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Transcription

MS: Hello Salma, my name is Marco Siu and I am an Ethnic Studies major and I am here to interview you. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Your name, your intended major, your grade, and just anything you want to talk about.

SP: Okay! So, my name is Salma Parra. I am 18 years-old. I go to Kearny School of Science Connections and Technology. I am a senior there; I actually don't live in Kearny Mesa, I live in City Heights and I've grown up there my whole life, but I am planning on attending UCSD and Muir College to major in Public Health and also in Chicana@ Studies. In my Public Health major I think the focus that I want to go into is epidemiology, which is research. The research of disease and study of disease, so I'm really interested in that aspect of science, so that's where I'm looking to go into My family is just four people, it's my mom, my dad, and my younger sister who is two and a half- exactly two and half years younger than me. She is a Sophomore and she also goes to the same high school

MS: All right. So, the first question: What do you identify as and how did you come to know-come to understand these identities?

SP: So I identify as Mexican-American, a Chicana-Latina and I just came to understand it just based on like family's ethnicity and our culture. So both of my parents are Mexican, my dad is from TJ and my mom is from Durango which is another state in Mexico but they actually met in

Tijuana. And- But actually some of my mom's ancestry is Spanish and Italian, but that kinda explains my second last name which is Pulgarin. I identify more as... there's also the Mestiza aspect, but I identify as just Mexican-American.

MS: So being Mexican-American, has there been any struggles specifically with these identities growing up? In school, in community, or family?

SP: I think, so I've lived in City Heights and I've lived there my whole life and I've lived there since I was born, but at some point my mom realized that the education system around my community wasn't the best, so she kinda wanted to search for more in like other communities. So after Elementary School, I went to Middle School in Creative Performing and Media Arts middle school in Clairemont. And, so there is where I started to think more about my identity in the aspect that most people didn't exactly look like me; things were a little bit different getting used to all that. To compare it to an area where I lived where almost- everyone is diverse and it's not just one... maybe it's not just Mexican-Americans but it's not just like White people if you want to say that. So then I started to think more exactly how or what exactly I was and just accepting it because like I said, I never resented my ethnicity or anything, I've always been proud of it. But there was just kinda a mini shock of like having to think that oh I'm kinda different from everyone else, but there's nothing bad in that aspect.

MS: Right, and can you tell me something that you're proud of in your ethnicity or culture in being Mexican-American?

SP: I think... well there's kinda like the generic idea that people come here... for in search for opportunity and things like that. My parents actually came way before they thought about having kids. They already knew there was a system here that was gonna benefit my sister and I more or

whatever kids they were gonna have. So I think something that I really value in my culture and in my ethnicity is our search for opportunity everywhere else even though... and getting out of your comfort zone, spreading away from where you've always felt comfortable and safe in search for those things that seem kinda unreachable from where you stand.

MS: That's beautiful. Yeah, some of the things that our families sacrifice for us is unspeakable.

SP: Yeah.

MS: All right, more technical question, what pushed you to select Public Health as your major and also your double major because you're interested in Chican@ Studies?

SP: Yeah, so definitely in the Chican@ Studies aspect I've always loved history. I noticed that in Middle School and even in Elementary School I've always liked learning and have always been really good with dates and things like that. So I always knew that it was something that, in a way, I had to pursue and then I picked Chican@ Studies specifically because... so at my school you get to take, at Kearny, you get to take... if you're doing good and in the top tier of your class... you get to take classes at the community college nearby, which is San Diego Mesa College. So my junior year, the very first class that I took was actually going to count for my US history credit for high school and it would also transfer to when I went to university. So I took US history from a Chican@ perspective. So it was a really really eye-opening class and I just really learned to love that aspect of history because I could resonate more with it and so I definitely knew I had to pursue it in one way or another. And then Public Health, so the sciences... I mean I went to a science high school... but I always knew that I had to do something in the sciences and so before I actually went to Public Health I was a bioengineering major, but I decided to move away from that because I realize that a lot of... I get my energy from people and I want to

work with people and specifically with communities. So if there is any way that I could get a little bit of work with communities, I figured that Public Health was the way to go- and I also learned more about careers that you can go in with it and like personal experiences that I had with my family like regarding healthcare and things like that... or lack of healthcare. So I just kinda realized that it was something that... kinda my true calling if you want to say that, but I do love Public Health and what it stands for and... because it is just the wellbeing of people and I care about communities similar to City Heights, underserved communities so that's where I plan on going back to.

MS: That's awesome. And regarding your community college course for Chican@- basically Chican@ Studies in US history, can you tell me one of your favorite example or favorite parts that you learned about?

SP: Yes! So one of the- we read two books, the first book is Mexicanos which is just condensed with history. And the second book was a Mexican women in the 20th century; so that really caught my eye so I really fell in love with the book. It was broken up into chapters so basically every other chapter spoke about real stories of women in the 20th century so it spanned from the 1910s to the 1980s so that was kind of the timeline. It was talking about all of that... just really crazy stories and then it was actually so kinda like the granddaughter was telling the story of her grandma and how she experienced things but they are real stories and it was just really cool to see that. Oh, even issues you think are not existent now but they're still kinda there but they were so big then. Things that now are regular were not regular then so it was just really interesting. I found that super interesting in the aspect of the women and their roles and how at some point

they were powerless and how they got through that and how they are equal in society so it was just really interesting, I really enjoyed that book.

MS: Ah, that's awesome. Did you ever learn about the forced sterilizations in LA area? The No Más Bebés movement?

SP: Mm Mm.

MS: Ah, well that is something. I was thinking about your major Public Health and also your potential double major where some of the things might intersect where bad science could potentially harm specific communities like in the Latinx community where they forced sterilized a lot of Mexican-American women. A lot of those folks were in labor or giving birth at the time when they were signing the form; a lot of them didn't know English so there's a lot of intersections.

SP: That's crazy. Wow, that's really cool.

MS: Yeah, which is why I'm really excited for your major and also your goals because it really goes back to community.

SP: Yeah, thank you.

MS: So tell me a little bit about growing up in City Heights and how BLCI has maybe contributed to your college matriculation path.

SP: Yeah, so definitely... so I will be the first in my family to go to college. I have a lot of older cousins who also grew up in City Heights but they... they never had... they're older than me so they didn't have the right... I don't know if counseling would be the word or like someone to just really be there for them in that aspect of college and things that my aunts and uncles didn't understand and things like that. So my parents always knew that we needed some kind of help

that was gonna be outside of our community or maybe that could be in our community but would help us get out into University because they knew that... they always knew about college and they wanted us to pursue college and find a career that we were interested in. So- but growing up that was always something that was there so like growing up in City Heights is just like my home and I love it and I know some people... there's always this kind of stigma that it's not like the safest place but it's definitely- I mean it's been my home for the last 18 years; so I've grown used to it and everything there I enjoy and I love and I actually- so maybe when I was 11, my parents made us join swim lessons and... I really liked it and I really liked the pool so I joined the swim team right after and then my sister a couple years later. So I became in love with swimming and the swim team and just like community I created there. And what was crazy to me was that everyone in our swim team looked like me. Like everyone was Mexican-American or some kind of Latino or Latina. So that was definitely a concentrated community of people so like all the moms got along and all the kids, they were my best friends. We actually had one of the biggest teams in the city... these were like city pools. So we would go to competitions like our team would be the biggest and we were all Mexican or all Latinos. And like other teams you would see teams in other communities like Allied Gardens or Swanson or Clairemont and they were all either one race or another. You could kinda see that... it was crazy to me at the time because I was 12 but we were in completely different communities with completely different lives but we would just meet for competitions and things like that. And so after that I think I was like 14 or 15 when I decided to become a lifeguard so but I had to do all the training for that. So I became a lifeguard in my sophomore year and so then I was actually able to get hired. So you pick your three choices and I got my top choice to work at the pool that I would have been

swimming. So I got it and I was really happy about that! It was also cool to be able to just stay in my community and do something that I liked doing within where I had grown up; I also really liked that aspect of it and going back to the college aspect so my mom actually heard about BLCI through the swim team through another mom in the swim team. And so that's kinda how I ended up here around middle school where my mom learned about it and we applied for a couple years but I was waitlisted for two years because the classes were full and they weren't just- they weren't letting anyone go because the classes were full. But my sister got in a couple years before me but I remember I would still come because my mom liked that it was just a good place to do homework. I could just concentrate and it was just a positive environment and everyone here was trying to do something that was good and for the benefit for everyone else; so for a couple years I just came here to do homework and I got in on my 9th grade year. So I got in 9th grade and I've been here ever since and it's been a nice family like community that has taught me a lot of things about college that I didn't know and has kinda walked me through the process of everything but also has made me a stronger individual by myself.

MS: That's awesome, so BLCI was kinda like a second City Heights kinda feel?

SP: Yeah.

MS: Nice, I'm really glad you have something like that.

SP: Yeah, me too.

MS: All right, so when I was reading your application, the scholarship, one thing I noticed was you are... and correct me if I'm wrong- working class and low-income.

SP: Mhm.

MS: So I wanted to know: how you think your socioeconomic status, so for example your place in society per se, being low-income and Mexican-American factored into your higher education journey?

SP: So definitely my parents, when I was younger, my dad always had two jobs and my mom wouldn't work because she wanted to be there for my sister and I during school. So what she would do was actually had to go to adult school to continue education in of sense of learning English so she could be able to talk to my sister and my teachers and go to our open houses and things like that- just to be able to communicate, so that was something I always admired about my mom. So maybe around middle school... oh no maybe around third grade, financially things got a little bit rough so we had to move to Mexico for the summer and I remember that was actually one of my favorite experiences growing up because I was close to my cousins and I was just really enjoying being over there and then we moved back and everything got a little bit better, but financially we've always been low-income. But my parents have also always sought things for us to do that were free or getting scholarships so that was something I actually did for five years because my parents were always like "If you get scholarships... San Diego junior lifeguards, it's like a beach lifeguard program-thing for a month during the summer everyday and I remember that was a big part of my life growing up. I always knew I was gonna look forward to that over the summer and my parents always ensured that. So definitely I had a busy life because my parents were always looking for things for my sister and I to do not miss out on things I guess. So that's something that I've always admired about my parents as well. And then... I think after my... oh, a little bit after I started high school my mom decided to start working as well because she saw that my sister and I were already grown up so she didn't need



to be at home as much during the day. We just had grown up a little bit more and so she started working and my dad went back to one job, but his job has always been really strenuous on his body like very... it's really laborious. It was taking a toll on his body at some point; and so definitely always working and jobs that people who are immigrants are able to get so... but my parents have never resented that in a sense so my mom is actually a nanny and my dad is a commercial baker so he works for a bakery in La Jolla. He's always worked at a bakery ever since I can think of... in these big bakeries, he is like the baker... you know the commercial bakeries, the big brands and things like that. But I think around my junior year my dad... I don't know if you read, it's also in my application story about my dad and his... because of his job he got a bad internal injury and that led to an emergency surgery that led to a couple other surgeries so it was a really hard time on my family and a really hard time on me, but I was trying to be as strong as I could for my family, especially for my mom and my sister just trying to take as much stress away as I could for them. And at that point my dad wasn't able to work for a while, a long time, so my mom started working longer hours and so I focused my care on my dad when I was home and just making sure I left everything ready like when I left for school so that he would have an easy day while he was recovering and then my sister- always taking care of my sister and always with her. I always had to take public transport to get us here to BLCI, take care of the house like clean everything just all the responsibilities that I wanted to take away from my mom who was working really hard to be able to put food on our table. So it was a really hard time financially and to this day we've never had a lot I guess but we've always been really happy with whatever we do have because we are... just- not super materialistic in my family, I never, I

guess, felt like I was missing out. They've always made sure that I was never missing out on anything.

MS: Thank you for sharing, I'm really glad you're having a really positive outlook on a lot of these things. All right, so specifically in college since you're about to start soon, how do you envision your college journey to really play out? What do you think is gonna happen?

SP: Hmm. So I think... I think I'm definitely really excited about meeting a lot of people and just getting to know people from all over. I love meeting people, I'm really social and extroverted person so definitely get my energy from people, I'm really looking forward to that! Also, the program that I'm in, Pathways to STEM, I'm looking forward to that because there's only 11 students so you build a really tight knit community with them, so I know that Path is definitely gonna be a really big part of my college career, which I'm happy about to have a community on campus. I know I also like to join a lot of clubs but I also know I want to limit myself because I want to do good in school, but I do want to search for my own communities on campus to just feel like I'm at home while I'm there and to really just grow as a person and as an individual. And learn, I love learning, I've always loved school, that's something that I've always have enjoyed and I love learning and just really finally getting into a career that I actually want to pursue and enjoy- I'm excited about that.

MS: Nice, and have you looked any clubs yet?

SP: Yes, so I definitely want to be apart of the Raza Resource Center and I was looking at small dance teams like I wanna try folklorico. So that's baile folklorico- I've never had... I've always took dance when I was little more because I went to an arts school, so I liked dancing there but it was your typical jazz, tap, and ballet. I was telling my mom recently that she never signed us up

for folklorico but because she thought we weren't gonna like it. It was definitely a part of my culture that I want to explore more and I want to see if there's any way I could join folklorico group and learn from them at UCSD. And then also there's also a salsa club and a lot of clubs- oh and there's this... I don't remember the exact names but there's this leadership alliance on campus and then there's... I was looking online and there's definitely a lot that interests me. Hermanas Unidas... I'm really excited to just get into all these things and meet all these people and really learn different things from all of them.

MS: That's awesome, for fol- how do you pronounce it again?

SP: Fol.Klori.Co.

MS: Sorry I can't roll my Rs.

SP: Yeah.

MS: But the dance with the-

SP: The skirts and the, the, the, they always hold the-

MS: Yeah, yeah!

SP: I saw them at Triton Day, they were performing in front of Marshall and they looked so cool and I was like "I want to join!"

MS: That's good, and Raza Resource Centro is a great place, you're gonna love it. Another club, MEChA, have you heard of it?

SP: Uh yeah, do they have a MEChA at UCSD?

MS: My close friend is next year's Chair so if you want I can help link you up.

SP: Oh yeah, I'd love to join that!

MS: That's awesome. All right, so more personal kind of questions. How do you feel about leaving City Heights and moving to La Jolla because La Jolla is a whole different kinda playing field.

SP: Yeah, it is. Because I've been a junior lifeguard I've had a lot of experience at the beach nearby La Jolla, so I've also had experiences with the community of La Jolla.... and my mom, at some point, also cleaned houses. I would go with her so I would end up cleaning houses at La Jolla. So definitely it's gonna be an adjustment because like I said, I love City Heights and it's been my community for forever but I do know that even if it is a challenge to adjust to La Jolla, that I need to do it because I need to get out of my comfort zone and just really learn how to be alone by myself and not just with my family even though I love them obviously but just really be able to go out as an adult and just finally be super independent, so I'm looking forward to that even though I know that it's definitely gonna be an adjustment.

MS: Right. That- yeah that definitely makes sense, plus you'll be kinda close by... it's really close by anyways so you'll be able to visit when needed.

SP: Yeah, haha.

MS: So this is also another question about community- so what do you think your peers will end up doing in the future and why? For example, one of the things that made me reflect on this question was that I ended up going to UCSD and I ended up being able to afford college and go to college, but a lot of my friends weren't able to. And so a lot of them ended up working, going to vocational school, or some of them were involved in gangs. So I want to know- what do you think some of your peers will end up doing and why?

SP: I think there's definitely- so in my class- my school we are divided into four schools. I go to the science ones, so there's only 80 seniors in my class at SAT, so... so I kinda know where most people are going. So the people close to me... I know people are going to college- my best friend and I, we're going to room together; we are both going to Muir at UCSD so we're really excited about that, but there are other people who are either going to community college because they already adjusted to being a Mesa student and then also I have a few friends going to college like in different areas in California, so everyone's kinda excited even people who are just planning on working. Everyone just seems kinda excited on just getting out of high school. I think that most of my peers are going down, I guess, the right path. I haven't seen- there's only three options that I've seen and that's enrolling directly into a University, going to a community college, or working- they just found a a job they've enjoyed doing and they're gonna get paid more if they stay in the job so... so they've stuck to that. But then also because I've been a lifeguard I've noticed a lot of my friends lifeguarding who maybe graduated a couple years ago, they've kinda stayed working for the city because if you stay working for the city, at some point, you become a manager and then another manager and then like a higher manager and it kinda goes from there, so some people have actually stuck with some jobs that they are already in because they know they can grow, so it kinda depends. There's also, I mean, in my high school there's also quite a few teen pregnancy but they're definitely... I think they're definitely doing the best that they can with their situations. So, yeah.

MS: That's great that your community around you is doing well as well. So, now a more reflection questions for yourself, where do you think you'll end up?

SP: So... I think- I think if I really stick to my plan, which is to work really hard and stick to my major or even if I decide to change my major at some point to just pursue it if I want to if it's something that I like. I always- I know for sure I want to get a masters in whatever I do or maybe a masters that will match my career. So my plan is to just grow in my career as much as I can and really enjoy it as it goes. At some point I want to buy my parents a house and be okay financially and not have to think too much about financial problems in my- because I know in the long-run it'll affect your happiness and how happy you are working and in everything. So I definitely want to like- Oh, I definitely want to travel a lot. Let's say like 10 years from now I want to have already graduated from college, have a really nice career and a job I enjoy and have traveled definitely.

MS: Awesome, so do you plan on returning to San Diego after college and getting a masters or do you plan on kinda going out of California or being somewhere in California?

SP: So I love San Diego so I'll definitely come back to live permanently but I do, maybe in my 20s or at some point, I do want to live in New York. So I've been to New York before, I did the east coast trip in 8th grade year, so I went to a lot of places in the east coast and I fell in love with New York. And so it's definitely a place I want to live, either for a summer or a couple months just to like live somewhere else to get that experience because I love big cities. So I'm excited for that at some point.

MS: Have you ever checked out San Francisco or LA?

SP: Yeah, San Francisco I like and LA isn't really my thing, I don't know why, maybe it's just because I haven't been to the right place.

MS: Haha, I totally get you. What really draws you to New York?

SP: I think... just so many people. Just the amount of people that are there and like how many things you can do, all the places you can see, just like the idea that the people that go to New York have some kind of dream or some kind of career, but you just kinda go to New York to have fun, essentially

MS: Okay, I'm glad, that's awesome. I'm glad. What is your dream job?

SP: I don't know if I can describe a specific job but my dream job is a place where I can be myself where I can really enjoy my identity and explore people's identities around me. I definitely want to work a lot with people- I don't want it to be me individually. And I definitely want to work with the community in any way that I can.

MS: Right and when you say you want to work with community, what do you mean by that?

SP: I mean that I want to go back to City Heights or a community similar to it and if I stick to public health, I want to work on informing people about things that could really affect their health and people are not really well informed maybe for a language barrier or things like that so I want to be an aid in that aspect.

MS: Oh, that's awesome. And again, tracing back to college, what are your fears for college?

SP: I think, well, I guess not fitting in has always been a fear and I know that I will fit in at some point but I just really need to search that and I guess I'm scared that even after searching for a while I might not find it. And then, I'm excited for the independency that I'm gonna have when I go to college but I'm still kinda hesitant to think about being away from my family, I'm close to my family and especially my younger sister so it's something I have to get used to and it's gonna be a little bit scary at the beginning.

MS: I'm sure it's gonna work out. We're almost done, we have two more questions.

SP: It's all right.

MS: Haha, so do you think you'll return back to BLCI? Because I know, who was it, there's these two- Daniel is one of them that came back from BLCI.

SP: I think so and Crystal.

MS: Yeah and Crystal. Do you think that you will take a role in that?

SP: I don't think that I'll come back per se in a job for BLCI but I do want to come back and I do have a really close relationship with the CEO, he's actually my mentor because I'm in the leadership council, I'm like one of the President in one of the leadership councils so I do have a really close relationship with a lot of the staff here. So definitely I know that I want to come back and some point, if I'm doing really well in my career, I want to be a donor and finally give back to a place that gave me so much and allowed me to be in the career that I am. So I do plan on coming back to BLCI.

MS: That's awesome, I think that's the beauty of community that it really fosters wanting to be back not because you have to but because you choose to.

SP: Yeah.

MS; And so, last question is: What is one thing you wish you could tell your older self if you could?

SP: Oh that you're gonna get there and you're gonna pull through. Because definitely I've had a lot of challenges in my life that weren't planned obviously and that I had to deal with ways that have changed my personality and kinda altered me during my life. But I've definitely always been scared of not being able to get to college and not get the GPA that I have and not just doing good in school and making sure that I'm the best that I can be. So, but yeah, I am proud of who I



am and what I accomplished. So definitely I'd like to tell my younger self that you're gonna pull through and you're gonna get there.

MS: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

SP: You're welcome thank you.

MS: I'm really glad and I'm really excited for you to enter college.

SP: Thank you, me too.

MS: This concludes the interview.