

Race and Oral Histories In San Diego, UC San Diego

Interviewer: Brianna Driscoll

Interviewee: Heather Garcia

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Brianna Driscoll

Okay, so my name is Brianna and I'm here with Heather. The date is June 5, and it is 10:19 am. Can you introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about what you do for Casa familia?

Heather Garcia

Yes, my name is Heather Garcia. I work at Casa familia as Community Development Assistant, and as the supervisor for the financial literacy program. So essentially, when I'm on the community development, when I have my community development hat on, I'm working with, like SANDAG and getting representing our community, there are different meetings, I am putting together helping put together community meetings where we get feedback on certain projects on projects we're doing on projects that the city and county are doing. Right now, for instance, we're working on some housing development projects. So that's been taking up a lot of time. I also help with logistics and whatnot for our art gallery. And on the financial literacy side, I have a team of four people who are financial coaches, and go out into the community this program initially started as outreach for Mexican nationals who are immigrants here and don't understand the American financial system. So a lot of people were we've been noticing for a while have don't have bank accounts. I tend numbers, don't know how to do their taxes, things like that. So we kind of try and bridge that gap.

Brianna Driscoll

Can you describe what your typical workday is?

Heather Garcia

Sure. Let me see if I can open up [inaudible]. Okay. So typical workday for me starts. Come in, usually check messages, emails, I'm usually here in front of the computer a lot. And if there are any community meetings, getting ready for those, or SANDAG meetings, I sit on a board with my boss, for community based organizations, and we represent our communities at SANDAG. So for their regional transportation network, it's like a huge update they do every few years. We sit on there. So I'm down at SANDAG meetings, like twice a month. And I at our community meetings we have every other month, so kind of depending on where we are in the year. We've been super busy lately with grant writing. So usually, well, typical workday. I'll come in check emails, make my to do list, start working on whatever, whatever gets thrown at me. And then if I have any community meetings, one of the fun things I think and I'll kind of go into the second question is, we have like a really good group of people who are consistent at like coming to the events they like. So one event that's like our best attended is Zumba classes, we have free Zumba classes. So after those classes, I like to show up and like, give any announcements, or have meetings about like civic engagement, I come from the government world, I worked for

politicians, before I came here. So I'm always like, looking for a way to engage people and be like, Look, you know, if we want to fix our streets, because we hear lots of complaints, it's like, you're like, you don't like that pothole. Like let's fix it. Let's go talk to the city or let's, you know, whatever. And some people are like, Oh, well, the city never does anything. And they're talking about something like no, that's County. That's why the city's not doing anything because it's County. So I love having meetings like that getting people involved, like into actually care about, like boards, where we have elected officials on, like our planning group. That was something I wasn't super familiar with. But there's a group of like, 10 people here who are like, what is that? And they want to go to the meetings and like have, like, we called it a chisme session, like a gossip session afterwards to talk about what happened and just get people involved, get them caring, and like first step, I think is understanding what goes on. Because they go to these meetings, and they're like, I have no idea what has happened, how come they know that person had to wait to talk? And then they always talk to this person? And and I didn't understand that question. And what was this so it's been really fun to engage with them, take them to meetings, and then talk about it a little bit. And hopefully get some people elected to the board. That's one of our big goals. So that's, I would say, my favorite favorite interactions that I get are probably those where I get to just, like, talk to people and do my best to get them in, like excited about government and different the different aspects and boards and city council meetings and things that people are like, Yeah, I know things. But get them into, like, understanding a little bit and then saying, Okay, well, I'd like to go or maybe we could listen. Or maybe we could engage with the city using their app or reading a letter or making phone calls to say, hey, there's this pothole on fire that is like super big, and no one's fixing it. And like, it's a problem. So I think that's like my favorite part to get people excited and passionate about things that affect their everyday lives.

Brianna Driscoll

So you said you came from the government? Kind of side of things. When did you start working at Casa? And like, how did how did you transition from that to Casa?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I came from the government side working for elected officials. And I arrived at Casa in October of 2017. So I'm coming on to eight months, eight or nine months now. And I had a contract, a temporary contract with the mayor of San Diego's office. So I was working at Mayor Faulconer's office, and then my time came to an end. And it was actually through a connection there that they said, Oh, well, let me put you in touch with Casa. And I was I met Lisa and David and interviewed and then ended up getting hired over here. And the transition was kind of it was different. I had gone from a congressman's office to a state senators office to the mayor's office. So elected officials at different levels, but still being elected officials. So I was very used to like people coming and saying, like, look, this is a problem. And this and this and this, I'd be like, okay, it's my job to go find the solutions to that. Let's do it. When I came here, I was like, oh, man, I'm on the nonprofit side. Like, I'm the one who needs to know what these problems are to take them and say, hey, this is the problem, you guys need to fix it. And for my first few, like SANDAG meetings and stuff, I would hear other people like making comments and saying things, and I'm just thinking, I don't know what the problems are. But I know like, we can fix that

by talking to this person. And so it took a few months to get like that switch in my brain to go, okay, you need to take a step back. You're not the solution finder, you're now the problem identifier. So that transition was a little bit not difficult, just kind of weird, because I never, I'd never been on that side before. So now that I've been here for eight months, I'm like, Okay, I see things and I'm like, oh, like, I'll see like a communication from the city. And I go, we should have had that in Spanish. I wish they would have put Spanish on the other side or something. Because if I go give a flyer that's an English to someone, and be like, Oh, thanks. But I have no idea what this is and like toss it. So just like the simplest things like that. I've I've learned to like, Okay, take a step back. We need to reach these people. Like what's the best way to do that? And now it's my turn to be the voice and like, Hey, don't forget, we need to do this or don't forget about the South Bay San Ysidro is part of the city of San Diego. So kind of like making that switch and, and understanding the different roles has been has been like the biggest transition point, I think.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you have any personal connections with Casa? I know you said like, you got to Casa through a connection. But do you have any personal connections with Casa itself, like being Mexican American and like, standing for a lot of the things that they represent and do?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, so I am, I am Mexican American. My mom was born in Mexico. My dad was born here. So on my dad's side, I am fourth generation born in the United States but on my mom's side, I'm first but I when I first I remember interviewing for the position, and at the end of the interview, they said oh Is there anything else you know, you want to let us know or tell us and I said however this goes if I get the job or not. I just want you guys to know that I love your organization. And like every city should have a Casa Familiar. They kind of chuckled but I was like seriously all the services and programs they provide and the resources and like the the events we have that that kind of remind us of our culture and let us celebrate it are are something that you just you don't see everywhere. A lot of low income assistance like for filling out immigration papers. Any kind of benefits, like government benefits, we help fill those out, we have all our staff at the Social Services Center, are, they're certified to help you with that. So when I started learning about all the programs they provide, and all of the the ways in which they really enrich this community, I was just like, Dude, this is so cool, like, whether I get the job or not, like, what a great nonprofit we have here. So when, when I came here, and I got the job, I was like, really stoked to have a different perspective on on helping people because I, I've always chosen jobs, that put me in a position to help people, I think we're put on this earth to make it better to make this a better place. And if we're not, like doing something good, like something's wrong. So here, I'm able to talk to people and like, get them engaged and provide them knowledge of of stuff they may have thought was useless before or something they're like, I could never understand that. But it's like, if I can give you one nugget of information, and that like makes a difference. Like that means I did I did it. I did it right. So that's like, that's what I love about this organization, that they're all about informing the community, while at the same time, like having those events where we have fun, and we get to celebrate our heritage, and we get to eat tamales and stuff like and, and speaking Spanglish and just celebrate who we are, like

where we come from. So it's been a pretty positive experience so far. Yeah. Yeah. There's been a few times where like, people say things or they get angry. But I think overall, it's been just like, it's been really positive people are, are super thankful for the work that we do and thankful for the events we put on. And sometimes like, you'll be like, Oh, well, I didn't like those sandwiches. You should have had whatever, like, come on in the grand scheme of things, sandwich. But it's been positive. I'm like, really nice. Nice, like, pleasant experience.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you see yourself with Casa for a while, because I know you enjoy it. I know. It does a lot of great things.

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I definitely love the work we're doing. And if I continue to get the opportunity to, to keep doing that work, and helping people, like grow, expand their knowledge, help them just gain a better quality of life. I would love to keep doing that.

Brianna Driscoll

So I know you said you were first generation on your mom's side and fourth generation on your dad's side. So did you like learn Spanish growing up from your mom? Or was it your first language? Or is it kind of like a dual?

Heather Garcia

I learned Spanish and English at the same time. So I spoke like, I want my shoes zapato or I'm gonna get my queso cheese or whatever. So I, I spoke both together for a very long time. Well, not very long for like a year or two. Both of my parents speak Spanish. So it was it was just kind of like natural. Like they were like we're teaching our kids Spanish. So I, I learned at home. I have two younger siblings who also learned at home, but it was harder for them. They my brother was like, not super sure about learning Spanish. My younger sister still struggles a little bit with with Spanish but I learned both of them at the same time and like have always spoken both languages. I went and studied abroad for a year and learned Italian. And that was when my Spanish started getting confusing because I would start mixing up Spanish and Italian. But I've spoken Spanish my whole life.

Brianna Driscoll

So do you know your mom's story of like coming to the United States as her crossing or what that process would have been like?

Heather Garcia

Vaguely. Her dad was working in Calexico. He migrated from Sonora when he was young like 16 and he Calexico is a border town like we are San Ysidro and Tijuana Calexico and Mexicali. So her dad spent time in Mexicali and that's where he met his future wife. So they got married. He was still living over here and working. And my mom and grandmother were in Calexico. So my mom was born in Mexicali. I mean, basically, my mom was born and I think like, at six months, she immigrated to the United States. So she lived here like her whole life after six she

lived six months in Mexico. But since should they lived in Calexico on a border town. I mean, they traveled back and forth a ton to and a lot of family was in Mexicali. So they spent like weekends over there and holidays and stuff. So it was she immigrated over here rather quickly. But very, like lived a very, like, border crossing life. I don't know how you say that. But like she lived in both countries like.

Brianna Driscoll

Did you do you know if your mom faced any challenges from. Yeah, faced any challenges from when she first started living in the United States? Or do you know of anyone from Casa that might have had challenges when they first immigrated?

Heather Garcia

My mom, I never heard of anything, she was really young. So she was a baby when she came. But I know like, her parents, her mom, like to this day doesn't speak English. And still like, is sort of very much like prefers to have I don't know, she like prefers to pay her bills in person, she refuses to do anything online. And that just might be like a technology thing. But very, like, her and her husband were like, Okay, we got to go do this, we're gonna like, go buy the groceries, like for a couple of days only, which is very, like traditional Mexican, like, I know for their, they they like to buy, you know what you're going to use today. And then you go again, tomorrow and stuff, where I feel like, at least in my house, we like buy for the whole week or like stock up at Costco or something. So that was something that I think they brought with them, but any difficulties they faced, I mean, the regular, the typical difficulties, my grandfather was a farm worker. So he worked very rough labor out in the sun. He would travel to wherever, wherever the work or the work was. So that was something I think as as immigrants is kind of like, sort of typical thing that we see a lot with, with Mexican immigrants, but they he very, like he worked that life. My grandmother didn't work. But it was like very, those I mean, it's just difficult work. But I don't know if those difficulties faced like when coming here. Im tryna think. I know, I mean, like I mentioned the typical difficulties just coming to a whole new country with a different language, and a different government system, financial system education system, that it's just kind of like, I'm sure the cultural shock hits pretty hard. And having transplanted to another culture for a year, I get that we're so different. But any immigrants like, I don't have any, like personal stories or stories of people I've spoken with just the typical like, Well, you know, language is hard. And sometimes it's kind of scary to go to the store to go buy things because because you you know what if you have to say something you don't know how to say or they know and speak Spanish or things like that.

Brianna Driscoll

What differences in job opportunities and education Do you see here in the States versus in Mexico?

Heather Garcia

I think one thing I've noticed just kind of working with immigrant communities is the the job opportunities. Here it's more like based on financial, the financial aspect. The jobs that that people can get in, in Mexico, I think might be like less labor in-involved. And here, you might

make more money but have to work more sort of back breaking jobs. That definitely exists in Mexico. There are like, I mean, farm workers and stuff, but I think here, we see a majority of immigrants coming in working more like backbreaking work for maybe higher wages than they would get in Mexico but still, like I think that that's one thing. And education. And this is just kind of like based on my experience. I've noticed that a lot of people who come from Mexico older maybe have far less education than here. Here you like have to go at least to 10th grade and And you can't really drop out before then. In Mexico like, my one of my grandfather's only got a third up to a 3rd grade education. The other one, I think got to like sixth grade. So, I've seen and I've seen that a lot in our financial literacy program to where people, we asked what their level of education is. And it's like, elementary school, maybe eighth grade, it's just a lot lower, which is, I think it's just based on the need that people, you have to start working younger. But that's one thing. Like they have wonderful universities and, like, well recognized schools, but it's, I don't know exactly what it is, I wish I was anthropologist, but it's, it's very interesting to see that people have lower like, like far lower education levels, then a typical American.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you think that the lower education levels make it tougher for them? coming here?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I think like, absolutely, because one of the, the, like, easiest ways to get into the cuntry is, like, if you're being sponsored, because you have a job, if you're coming, because there's like a necessity that needs to be filled, because we need more like rocket scientists, or whatever. And if you don't, like fulfill those categories, or you can check off those, like, I have a Master's degree or PhD or a Bachelor's degree, then like, it makes it harder for your application to be, like, competitive. So I think when it comes to immigrating, like for sure, you if if you're, it's like, one more thing that's like, Oh, well, if this person has, you know, a level higher, like, let's take the person with more education, because they can, like, help the, you know, the economy or, or whatever, whatever it may be, but I think it is, it is a factor that does play in.

Brianna Driscoll

Um, you spoke a little bit about culture already. But have you seen a difference in culture between families that have been in the US for a while versus immigrant families that have not like they keep any traditions or customs from Mexico? Or did they kind of develop a new like Mexicali or something?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I think so. I think families who have been here and maybe are like, their kids are starting to be born here and grandkids, you definitely have like that blending of cultures, where you're, you know, you might watch Sabado Gigante but you're also like, you know, you started the morning with like, Saturday morning cartoons or something. So you you definitely see like the the blend it's almost like a marble of have like my Mexican and my American and it's sort of like overlaps and comes together. Some customs, I think that and cult, like culture transfers and traditions that that come about are I think we're, we're pretty good at keeping those as Mexicans. Like, you always have to have your tamales at Christmas. And I have been to

countless Thanksgiving dinners where we have the turkey and the mashed potatoes, and the the green bean casserole, but we have our rice and beans on the side too. And maybe like a carne asada. So I think we, we do a good job, at least in my experience of like mixing the two cultures where it's like, yeah, I can be American and have my Thanksgiving. But I'm also going to have like my rice and beans on the side of my turkey. So I think that's really interesting. How the two just like, we sort of seamlessly blend them together. It's not like Oh, I can't have turkey with my rice and beans and I can't do it. Like, I've seen a lot of blending like you have salsa on the Thanksgiving table or something.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you have any traditions like that back home like cause I know your mom like coming in and then maybe your dad is like, No, we do it this way.

Heather Garcia

Yeah, yeah. It's always been like a mix of the two like you have rice and beans with him. We've always had raised Indians with our turkey. For Christmas, you always have the tamales. And it's, it's, it's kind of weird, but it's like our norm. Or you go somewhere and you're like, Oh, they don't have rice and beans here or, like where what? It's a birthday party. Why don't they have tacos? Like with what's going on?

Brianna Driscoll

So yeah, I mean, I feel like with all like the Mexican immigrant style, but culture, like the traditions and stuff like that itself isn't too big of a culture shock. But do you like do you see any other lifestyle type changes? Other than the culture itself when living here.

Heather Garcia

One thing that stands out i think is like, mothers, women who typically didn't have a job, or maybe when they lived in Mexico, they didn't have a job, they come. And over here, it's just like you have to, you have to work in order to support the family. So I think that's one thing we have Mexican culture is very machista. So it's like the man works. And the woman stays home and cleans and cooks. And that's just the way it is. So when you come here, and you kind of feel that financial burden of like, Am I going to make my rent? Am I going to be able to put food on the table? And it's like, Okay, well, time to work. And it's, I would imagine, it's an adjustment, because you're used to things being a certain way. And maybe you know, when you have a full time job, you're your bathroom can't be like, so clean that you can eat out of it. So those those kinds of like tweaks and adjustments that people have to make that seem kind of basic, and you wouldn't, like super think would be a big burden, I think, or something that can, can really make a difference. Also, I, I've noticed, just in my experience is that a lot of times, people maybe had more money, or were more well off in Mexico and come and live very poor like that. They don't, they're not at that same level where like, get back home, they owned a ranch and they have like, people work for them and all this and then they come. And it's like, oh okay, yeah, this is a very different lifestyle now, like, I'm the one who's going to be doing the work that I used to pay people to do. That kind of stuff is it's like, total, total change.

Brianna Driscoll

So after living in the states for a long time, do you think you could ever see any left like family that cost of living back? Like, I know, you said, the, like, money wise, it is a lot different. So do you think people come here and then just decide like, no, this isn't for me, and maybe go back?

Heather Garcia

I've seen it a handful of times where it's like, No, I can't afford life here, I'm breaking my back. Like, I'm just gonna go back. And, or I can live on my social security, like, you know, come here and work. And then say like, but I'm not going to, like continue working until I'm 80. To be able to like, just survive. So I have seen a handful of times people say I'm taking my Social Security check is going to go a lot farther back home. But I think for the for the most part, just even being like a person who lives paycheck to paycheck and works super hard and long hours. here in the States. People see the opportunity it provides even, I mean, as basic as education. And I've seen a lot of families, my dad's a pastor, so I've been around church working in Spanish churches with the with mainly the Mexican community for like, my whole life. So I see I pulled from a lot of experience there to where like someone will will arrive, like the the male Head of Household will arrive and say, No, I came here to work, and I'm sending my money back home, because I'm building a house or work just to keep my family afloat or whatever. And then a few years in, they bring their family because they're like, I just, I can't provide my family with what they need over there and sustain myself plus, we're separated. So let's just see, you know, what, kind of like we can make here. And you hear a lot of like, Oh, well mi rancho, oh, you know, I'm going to go back, I'm going to go back or I'm building this or that. But I think you just become so accustomed to life here that like and if your kids grow up here, how do you pull them out of that and transplant them somewhere to you're like, Oh, yeah, I remember and your kids just hear like, Oh, yeah, I remember you talked about that, dad, but that's not what I like. I've never been here or I've been here once when I was a little kid. I think that's the hard thing. Like once you, you put some roots down and live for years, your kids become accustomed to the culture, they get that marbling that I was talking about that mix of cultures and you go back home, you're like Wait, what's the you don't do Thanksgiving here? Like just different things. I think you once that culture sort of sets in and you create your own culture. It's It's hard. It's hard to go back. I mean, like I could never imagine living in another country. Even In Mexico, where both of my parents lived, my dad lived in Mexico longer than my mom did. But it's just it's kind of weird because I'm like, No, this is my home. This is my culture like, I, I like it. I like my life. So I think I think that becomes part of it where you get accustomed to something. And it turns out that you like it, and you might even think it's better or worse, but you're like, I like this, I can do this. And then, like going back and transplanting your whole life again. That's, that's hard.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you think your dad would ever go back and then maybe just to retire?

Heather Garcia

He He's talked about it. And he's like, I can go back like and buy a really nice condo on the beach and stuff. I'm like, dude, really? And he's like, yeah, I lived, he lived on it. In a an undeveloped area of Tijuana that didn't have running water, or electricity. So for nine years, he

lived there. And it was like normal, they would take showers like with buckets and have to heat up the water and stuff. So he's like, now, it's a breeze. I'm like, but he's done it before. And I'm like, I've never lived there. I've gotten to visit a bunch of times, but to like, live there and be like, this is where I want to live. I don't know. Like, it's hard for me to think about that. He's been like, yeah, my mom, like, No, I am not gonna live in Mexico. She's like, No, I'm American. So it's kind of it's weird.

Brianna Driscoll

Um, what are some of the ways that you've seen Casa help these immigrant families or like certain individuals?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I think some of the things that we focus on here at Casa are like preserving the culture and the heritage. And like celebrating that, and being proud of it, we have big events on Dia de Los Reyes, which is kind of like our extension of Christmas. It's, it's actually like bigger, more celebrated than Christmases. And Dia de Los Muertos, which is around Halloween. But it's a it's a time to remember and celebrate the dead. So I think those are our big ways that casa, preserves that history. We're one of the few like big parties around around those events here in San Diego County. I think we also focus a lot on bringing resources and assistance to people, whether that's at our social services center that does a lot of immigration work. And just basic social services, they provide a lot of a lot of that also providing resources of like information, different workshops that are going on bringing local government agencies here to San Ysidro. So people have access, and also providing the the connections that are necessary to like make our voices heard, we work really hard on making sure that we have good relationships with elected officials, and local government agencies. Like other like big companies in the area, so that when things are going on, or we like we have a phone number we can call. And I think Casa works really hard at making sure that the people here in San Ysidro know what is available to them and take advantage of that. And also like things that affect our community a lot like a lot of health risks, diabetes, we have classes on on diabetes, how to take control of your health, like parenting, like advice talks, we have like the free Zumba classes and exercise classes that people come to and it just gives people like an hour to come and exercise and it becomes part of their day and they have make friends. And so we try to do a lot of just free resources to the community are very low cost so that they feel like like so they have a place that they know they can go to for good information. Sometimes we don't provide certain services they're asking for but we can refer them somewhere in the trust us. We've been in the community for about 45 years now. So it's it's a place that everyone here knows and and trust. So we try to to live up to the expectation that people have of our organization and provide the best information, the most quality information and like just be sometimes a listening ear and a friend.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you know of any other maybe like border states that have some sort of nonprofit like Casa?

Heather Garcia

You know, I don't know. That's a good question. We should look into that. Because that'd be really cool to like form a coalition or something just to talk about different programs and different difficulties that are our clients are facing that's a really good idea. I'm gonna write that down.
[Brief pause]

Brianna Driscoll

So Casa does do a lot and like many different ways for the community, but is there still something that you would like to see Casa maybe do in the future? Like any new programs?

Heather Garcia

Yeah, I think focusing in on our, on our culture and teaching young people about, like Mexican history, that's something that we don't learn here very much we get, like, the highlights of different wars, but learning the history of, of our ancestors, because a lot of times, you see, like, children of immigrants who who don't, who don't speak Spanish, we're like, kind of understand, or who like don't know, anything about Mexican culture. And like, I get it, a lot of times parents come here, and they're like, Look, you need to learn English, you need to do this, you need to, like fit in. And, and if you come like, you can, you can let a lot of that fall by the wayside. I think maybe having like a cultural center, or, or classes that that help, like, teach history or, or just help our kids understand their, their heritage a little bit more, why we do certain things, why we have certain traditions, I think that would be cool to see. I studied history in college, so I can I like that aspect of bringing it back. And I think I'd like to see like, a sharper, and like more tailored focus on civic engagement, and just more like, civic understanding. Because a lot of people well they come and they don't like they don't understand our government. If I went to Mexico, I can tell you like, this is the way it works. And these are the people and counties and stuff like we're here, we have a lot of a lot of pieces to this huge puzzle that we call government. So maybe like focusing on on teaching people that civic part and and we have like citizenship classes and like basic classes like that, but something that teaches people the the basics like this is and tailored to San Diego, this is like this, you know, the city stuff. And since we're kind of far from the city, we have a couple cities in between us to know the differences, who to go to and like who to complain to when things are going, going a little sour. So i'd like to see those two things.

Brianna Driscoll

What do you want to see get passed on to future generations?

Heather Garcia

I think I'd like to see the the importance of education passed on. And like more, I want to see more people graduating from high school and college and Master's degrees and postgraduate work. Like, I'd like to see that I was raised in a home where like, education was super important. And a lot of times I see that it's kind of lacking in our community. Like, oh, I'll finish high school, and then I'll get a job or whatever. And we sort of see that that complacency or even like lack of confidence, like, Oh, I can't do that. I'm not smart enough. And I hear that a lot. Like, Oh, no, my kid it's because they're not, they're not that smart. So now they're not going to go to college and waste money. And it's like no, like, you need to push yourself and do it. So I I'd like to see that

just like love of education and learning. And like that pursuit that like undying, like never ending pursuit of, of learning. And I think I've talked about it a lot like just loving and understanding your heritage and knowing where it comes from and knowing why we believe certain ways why we do certain things. And not letting letting that be a barrier to to who we are who we want to become like you can be a PhD like professor and still eat your tamales and still eat your rice and beans with your with your your turkey like to know and say like this is part of who I am like it's part of what has formed me. I'd like to see that. Those two things.

Brianna Driscoll

So education is big and your family is like all of your family did they go to college?

Heather Garcia

My dad has done postgraduate work, postdoctoral work. I have a bachelor's degree. My brother just graduated and is working on a Master's. My sister is halfway through college, which I can't I believe, but my mom did not go to college. She got married really young while my dad was a pastor, he was a pastor actually. And they met and got married. And then he was sent off to go get his Masters degree so while he was working on his Masters degree she was working and then I came along and years later my brother came along so she just never got that chance but we in our immediate family we have worked really hard to achieve those goals but like my dad came from a family that nobody, he was a first in his family to go to college, his brothers didnt go to college. Same on my moms side. We would be the first ones so its kinda like a mix? But something that's really important, like I always tell kids around me, at church, and anyone who listens really like you need to go to college and finish but also take a year and go abroad [laughter]. That's like my two cents all the time. I'm like take a year abroad I don't care if your mom gets mad at me, tell her to come talk to me.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you think your mom would ever see herself going back to college cause I have someone in one of my classes he's actually a [inaudible] and his reason for coming back to school was to uh he was in an industry that he saw wasn't making very much progress because of all the new technologies and stuff and so he wanted to get with the times and kinda update his you know resume and what not and get some sort of education and learning.

Heather Garcia

Yea and get like the skills he needed to. Um it was always her goal but unfortunately she passed away so.

Brianna Driscoll

Oh i'm sorry about that.

Heather Garcia

So it was always her she you know was always talking about it like oh if I would've done this, like i'm gonna do it. Once I get you kids out i'm gonna do it. I'm gonna do it. I wanna do it so it was always a plan.

Brianna Driscoll

Ok. Is there anything that we didn't discuss that you know wanna talk about?

Heather Garcia

We hit a lot. Let's see. I think like i've said a bunch of times so we have talked about it, celebrating our culture and just celebrating that the United States, America is a melting pot. Like we are that marbling I talked about. I really like that metaphor today. Like we have made up this country by accepting all kinds of different cultures like taking taking a piece of it and saying oh I like that, I learned it from this family or whatever and just being accepting of cultures and celebrating your own while not putting others down. So I think like working together to to advance everyone and working together to make a better place, to make everybody's quality of life better is is just like an important like piece of life that if you if we would all put our differences aside, like I know we have differences but to work on the things and like pick out the pieces that like ok I agree with you on a hundred different things and I disagree on a million but let's work on a hundred things, like there's a hundred things we can accomplish instead of arguing about the million things that we could never work together on. Like focusing on what we can do together to make, to make it better. Oh there we go we got a campaign [inaudible] to just increase the quality of life and just make it a better place like I feel like that's why we're here. That's the goal to leave this place a little bit better than when we got here. So if we can work together and do that despite colors and creeds and religion and politics and everything that we can just work together and make it a better place, we'll be on the right track.

Brianna Driscoll

Alright well that's all I have so thank you for this interview I really enjoyed it and it was very informative.

Heather Garcia

Wonderful.

Brianna Driscoll

I really appreciate everything that Casa does i've been there quite a few times and everytime I go i'm just like wow this is amazing.

Heather Garcia

Yea that's how I was like in my interview, I said you know whatever happens this is such a great place, i'm so glad that Casa exists.

Brianna Driscoll

Do you think that you would have attended events and what not even if you like hadn't gotten the job?

Heather Garcia

Yea probably, I would have been looking for... I live in North county so it's kind of a drive and I had never heard of Casa Familiar until I was connected with them but in mentioning it to my family, like my uncles i've been like oh yea I work for Casa Familiar its in San Ysidro and they're like yea Casa [inaudible] they're like talking about. How come no one ever told me about this, you guys have been keeping this secret. One of my uncles worked for the Border Patrol and he literally worked right next door. And i'm like dude nobody told me. One of my other uncles was like Yea we I worked with Casa or like I saw them. Another one of my he was my great uncle he was like Oh yea that lady who who worked there for many years i'm like yea Andrea or whatever, he's like oh yea I talked to her. What the heck people. No one said anything [laughter].

Brianna Driscoll

So do you think you could go to like Casa and mention maybe one of your family members names and be like yea...

Heather Garcia

I know I know I should do that I should be like did you ever hear about this person or that person, I should. I should totally do it but I know its nuts. But I love places like this who provide the help that's needed and also like working to just you know make it a better place. It's hard, it's hard work. I have to put on a hundred different hats sometimes or its like i'm doing this or switch to this. And stuff but its like gratifying because you get to see the impact you're making and you get to have a conversation with someone that oh you know this and this, my kid has asthma so that's why i've been interested in the air quality work you guys are doing which I didn't talk about but like doing all that kind of stuff like now we're getting the state and federal government to recognize that San Ysidro is an area that is really really affected by a lot of air pollution and the health problems that come with that so its like the hard work of writing the grants and like the work and all the uh work afterwards and stuff but you're like ok at atleast we're making a difference and people are noticing we're advancing the [inaudible] just a little bit but we're getting there. And so that's like that's what I like, especially that tangible part where you see i've been in my office for a week, I haven't left and eating at my desk and writing emails all day long but like ok we did something like it worked.

Brianna Driscoll

Yeah I actually went to the art project, the final art project for the [inaudible] where they like made like the canvases with like the soot and air pollution stuff from like oranges, I had no idea that it was that bad and so I was just like blown away you know?

Heather Garcia

Me too. I was like air pollution? It's bad here? And you know with like the border crossing, duh [laughter]. Cars are just idling, they're just sitting there and releasing all the junk and we're breathing it. It makes total sense and it's really crazy but very interesting. Very good work very

interesting work. Sometimes a pain but you gotta get through the bad to get through the good.
[laughter]

Brianna Driscoll

Yea that's true yea. Alright well thank you.

Heather Garcia

Okie doke.