee community, but as I started reading the letters every month and coding them, and helping out in anything I could, I started to learn more about the reality of how things really are and how hidden it is from the public.

PG: So, what do you... can you expand a little bit of what you mean by "the reality?"

IL: Yeah. So, the reality that I mean specifically all the human rights violations and the horrible and inhumane living conditions that migrants and refugees are living in Otay Mesa. And it makes you think like, if this is happening here twenty five miles from San Diego State [University], what about the other detention centers. And I actually live ten minutes away from Otay Mesa and when I told my family about what was happening, what I was volunteering in, and what I was reading in the letters, they told me they didn't even know there was a detention center. And my whole family is from Tijuana, so, it was just very shocking for everyone to know what was happening.

PG: How did that impact you knowing that you were so close to the border but yet you didn't know these things were happening?

IL: [Pause] I don't know what's the word to describe the feeling I felt, but I definitely felt like I had to do something. I had to learn more. I had to just get more involved, be able to know what else is happening that I don't know. It's just, I can't find the word to describe it but it was just so much. I just want to say that it's shock, it was just shock of everything that was happening, that's happening ten minutes away from my house, but this is happening in the place that I grew up in. And during that time when I was learning about this, the caravan arrived in October or November. So, I was...even though I was not directly involved in helping the caravan, I was always informed in what was going on. And the more things I learned, it was just, the more anger and the more disappointment I felt for what was going on. And then... yeah, I don't know...

PG: So, you mentioned that you're an intern for Detainee Allies, what does your work specifically look like?

IL: What does my work specifically look like? As an intern coordinator or as an intern or do you just want me to, like, talk how I ended up as an intern coordinator?

PG: Everything. Both. Whatever you want to share.

IL: I can start with how I started. Um, when I joined Detainee Allies, I was just a volunteer or an intern. I was doing it during my free time, um, I was not doing it for course credit or anything, it was just something that I wanted to do by myself. And I started by just reading the letters and coding any violations or the living conditions inside Otay Mesa. This could include medical

neglect, the quality of the food which could've been like rotten or bad, looking for deaths, if there were any mention of deaths, people who needed legal representation...what was the other ones...there were other ones, I just couldn't remember. Those are the main ones. From there we started also selecting passages from the letters and translating them to either English or Spanish, because most of the letters that we receive are in Spanish.

IL: By the time February came, that's when Detainee Allies started collaborating with the library here at San Diego State, where they were donating the letters to the library. Specifically, special collections for them to conserve those letters. During that time, I actually got hired as a graduate assistant in January and I started helping them redacting any identifying information that was in the letters. So we would digitalize the letter and then we would go ahead and redact those letters. February came, that's when Detainee Allies had been throughout the coding we've been doing since September, we compiled a report... I can't remember the name of the report... but we compiled a report that we presented on February 1st, as well as letting the public know that these letters were also available to them, obviously at no cost and they could just go on the website for SDSU. Since I was one of the interns who had the most direct contact with the letters, I was asked to have a little more, I could have more responsibilities. That's when I switched... I didn't switch but I took on more responsibilities and became the intern coordinator for what is the rest of spring semester. As an intern coordinator I... I work very closely with Joanna [Brooks] and Jennifer [Gonzalez] and Kate [Swanson. All three of them are the lead organizers and co-founders of Detainee Allies]. Well, and I help be able to distribute other responsibilities and tasks to the interns and see where is it that we need the most help in. We started with five interns last semester, now we are up to eleven or twelve interns. And we keep getting more volunteers, because everyone is very interested in helping out in any way they can. But that's mainly what I do.

IL: Also on the side, I give out... started giving presentations to students, to faculty. I started also talking to the media, like talking about what Detainee Allies is, what I do specifically. And actually recently, two or three weeks ago or the last weeks of May, I was actually leading a seminar, a graduate seminar class that they were helping us with the coding. Which is actually the class that I was in. So, one of my professors, he was very interested in what I was doing, he went to one of the presentations I did. I, kind of like a training series. He was very interested and he asked me if, how can him and the class help Detainee Allies. And I started leading the coding, and teaching the class how to do the coding with the letters and all that good stuff.

PG: That's awesome.

IL: Yeah.

PG: So, obviously the organization is very important to hear these people's stories, but why is it important to you? What's the significance to you?

IL: The organization? I think for me the significance of volunteering and being able to help out in any way I can is just being able to amplify the voices of the people who are in the detention center because who else knows about them? Only Detainee Allies or other organizations that work directly with them, but if you ask anyone else they don't know anything about what's

happening. They know there's a humanitarian crisis, but they don't know the conditions that migrants and refugees are living in in the detention center. So for me I feel like my role not only as a student or as a researcher but also as a concerned...local, concerned local, I want to be able to talk about what's going on. Make it more...how do you say, like ...I don't know if it's making sense...but just so that they know and be able to talk more about it with people for them to know. And also, be concerned with what's happening in San Diego.

PG: Um... Sorry...

IL: That's okay. I can elaborate a little more. It was kind of like...

PG: If you want to.

IL: Yeah. I think also the significance of not only amplifying their voices and be able to tell people what's going on, is that I am also a Mexican immigrant. And even though the path that my parents took or that I took to come to the United States was very different, I still feel...or I see myself in them. That they're all looking for another shot at life, another opportunity, or a second chance, or be able to get an education, or be able to feel safe. And I feel like a lot of us who are immigrants or children of immigrants, I mean, we all came for a reason and most of it is because of another opportunity.

PG: So, how does it feel to be...to see yourself almost reflected in um those who been detained. Like, you coming from Tijuana and seeing other people just want an opportunity to...you know, for a better life. How do you... I'm sorry... how does that...like cut, I guess. I'm sorry...

IL: Can you rephrase the question?

PG: Yeah. Okay, so basically... I imagine that that's a lot of strong feelings, you being yourself an immigrant and seeing these other immigrants coming across the border also looking for an opportunity. You knowing that they're not granted the privilege and opportunity that you had, how does that make you feel? ...I guess...

IL: It makes me feel privileged. It makes me feel privileged. I think that was one of the feelings I felt reading the letters and seeing how people would write. Asking for not only money for food or funds, but just reading about their stories and seeing how there were some similarities to mine. And I definitely felt privileged, and I felt like they also deserve those opportunities that I have or.. yeah, that I had and that I have. But to be able to describe those emotions is really hard. But I definitely see in my family, like, how hard they worked and all they did. And just also talking with them and wondering(?) to know more about their story. I don't know about you or anyone else, but when you come from an immigrant family, your family doesn't really talk about their story. They just talk about we want you to do this, we came for this reason. They don't ever talk about where they came from or what was happening. And even though for me I just crossed the border, but still, these people come from long way and they're seeking asylum and many of them do romanticize the United States as being...what is it? Not the American Dream...

PG: Land of Opportunities...?

IL: Land of Opportunities... no, there was another word... But yeah like, the Land of Opportunities and then to be able to detained and felt like criminals. They don't deserve that. Imagine like if that would've happened to me or my family. So it's just like those things that made me think like, how privileged I am but also to check that privilege and be able to use it, again, do what I do with Detainee Allies and then go a step farther and be able to talk with other people and give presentations... So yeah...

PG: So, I think you already talked a little bit about this but what has been the most significant part you being in this org?

IL: I guess I talked more on the personal aspect of the significance, of yeah how significant it is for me to volunteer for Detainee Allies. Academically, for me it's been really...it's been challenging. I think it has been one of the most challenging academic paths, you could say. I decided to take on, because I'm helping volunteer, and I'm a full time grad-student, and I'm a part of different student organizations but I still dedicate my full time to Detainee Allies. But reading the letters have helped me out, academically, has been very...significant because I've learned more from those letters. I've learned more from reading from someone's personal story than hearing it from the media or reading it from history books 'cause history books don't tell you what is going on. And, of course there's no information on what's going on in detention center. So for me it has been very significant in the aspect that I've learned so much from those who are detained in Otay Mesa or any other detention center. And from there I feel like I needed to push myself more out of my comfort zone and be able to do other things. For example, while I was helping Detainee Allies, actually for spring semester I signed up for a sociology class where we were going to do research or conduct surveys out of a shelter from the Rapid Response Network. And we would survey these families, migrant families about their journey to the United States, what happened when they were in Mexico, how they were treated by Border Patrol or CVP (Customer Value Parters) agents, what was happening or how were they being treated while temporarily detained before being released. Also, what health conditions they had, where they're coming from and why, if they're fleeing from their countries. So its like all that research, kind of more like the before, kind of like the before and Detainee Allies is kind of like the after, you could say. I don't know...

PG: Before and after...

IL: Kind of like the before and after...

PG: Of?

IL: The journey to the U.S. Their journey to seek asylum in the United States. Kind of. That's how I see it. Kind of a before and after. Just pairing everything up has, like, gave me more of a...what is... a more well-rounded...view? You could say... A more well rounded view of what is this humanitarian crisis that has been happening for a long time.

PG: So, you mentioned a little bit about asylum seekers. What is the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?

IL: [Pause] I think that's one of the hardest questions [laughs]. I think we all get confused with what one is and what the other is. As far as I know, refugees is someone who comes from overseas, who comes from overseas seeking asylum. Whereas an asylum seeker is someone who crosses the border, yeah, crosses the border seeking asylum. That's... I'm under the impression that that's the definition for both terms. I could be wrong, because again, we all confuse them. [Laughs]

PG: Right. [Laughs]

IL: Yeah.

PG: Thank you for clearing that up a little bit.

IL: Well I could be wrong so... don't take my word on that.

PG: Can you describe some of the struggles that either you personally have encountered being a part of Detainee Allies or that your team of Detainee Allies folk have encountered?

IL: I think one of the main challenges that we continue to experience has been that feeling of the feeling that we can't really do much for them. But even though this organization came up because of a concern and be able to try to give them funds and be able to contact them with lawyers or be able to contact them with their families, but yet there's so much to do but there's so little we can do. It is an organization based on volunteers. And even though we all have that passion and that drive to help them, there's not much we can do. Sometimes I think one of the hardest things when we, like, meet up on a Thursday or whenever we have to meet up and we talk about the successes of how some have mentioned that they were able to get asylum but it gets very challenging to hear that someone that we've grown close, that we have grown close to through the letters, they've been deported. I think it's just that feeling of, like... I don't even know how to describe it... It's just like, we could've done... that feeling that we could've something even though we can't. So, I think that was one of the most challenging things being able to just keep pushing through. I think another one of the challenges is how overwhelming sometimes it can be, not only to read the letters because of the strong content or the graphic content they may have, it's just having a system to be able to have the letters read, look for any medical neglect and then pass on to the interns for them to be able to upload them to the drive. So, there is this whole system. And then [the letters] end up at the library, but to be able to have that smooth system of the letters going through all these different stages it can become very overwhelming. So those are the couple challenges that I've seen, and that I've experienced, and that I've continued to experience as of now.

PG: Is there a way that y'all kind of, not moved past them but work, work on [the struggles]? Even though it's difficult because it's a whole system and everything, like, like you said there's not really... in the end there's not a lot that can be done. Is there... what are some ways that y'all deal with that?

IL: [Pause] When it comes to the emotions and the feelings, all we can do is self-care and debrief. We debrief a lot. We talk about the letters, and then we brainstorm ideas about what we

can do. For example, I've had a person mention that they reported some health condition if they're not receiving help or they mention that they need a lawyer, we try to connect them or we try to, like, let them know a little more of what's happening. That's on the individual level when it comes to the whole system, it is just trying to multitask just like any other person would do. Just try to multitask and to organize. As an intern coordinator, I took the responsibility of once the letters pass on to the entrance into the library, I try to be the liaison before... between those two... between the library and Detainee Allies but as well as makes sure okay who has too many tasks, who is more responsibilities, or who is fluent in Spanish and can help with this, or who is available to do read letters in the media. So it's trying to distribute and organize, and as well bring in more volunteers and get funding later on [laughs], so there can be more people who can dedicate more time to it because, again, a lot of us are full time workers or full time students. And it is hard to manage our own time. And then the library also has its challenges, separate from Detainee Allies, because once we have the letters and if they're open to the public, they have to be very careful that there is no identifying information from the migrant or refugee who has written the letter and of course avoid any retaliation against them.

PG: Thank you.

IL: Yeah.

PG: Can you describe, to the best of your knowledge, how one becomes a detainee? What happens on a legal and personal level after they've been detained?

IL: To explain how they become a detainee?

PG: Mhmm. If you know...

[At this point a man walks by talking on his cell phone]

IL: I should know. [Laughs] I should know! I'm honestly... I'm honestly not familiar with the legal aspect of the asylum process. Because most of my work and most of my knowledge is on the letters themselves, the content that I read, that where I have more of my experience... So, I'm gonna have to skip that question. [Laughs] Yeah.

PG: [Laughs] Well... Then... in that case, from reading the letters, what about on a personal level? Do you know what happens once they get in there and you start receiving letters?

IL: Oh! I can talk about that! [Both laugh] I may not know a lot about the asylum process, and what happens but I definitely do know what is going on in the detention center and what they are experiencing and what they are trying to... what messages they want outside... let me rephrase... what message they want people outside the detention center so they can be able to help them. A lot of the letters are mainly expressing gratitude, or expressing the need for help. There are letters that are eight to twenty pages talking about their story, starting with their childhood all the way up to what they're facing in the detention center. There's other people who talk about the conditions inside, mainly the discrimination and the racism and even the violence that they experience just for being a migrant, or for their color of skin, or their sexuality. But even for all

the negative... I guess not the negative...of all the bad things that they face in the letters, there's also some good things. There's a lot of support, a lot of community building. There's a lot of support within the detention center, not from the agents but from the migrants themselves. For example they hold mass...I think on a weekly basis. It is a way for them to spiritually heal and be able to debrief and talk about the challenges they've faced and be able to not just disconnect themselves... I don't know what's the word but avoid reality for a bit and heal their spirit.

IL: [Unintelligible then laughs] There's also when they're place in pods, in mixed communities. There've been letters of Chinese community and Mexicans and they all try to learn each others language. Or for example, some of the most recent letters have expressed how they're receiving help from someone who's helping them write a letter because they personally don't know how to read or write, they can only speak. There was one... there was a 21-year-old who was mentioning he can only speak but he could not read write and needed help from someone. We also get batches of letters written by the same person. One of the latest batches, I think it was like nineteen letters, was written by a pastor who was saying he very grateful for what Detainee Allies has offered to him, that he wanted to share that help with anyone else who couldn't read or write for themselves so he wrote nineteen letters for nineteen different people... Yes. They are also... some of them are also following a format here they introduce who they are, their age, their A-number, their commissary number, and they express in two to three sentences who they are, why they came to the United States and then they of course ask for help, and they put the instructions on how to place their funds into their commissary account. So, all this community building that is going on in the detention center. But there's also some letters that make you think and make you appreciate life as it is. There was a letter of a woman who mentioned that she missed seeing the trees. She didn't know how trees looked anymore because she hadn't seen them in a long time. There was another person that expressed pretty much for him that being able to go outside even though it was already dark but to be able to look at the stars, because he ws one of the few people who could do that. He was throwing the trash away of course, but he realized how thankful he was to look at the stars. And it makes you think that we see trees everyday, we look at the sky everyday and we don't.. and we don't think twice about them, but they do. They miss that. They miss talking to their families, they feel very alone and sad. And it makes you think, when was the last time I talked to my family? I probably talked to them a couple minutes ago, I talked to them yesterday. I may not see them, they may live far away from San Diego, right, but still you know that your family is there and you know that your family is safe. They don't. They fear for their families, but how can they reach out to them if they don't have the money to be able to call them. So, it's just all those little things within the letters that make you think. But going back there's many stories throughout those letters. And each letter has its own personality, you could say. I think the most recent letters we got is... There was a guy, I think from some where in Central America, he was writing to his volunteer, his ally, was talking about his family, his babies and all [laughs] but then he quoted Rihanna. He quoted Rihanna. He was saying how he felt alone in the detention center and it was as if he was seeing demons or something like that and then he quoted Rihanna's song... I forgot the name of the song... something about the demons underneath... monsters underneath my bed. I don't know if that's right, but he was quoting that song. I've had another letter stand out to me was a teenager, well he's not a teenager anymore. He was eighteen or nineteen, he was young. And he was telling us about the conditions of the detention center and that he needed money "because the struggle is real." [Laugh] So I read that, I read that and I was like "wow, that stood out to me"

because I say that! Millennials say that! So, it's the little things. I always try to st a little on the positive things. So, for me each letter has its own personality. Yeah.

PG: Thank you for sharing the negative and also the positive of both of them.

IL: I can do a little more. So most of the... I don't know if you speak and understand Spanish? So when you read the letters, when you go to the archive and read the letters, something that I've noticed being bilingual is that they sometimes switch from English to Spanish. But we do notice when it more meaningful to them or feelings about their families or anything emotional or meaningful to them, they say it in their native language. They say it in Spanish. And then they ask for help in English. So next time you read the letters or anyone reads the letters, notice that switch in the language. Notice how things that are meaningful to them are said in their native language. That also applies to French and English but also applies to... There was letter about that had at least one sentence in their indigenous language. So it's not always the stories itself but the language they're using.

PG: Thanks.

IL: Yeah.

PG: So, again you may not know the answer to this question but how does them being put in detention centers affect them afterwards if you hear from them once they come out?

IL: Can you, ah, say the question again? How they're placed in the detention center?

PG: So maybe if you receive letters after they've been detained... What... How does being detained affect them afterwards? If you get any letters after?

IL: After they've been deported?

PG: Uh...

IL: Or after they've been placed at the detention center?

PG: Maybe both.

IL: Okay. As far as being...once...once they're deported or once we don't we receive any letters from them, most or I think almost all...I think, I at least haven't heard of anyone writing back to us, even after they've been deported. Maybe Kate or Joanna or Jennifer [three the leads for Detainee Allies] know more, but at least I haven't seen those letters. But I do know that once they're placed in the detention center and they ask for help they mention that they've been there for one, two, three years. Sometimes three to four years. They mention that when they're placed in the detention center they felt like criminals. They felt like they were being treated like criminals and they felt like they didn't understand why they were being treated like criminals or prisoners if they're only trying to get asylum. If they were only trying to look for safety. Or they were only trying to get an education, or go to university, or get a career. They just express that

confusion. Regular people who've been caught... I don't know if that's the word... but they've been caught by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] in front of their houses or going to work, and they're placed in a detention center. And they're like, but why? They tell me I'm from... Guatemala but I've lived all my life in the United States. That, you could say identity, there's just a lot of confusion, although that is what I've read in the letters. People feel very lonely, that's something that I've been seeing constantly. Loneliness, sadness... Not being able to talk to other migrants either. Or when they do, they try to support each other, but what happens when one of them is transferred or one of them is going to be deported, so it's just not knowing. When it comes to the court hearings or their actual process they don't understand. They say that the documents they are given are in English but their language is Spanish. Who's going to help them when they don't have to represent them? There are migrants and refugees who do have lawyers, but what about those who can't afford one or even know how to contact one? They're alone in the court hearings. So those are some of the things they're expressing once they're in detention center and once the process is going. But yeah, I think the main feeling is just feeling like prisoners. And they are. They are being treated like prisoners or even worse. I think there was a quote in one of the letters, I don't know exactly it went but it was just saying that they were being treated like criminals, but why? Is there... I don't remember the quote. The only thing they are trying to do is move to the United States... I can find the quote later... But yeah. I hope that answered your question.

PG: Yeah, it did. So, you already mentioned some of the experiences you read most about in the letters. Is there any that are particularly memorable from a letter that really stuck with you?

IL: Memorable... There are many things that stand out to me, but usually... Mainly the ones that stand out to me are the negative, the negative things in the letters. There's one letter that I read on February 1st when we were presenting the report. I chose that letter because I felt like that letter related to everyone who was an immigrant themselves or their family is an immigrant family. In this letter, this woman was talking about why she fled from Mexico, saying that she was fleeing from domestic violence and she grabbed her one-year-old. She was only seventeen and she grabbed her one-year-old and she crossed or she jumped the wall and made a life here in San Diego. She lived here for many years. Her daughter was under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), she went to university. One day, she got... ICE took her away, in front of her house, just took her away and put into a detention center and she hadn't seen her daughter for months or, I think, a year. Her daughter had to leave the university to be able to pay for the bills and maintain the house in San Diego. But that's not the story that stood out to me, it's not how she expressed missing her daughter but all she wanted for her daughter was for her to be a professional, to be able to receive an education, to be able to be safe and away from the violence that she herself experienced. So it's just knowing that for me, as a Mexican immigrant, that my family brought us here to the United States, even though we cross the border constantly, but they brought us here with the goal of us receiving an education. That's why that privilege that I feel that my parents were able to brought us here, and I'm a graduate student and I'm continuing my career. And that's what many parents do for their children. Many parents have been separated by the port of entry from their children or they're detained together in Otay Mesa. So, to me, that was the one that stood out to me.

IL: Can I say another letter or...?

PG: Yeah, of course.

IL: Another letter that really stood out to me that has been the most significant one has been the one letter that I actually sent, and I did receive one. For me receiving a letter from someone inside was just, I don't know, it was very exciting. Not exciting... Not sad but just exciting to know, like, that wow someone actually received my letter and they're responding back. He was 23 year old Honduran boy, he had his bachelors and something with administration, I want to say, but he was just talking as if I was talking to you or to anyone else. Yeah it was just a normal conversation through the letter. And at the end, it said he mentioned to, to always live life as if it were your last day, and this is coming from someone who's been detained in a detention center. To me reading that letter, that's when I realized "wow." This is going to sound... I don't know how to say it but it was like, they're human too. They're just like us but when they're portrayed in media or when people talk about them they talk about them as not human. That's where all that dehumanization and criminalization that comes... Take us as that (?) But reading the letter is just when it clicked to me that wow, this is just another person.

PG: That's so impactful.

IL: Yeah.

PG: So you mentioned a little bit about them feeling isolated and you've mentioned that they don't get contact with their families, what... What else are they being kept from?

IL: Besides their families and... What else are they being kept from?

PG: If you don't have an answer, it's okay.

IL: I mean I do have an answer but it's not... I don't know. This is not something that I can say. That's why I'm not... I don't want to say it but I'm just going to say that based on what I've read of the letters and what they're writing to us and to volunteers is that they're not been given proper medical care. Many of them are mentioning that they have a flu or a cold or they have high blood pressure and they're not given anything but water or salt or Tylenol. A lot of them also mention those who are diabetic can't eat the food. They'll go days without eating because they can't eat the food. Some of them depend on the funds they receive through the volunteers to be able to buy proper food to eat. And yet, the food they have at the commissary is, you could say, is junk food. The fact that that they have to work for a dollar a day and sometimes they mention that they don't even get paid, what kind of life is that? What kind of life... what are they giving them to... what are they giving them inside the detention center? They'll work for five, six, seven, eight hour shifts and get paid a dollar. [Bell chimes in distance] I'll wait... [Bell continues to chime]... Okay it's getting windy. They're also kept from talking to their families because they have to pay for that, pay to be on the phone. So it's just depriving them of the basic needs that every human should deserve, which is dignity and compassion. They're not getting that.

PG: So, I think just to end on a good note, what do you think the importance of, you know, telling their stories and making sure that their stories are heard. What's the importance of that? I guess, depending on how you go about this question it can be very...

IL: So, what's the question?

PG: So why is it important that these people's stories gets told?

IL: As I previously mentioned, it's very important to be vocal and to amplify the voices of those who are hidden. Hidden in a detention center facing all these challenges and being dehumanized and criminalized for just trying to look for asylum or seeking asylum. It's important not only for the locals here in San Diego or for students or for anyone here but for the rest of the United States and for everyone else, to know that there's people, there's humans that are facing this. What kind of government does this, when the United States is all about freedom and human rights? Just because their migrants or refugees or because they come from somewhere else, who dictates that their so called "aliens" and assigned A-numbers? What kind of treatment is that to someone who could be a brother or sister to someone that we know? So, to me, it's very important to talk about the letters, talk about what's happening. For me at least, the best way to be able to talk about them is relating these stories that I read, their personal stories, these are things that they mention and be able to humanize them and be able to say this person received an education in a university, this person is a doctor, do you know any doctors? Or for example, when I mentioned about the trees or the stars, just us realizing that these little things like how privileged we are, or when was the last time you drank coffee or ate chocolate? To them it's like a once a month thing, yet for someone here, drinking coffee everyday. So, it's trying to relate to those stories they mention and be able to share those similarities and be able to see that they're also human. They're also people! They also have goals! So for me it's very important to be able to humanize them.

PG: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

IL: Not for the moment, I think. I don't know if there's anything else that you want to know. I know that your questions focus on Detainee Allies but I also work for the library so I don't know if you're interested knowing more about the collection? Because I call it a collection because that's how we refer to it in special collections.

PG: Um, I feel complete.

IL: You feel complete? Okay. Yeah.

PG: Thank you so much.