

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Magdalena Ramirez

Interviewer: Lianne Duong

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Length of Interview: 00:25:22

Sp Lianne

[00:00:01] Okay, we are now starting the recording for the interview, my name is Lianne and today is June 1st of 2022 I'm here with Miss Magdalena Ramirez on a zoom call. Um for my UCSD Race and Oral history class, I will be interviewing miss Magdalena who will be discussing her story in relation to the Detention Resistant, um, Resistance, an organization dedicated to putting its focus on Otay Mesa Detention Center and promoting humanity. Um, can you briefly introduce yourself

Sp Magdalena

[00:00:34] Yeah, so my name is Magdalena Ramirez um my pro- uh my gender pronouns are she her hers. Um, I am born and raised in the border town of San Diego and Tijuana um and I've been here, ever since yeah.

Sp Lianne

[00:00:52] And um can you repeat the name of the city that you grew up in again.

Sp Magdalena

[00:00:56] Uh, I was born and raised here in San Diego.

Sp Lianne

[00:00:59] And can you describe its livelihood

Sp Magdalena

[00:01:03] Like my- the livelihood of San Diego?

Sp Lianne

[00:01:05] Yeah

Sp Magdalena

[00:01:06] Wha- can you be more specific?

Sp Lianne

[00:01:08] Um kind of like How you thought of or how San Diego was as-as a community and how you perceived it to be.

Sp Magdalena

[00:01:20] Mhm, So in San Di- I-I grew up um in the south Bay of San Diego um so kind of like the San Ysidro south, um like very San-San Ysidro area really close to the border. Um so, because of our proximity to the border, um there are a lot of Latinx uh, there's a larger Latinx Community specifically like folks of uh Mexican nationality. Um and I-I specifically grew up in a neighbor- in like uh an apartment building where there was um, also a lot of other Mexican folks.

[00:01:56] Um, but yeah I- that neighborhood um was I-I mean you know lower middle class um, kind of neighborhood and uh and I think that you know I-I don't think it differs from like what my perception of it is different to like what others perceive it as. Um, yeah

Sp Lianne

[00:02:24] Um since you were so close to the border, did you- was it like um I know you said there's a lot of Hispanics but was it pretty diverse um, other than just like Hispanics since it was so close to the border.

Sp Magdalena

[00:02:39] Yeah, no I- there was there was a lot of diversity, um I-I wouldn't be able to tell you, like specifics, you know about what other like you know numbers specifics to demographics, but there's a lot of black folks. Um in-in-in our neighborhood uh, not specifically in the-the neighborhood apartments that I grew up in but um in the neighboring apartment complex, there is a larger like uh black population in that neighborhood um and there were also um other uh, other folks from like uh, like A-Asian descent. Um So there were other, other communities, but I said definitely there were more like Latinx uh folks in the spaces, that I grew up in.

Sp Lianne

[00:03:24] And did like the diversity or like the different kinds of cultures affect like how the city was, um whether it be like um, do like cafes, different restaurants uh, like different shopping centers like how did the diversity of your city impact its community.

Sp Magdalena

[00:03:48] Yeah, so I-I feel like my-my upbringing in the South Bay was really close. Like um, I mean, I feel like we just didn't leave the bubble of the space that we were in so I-I feel like I wasn't really introduced to a lot of different as far as like different restaurants or foods. Foods, I think.

[00:04:15] It all just kind of concentrated in that small radius like of space that I grew up in um and it wasn't till I went to college that I went to SDSU [San Diego State University], that I-I started leaving that space, you know I never as a kid didn't go anything further than the eight, the eight freeway, which is- goes East East and West and for us the Eight was kind of like a, a not a border, but like anything further north than the eight was considered like La Jolla or North county and it was for us like our perception was that it was um-

[00:04:38] You know all the rich folks all the white folks live on that part of the neighborhood, and so I never really got to see and know anything beyond uh the South Bay, specifically the area that I grew up in until I went to college, and I started navigating San Diego a little bit more um so yeah I think I wasn't like, uh-

[00:04:57] yeah I guess like my upbringing was really secluded in that sense, and that I only got to be around kind of those folks in that space um and it wasn't until later that I got to explore more of the rich, the richness that San Diego has.

Sp Lianne

[00:05:17] Yeah, I've heard how there was like kind of a divide between like the north bay and south bay and like there's several- I know of several people who like said that um they've also experienced same thing, where they didn't know much about the north bay. Um and then I know you said that um your perspective of your community was- is not really different from others um, but

[00:05:43] How has your perspective changed um, Of the north Bay after like visiting and like exploring it and getting to know it versus how you must have thought about it before visiting and like getting to know it.

Sp Magdalena

[00:05:56] Yeah uh I mean it's I think it is true, I guess, like what I grew up kind of believing was that you know, all the more affluent communities were-were further north, I think, to some extent a lot of that is true, but I know that you know San Diego has a lot of pockets of-of communities of- very different like socio-economic statuses and like uh ethnicities and backgrounds, like all over like sprinkled all over San Diego. Um so I feel like I've gotten a-a full understanding of what, uh um, of what the spaces in the geographies look like throughout San Diego um.

[00:06:35] So it was a little bit true, I think, from general in general terms, you know that I-I think the further north you go like you have nicer schools, you have like nicer everything. Um, compared to kind of the resources and things that we have, for example, San Diego, like South Bay doesn't have like coffee shops or-

[00:06:59] Like there's, I feel like it's not a place people go like for- I mean San Diego was a very touristy uh city, and you know South Bay doesn't have anything no attraction, not that I feel like it should have any attraction like where people go, but like if there isn't uh, just like a lot of spaces for-for people to, to share space like collective spaces, or like uh whereas I feel like you know North Park or- and I don't know the beach towns just have like more like foot traffic and um are just like experienced differently, the cities are designed.

Sp Lianne

[00:07:40] And then you said you went to SDSU, um I also noticed you're a filmmaker did you study film at SDSU

Sp Magdalena

[00:07:48] I did I did um my-my degree was in television film and new media at San Diego State University.

Sp Lianne

[00:07:56] And then, what made you interested in filmmaking.

Sp Magdalena

[00:08:01] Yeah, so when I started school at this SD-SDSU I wasn't really sure what I wanted to study, like a lot of folks you know how-how are you supposed to know what you want to do at such a young age. Um, but I think what really attracted me about the field of filmmaking was that it seemed like a kind of like a broad um art form or where-where I could I felt like it was like an all-encompassing tool or creative expression tool that allowed me to-to kind of like uh dip into other spaces or other um fields that might interest me so like if I was interested in um-

[00:08:44] Like any particular topic that I that I wanted to investigate or know more about that I can use filmmaking uh specifically documentary to-to study that or become more involved in that, um so I just and also it was a-a field that allowed me to be creatively to express myself creatively that I, I think really needed, and I have continued to need, you know throughout my my years of doing any kind of work is just having a creative outlet, I think, is so important for me an-and um-

[00:09:19] So I that's what I loved about filmmaking and so far has proven to-to be that you know it's-it's a tool that I can really do so much with and so I'm happy I studied it.

Sp Lianne

[00:09:31] That's nice to hear um. And then what inspired you to become um a founding member of detention resistance, or how has or how were you like, inspired to like become a part of this organization.

Sp Magdalena

[00:09:49] Yeah so it happened in the late, mid to late, excuse me. Um 20-2018 actually I-I believe it started um in the spring of 2018 um so what happened was um. There were two caravans that came from Central America in 2013. There was one in the spring I don't remember the exact date, and then there was another one in the fall and so what happened was that in the-

[00:10:17] During the first one, that the one in the spring um. You know, we heard a lot about it on the news we-we-we anticipated at least send the San Diego Tijuana region anticipated the arrival of the caravan and we heard about it in the news this was under Trump and so um.

[00:10:34] You know, there was a lot of kind of attention and spotlight on-on the arrival of these folks into to-to the border, um and so there was another group called um [Spanish word],

which is a-a it's like a non-nonprofit group that support immigrants-immigrants. And they did a lot of work. They didn't, they didn't organize the caravan, but they supported a lot of folks along the way, and you know, did the best to um provide resources to folks as they arrived in their journey, so they-they were like a group that accompanied folks and once they got to the border, um a lot of folks um-

[00:11:15] Some folks were-were um being, had the opportunity to process their asylum and into the, into the US that's bringing them into the detention center while there were other folks that you know um weren't as lucky and were stuck at the border and had to wait long periods or-or met with just long or lengthy bureaucratic processes. Um so when-when all that was happening-happening, um the folks that were in [Spanish word] reached out to um organizers and activists in the San Diego side of the border um, for support because they saw that a lot of the people that they had accompanied throughout the caravan were eventually making their way through the detention sys-system.

[00:12:02] And needed support there, but you know they had their hands full with the work that they were doing on the, on the, on the South side of the border in Tijuana um. So, they reached out to community folks in San Diego. Um activists and people who were abolitionists and, um and wanting to support migrants at the, at the border on the US side, specifically in the detention center, and so this-this kind of committee formed and at first, we were consid- we were called.

[00:12:32] Otay Mesa Detention Resistance Committee, uh committee as in we were we're kind of like an extension of um (Pueblos Si Contreras?) but eventually you know we became autonomous and, in our space, and I realized we were just Otay Mesa Detention Resistance and eventually we just became the Detention Resistance so that's the standing name now. Um, so yeah that's kind of a long story um, I can keep going but that's more or less kind of how the beginning and the inception of Detention Resistance started um

[00:13:07] And so we started to you know, we-we met and-and figured out what the specific needs were on the US side of the border um to how to-to help migrants, um so we realized that there was a lot of humanitarian need um for folks and you know we started thinking about like what does that humanitarian work look-look like what is that we need to do, um and so manifested in different ways, you know we uh, one of the things that we did is that we had a letter writing campaign, uh where we-

[00:13:40] Um send letters to folks that were in detention um, and they didn't necessarily have to be people that were had been part of the caravan, I mean we wanted to support everyone that was in there, because we didn't believe in detention, in detentions. Um and wanted to support everyone, I was saying we realized that there was a community of folks from all over the world um had come to the Tijuana and eventually made their way into the US um and needed and needed support. We had the letter writing campaign, we had a phone-phone phone line like a hotline system where folks can call and and, and have someone to talk to um.

[00:14:19] And then we also did post release support, so people once they were eventually and hopefully um released on parole or just um and under whatever circumstances-circumstances they were released, we would try to support with either um with some cash, so that they can be a bit more mobile, we provide a phone so that they'd have access to communication and- and they can contact either their attorneys or um.

[00:14:45] Or the family back home and um also would provide transportation to whatever location that they were needed to go and specific to like where their sponsors-sponsors were or that kind of team, things. So, I worked I think in the humanitarian sense like it looked like that. Um so-so yeah that that's, that's a little bit about what Detention Resistance is.

Sp Lianne

[00:15:12] Yeah, it's really interesting to hear, because my parents are also immigrants, um so they kind of went through the same thing back way back then. Um a little different but. kind of the same thing.

Sp Magdalena

[00:15:21] Yeah.

Sp Lianne

[00:15:23] Um, so how has like um involving yourself in like the humanitarian side of um detention resistance. Um how has that like played a role in your life, um whether it be like your how it shaped your values, um how it influenced or inspired you with anything else you do?

Sp Magdalena

[00:15:43] yeah.

Sp Lianne

[00:15:44] Just overall

Sp Magdalena

[00:15:46] yeah I think one of the things that I-I quickly realized, and one of the things that I think was an impulse for me to-to do this work was one I think I mean it was living at the border, um it was hard to ignore I think everything that we were seeing at the hearing in the news about the caravan and how incorrect, I think, just like people's perception of what the folks that were doing like were-were doing at the border were, and so I think I, I just wanted to become more involved um. Because it was at my like doorstep, you know I'm I was born and raised in this in this community in this neighborhood and, and um.

[00:16:25] One of the things that really kind of pulled me towards it was just like I-I am so privileged in so many ways, you know I am able bodied I-I have the privilege of being bilingual. Um, and so, being able to kind of code switch and be like understand the system and, like be able to communicate with people that are Spanish speakers um and I also have the privilege of having this piece of paper that says that I can move across the border. Um you know this arbitrary paper that says, I am a US citizen and, and with that paper, I just have all these, these

privileges that that it's in it's one of the reasons why you know people are coming here, you know they, they um are looking for a better life um.

[00:17:09] And so I think understanding and recognizing all of those privileges, one of the biggest reasons I think I wanted to, to participate and support. I mean outside from just like um, I don't know so many other reasons, but um but yeah I think the more I did the more I got involved I realized just. I realized more like how huge my privilege is and dude it's just like I had I had time you know I had. I don't have kids I don't have like other than like my work, you know I don't have like huge responsibilities, and so I feel like the least I could do is, is, is be a support to other folks as much as I can

[00:17:53] Um although sometimes you know the weight of the work seemed like monstrous and was overwhelming you know I felt like okay a little bit of a time and, and try not to you know beat myself-beat myself up over like not feeling like I did enough or not making a huge dent in this larger systemic problem which is incarceration detention. Um, so yeah I think I've those were some of the reasons why I did the work and-and I think I grew a lot in just. How did I grow a lot? I don't know I-I just I think I realized that a lot of um. I think I realized I learned a lot about like the collective effort to do like if if we want to dismantle or abolish you know these this these big systemic.

[00:18:55] Like forces that had been in place for so long, it it's going to take a lot of collective work um and that collective work is is, is something that is that's going to take a lot of work and a lot like a long haul like it's not going to happen overnight. But just I-I learned to work collectively and the value of collective effort um and joining forces with other people who are very similar kind of morals and values as your own, and so I think those are some of the biggest lessons and is appreciation for working with others and organizing with others.

Sp Lianne

[00:19:39] That's really great to hear. And then going back to filmmaking um. Did like your filmmaking skills ever play a role with um your what or with your responsibilities in detention resistance, or were you able to like apply those skills?

Sp Magdalena

[00:19:58] Um unfortunately I don't, I-I never had a chance to-to document, I think, in a way that I that maybe would have liked there were a lot of opportunities to uh yeah I mean there were so many stories so many stories throughout the whole experience that um that could have easily been you know formed creatively put together and, and not only that just you know, create documentation for what was happening um there was never enough time.

[00:20:34] There's never enough time, I think, to-to kind of step out of the work and then, and be someone that was there to document. Um and other I saw I think other folks doing it too, so I was like okay I'm gonna let them do it, you know, right now, I feel like my space and my-my job and duty is-is doing the collective work that I was doing at the time and that felt right. Although I think.

[00:20:59] I-I-I did yearn or didn't want you know. I definitely entertain the idea of like doing a documentary about this, but I think. Yeah at that time it-it just felt like my role and what was more important was just to-to do the collective work with other people and to be lists of help with the humanitarian work that needed to be done. Um uh yeah I would have wanted to.

Sp Lianne

[00:21:28] Yeah it would yeah it sounds like a lot of work to like put together your whole documentary for everything.

Sp Magdalena

[00:21:34] Yes

Sp Lianne

[00:21:37] Yeah um, that's all I had for you today. Um is there any like closing notes that you wanted to like leave on or.

Sp Magdalena

[00:21:48] Um good question. I don't know. Yeah, I mean I guess just wrap up like I-I'm currently not in Detention Resistance. Um I-I kind of faded out a little bit because I-I want to go do a master's program in Cuba for documentary work. Um and, and so I I had to take a break an-and you know when I come back, I think, just like there was a pandemic and um and I got involved a little bit, but uh.

[00:22:24] You know, never really kind of went full force in the same, in the same way that I was during 2018 and 2019 um. But yeah I-I guess you know there's so much work to be done and but it's also I think okay to take breaks, you know, because it is not only. I know overwhelming, in the sense of just the time and energy that it takes but it's tax- emotionally taxing.

[00:22:51] Um and that's been something I think that has been hard for me to negotiate is just like yes, all this stuff you know folks need to be involved, I need to be involved, but at the same time. Um it-it can become overwhelming, um so I think you know just kind of balancing that has been you know where-where I'm at right now, um and hopefully I'll be able to come back and-and support in the same way, or in different ways, or in whichever way that I, I am able to, uh, to continue to support migrants um specifically here in this border land it's that is such a unique space, you know, like we live, Tijuana is the.

[00:23:37] The corner of Latin America. It's, it's like where Latin America and, and, and you know, we have the neighbors like the US, and also what's really interesting about Tijuana is that our the, the border region is that it it's. The, the US Mexico border has the highest economic contrast than any other border in the, in the world like there, there isn't like a that huge of a economic contrast between two bordering towns anywhere else, but between the US and Mexico, and I think that makes it for such a complex space.

[00:24:17] Um so anyway I'm kind of going off on a tangent, but, but yeah I think you know collective work is something that I, I want to continue to do um. Right now, I think, with work I'm um just taking a break, but would love to continue to do this, um like mi-migrant, migrant, migrant support work.

Sp Lianne

[00:24:39] It's good to, it's always good to take time for yourself and to like further um your own personal interest, but you also sacrificed a lot for Detention Resistance and like um put a lot of time and effort to it.

[00:24:52] Um, um so I'm, I'm sure everyone is thankful for that as well and they're probably wishing you, or I'll wish you the best for um your master's program that you are planning to do, and I thank you for your time today as well. Um yeah.

Sp Magdalena

[00:25:09] Oh yeah. Thank you, thank you Lianne for, for uh preparing the questions and meeting up with me and it's been a pleasure to share the space with you.

Sp Lianne

[00:25:20] And then, I'll go ahead and end this recording.