

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

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Interviewee: Esmeralda Sarmiento

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MV: Marysol Valdez

ES: Esmeralda Sarmiento

MV: Hello, so without further ado, we are going to get started... I will um introduce myself and go over a brief interview statement... so I am Marysol Valdez... Thank you for meeting with me today and accepting my invitation to be a narrator for UCSD's Race and Oral History Project. The time is currently 8:09 pm and today's date marks Saturday, May 14th. And before we get started, I wanted to acknowledge the land we are on which is home to the Kumeyaay people and has been built on conquest and militarization. Through these interviews and exchange of stories, we capture a San Diego by histories of settler colonialism, war, displacement, and criminalization, and reveal the efforts to confront systemic injustice and to work towards a different future through community building and activism. For today's interview, I will ask you a series of questions that you may answer however you may like. And you If you would like to take a moment to pause, think, or take a break from the interview session, feel free to do so at

any time. This is your space to address and answer the questions however comfortable... So does everything I said... sound good... (laugh)

ES: Yeah it does

MV: cool, thank you

MV: And, I will start with the intro questions. First first one is “What is your full name and your place of birth?”

ES: Hi, I am Esmeralda Sarmiento and I was born in Escondido

MV: Thank you so much, and what college do you attend and what is your major?

ES: I go to Cal State San Marcos currently

MV: Sorry and your major?

ES: Um sorry, my major is in Business Administration, and im focusing it in Management

MV: Thank you and can you describe yourself in a few words?

ES: Um this has always been you know a difficult question for me, growing up sometimes I would be asked that but I say kind, ambitious and hardworking

MV: Thank you, and what hobbies interest you?

ES: Ooo I really like dancing and also doodling and drawing as well, I really enjoy those things, uh, I really think it goes with my creativity sometimes and when it comes to dancing I really like freestyling a lot or hearing a song, ill dance to anything

MV: Just to follow up on that, what, do you have like a specific genre that you like to dance, or a specific type of music to that you like to listen to when when dancing?

ES: like I said I like to listen to anything when dancing, but mostly Spanish music for sure, and lately I've been into a lot of Arabic music as well, I just like the beats and just getting your body

moving and also growing up like my grandpa I would also see him see him dance sometimes when I was in Mexico so he really introduced me to that

MV: I love that thank you, so the next series of questions I will be talking about your first-gen experience, and so the first question is how would you describe your childhood in Escondido and San Marcos?

ES: Um to describe my childhood, I would say pretty interesting in a sense that I had a lot of first experiences um, and also moving here you know, and like seeing it for the first time once I was a bit older it was also very interesting to see the... scene and the views.., um, I, per... um as a kid when I got here, um I thought America would be like in the Shrek movie where Donkey is looking into palms, and (laughs) just you know (laugh)when he was in the gaze (laughs) um so yeah, like pretty much, and like I say that as a funny story (laughing) no? (laughs)

MV: I am so sorry that I interrupted, just cause I can visualize it and I am thinking of this scene right now, and i .. I totally ... I see it, I envision it

ES: Yeah and I'm like, I used to tell all my friends like all my friends like at school and stuff, and I'm like, when I got here like I thought it would be like that and when I got here like it was kind of like that on the road and stuff but i but I really envision that but overall I say interesting like overall there was some difficulty like riding the bus my family didn't have a car growing up and when we moved here so we would have to ride the bus a lot and I would have to visit Escondido with my mom, but it was also adventurous I would say

MV: thank you, um the next question to kind of follow up with that is, is there anything you would change about your childhood experience?

ES: Um...say not necessarily change in a way, I think that everything that happened you know, I like to go by like saying that "everything happens for a reason", but say if I definitely did have

like an older you know person or older sibling, I would have really wanted that as a kid you know, and have them as an aid or someone to talk to, or something to be like... hey... When you go here or when you go to high school for example... this will be some of the experiences you know... so I really wanted that as a kid, but like I said i think everything happens for a reason, and if i was supposed to live like that you know, it made me like who I am today

MV: Thank you, and the next question is, “What struggles have you experienced as a first-generation and what would you have done differently”

ES: I think being first-generation too... um when it comes to your family and moving here for the first time... Um, a lot of parents like my parents don't know English till this day now, and so growing up I would have to translate a lot of like you know government documents, or my dad getting sick you know and getting to translate like his doctor's documents as well... so I say those were some of the challenges and obstacles sometimes because I would be like well I know this word in English, but how do I translate it in Spanish, or for them to even understand, and sometimes it didn't even make sense, and sometimes I would have to take my time you know go on the internet and like translate the specific word so they would understand and I say like also in school it's very different you know growing up here... Um because you know there's like a bunch of different people as well but I feel like I felt some type of outcasted way, um you know having to learn English in the second grade and like you know kids making fun of me for like mispronouncing some things or confusing some things or some teachers would be like... oh she would have to be held a grade back because she's not learning English yet you know they would ask certain questions like that and I knew a lot of the material at school in Spanish, but my teachers sometimes thought that I knew it all because I wouldn't say it in English

MV: and to kind of follow up on that note, this isn't specifically in the questions... but, I was wondering what your demographic, what your racial demographic were in your early childhood, in your neighborhood, or even in elementary or high school, and how that maybe has affected the language barrier and also you learning English in the United States

ES: yeah, that's a very interesting question, um elementary I went to very much like a hispanic elementary and there would be a lot of like cultural stuff, and like specifically like um we were known as like the "Mexican neighborhood" pretty much um I went to San Marcos Elementary, so there was a lot of Mexican kids, and I did feel comfortable, I felt like, you know im comfortable here I can like learn you know, um ... but then there was also some things you know like in fourth or fifth grade were I would be a little smarter than the kids sometimes and I would also get made fun of them for that or they would use me and be like um "let's be friends with Esme because she is the smart one or she is like you know the goodie-goodie", so they would kind of put me into that spot, but I got into middle school and um i say some of the i say like half it was kind of half colored kids half white kids, i started to see there was more white kids when it came to honors and AP courses you know middle school and high school and that's when it got me because i for example didnt feel as smart or as intelligent you know compared to them or sometimes they would talk about you know their home life, family life and i would i would ust be like damn just like in a room with like you know my parents like we were all stuck in a room and they have a house you know and they have certain things and that's where im like i just dont understand why sometime i would think as like you know growing up and stuff and that when i started to realize well and im like well because they um have some more privileges or they grew up here... um... so i say that one of the major things that i did notice in highschool...um... was

that although there was still colored people, when it came to you know social or popular and it will only be filled with white kids, they would be more respected

MV: thank you so much, thank you for sharing... the next component of our questions... we will be.. I will be asking questions primarily on your family.. so .. the first question is ...“Who is your immediate family and can you describe your family dynamic?”

Long pause due to zoom complications

ES: Um I have a little sister also shes twelve... um.. We also do have a dog, we recently got her November 2022st

MV: Im sorry there was a brief pause, Im going to repeat the question again

ES: Yeah

MV: Sorry ok it like glitched on me... ok.. So who is your immediate family and can you describe your family dynamic?

ES: Yeah so my immediate family is my mom, my dad, and i do have a little sister who is twelve years old... i also do have a dog and she is (laughs)... in our family, her name is Luna and we got her um uh you know some years ago i say two years ago, so um im the oldest sister and uh pretty much the dynamic in my family is being the oldest sister and the one who knows english you know giving advice to my little sister for school or helping my parents out or once i turn the age of you know being able to drive... um.. I would beg my parents um to get me someone to learn how to drive.. I want to have a car and um now i (laughs) am considered the chauffeur of the family.. um ... i drive my family around all the time when my dad has appointments or my mom or my sister like you know things at school like um pretty um thats how my dynamic is but um there all my like the biggest support system and i know that at the end of the day they are always there for me

MV: thank you and the next question is kind of a follow up on that... it was what role do you play in your family... but is there anything more that you will be able to describe or share?

ES: Um, yeah i also would like to add i did mention that i am the oldest sister and i feel that sometimes bring a lot of pressure of being you know like perfect or sometimes growing up and i would be like i started hanging out with friends when i was like in sophomore year of highschool like i would never go out um my friends at school would be like hey lets hang out outside of school and i would be like i cant. Um.. just because I felt like I would disrespect my parents in some way, they never told me I would but i would be like no i just have to stay at home and study like thats what i would do all the time you know fitting this role of having to be perfect or you know pressure as well or i would hang out with my friends sometimes and lets not do anything dumb because if the cops find out they could get my parents involved with this and i just think ahead all the time you know and sometimes i found myself going out but still thinking about homework back at home, i have to do this back at home, i have to do this for my mom my dad my sister so just having that pressure but now i feel like i have to like you know like continue doing it because it has become a part of me and um helping my family as well

MV: thank you so much for sharing. The next question is during the pre-interview you stated that you are a daughter of immigrants, can you tell me more about your experience with the border and how this physical barrier has affected your family

ES: yeah um so i am a daughter of um immigrants and i feel like that really shaped me of who i am today and the struggle that comes behind it um the border to me and i say it also for my parents theres some type of like anger with it um and you know with political people saying they want to build a wall um like it just you know hurts sometimes becuase we are already separated and long distance with my family already in Mexico and just seein my parents like not seeing

their parents and their family really breaks my heart sometimes because i dont know what i would do like having my parents close by me or wanting to help them out so i just say there is some anger also in there like i said but i am just very blessed and grateful my parents made the decision you know to bring me back here um when i was five because i was born here um and i feel that is a blessing that i do have and many of my cousins in mexico for example are like oh you are so lucky because you were born there, i feel like sometimes i do have an identity crisis when i have visited mexico when i was 15 and thats also another things, i was the only one who went in my family you know obviously because my parents couldnt go and my sister was too young, so not being able to travel with my parents as well, um, its pretty hurtful

MV: I just want to elaborate on that, the point that you brought up, you went to Mexico when you were 15 correct?

ES: yeah, so i visited mexico when i was 15 so i was able to see some of my um family members over there and just seeing them this my grandma was brought to tears you know when i first saw here, the last time she seen me i was five um and i stayed with them for some years because i was born here and then at one my parents decided to take me back to grow up with like my grandma and my family and then they brought me back when i was five, um, and i only lasted a month when i was 15 and visiting, but the world is uh free over there pretty much, i felt very free and very relaxed

MV: Thank you...is there anything that you would like to add on, or share that you havnt yet?

ES: Um, sorry im just taking a minute to think about this question...i say just um my biggest thing for me right now is obviously like i mention in one of the first questions is having like ambition you know and i feel thats something um you know one of my qualities from like

already accomplished this what is next for me and college has been hard not going to lie as a first generation student um it has been very difficult to go through that um im like what am i going to do next and what will continue for me but also along the way, i want to be that person i didnt have for other people, so whenever my little sister has like her friends over or you know i give them rides and stuff and i always reassure them you know and i can help you guys whatever you guys needs

MV: Thank you, you know im also the older sister so i totally get that responsibility, a lot of people, like in college especially they have that freedom to kind of escape their home lives and live college at a totally different environment, but like you are doing that home at college so i totally, totally understand your responsibilities, thank you so much

ES: yeah of course

MV: And, to kind of play onto that note that you just uh left off on uh the next section will be talking about college and future goals, and yeah, so uh, the first question that i will be asking is..."What compelled you to your current college and what compelled you to your major in business?"

ES: Um so i graduated highschool in 2020 and pretty much during that time obviously the pandemic had gone here in America, um and um the school closed down so um if im being honest Cal State San Marcos wasnt my first option, I always found myself you know going far and away from my family or somewhere else rather than San Marcos. I was like "I don't want to stay here", but honestly just seeing like all the help that they would give me and seeing all of the support and also seeing the like diversity that there is and how they are involved in like the hispanic culture and helping hispanic students as well thats what really gravitated me towards them, and i chose business administration because growing up i saw my parents you know we

were poor growing up and like we didnt have much, i always saw them have ambitious and my mom would get her catalogs and be like “you wanna buy shoes” and her friends or people would just like meet and she has always been like a good seller for stuff or when she puts her mind to it and oh like i want to do that later on you know like i want to see where that ambition takes me too and also i also wanted to create something of my own in the future im still not quite sure but i do want to go into public relations and also becoming a business woman myself and a business owner

MV: thank you for sharing, thats really cool how you took inspiration from your mom, and to carry the entrepreneurial traits, thats really inspiring. So the next question is “Can you describe um your experience as a first generation college student so far? I know you kind of touched a little bit on the previous sections but um is there anything specific that you would like to mention about your school or your classes, student dynamic, or anything in regards to college?”

ES: Um so because of the pandemic, i havnt really been too much on campus, i have had two in person class, but i do see like a lot of diversity when i go to those classes and there is always someone like you know there to talk to um i also um got into your know EOP and its like an AVID in college, so they have been helping me a lot you know especially like my degree planner because um it has been difficult for me since i am experiencing this for the first time ever you know and um its nothing compared to highschool at all um like i took some AP courses in high school but um you know taking these courses im like wow i have to study study you know all the time and just keep it up and i also do work you know so i also have to like kind of section my week off where im like oh i have to focus on school thats my main priority, but i also have to work so just having that balance is sometimes also difficult especially in college and um at home i cant really talk to anyone because obviously my family doesnt know um what college is like um

so im just glad that all you know set the path for my sister and you know help her out when she is older

MV: Thank you for sharing. And um in the pre-interview, you stated that you work part time to financially support yourself, can you describe your job and how it impacts life and your college experience

ES: Yeah so i do do part time um I work at Starbucks and I really enjoy my job although it is tiring sometimes and you know there is a lot of customers throughout the day but um thats also what I like cause im also to mee t a lot of different people throughout the day you know there comes like doctors and like you know some like lawyers in there and also like business like business people as well so you know I really enjoy that and like also I feel like work it gets my you know head in the game with on work and it distracts me with whats going on like in my life as well but I say at first um my first semester of college I was working up to 30 hours and that was so stressful it was very stressful I was running around the whole time like if it wasnt work I would have to like go and study or at school you know um so I just say I have found my days now what days work for me and what hours work for me so i feel like finding that was very helpful along the way.

MV: Cool thank you, the next um question is “Have you faced or do you anticipate facing any obstacles in college so far?”

ES: Um, yeah i say like just in my classes um i have found like im not the best at math when it comes to college math or business math so i would say struggling with that part but um i also am trying to find you know help and um you know going to tutoring and stuff or asking my professors for help as well or also students like there are a lot of students from highschool that i might know and they are also in business so sometimes we ask eachother questions you know

and also freshman year they introduced me to linkedin one of my professors, so i feel that just like seeing that aswell like has really helped

MV: And the next question is “How do you envision yourself in the next ten years?”. It may be a loaded question im sorry (Laughing)

ES: (Laughing) No your good, um i say definitely by the time having my degree and hopefully you know being happy where i work at and also helping my family out but something that i did have to learn also as a first generation student is to care about myself and i know that like a lot of people you know thats like priority right away, but for me it took like years to like a priority was myself and that i had to take care of my health and like what i had to do as well and um you know also saying “no” is a good thing its not always a bad thing you know, so i say growing and you know developing also um you know emotionally mentally as well, but I do see myself um having more ambition and being like what am I going to do you know I like fashion and cafes a lot so like um you know it does take a long time to obviously create a business and get that going but yea I see myself there in ten years

MV: Cool thank you, and just to kind of elaborate or follow up on that, do you have already like a business plan or an ideal business um that you would like to create, it doesnt have to be concrete, you know just throwing ideas out there

ES: Um yeah so not like to the specifics you know, but i did mention really like uh cafes and also like i have found that you know studying with my friends really takes away the stress that i have going on in my life and getting my homework done and like wow i can concentrate more here than at home you know so i feel like building that and like creating that for like other people and me running that and making sure that you know its a safe space for them as well because thats what i want to do with business also help people in a certain way, and just take my experience

and you know create something with that, so i say that and my other interest is like fashion and um you know “you dress good you feel good” so i say creating something like a line for that, so yeah those are just my ideas for now (laughs)

MV: Thank you that sounds really exciting, so the next section we will go into a couple of last personal questions, so the first question is “What makes you happy?”

ES: I’d say my family, friends, and my health makes me happy, um i think those are my top 3 when it comes to happiness... i like my people happy as well so i see them happy you know that brings joy into my life

MV: Thank you, and the next question is how do you express yourself?

ES: I’d say i express myself um, with like recently like show my personality more and not being afraid of showing my personality more to like even like in public or even sometimes it takes some time to kind of get me like out of my shell sometimes when meeting new people so i say like expressing it right away so like i said earlier i really like like you know you know sketching or doodling so i say just like scribbling on a piece of paper, that’s how i would express myself, i find that very therapeutic, and also i like to record little vlogs sometimes on my computer today is this day and like im feeling this certain way and just like have them recorded

MV: Thank you i really like that, you can also like look back on it in the future and it’s a really cool thing to look back on

ES: So our, my last question today is kind of open ended um is there anything else you would like to share or is there anything else you havnt mentioned? um i know we kind of elaborated on all the points but yea, this is your space and if there is anything you would like to share or havnt shared feel free to do so

ES: Yeah um i guess like one last thing is that um like i said earlier i am very like blessed to um have been you know living in America for some time now and also i find that makes very interesting you know that like theres that cultural mix as well so i think thats very interesting and how that plays out to me and sometimes it also is very cool to teach my parents and educate them in a certain way um so yeah, thats it pretty much

MV: Thank you

ES: Of course

MV: That kind of concludes our interview for today, um thank you again so much for meeting with me and sharing your time and sharing your stories, I greatly appreciate it and yeah

ES: Thank you, thank you for having me

MV: Bye

ES:Bye