

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASTRID SILVA

An Oral History Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2018

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) Grant. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

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PREFACE



Astrid Silva was born in the state of Durango, Mexico. In 1992, she was barely four years old when immigrated with her mother to the United States. After a few months in Los Angeles, California, her father found a better work situation and relocated the family to Las Vegas, Nevada.

Astrid attended Doris Hancock Elementary School, Garside Middle School, and was a 2006 graduate of the Advanced Technology Academy (A-Tech).

After facing many barriers as an undocumented student, she earned three associate degrees from the College of Southern Nevada and earned a bachelor's degree in History/Pre-Law from Nevada State College. A chance encounter, after a personal tragedy, put her in touch with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in 2009. It was through her personal story that she was able to connect with other young people that were in the same situation as her. As she began to get more involved in immigration politics, in particular those regarding the DREAM Act.

She was involved in forming DREAM Big Vegas, which was a club that aimed to educate the community about the problems faced by DREAMers and their families. As she started doing media appearances, she became the poster child for the DREAM Act in Nevada, and eventually went on to receive national recognition for her role in advocating for DREAMers. She has been a speaker at the Democratic National Convention and has been named a rising Civil Rights leader by the Los Angeles Times.

She serves as the Executive Director for DREAM Big Nevada, a continuation of the work started by DREAM Big Vegas, whose focus is on providing the immediate needs of the undocumented immigrant community with the long-term needs. She continues to educate people about DACA, and to create a bridge of understanding between people inside and outside the immigrant community.

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April 22, 2019
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Monserrath Hernández and Barbara Tabach

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Astrid Silva
Signature of Narrator

4/22/19
Date

Monserath Hernandez
Signature of Interviewer

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Date

My name is Monserrath Hernandez. Today is April 22, 2019, and we are in the Oral History Research Center, and I am with...

Barbara Tabach.

And Astrid Silva. Astrid, can you spell out your name for us?

A-S-T-R-I-D, S-I-L-V-A.

Let's start with the first question. Astrid, how do you identify?

I would say I identify as a Latina, a Dreamer, and most of the time it would be Mexican American.

Where is your family from? What's your family history?

My dad is from Gomez Palacio, Durango, in Mexico; and my mom is from Durango, Veracruz. They met in the early eighties when my dad was working in Veracruz in Durango. He was working and met my mom and they started a relationship and ended up moving to Gomez Palacio where I was born and that was in '88. I was born and now I feel very much a part of what it was to be from there, but it took me a really long time to figure out where I belonged because it was never—my mom is from the coast, the beach, the surf; it's like a jungle. And my dad is from the desert where there's no lakes, there's no rivers. I've always been in the middle of whatever it was, whether it be my parents or United States/Mexico, whatever. I always felt like I didn't have my own. My dad came to the United States in 1989 to work.

What did he work as?

He worked at a golf course company that built golf courses all over the United States. It was a traveling job, and so he lived out of hotels; he lived wherever he could so that he could send money back to my mom.

When he came here to work, where did he go, what part of the U.S.??

Wherever. The company went all over the country. Sometimes when he talks about it, he tells me the places he's been and I'm like, *wow*. California, Nevada, literally anywhere in the United States that was building a golf course and the company was sending people there; that's where he would go. It was a driving thing, so it was in the continental United States.

What did he do for the company?

In those days, he was a laborer just working to make the golf course happen, and then he started learning more and more about the actual irrigation systems, and so over the years he became an irrigation technician, which is the person that actually puts in the pipework and all the PVC and all that to actually make the sprinklers go. It's a lot more complicated than it looks and sounds, but literally he's the one that lays the pipework for the golf courses at that time.

What year did your family come over together?

My mom and I came in '92, June 22nd, 1992. My mom told me I was going to go to Disneyland and see my *papi*. I was really excited because you see Disneyland on TV and the movies and stuff. Yes, she told me I was going to come to Disneyland and that I would be able to see my dad that I hadn't seen since I was one. But I would talk to him on the phone all the time. He would call and we would talk to him. My mom was really good at saying, "That's your *papi*." Yes, I didn't think we were going to be coming forever. I was four, so forever could be two, three days. I remember that we were going to go to Disneyland, *Disneylandia*, and I was going to get to see Mickey Mouse and go to the castle, and I was really excited about that.

What was that trip like?

Now that I look back, not that I talk to my mom about it, she was terrified because we did have to cross the river. But to me it was kind of an adventure because it was like a waterpark. Now I look back and I'm like, *oh my goodness*. I have my nephew who is three and I can't imagine

having to make the decision to put him on a raft and be like, *we're going to cross this river*, or I'm like, *don't get on the slide; it's too high*. My mom had to make that choice to put me on a raft and get dragged across this river, which, mind you, it was June, so it wasn't like it was overflowing, but it was still a river where you're putting a four-year-old. The man, I remember, like they rope you across and we walked up the embankment.

I always remember it because I had patent leather shoes, black, because my mom dressed us up, her and myself. My dad had told her, "Here is American clothes." He sent American clothes. And my mom was like, *I'm not going to see him for the first time in three years and be wearing acid wash jeans*. I remember she had this really, really bright yellow skirt. Now we make fun of her. But you're crossing a river; you're supposed to be doing it secretly, and my mom had this bright skirt on. I had the dress that she had made for my fourth birthday, which had been in March. I was wearing this really pretty dress; it's super frilly with a purple band on it and black patent leather shoes. I just remember that my shoes got really dirty in the mud because you have to get into the river. I just remember being so scared because my mom said we had to look good. We were going to see my dad. I just remember that I was like, *I'm going to get in so much trouble*, because my shoes were really dirty; they were muddy. It was the cute lacey socks and everything and there was mud all over them.

We crossed and there was an opening in the fence and we just walked through. Then I finally got to see my dad. I remember just being so excited. I don't remember how long it took, but I just remember we saw my dad after that. It was really strange because one of the first things I always remember is that we walked into the airport, because we still went to the airport, and at the airport we flew to L.A., because things were different back then. We walked in and I remember at the airport the doors opened up, the automatic doors, and it was so bright in there. I

had never seen electronic doors, and so I was really scared and took a step back because the doors moved by themselves and that was so strange. I'm like, *where I am?* I'm like, *this is all Disneyland.* All of it was Disneyland to me.

I'll always remember one of the first times I saw my dad, he was reading a newspaper. Whenever I see somebody reading a newspaper, I always remember being in that moment and seeing that he was there and it was a real person that was on the phone, but it's like, this is what he looks like. I had pictures, but I had never seen him. That was really interesting.

We flew to L.A. and then we went to my aunt's house, my dad's aunt, his mom's sister. I remember that they didn't have kid movies or anything, so she just put on "Willie Wonka." I wonder if it was on TV or if it was with the VHS they had. It was "Willie Wonka." And she gave me chocolate milk. It was the first time I had Nesquik because Mexico, there's different type; there wasn't Nesquik. To this day that's my favorite movie. I don't drink coffee, so whenever I'm like, *I need to go*, I have my chocolate milk; that's what I have.

I remember that's where everything started and thinking a few days later, *when do we go home?* I just wanted to be with my grandma. That's what I was raised by, my grandparents, my uncles, my aunts. I was like, *when do we get to go back to see them?* Because we didn't go to Disneyland. We didn't go to Disneyland until like three months later. The first few days was fun and then you think, *where's my bed? Where's my toys? Where is my house, my life?*

What did you bring with you?

I had a Ken doll. It was my Ken doll and his bikini bathing suit shorts. And then my mom had a plastic bag with all our stuff and I had a few cassettes in there and just the tokens that we had.

Did they survive the water?

Yes. My cross, the one that I got at my baptism. Those were the only things we brought. I actually don't have the Ken doll anymore. I don't know why, in a fit of rage I gave away all my Barbies and all my toys. I was older. Now I look back and I'm like, *why did I give that one away?* I remember just thinking, *I want this toy and I want this toy*, the things I left behind, which wasn't a lot, but it was my things because here you're buying all these new things and they're nice, but it's like, *where is my things?*

Now that I look back I see how it affected who I am now, just leaving everything, even at my age. I'm older now than my parents were when they came, and so I think about it. Sometimes I forget to throw the milk out; I'm not great at "adulating" yet, and they made this decision that affected so much of our lives. They went to a country that they didn't know the language. They went to a country where they had very few family members where there you walked out and it was one family lives here and the other family lives over here. I don't know how they were so strong to make that decision.

How old were your parents?

When my dad came in '89, he was thirty and my mom was twenty-six, twenty-seven—no, she was twenty-nine, twenty-eight. She was born in '63 and we came in '92. I can't do math that well.

What did they tell you about why they came?

We don't talk about it often, as with most of our families. It's just something you did and you never talk about it ever again. Now that I'm older I ask them because I get asked this often, but they still...It's like getting a little bit of info at a time. They'll never talk about how it was coming. Like I said, my mom just told me that because I think I asked enough times that she was

like, “Okay, I was scared.” With my dad, there is no conversation ever about him coming over. Because it’s just something that they learned to forget.

Internalize.

Yes, and like many other people. I asked a lot of people that I work with, “How did you come?” And they said, “I came,” and that’s it.

What part of L.A. did you guys settle in?

We moved into Inglewood. We went to Riverside and then Inglewood. In Inglewood, we stayed for a few months and my brother was born. My brother was born in April of ’93. There was an earthquake and there were all kinds of things and my mom said, “Nope.” Because, again, it was supposed to be temporary. We were only coming while we figured out what was going to happen because there was no going back and forth anymore. They actually changed everything and it was difficult for people to come and go. We were only supposed to be here for a year or two. My dad was going to save up enough money, a good amount of money to keep going in Mexico, because there just weren’t a lot of jobs. There were no plans of staying here past two or three years.

I don’t even think they thought I was going to start school here. I was in school in Mexico because there you start when you’re three, so I was already in school and everything. Yes, I don’t think there were any plans. Again, we never actually talked about it, but I know that for them their plans were not to stay here that long because even for a few years after we left, they had all their stuff stored and there was a desire to go back to it.

But when my brother was born, my mom got really sick. She got really sick. She went to a hospital, which is actually now closed down because of the practices they were doing on black

and brown women were not what they should have been. When my brother was born, she was in bed for like three months.

It was really difficult because my dad had to stop working because he had to take care of me and the baby and my mom. That's when he said, "Look, I'm going to find a job that doesn't travel." It was a very good job, but he was away most of the time. He would drive to us. I remember he had a job in San Diego or Sacramento, somewhere in California, but it was a really long drive every time and he would still do it. He would come on the weekend and then drive back just so he could see us like a day and a half, the driving included. When that happened, it was a decision that he was going to look for a job that was stable in that they weren't moving. The other job was stable; financially it was a good job, but it moved around a lot.

When my mom got sick, we had an uncle that lived here in Vegas, my dad's cousin, and he said, "Hey, there's a job at a golf course." My dad said, "Okay."

Which golf course, do you remember?

It was Canyon Gate and my dad went to work there. It was interesting because we moved here. We came here with all the things that we had, which wasn't a lot. My dad came before us, like a week, and found an apartment and then we moved in and that was just home.

What part of town was it in?

I was raised over by Bonanza High School over on Rainbow and Charleston. I just remember that was just home. There wasn't any question, like this is where we were from. That was just where everything was for me. We moved here in the first weeks of August and I started school mid-August; I started kindergarten and that was it.

What was that neighborhood like when you guys moved here?

White. White Mormon. There wasn't a lot of people that looked like me. I was never raised with people that spoke Spanish. My dad's friends and my mom's friends did, but not my neighbors, not my classmates. I remember being in kindergarten or first grade—it had to be kindergarten—because I used to say my name. “My name is Astrid.” That's what my mom told me. I remember one of my friends' moms said, “No, no, that's too hard. Astrid.” That's where I was like, “Okay.” Now that's why I'm like, my name is Astrid. But being little I just said, “Well, yes, that's what that lady said and okay.” Because there was nobody that spoke Spanish.

I remember the first day of school. I didn't speak English. Even though we had been in California, in California there wasn't that much of a need to speak English. I hadn't gone to school. I had gone to some of the programs that they have or kids playing and stuff, but it wasn't like school or any real solid program. It's just like I would go sometimes and play with the kids and get interaction, but they spoke Spanish, too. It wasn't really a huge need to speak English until I got here and I went to school the first day. I loved books. I loved everything. I was like, *yes, I'm going to go to school*. I got in trouble the first day. I don't know what the teacher said, but she yelled at me because I went to the bathroom. I didn't know you had to raise your hand. My mom would get mad at me if I didn't go to the bathroom, so I just got up and I went to the bathroom. I was like, *there's a toilet*, and it was a little kid toilet, which I had never seen. I was like, *it's a little kid toilet*. I went and I got in trouble and then none of the kids wanted to talk to me because I was the kid that got in trouble. Like I said, now I think about my nephew and I'm like, *don't mess with the kids that are bad*, and here I was being a bad kid on the first day and I got in trouble and none of the kids wanted to play with me. And then I didn't speak English, so I was just like, “*Hola, ¿quieres jugar?*” The kids were like, “What?”

My mom, the first three months of school—my brother was six months old at that time—we would walk. She would get up and walk me to Doris Hancock. She would sit outside because there was a little fence. She would sit outside and wait for me, and then when it was lunchtime I would just bring my lunch over to where she was. She sat on the other side of the gate. That's how I ate my lunch for the first three months with my mom and my brother and her eating whatever she brought for them and then me eating because none of the kids wanted to play with me.

With a fence in between you?

Yes.

Nobody made her feel comfortable to come in?

No. She didn't speak English. I'm sure somebody might have asked, but she didn't speak English, so she didn't know what they were saying. Finally, one of the girls in my class—they would see us, like my mom pushing the stroller. I remember it was this mint green stroller. She would push it. Finally, the lady said, "I'll give you a ride." The lady was from New Mexico, so she knew some, the New Mexican Spanish. That was enough for her to start helping my mom. Then I started speaking English because my mom was like, "No, you're going to speak English." My dad was like, "Nope, you're going to speak English because we're going to figure out how to do it."

I used to come home, because it was half-day kindergarten, but there was still lunch. Now I look back, I'm like, how long was I really in school? I would walk back and then my mom would make food for my dad to come home to and then when the food was ready and she left it prepared, she would walk me to the West Charleston Library, which wasn't that far, probably a mile. We would walk there. Once she was making the food, she would make me watch "Reading

Rainbow” on PBS. I would just watch whatever was on PBS and it was always “Reading Rainbow” at the time. I would watch “Reading Rainbow” and then they would read the books to me and then we would go to the library and find the book that they read to me. I would come back with all the books. When we figured out how to get a library card—because we would just go and read them there and come back home because we didn’t think you could take any books. Then we figured it out. I don’t know if she asked. I don’t know what, but we figured out you could take them home. It was like, *what?* I used to start bringing the books home and watching the episodes because sometimes they would replay them. By the third month I was speaking English because it’s a kid; I just picked it up. Then finally I could start translating for my mom and telling the friend that she had made, “This is what my mom needs.” That was how I started speaking English.

I was the first to read in my class. That was great. I was the first to read because my parents were like, another book; another book. I would finish a book and it was another book.

I watched a lot of PBS. PBS was the one thing I watched the most and “Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.” My English when I was little was really strange. I look back now and I’m like, I used to say really weird things, but it’s because that’s what English was to me. It was Will Smith; that’s what English was.

Were you placed in any ESL classes or ELL classes in elementary school or anything like that?

There was no direct ESL—it was ESL then at my school—until I got to second grade and they were like, “You have to go to ESL.” And I was like, “Okay.” By this point, like I say, I was the first reading. I was already translating papers for my parents. I was already doing all these things. I was a really big overachiever. They put me in ESL, second grade, but that’s because there were

more immigrants coming at the time. In '95 is when the construction started growing a lot more. They put me in ESL and I remember I used to have to sit there for an hour watching "Roscoe and Friends." It was this VHS. I've YouTubed it because I want to watch it again because I'm like, what the hell was I learning? I'm sure it was great for whoever put it out. I used to come home and I remember I'd be like, "*Mami, quiero el plato rosado.*" I want the pink plate. She would be like, "What?" And I'm like, "*El plato rosado.*" And then she was like, "Where are you learning this?" It was like Spaniard Spanish. We couldn't figure out. And it's not like they were going to go complain at the school and be like, why does she...? They were just like, okay, I guess she's learning this stuff.

What they would do is they would take me out for an hour. I don't remember if it was once a week or every day. I just remember I used to watch "Roscoe" a lot. Like I said, I still remember all their names because I watched it. Jorge the giraffe. I think Roscoe was a raccoon or a fox or something; I don't know. They were puppets. I used to just watch them.

Finally, somebody was like, "What is she doing in there? She has the highest grades in our English class." Not English, but the subject English. They tested me for GATE and they were like, "No, just send her to GATE." There was no need for me...Because it was just me and I remember, God bless her, I won't say her name, but the nice lady that was babysitting me while I watched it for an hour. It was just this poor woman sitting there. I'm pretty sure she's passed away by now because she was really, really old. She would just put on the VHS for me and I was the only kid sitting there. There was nobody else with me. It was just me watching "Roscoe."

There were no other students?

No, just me.

This program was implemented and just had you in it.

It wasn't until I got older that I understood what ESL was. Like I said, I spoke English. I was actually learning Spanish at the time. In second grade, I would come home and my dad would sit me down and we would read the newspaper in Spanish and he would have me write because I didn't know how to read or write in Spanish. I knew how to speak it. Their goal of me forgetting it was really working. Then they're like, *no, no, no, wait; you've got to remember both of them.* My dad started getting me to read and write in Spanish. I would write down things in notebooks. He would have me practice it.

But they didn't know what ESL was. I didn't come home and like, today Roscoe... They were like, okay, Roscoe; that's what they teach in school. It wasn't until I got older where I realized how it had affected me because I'm really bad at math. I am horrible at math. I never knew why. I just don't get it. But when they would take me out of class, it was math; that's when I would go watch "Roscoe." I had a gap from first grade to third grade. When I got to third grade, the teacher was like, "We're going to do multiplication." I was like, "Okay." I would do really good at memorizing. I'm very good at memorizing things. But I didn't know how we had gotten from one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten to four times five. There was this whole missing year where I was watching "Roscoe." I never knew it until I was like, wait. Then I went and talked to my third-grade teacher and I was like, "What was the curriculum?" And she is like, "This is it." And I was like, "Yes, that's 'Roscoe' time." That's how we found out.

When I finally went to college, I went to the library and the bookstore and I had to buy kindergarten through second math books and I taught myself just enough to get past my college, my Math 98 class. I did it three times and I finally did it. I will never... I don't know how because I want to be an architect because I watched "Reading Rainbow" and I wanted to be an

architect because of the Vietnam wall and a girl that wasn't born in the United States had built it. When I was five I was like, "I'm going to be an architect."

Where did you go to high school?

I went to A-Tech. I had gone to Garside Middle School. A-Tech came and they were doing their magnet program presentation and I was like, *that's where I'm going. I'm going to become an architect and I'm going to make little models and it's going to be incredible.* Then my mom and dad said, "No." Now I know it's because they were scared to apply because you had to apply and they didn't know. What if they ask for a Social Security number? What if they ask for...? There had already been things throughout my childhood that I couldn't do because you had to fill paperwork out.

What were some of those things?

Girl Scouts, cheerleading, Space Camp; that was a hard one. A lot of the school activities, like sports and stuff; I couldn't do any of them because you had to have the insurance proof and things like that. My mom and dad were like, "We don't have any of that." I always knew I was different, but I just didn't know why because my brother could do karate; my brother was a Boy Scout. I was like, *oh, he's just better.*

Did you feel like they were purposefully holding you back?

I thought they were until now I'm older and I'm like, no, they were terrified we were going to get caught. But when I was little it was like, why don't I get to do all those things?

What would they say to you, or would they explain that to you?

No, they would just say, "No, you can't do it. We can't do it right now." Usually I was like, oh, money or whatever it was. Girl Scouts was a hundred dollars. I don't know. I was always like, "Okay." It made me a very—I understood. I never fought back. I was never like, why? I'm sure I

did a few times, but not like, you're terrible parents. I was like, "Okay, I get it," and that was it. Then I would find something else. I was like, all right, I can't do cheerleading; I'll do National Honor Society. I was like, whatever, I'll find something else, and I would always find something else.

How did you apply to A-Tech then?

My eighth-grade publications teacher, Ms. Wolfe. I was like, "My mom and dad don't speak English." They did, but I was like, "My mom and dad don't speak English and they can't help me with the form." She helped me put it together and then I just had them sign it. I was like, "The school needs you to sign." I feel so bad now. I was like, "I need you guys to sign this," and they signed it and I mailed it.

I did the same thing.

Did you really?

Yes, because my parents, I told them, "I want to go to magnet school." I was zoned for Bonanza, too. I was like, "I don't want to go to Bonanza. I refuse to go to Bonanza."

I lived literally across the street.

I told my parents, "Hey, I'm going to magnet school." They were like, "Sure, whatever." I had them sign the paperwork and I had them drive me to Valley, which was the school that I had chosen. I'm like, "Here's my paperwork."

My mom took me to drop it off, but I told her the school needed me to—that's the thing, as an immigrant kid you get to lie to your parents and tell them whatever you want because they don't know. This is just normal for them; you're supposed to drive and take paperwork to another school because that's the homework assignment, which is horrible in two senses. It's horrible in

the sense of I legit lied to my parents a lot, but I was always doing good things. Most people do it for bad things.

We were trying to get to magnet school.

I just wanted to go to A-Tech because they had CAD and I was going to become an architect. I was like, they don't understand. Now I look back and had I done something that could have gotten them in trouble...I could have gotten them in a lot of travel had I applied for a traveling...I remember seventh to eighth grade, that summer, I got a Student of the Year thing and that came with my geography class was going to go to New York and D.C., which I wanted to go because that's where the Vietnam wall was. My parents put a firm *no*. I was like, "You guys are horrible." That was the one time I was a horrible kid. I was like, "You hate me." I wanted to go to New York. That was summer of 2001. When the towers fell I was like, "I was like it's your fault I never got to see them." I remember I was so mad at them. Now I look back and I'm like, yes, you can't travel; you shouldn't have. I could have gotten them in trouble. If they dropped me off at the airport, I could have gotten them in serious trouble, but I didn't know. I didn't understand. My parents were good people—they are good people. I didn't understand why they had to hide from anybody. I didn't understand why I had to hide from anybody.

That's how I got to A-Tech. I got in. When I got the letter of acceptance, I was like, "I got in." They were so proud. They were so excited. I think it was that initial...They just had to get over the paperwork because it was a lot of paperwork. We had to do an essay. We had to get three letters of recommendation. This was 2002. It was when magnet schools were at the height of all these requirements.

I got in. Now I'm very happy. But I also look back and their fears were...If I was in school now, I would have never been able to go to A-Tech because there's no busses. My mom's

fear was she would have to drive me. That's why they were so excited about Bonanza because I could just walk across the street. Here I was putting my mom in danger of having to drive me five miles to drop me off at school. But because the bus was able to get me, that wasn't a... Now I look back and I'm like, had there been no bus system, I could have put my mom in a lot of danger because she only drove for emergencies.

What was A-Tech like? What was the student body like at the time?

I look back and it was really incredible. Like I said, I grew up with a lot of white kids. Most of my friends were white. I had never been anywhere diverse. Garside was barely starting to become—now I'm pretty sure it's majority Latino, but it was barely starting to get a larger population of Latino students. I was never talking Spanish to a friend in a hallway. That just wasn't a thing. But then when I got to A-Tech, it was students from all over the place. There were kids that spoke Spanish and there were kids that were black and there were kids that were white and there were kids that were Asian. Then you're just like, okay, there are all these different students here. For me I think A-Tech formed my view of what the outside world was because I met friends that were rich and had really fancy everything and showed up with everything and then I had friends that would not talk about their families because they were poor and they didn't want us to know about them.

Now that I'm older I always talk about it like we were famished; my family was so poor. I'm like, no, we weren't because my parents worked really hard. It's just that compared to the people I was being raised with, yes. *I have a chauffeur*. Okay. This is a conversation I did have with my dad because he said, "Well, you did this interview and you said that we were really poor." And I was like, "Well, we were." And he's like, "You had a roof and you had clothes and

you had all the things you wanted.” I’m like, “I didn’t think about it that way because I was seeing what all my friends had.”

What you lacked instead of what you had.

Exactly. Now I look back and I’m like, no, we had a really, really good life; it’s just that compared it wasn’t. Now I look back and I’m like, no, we had everything we really needed. Were there times when things were really rough because my dad was out of work because of his status? Yes, there were times when things were really rough, but overall...I remember I was so excited when my dad would come home with books because he’d get them at a yard sale or one of the clients threw them away. It wasn’t until third grade when I had a book that was mine that I bought; it was a Spice Girl book. I got it because I got a gift certificate for the children’s—I forgot what it was called, but I got an award for writing an essay. That was the first time I had a book that was mine because they always had somebody else’s name in them because he would bring them to me. But I loved my books. I didn’t get rid of them until recently. Again, I kept all my stuff because I had left all my stuff in Mexico, and so it took me a long time to understand I don’t need all this. I just kept it because I was missing all my things. I was so excited because I remember when I got that book. Now I look back on it. When people say, households don’t have books, I’m like, that wasn’t my house at all. I had bookshelves. I remember when I shared a bedroom, but books were everywhere because my parents were so strong on you have to read.

I remember going to the library over the summer. People now are like, oh, you’re a Millennial who doesn’t like to talk on the phone. I was ten years old and my friends would call me. Girls would call, “What are you doing?” I remember I would never give anybody my number. It was summer and I would go to the library and get thirty, forty books and just go home

and read them all and then be like, “Mom, can you take me back?” Reading was what my mom and dad said was the most important thing.

That’s what made A-Tech really important for me because I could learn everything. There was nobody taking away the Girl Scouts. There was nobody taking away cheerleading. I was like, whatever, you can’t take it away; I’m going to read.

But I also started meeting other kids and meeting a lot of Mexican students and they speak Spanish. That’s when I started speaking Spanish. I would speak it at home, but very, very *mocho*, slang, very cut off. When I got in high school is when I started speaking Spanish. I met my best friend who is still my best friend. She is still my best friend. I was like, *oh my goodness, there are other people from Mexico*. Whenever people would say, “Oh, I spent the summer in Mexico,” I’d be like, “Yes, me too,” because that’s one of the things that people would say. Kids are mean, so people would be like, “If you can’t go to Mexico that means you’re…” All these bad names. I was like, “Oh, okay.” I was like, “Yes, I went to Mexico,” when I didn’t.

That’s when I started understanding. Growing up my idols—still my idols—are Los Tigres del Norte, which is a Mexican band. I love them and they are wonderful. But their songs about immigrants is really what calls to me from them. I remember being little and being like, *oh, that’s so sad*. I was always like, *those poor people*. One time when I was nine or ten, my dad said, “You are one of those people.” I was like, “I’m a kid. Kids aren’t like that. Just adults.” As I got older I was like, yes, they were right, because I was getting closer and closer to eighteen, which makes you an adult.

That was when you finally began to realize some of the reasons that your parents put the brakes on opportunities?

Yes. I mean, I think I always knew. I think you pretend because you're little and I'm a kid. The thing is my dad was adjusting because he had been paying all these years to do his paperwork. They kept telling him, "Before she's eighteen this is going to be fix. This is going to be fixed." We'd go in there every year and be like, "She's thirteen. We're almost there." My dad had applied for himself, so then he could adjust for me and my mom. We didn't know at that time that it was a scam. We were just like, *all right, it's going to happen soon. We know the immigration system takes decades, so, yes, fifteen years is not too long to wait.*

I remember when people started driving and having to come up with excuses for why I didn't drive. "My mom's mean; she won't let me drive. My dad said I can't get a car. I'm afraid." I told people I was afraid for so long. I was like, "I'm just afraid of the cars." But that was just ways to get by. But then, once again, I was really, really, really an overachiever. But then, being at A-Tech, everybody else is an even more overachiever, so it was really difficult because you had to participate in clubs.

I couldn't do debate because they traveled. Now I know; they traveled to Riverside or wherever, but I didn't know; I was just like, *what if they travel to Europe? I couldn't come back.* I just knew I couldn't come back. I didn't understand, but I just knew I couldn't come back. Now I'm like, no, they were traveling to St. George to do a debate, looking back. But, again, it comes with my parents didn't understand the school system. There was nobody to tell them, hey, she should join clubs. I didn't have anybody older that I knew that was like, hey, join this club; join this. It was just me and hoping that all my friends...

That's why it's so difficult when people are like, "Oh, you turned out so good." I'm like, "Well, right," but all of us had that opportunity; it's just people didn't know. You can either go one way or the other. I was just really lucky that I was watching the Seavers that were telling me

on “Growing Pains” go to school; I was being parented by all these white shows and Will Smith and “Fresh Prince” where they were like, go to school; do this. But I paid attention a lot and I was like, well, that’s kind of what my mom and dad said, but then they say it in a different way because, like I said, my parents were very much like, education, education. But now I see other families where their kid went the other way, but it’s because there’s nobody there to say, hey, this is her school. And sometimes you can be like, whatever; if I can’t figure it out, I’m done.

When you reflect on your opportunities, was there that point when you’re coming to the road of life and you could go one way and you could go the other? Same person—I’ve heard Will Smith talk about he and this guy who ended up in prison, using Will Smith as an example there. They’re from the same neighborhood and Will’s life became very successful and the other person ended up in prison. That moment, did it ever...

I think about it and I remember—but I didn’t go to UNLV—I was outside of UNLV and it was in the admissions office when it used to be that little building out front. There is that giant tree out in the parking lot. I know exactly which tree. I’m looking at. But there is a tree outside, kind of right when you come in from—what is it?

Harmon?

Is it Harmon? It’s on the front of the school on Maryland. Right where you come in there is this giant tree. I remember because I came here really excited, January 23rd, 2006. I was really excited and I had my package because I was going to go to college. I couldn’t take the SATs or ACTs because they need a Social and my teacher was like, “Just put in a fake one.” He didn’t know. I was like, “Oh, my mom and dad said I couldn’t do that. My mom and dad said don’t lie about that stuff.” I don’t know how I got out of it; I really actually don’t; I don’t remember how I got out of taking it or I took it; I don’t remember. I did everything I needed to do to come here. I

had a really good GPA. Granted, it was A-Tech, so I wasn't valedictorian, but had I been at Bonanza, I might have been. I was doing really good in school. I stayed eight classes because the bus didn't leave until the end, and so I was like, well, you can't get a ride. I took eight classes and my friends were like, "You're such a loser," because they could all get off at noon and there I was four hours later still in school. But I did everything I could. I read and everything.

My dad drove me here. I remember he had his little truck and he drove me out here. I had, I think, ninety dollars; I can't remember. It was a check my dad had made out for the application and everything. It was a yellow manila folder. I walked in and I was like, "Hello," seventeen-year-old me, really excited and like, I'm going to college and I'm going to come—my first field trip had been to the Flashlight and we watched a play—and I was like, I'm going to go to UNLV; I'm going to be a Rebel. The guy behind the counter said, "I need your Social." And I was like, "I don't remember it." Then he said, "How do you not remember your Social?" I was like, "I don't know. I think I left it in the car." I walked out and that was it.

I remember there was that giant tree and I sat by the tree. My dad walked over because he's like, "We can't park because we're going to get a ticket." UNLV. He walked over to me and he's like, "*Que paso?*" And I said, "They said no." Now, had I told him what had actually happened, I'm sure my dad would have been like, go back and ask somebody else. But I just said, "They said no." Because, again, I followed every rule. I was—I still am, follow every single rule because that's what you're supposed to do. He said, "Okay. Well, what are we going to do now?" I was like, "I don't know. I have to go to school. That's what you said I had to do." He was like, "Well, okay." Again, I just told him they said no. He didn't know. It was probably like a student person there. I was like, "Okay." I'm like, I'm not going to get in trouble.

I remember at that time there was an older gentleman that was going to school here who I believe was homeless. I had the newspaper article somewhere. Again, my dad had taught me how to read the newspaper. We had the newspaper at the house every single day. He said, "That man over there..." I'll always remember it. He said, "That man over there, do you know how old he is?" I was like, "No." I was seventeen, so I was like, "No," already crying and everything. I forgot how old he was, but I think he was seventy or eighty. He said, "He's homeless and he comes to school." I was like, "How do you know that?" He said, "Because it was in the newspaper a few days ago." I was like, "You're just making it up." He said, "No. And he's going to finish school." He's like, "So you're going to do it somehow." And I was like, "Okay."

I was crying all the way home. Then we got home and he looked through all his piles of newspapers and he showed me the article. I was like, "Oh my God that's the man that was sitting there." But just because he had been sitting there. And my dad said, "Yes. You might not do it now and we might not do it here, but we'll do it someday." I was like, "Okay."

Then my mom, the next day she took me to the Mexican Consulate and she asked and she took me to the front. I'm a lot bigger than my mom, so it's this tiny lady dragging this giant kid. The Mexican Consulate used to be this tiny office downtown. She dragged me to the front and she took me to the consulate and said, "What am I going to do?" She said, "We haven't fixed our papers yet and she has to go to school." They were like, "Oops." There wasn't a lot of research because there wasn't anything they could do. Realistically there was nothing they could do. She said, "We're going to figure it out." I think that for me was like when I said, "All right, I'm going to figure out whatever I'm going to do."

It took me a little bouncing around because after that I gave up on school. My last semester I had the worst grades I had ever gotten because I was like, *whatever, it doesn't matter.*

I applied to school in Mexico. They said my Spanish wasn't good enough. So, I said, "Well, where am I going to go if they don't want me there and they don't want me here? What do I do?"

Finally, I talked to one of my high school teachers and he was like, "Where are you going to school?" I was like, "I'm not going." And he said, "What do you mean you're not going? You've got the highest grade in my...*The Crucible. The Crucible*, I got the highest grade, but he was already working at another school. And I said, "No, I'm not going to college." He said, "Astrid, what are you doing?" I'm like, "I'm not going to college." He said, "Why?" And I was like, "I don't know." Seventeen, I don't know. Finally, he said, "Astrid." [Spanish pronunciation] I was like, *shoot*. He spoke Spanish. I said, "I don't have papers, okay?" And I just started crying at this football game at Bonanza. He's like, "Okay."

The next day—and he was working at Bonanza at the time; he wasn't at A-Tech anymore—he drove to A-Tech the next day. I don't know if he took the day off. I should ask him. I don't know what happened, but he came and he said, "We're going to talk to the counselor." He took me to the counselor. He made me go to the counselor. I never even set up a meeting because I was like, *whatever*. I was only going to go to UNLV. I had wanted to apply everywhere else. I had so many dreams because I had the GPA; I had everything I needed to go to all these. They do every presentation and I was like, *oh, I'm going to go...I'm going to go everywhere*. I was helping my friends on their scholarships because I couldn't get any. Then my friends were like, "What if we get one and we give it to you?" These are the things we were thinking at seventeen.

My teacher took me and the counselor said, "Well, if you go to war, you can become a citizen." This was 2006. Iraq was full on. And I'm like, "What?" She said, "Yes, if you kill people in the military, they give you a faster path." I'm seventeen and I'm like, "I can't do that."

My teacher was just like, “Okay,” and he walked out. I walked out with him and I was like, “I told you I couldn’t do anything.” And he’s like, “No.”

He went to my other teacher; that was Mr. Melena and Mr. Konopol. He walked over and he talked to Mr. Konopol, and Mr. Konopol was like, “That’s why you didn’t apply.” I never applied to any of the contests, like the AIA, the architecture thing. I never applied to any of them. I would always say, “Oh, I couldn’t print it; oh, I didn’t have time.” He’s like, “You know, this is really affecting your grade.” You had to submit them. But the thing is that to get the money, because it was always like bonds and stuff, you had to put your Social, so I was like, I can’t do it. He goes, “Now that makes so much sense.” Obviously, he messed with my grade because he’s like, “I never thought about that. I’m sorry that I was doing that. I didn’t realize that you couldn’t apply.” So, it changed that there. He told me, “Hey, there are other kids like you.” And I was like, “No, there’s not.” And that was it. But he told me there was other kids, and I was like, no, I don’t know anybody, so they don’t exist.

Finally, Mr. Melena called me the next day and he said, “Hey, you’re going to CSN.” I was like, “What did you do?” And he was like, “Don’t worry about it. You’re going to CSN.” For a second I was like, “I can’t go to a community college. We’re A-Tech. We’re supposed to go to the fancy schools and UNLV is our fallback.” This is what we’re trained to think.

Yes, that’s magnet culture.

Yes. UNLV was our fallback. UNLV is just like, eh. If you don’t make it there, good job; good luck with your life. I was like, *community college?* Even when I had just been told I couldn’t go anywhere and then I’m told CSN, I was like, *oh, I don’t know.*

I got home and my mom and dad were so excited. I remember they were sitting outside and they were like, “What? Now you’re going to go to college.” That was the moment where

everything changed because I saw how proud they were that I got into community college. I was like, *okay, we're going to community college*. I was like, *yay, coyotes*.

That was that moment for me when I was like, okay, there is no way that I... Because at that time everybody was like, "If you get married..." Seventeen. They were like, if you get married to a U.S. citizen, you can become a resident; you can go to war; all these different things that I was like, *I can't do any of those; I don't want to get married*. I was like, *I don't want to get married to anybody*. That's what started me on a different way because I was turning at eighteen and at eighteen I was going to age out of my dad's application.

I cried so much before I turned eighteen. It was so horrible. Everybody was like, "You're eighteen. Chippendales." And I was like, "I don't want to go." I gave my ticket up. All my friends turned about the same time and they were waiting for me to turn eighteen. I gave my ticket to somebody else.

And you didn't share with them what was going on?

No. Only my best friend knew. She just knew there were things I couldn't do. She understood it because her dad had gotten a green card and she had a green card, so she was going to become a citizen when she turned eighteen. She was in a different... She just thought I was in the same boat as her except she got it ahead of me and I was just waiting for my turn. That's what we thought; I'm just waiting for mine to come. No, it wasn't until I got out of high school and I started talking to them and saying, "Hey, I can't do this," when they started going to parties and stuff and I was like, "There's alcohol here and I can't get in trouble." I literally was like, "I just can't get in trouble." I stopped hanging out with everybody. I just became a recluse with my books and that was it.

What did you study at CSN?

I started in interior design because that was the closest thing to architecture. I never worked with a counselor, ever. I just started taking a bunch of random classes.

How were paying for those?

The first semester my mom and dad paid for me to take five classes. My dad just worked extra jobs and my mom would sell things that she would make and they paid enough. Then it was the excitement of, *yes, we paid the class*, and then the books came and they were like, *what do we do?* My dad used his credit card and I bought books on credit card, brand-new. I did not know that you could buy them used. I didn't have anybody to talk to. I didn't have anybody to ask. The first semester taught us a really, really rough lesson. Then the next semester I took three classes because the rest of the money was for books. Then the next one I took two classes and then just progressively went down.

It took me eleven years to get my bachelor's. I didn't get my associates until 2011 and that's because I actually met Congressman Kihuen at an event and he was working for CSN, and so he said, "Have you ever talked to a counselor?" And I said, "No." And he's like, "Well, what classes are you taking?" I told him and he looked at me and he was like, "Okay." I just remember being like, "Yes, it's classes; I take all the classes I need." They just tell you that you just need classes.

You were just taking random classes?

There is no guide. After that I knew. He set me up with one of the counselors. The counselor was like, "Did you ever have a plan made? Did you ever do this?" I'm like, "No. Mr. Melena just helped me get into CSN and then I signed up for the basics and that was it." Then he was like, "Okay." He was able to get me on track, but this was in 2010, around then. I had been in school for four years, just taking every random class, literally any random class. Luckily they didn't do

that catalog change thing until I left; if not, I wouldn't have been able to finish because I had too many credits, just random credits. I had ballroom dancing; I had art; I had history, random number. I just didn't have anything that was consistent.

Finally, when Carlos Ezeta was a counselor, he's like, "*Mija*, this and this and this and this. You have several associate's paths." I was like, "I just want a bachelor's." I didn't know what an associate's was. I had no idea. It was just, you get a bachelor's; that's what you get at UNLV. And he's like, "No, no, no." Then he put me on the path to actually graduating. I graduated in 2011 with my first associate's and then in '13 I got two more.

In what?

The first one was Associate of the Arts, just a normal Associate of the Arts, and then Associate of Science because I took enough random science classes, and then...I can't remember what the other one is, because I didn't even know I had them. He just was like, "Look, you have credits for this, this and this." I didn't get them in the mail until 2016 because they didn't know either that I had enough credits for it. Chris Giunchigliani, she emailed me and she said, "CSN is re-auditing all their classes. You should ask." When I asked because of her, I called and I was like, "Hey, Commissioner said to..." And they were like, "Yes, you have another degree." Because I just took a bunch of random classes.

I used to help my dad clean up houses, whatever we could to just pay for the classes. That's why I get really mad when people are like, they're taking our kid's spot. I'm like, I was cleaning dog poop and I was cleaning whatever we had to so that I could get another class. It's not like I asked anybody for—I only got three scholarships in the whole time and that was once I was already in my bachelor's. The CSN years, I never got a scholarship.

Then after CSN, you went to...

I went to Nevada State.

Oh. Were you one of the first classes?

No. They started fourteen years ago, so '13, no, I wasn't. A lot of it had to do with, *I'm not going to UNLV.*

There was that resentment?

Yes, it always stayed there because I remembered. Every time I'm on campus, I'm like, *that's where they said no.* Like I said, I get it now. It was a student that was working. But it was such a big deal at seventeen. That was the first time that it wasn't my parents telling me I couldn't do something. It was somebody else telling me you can't do it. I was like, *nope.*

My friend who was working at NSC, Gil, he was like, "Why don't you go to NSC?" And I was like, "What they got?" He told me, "Well, this is what they have; this is what they have." I was like, "Sounds great, we're going to NSC." I applied to NSC and I got in and it was incredible because I felt like I belonged on campus.

I didn't drive until 2014, so all this time I've been riding the bus and walking to school and doing however I can, or my dad picked me up or whatever I needed to do. In order to go to school here, sometimes my dad would drop me off in the morning after he would go to work; he would take an hour off work to take me. Or I'd ride the bus or a friend would take me; I'd catch whoever was going. But that was the first time I felt like a student because I would have to stay on campus because there was nothing else to do. One day a week I was a student; there was no work or nothing else; it's just that I was a student.

That's what made me start driving more into what happened on campus. End of 2009, we had tried to start a club on campus at UNLV with some of the other ones and there was pushback on it. I was like, well, CSN doesn't have pushback, so we're starting it at CSN.

What did you start?

I don't even remember what it was called, but it was the Latino Alliance. We didn't start it; we just revived it. Then after that is when I was like, you don't need a campus for a club, and we started DREAM Big Vegas, which is the organization that we ended up starting. I was like, *you don't need a campus for a club; you just need people and a place to meet.*

How did that organization start?

It was 2011. Again, UNLV had been really difficult in letting us organize on campus. It was just like, why keep bashing your head? Just go somewhere else. Dreamers couldn't get into UNLV, anyway, because of the financial aspect, so they're not going to school, anyway, so get them to meet at random places. Then we would have random meetings everywhere else or like my house, friends' houses, and that was because in 2011 there was a convention here of Dreamers from all over the country and Nevada only had eleven people show up. There were people driving here from other parts of the country and they had thirty, forty people. We live here and we had eleven people. Those eleven people headed back to my house and we got pizza and we were like, *let's start a club, and we did*; it was DREAM Big Vegas. People got jobs. People kind of went their own ways and we kept it going as—again, I was in school for so long, so I was like, *whatever, I'll just keep it going.*

At first, we would teach people how to get scholarships, how to get textbooks; the things we didn't have anybody to tell us. We would be like, hey, did you guys know that if you rent a book...or if you talk to a teacher...photocopy the...Just money savings things was mostly what we were doing at first. That was in the summer of 2011.

My dad got picked up by ICE in September of 2011, and that's when I was like Dreamers aren't such a big deal because I was like, we're kind of good. We have a lot of opportunities, but

families don't have anything. Even just talking to my dad while he was in detention, it was really expensive. I was like, we didn't have money to do it. I started thinking, *how many people have to deal with this?*

We kept DREAM Big Vegas. My dad was thankfully released because we did a bunch of protesting and Senator Reid stepping in. But then it kind of woke something else up in me where I was like, we're Dreamers; we speak English; we're accepted. People tell us, "Oh, you speak so nice." That wasn't the most vulnerable community to me anymore. Also, when I started this I wanted to go to college. When I met Senator Reid that's all I wanted to do; I wanted to go to college and I was in college. What's the next school that you have? It was really difficult just understanding that the politics in play were Dreamers, and they still are, but the vulnerable people aren't Dreamers. We're easy to swallow for anti-immigrants. It's easier to say, oh look, the kid that speaks English. But the most vulnerable communities are our parents; trans people; LGBTQ people; people who don't speak English; people that are indigenous. After that it kind of changed everything for me.

Then DACA happened in June of 2012 and it was like, great, we're going to be fine. We're going to get a work permit and yes.

How did DACA affect you?

For me it was amazing. I remember when it was announced and it was just the most incredible thing ever because I finally was going to be able to do all the things that I couldn't do. I couldn't travel, I couldn't drive, I couldn't get a credit card; just normal everyday things, and we had been pushing so hard for it. That's a whole other sit-down on all the politics that were happening behind DACA happening. Senator Reid played such an important role in it, and a lot of it is because he would call and say, "Hey, as a Dreamer can you do this?" And I would say, "No, I

can't do this, but I can do this." "Okay, we'll call you back." Then a week later, "Can Dreamers do this?" He had such a large role in forming what DACA was that when it finally happened, it was like, Senator Reid pushed so hard for this, Again, it's not like he was the only one, but he played such a major role in it. You can't help to think of the stories of the people we were working with and telling him about; it played such a major role. Some of our Dreamers had orders of removal from being six, seven years old, and now they were twenty-five, and so telling him, "Hey, will this affect them?" And them going, "We'll call you back. We'll figure it out." And then them going, "Actually, yes, it will affect them, but there's not a lot that can be done on it." Just understanding all the background that was happening, we had an inkling that DACA was coming earlier than that spring. When it actually happened I was like, yes, it finally happened. It was real. It wasn't just us talking for nothing or wasting our time.

I remember that morning just waking up. I got a phone call. "Hey, things are going to change today. Get up. Get people together." It felt like being liberated. We could finally do all these things that we had never dreamed of doing. Now I look back and we take it for granted because it's been six years now and I don't think twice about driving; I just get in my car and go. Now that it is getting closer to being taken away, I'm like, what am I going to do without a car? What am I going to do without being able to travel? I go to conferences all the time; I go to these things. I remember not going to debate because I was afraid to travel. We're back in this seventeen-year-old mode where I'm like, what are we going to do? It's hard to not compare it.

I turned thirty-one in March and leading up to it I felt the exact same as when I turned eighteen because thirty-one was the cutoff age for DREAM Act, all the original versions of it. I thought about it and I'm like, had I been thirty-one when it passed, I wouldn't have gotten it. How many people were affected that were thirty-one the day before that had spent decades

fighting for it? Everybody thinks DREAM Act is 2010, 2015. It's like, no, DREAM Act was 2001 and prior to that. I try and talk to as many people as I can, so all the stories I hear...I had Dreamers that are thirty-nine now and because they were thirty-two when DACA was announced, they didn't qualify. That life that I'm now living is something that they would hope to me. For me it was really difficult. DACA was really difficult because one part, yes, you're liberated and you're so excited, but, at the same time, I'm like, the people that fought for it before us didn't get it and they paved the way for us to be here. Now all I can do is try and say, am I paving enough of a way for the people after us to actually keep going, or are we not? What are we doing that's actually going to make a difference for them? I'm not asking them, remember what we did. But there were a lot of things that had to be done.

Nobody was vocal about their status before and now I see these kids wearing Undocumented shirts. I can't even imagine at seventeen. Like I said, I stood outside crying for an hour and a half. Just seeing the different shift in it because of DACA; that has been something that blows my mind. When I go to a high school now, they're like, "Hey, Miss, I don't have papers, either." They just say it like, eh. That took me years to be able to say, and they're just like, yes, I don't have any. It's a very double-edged sword, DACA.

How did you meet Senator Reid?

Like I said, my dad had always made me read the newspaper, so Senator Reid was always in the newspaper. I was like, that's Senator Reid. I had grown up, again, reading about everything and anything. I used to read about the Kennedys and all the presidents. One day at the club that I was part of in CSN—now I know everybody was like, we don't want to go and stand in the rally for four hours. They were like, "Astrid, do you want to go represent us?" I was like, "Yes." I was

babysitting at the time. I used to babysit kids. I talked to the kids' mom and I was like, "Hey, I have to leave early." *Okay.*

My dad took work off early and picked me up and took me over to this rally that I was supposed to represent us at. Again, I didn't know politics. I showed up. They said, "Doors open at four," so I showed up at three thirty because I was like, it's going to start at four. No, it doesn't. I show up and my dad said, "Be careful." The usual, "You're probably not going to get let in." I was like, "Well, the lady said I just need to get in and talk to her." He dropped me off and it was over at what used to be the Excelsior Building; it's a pawnshop now. It's over on Main and Oakey; that little area.

I walked in and I was all happy. I'm like, "I'm here because I'm representing my org." I don't know why, I still don't know why, but the lady asked me for my ID. I was like, "Oh, I didn't bring one." Again, "Well, how do you not bring an ID?" I was like, "I probably dropped it in the car. I'll be right back." I walked back. This is flip phone time. I was like, all right, I'm going to have to wait until seven to call my dad for free. I walked back to where the car was and my dad was there waiting. He said, "I told you." I was like, "Oh, man." He said, "Let's go." He took me home. Mind you, he was waiting there for like forty-five minutes. He knew.

I drove home; he dropped me off. He went back to work. The lady that had invited us was texting me. "Hey, where are you?" I was like, "I went and they asked for my ID." I was like, "I don't have one." And she was like, "No, no, no, come back." I was like, "No, my dad is already at work and your thing started at four, right?" It was six. It was like, isn't it over by now? A rally. No, it wasn't. It hadn't even started, but I didn't know that.

I remember I begged my mom. I was like, "Can you take me?" Then I called my dad. He's like, "No, I already took you." I was like, "Oh, Dad. Come on, Mom." Again, my mom

only drove for emergencies. I was like, “Come on, Mom.” And she’s like, “Nope, it’s not an emergency. You’re not sick.” I was like, “Oh, Mom, come on. It’s not that far.” It was. Now that I think about driving as an undocumented person, it was far for her. She’s like, “No, no, no.” So I wallowed for another hour and I was like, it’s over.

Then the lady texted me again. She’s like, “It’s about to start. So if you’re going to come...” I was like, “Mom, it still hasn’t started.” It was in April, so it’s good weather and my dad would stay out really late working, taking advantage of all the work he could. I was like, “Dad’s not going to come back.” And she’s like, “No.” Finally she goes, “Let’s go.” And I was like, yes.

She took me back. The lady that I was texting, I was like, “Hey, I’m here. I need you to walk me in.” And she’s like, “I can’t. I’m marking...” And I was like, “You said for me to come back and I’m back and I need you to walk me in.” She’s like, “Okay.”

She comes out and she takes us in. As soon as I’m walking in, the rally had just started. It’s all the red, white and blue balloons and everything and Senator Reid is on stage and there is all these kids with him. I’m just like, well, I guess I didn’t make it on the stage, because that’s what we were supposed to do; we were supposed to be representing.

As I’m walking in he says, “These Dreamers that are American and everything, but papers.” And I was like, wait, what? I’m like, okay. He’s like, “They were brought here through no fault of their own and they are just American, but they don’t have a Social Security.” I was like, wait, there’s more people? Again, I didn’t know anybody. He was saying, “These Dreamers, they just want a chance to go to school.”

I was like, what? I started crying because I was like, that’s me. I was like, are all those people on the stage...? They weren’t. They were kids from Rancho High School. I just

remember I was crying and the lady was like, “Why are you crying?” I was like, “I think I’m a Dreamer.” She was like, “Okay. Well, let’s go meet him.”

This other lady grabs me and takes me up to the front where he’s at. It wasn’t that major of a rally because it still wasn’t the campaign season. It was a year early. I walked up to him and I was like, “I think I’m a Dreamer.” And he was like, “Oh, really?” I was like, “Yes, I think I’m a Dreamer.” He’s like, “All right. What do you want to do?” And I was like, “I want to go to college.” This was 2009, and so I had been in college for three years. I was like, “I just want to graduate.” Because you’re supposed to graduate in four years. I was like, “I just want to go and finish college.” He said, “Okay. So, what do you want to do?” And I was like, “I just want to work hard and finish school and get a job.” He was like, “Okay.” He put his hands on my shoulder and he said, “Okay, if you really want to work, we’ll be partners.” I was like, “Okay, I’ll be your partner.” And I got really excited. He’s like, “Well, I’ll see you again.” I was like, “Okay.”

The next day I showed up to his office, the Democratic office, which I didn’t know; I thought it was his office. I was like, “Harry Reid told me to be his partner.” I just showed up and I started volunteering. They were like, “We need you to put these envelopes and sweep over here.” I was like, “Perfect.” That’s what Harry Reid wants me to do, great. I didn’t know it. He probably had no idea who I was. He probably didn’t remember me in the next two hours, but I thought we were partners. Now I think about it and the made-up story I had in my mind, I was like, well, he’s expecting me to do this. I was like, okay, Harry wants me to sweep and Harry wants me to do this; I’ll do it.

Of course, they loved me because I was such a good volunteer because I spoke English and Spanish. I would come in every single day as soon as I got off work and when I wasn’t in

school, I was there. I just started living there. Then one of the volunteers would drive me home at night because my dad was asleep by then, so he couldn't pick me up because I would leave at ten, eleven. Now I look back and I'm like, what the hell were we doing? It wasn't even election season, but whatever. It was great and I thought I was Harry Reid's partner and I thought we were best friends forever. I was like, okay, I'm just doing whatever he's telling me to do, which was by the volunteer coordinator. I didn't know how campaigns worked. I didn't know that those people had probably never met him. I didn't know any of this. I was just like, yes, this is what Harry Reid's people told me to do. I didn't know the difference between a party and him. I was just like, all right, Harry wants me to do this.

What ended up happening was—I was very, very close to my grandmother, my *Abuelita* Mica. She and I were very close because she was the only grandparent that could come to visit us and we were her only grandkids in the United States. She had no reason to come other than us. She would come and stay three or four months and then go back. Then she would come and stay three or four months and then go back. She was the only grandparent, the only real tie we had to Mexico. She got to see my dad and it was great. Then she got really sick and it was okay. It was like, she'll be fine.

She bought her ticket to come to Vegas for July and then she died and we couldn't go. It was the most horrible thing ever because the last conversation she and I had was me telling her, "Well yes, my friend Harry Reid, I went to his office today." And she's like, "*Que dios los bendiga.*" And she's like, "God bless him." She probably died thinking him and I were best friends because of the way I talked about, "I'm doing all these things for him and these envelopes." This was when campaigns would send out envelopes. "I'm cleaning these lists." My grandma was like, "That's so good." She was just so proud of whatever I was doing. She's like,

“When I come we’ll meet him.” And I was like, “Okay.” That was one of the last conversations. I used to come home and talk to her and tell her, “This is what I did today.”

When she died that was the first time that I realized that immigration wasn’t about papers. I always thought, *okay, I can’t get a license; I can’t go to school; I can’t fly*. These are all paper things. This is all because I didn’t have a Social Security number. It was a piece of paper and, yes, it’s clerical and I just don’t have it. But then when they told us, “If you leave you can’t come back,” I was like, but that has nothing to do with a piece of paper. That’s my grandma. I just want to go with her.

Then she got better for a night and she called and talked to my dad. I was volunteering and so I didn’t get to talk to her because I was volunteering. My dad said, “She’s good. She’ll be here in July. She’s going to get better.” Then the next morning they called and said she passed away overnight.

I was like, how do you not let somebody be with their family member? How do you not just give them like a pass and say, go and come back? Your life is here, but your parent is dying there. That was really hard because my grandpas had already died, but I didn’t have a strong connection with them. It was sad because my dad was sad and my mom was sad, but I didn’t know them. But I knew my grandma. Like I said, I talked to her every day. She would come and she bought me the dress for that award I had gotten in third grade. She was here. That was really difficult.

Again, I used to write journals in my books and everything and I wrote this really angry letter. I was just so mad and I wrote a really angry letter. I was like, this isn’t fair. Why would you do this to us? Then it was like, who are you writing this to? Who could I send it to? Barrack Obama? I never thought in my life I would meet him.

I was crying and it was the day Michael Jackson died, so all the Michael Jackson stuff was going on and everybody was freaking out and everything. Then Democratic Party called me and they were like, “Hey, Senator Reid is having an event. Can you come volunteer?” Well, they didn’t know. I was like, “When?” I forgot what the date was, but they were like, this date, and that was the day she was supposed to come. I was like, “Okay. Yes, I’ll go.” It was like three weeks later. I was like, “Yes, I’ll go. Thank you.” I hung up and just went back to my anger. I was like, I’m making this letter for Harry Reid then. I started writing. I added Harry Reid at the top. It didn’t have Harry Reid at the top and I added it.

Then I showed up to that event and it was at the Howard Hughes Towers. My job was to be the elevator girl. I was supposed to say, “You’re going to the sixth floor. Make a right.” That was my one task. I had my letter with me and I had it folded up. I talked to the girl that had been kind of guiding me in the volunteering. I said, “I made him a letter. Can I give it to him?” And she said, “No. Why would Harry Reid want your letter?” I was like, “Okay.” *Yes, you’re right. I follow the rules.* I was like, *yes, you’re right. Why would he want my letter?* We weren’t really partners. That’s just what politicians say. *You’re right.*

I put it away. I had my jeans and I put it away. I was like, *all right.* “Sixth floor to the right; sixth floor to the right.” All these people. It was all these important people showing up. I was like, *oh man, I read about these people.* It was a Latino roundtable. They were going up to the top.

Then Senator Reid came up and he has all his Secret Service people, Capitol Police with him. I don’t know, I was just really sad still because, like I said, he had given me a very grandpa vibe, like a grandfather, and I was still really sad. I was like, *whatever. What’s the worst thing she’s going to do, she tells me to go home?* I was like, “Can I give you something?” And he was

like, “Okay.” I handed him my letter and it was all folded up, like those letters that you do in high school. I just handed it to him and he was like, “Okay,” and he put it away and that was it. That was it. He got in the elevator and the elevator closed. I was like, okay.

Then I started thinking about it and I was like, *I just wrote in this letter that I don't have papers and my mom and dad don't have papers and I put my address at the end*, because you have to sign letters with your address; that's just what I was taught. I was like, *oh my goodness*. I called my mom and I was like, “Mom, I need you to pick me up because I just gave Harry Reid this letter and it says we're undocumented and it has our address.” My mom was like, “*Cómo...*” My mom was so mad at me. She's like, “Why would you do that? You said this was just volunteer.” I was like, *oh man*. I was like, “I don't know. I didn't think about it. I just thought about giving it to him.” And then she was like, “Aye, Astrid...” I was like, “I am so sorry.”

I got in trouble. She was like, “Well, just call your dad when you're done.” I was like, “Okay. But can you just pick me up.” She was like, “No.”

It's not an emergency.

No, it's not an emergency. I was like, “Okay.”

Then I was waiting and the lady comes down and she goes, “Astrid, Senator Reid wants to talk to you.” I was like, *oh my God, I might get deported*. I was like, *la migra is going to show up right now*. That one time we met was really brief and he didn't have enough time to remember me. But I put my address on this letter and my phone number. I was like, *ah man, okay*.

I went up there. I remember I had my jeans and my little blazer. I was like, *oh, I'm going to get deported and my mom and dad are going to be so mad at me because they hid so long and I just wrote a letter and that was it*. I don't know what had happened in the room before I got

there; I don't know, but everybody was just...I don't know. It was one of those moments that you walk in and everybody was just like...I don't know what had happened. And he goes, "Tell them what happened to your grandma." And I'm like, "What? What?" I get emotional now still talking about her. Like two weeks later, I was just crying, I was like, "What?" And he said, "Tell them what happened to your grandma." And I'm like, "She died and I didn't get to go see her." And he goes, "See, this is what it's about, not about all of you." I don't know what had happened in that room. But he said, "It's not about any of you. It's not about votes. It's about people like her. Thank you." And that was it. I was just like, *okay, okay*. I just went up there and I said my grandma died and started crying. And they were like, *oh*. He's like, "Okay, thank you. You can take a seat." I was like, *okay*.

I don't know the rest of what happened. I can't remember the rest because it was such a weirdness. After that is when I started getting letters from him. We actually became pen pals, like friends. He would have his staff call me and say, "How do you do this? How do you do that? How did your grandma die? How did this happen? What do you do to get to school?" I would write him letters and I would say, "Well, the bus broke down today and I had to wait for two hours, so I'm writing you a letter." I would just write him letters about anything that was happening. "I missed a math class because my dad couldn't get off work on time and it was too late to take the bus. Well, this is what happened."

Now I look back and I'm like, why was I writing this to the Senate Majority Leader? He's such a busy man and I'm over here, "Well, today I forgot my money at home, so I didn't have any money to buy food." Just dumb things that I look back now and I'm like, what the hell was I doing? But I was twenty-one and I was like, he's listening; he writes back.

He wrote back?

He wrote a few back and then he would have his staff call me back and say, “Hey, he wants to know this, this.” He would ask me questions about my letter. That’s how everything started. He would ask me, “Well, do you want to learn how to do this more?” And I would say, “Yes.” Then his staff would call me and say, “Senator Reid said you needed help with this.” They started teaching me what policy was, what the DREAM Act was, what cloture was, all the processes that were happening. Or they would call me and it was Jose Parra, his Hispanic communications person who said, “Look, Senator Reid wants to meet with you. I’m going to be out in Vegas and I want to meet with you.” I was like, “Okay.” From then on he was the one that started telling me, “This is what media is. If you want to do media...”

We started doing media in end of 2009 after the DREAM Act vote of September 2010—2009? I can’t remember. But there was a vote and it went bad, and so they were like, “We need more stories to elevate that it’s an issue.” I was like, “Well, I don’t want to come out. That’s dumb.” That’s what I thought; it was dumb. I was like, “Why would you tell people you’re undocumented? Then they could call ICE on you.” He was like, “Well, I understand, but thank you for your time.” I was like, “Okay.”

Then I talked to my dad and I was like, “What do you think?” As he still says today, he’s like, “What do you have to lose?” I was like, “Well, that’s true.” They don’t want me there; they don’t want me here. I might as well go somewhere where they’ll tolerate me. My mom was much more cautious. She’s like, “I don’t think so.” She said, “But if you’re going to do what you’re going to do, we’ll support you.” I was like, “Okay.”

I called Parra and I said, “Hey, I’ll meet with you.” I always remember because he still feels horrible about it, but he was meeting me at the Federal Building. He said, “Can you come

to the Federal Building and we'll meet here?" I was like, "Yes, of course." I rode the bus over and I get there. They were like, "You need an ID." I'm like, "Oh, I don't have one." And they're like, "Okay, sorry."

Then I called him and I said, "Look, I just can't make it to the Federal Building." I didn't say why. I was like, "Is there somewhere else?" He said, "Yes." I think it was Florida Cafe right there on Las Vegas Boulevard. He said, "Okay, I'll meet you there in fifteen minutes." I was like, "Okay."

I walked from the Federal Building to Florida Cafe and then he's texting me and calling me. He's like, "Hey, are coming?" I was like, "Yes, almost there." This was June and I walked that whole way. It's not that far, but it's hot.

It's hot, yes.

Yes, it's June. I walked there and he goes, "Did you walk here?" I was like, "Yes." He's like, "You didn't tell me. I was at the Federal Building. I would have brought you here." I was like, "I don't know; I don't know you."

The good thing was—and this was honestly one of the only things that I think changed me getting involved was his wife was with him, because she had come to Vegas with him. Now, I don't know her or anything. He said, "Do you mind if my wife comes? She hasn't eaten and since we're going to the cafe..." And I was like, "Yes." It just made me feel like, oh, they're a family; this isn't just like a political person. They're from Colombia and she was like, "Yes, I came from Colombia." She spoke Spanish and he spoke Spanish. I was like, ah, this is like a family; this isn't just politicians.

Then I went home and I was like, "Mom and Dad, I met with the man." He was "the man" for the longest time. I was like, "I met with the man and he said that nobody wants to talk

about being undocumented and Senator Reid really wants to fight this issue, but you can't fight it if there's nobody to fight for." They were like, "Do it."

I called him and I was like, "Hello. Yes, my mom and dad said I could do media." I'm twenty-one and I was like, "My mom and dad said I could do media." That was what it was. That's what began media.

What did you feel when your parents made this sort of—it seems like a shift in position from being more cautious to encouraging you to do that.

I don't think they've ever, still, shifted. I think if it was up to them, they would still be quiet. I just think that they've seen my passion for it and they were like, well, we'll support her. But I think it's still...It would have been better if I was quiet.

You spoke at the Democratic National Convention, right?

Yes.

How was that transition or process? You became the poster child of this movement, right?

It was really different because with Senator Reid I really felt Senator Reid's staff cared for me. I didn't feel like I was a prop. I didn't feel anything like that. With Secretary Clinton, her staff was incredible as well; a lot of them were Harry Reid's staff. But I think it kind of shifted my Democratic Party understanding because a lot of them were literally, oh, you spoke at the DNC; that makes you somebody. As I continue saying, you don't have to speak in front of thousands of people to be somebody. You can be my dad who cuts gardens and you're somebody. You can be my mom who doesn't have a job and you're somebody. That really shifted for me when they did articles and they're like, five things to know about Astrid Silva or whatever. But if they took the time to meet all these other people, they would understand there's nothing special about me. More people have harder lives than I'll ever have, but they don't get to do the DNC and they

don't get to do these things. I think that shifted my entire belief in what we were doing. It made me really readjust everything I was doing. I was working in an organization where I ended up actually helping people. I thought I was kind of putting people in this danger just to share their story. I didn't realize that until the DNC.

Like I said, Secretary Clinton's staff and Senator Reid's staff, amazing, incredible, but then you meet other staff and you meet other people that you're literally just the undocumented speaker; let's go, number four. Right? I realize how blessed I was to be under Senator Reid. I understood he actually cared about it and he did have a giant shift in his belief in immigration and that doesn't come easily. That's not just like I wake up and, oh, I love immigrants. He had to really go through a lot to get where he was at. I realize something that comes very easy to me, which is calling Senator Cortez Masto's office or calling whoever's office and saying, "Hey, can you guys help us on a case," is not what other people in other states are dealing with. Other people in other states are dealing with—can you guys make a call for a case? And they're like, why? And they're Democrats. It really shifted for me what being a Democrat was, what being affiliated with a party was. I think if anything that's what it did for me.

People are always like, well, you should have capitalized on it. You were a DNC speaker and you could have sold T-shirts. I'm like, yes, I could have, but that's just not who I am. Now I think about it and I got book offers, book deals or whatever. I was like, no, because if everybody can't benefit off it, I shouldn't either. It takes a lot of growing up and understanding. I was just thrown into this very quickly and you just go from one day to the next with President Obama and everything.

It took me a while to understand that I'm important whether I have my three degrees that I still don't know what the degrees are in or if I don't. I can tell you the truth, I don't know where

they're at right now, something that I made my parents work for so hard. I have no idea where my degrees are. I have them. I can tell you I have them, but I don't know where they're at. What I end up having is my mom and dad and my nephew and my family; those are the things I have, not my Social Security card, which, again, I don't know where that is either. It's in my tax folder. My work permit, I think it's in a box that I only take out... These things that they've told me I needed. I didn't need any of them. Do they make my life a lot easier? Yes. I drove here because of it. I paid for my lunch because of it. But no matter what, my family is what mattered in all of this. Sometimes understanding the danger I put them in makes me wonder if this was the right thing to do.

What are you currently working on?

Right now, we're doing educational forums; that's our really big push right now because, unfortunately, a lot of people don't understand DACA even when they have it. They don't understand what DACA means. They don't understand how temporary it is. They don't understand, again, what we did to get to it. A lot of people, like I said, kind of take things and they're like, yay, we have them. I'm like, no, no, no, they're really easy to lose.

Right now, we're focusing on educational forums. We have one coming up on Wednesday. Because a lot of these younger Dreamers never had to deal with not getting a license; they never had to deal with not going to Space Camp; they never had to deal with these things that we did. It's not even taking it for granted. They're literally not even understanding that it was a no at some point. Now that we're getting closer and closer and closer to them going away, we're having to educate them on, do you understand that once your card expires, if you don't get another renewal—we don't know because of the Supreme Court—but you're going to

have to get a driver authorization card. And did you know that we had a driver authorization card because all of these undocumented people went to testify for it in the legislature?

I think sometimes, again, being blessed to be in Nevada, we don't have to deal with a lot of the fears. There is nobody here that is like, oh, I'm so afraid that I'm not going to get my power turned on because I don't have papers, whereas you go to Georgia and you have to prove you're documented to get a power bill. Here, we do have 2870 and it is scary, but it's not Arpaio's Arizona where you have to be terrified to drive or drive in emergencies. My mom doesn't drive anymore at all and she can get a driver authorization card, but she's terrified because she's like, I'm going to get pulled over. Now I drive, so she's like, you're fine; I don't have to take you anywhere; you're good. That's that deep-instilled fear in her that even if she could get a driver authorization card, she could get in trouble.

I think a lot of it is we take for granted the things, no matter how big or small. I get it. Do I wish we would have gotten green cards? Yes, I do. But do I get that at least the work permit was helping me get by? Yes. It's a matter of perspective and, unfortunately, a lot of our Dreamers don't have that understanding because they come to UNLV and there is no kid standing outside of UNLV crying right now because they're like, oh, we have this program or we have this program, or they go to Nevada State College and they have the Dream-dot-US, a scholarship there, or they got to CSN and there was an undocumented student body president, Brenda Cortez. Somebody else did it, and so they don't get it.

A lot of what we do is education on how to further...How do we push another door down? Maybe even not policy-wise. Maybe some of it is just like educating your neighbor. *Hey, by the way, I'm undocumented.* Granted, don't go up to your neighbor and tell them that. But if you feel comfortable enough with somebody, say, *hey, I'm undocumented*, because people think,

like I did, undocumented people are the ones cutting your grass. It's like, no, it's me; I am what undocumented is. That's a lot of it.

We've been doing citizenship fairs because a lot of our elderly community—and when I say elderly, I mean seventies, eighties—they never became citizens and now they're like, my Social Security is nothing because we never became citizens and as a green card holder you get less in your Social Security. Now they're understanding, like, I really never did go back to Mexico, because a lot of people were like, we're going to go. Mexico isn't the only country where people come from, but in Nevada it is—

Predominantly.

Yes. And so, "*Este, que yo me iba ir a México.*" And I'm like, "When?" And they're like, "Eighty-one." And I'm like, "It's 2019. You're here." It's guiding them through it because there is a fear now. There is a much bigger fear of, if I'm not a citizen, what's going to happen to me? It's educating, again, any immigrant on marijuana. People don't understand as undocumented immigrants we are under federal law, which means marijuana is illegal. I have my kids posting pictures going, "Yay, 420," and I'm like, "No, take the picture off of Facebook." They're like, "But, Miss, it's legal." And I'm like, "But you're not. You cannot do this." I have people saying, "Weed is great." I'm like, great for you guys as citizens, but not for us as immigrants because it could bar us from citizenship. People are like, "They don't use Facebook." I'm like, "Yes. I know USA officers can use your Facebook and be like, 'Look at that.'" You're having the student go in there and possibly, possibly adjust their status, but then they're like, oh, look at all that marijuana use, and they can deny it. People don't understand that because they're like, weed's legal. I'm like, there is differences because we are ruled by different rules. That's been a lot of what we're doing, just a lot of education, a lot of me answering questions.

I took a year off after the election after sixteen. I worked at my immigration attorney's office, Peter Ashman. That gave me such a different understanding of what our community needs versus what we were telling them we needed. We're telling them, "You guys need citizenship, citizenship or nothing," or, "We need immigration reform." They're over here dealing with everyday things. I'm like, they don't give a damn about citizenship right now because they're trying to figure out how to pay their rent; they're trying to figure out how to fix their car. It's kind of marrying the immediate needs to the long-term needs, which is citizenship, which is long-term ability to stay, which is deportation defense versus, hey, how do I pay my ticket so that I don't go to warrant?

These everyday things that people just don't want to deal with; that's what I'm doing with DREAM Big Nevada, which was from the club DREAM Big Vegas that we started. Now it's just me. I founded the organization. I run it. I have my board who is amazing and our donors who hopefully will keep giving more money because that's how we survive. That's how this organization is going right now to be able to provide these things because that's what I know my dad asks me; that's what I know my mom asks me. There are other people asking it, but they don't have anybody to ask. Our immigrant community is growing so fast, and not just Latinos, Asian, African. Those communities are growing and for me to be the only undocumented person that runs an undocumented organization is crazy.

You're the only person? You don't have any staff or anyone helping you?

No, just me. My board is really great. My volunteers are amazing. But it's just me.

Who is on your board?

I have Chris Giunchigliani; Peter Ashman, immigration attorney; Justin Cortez, immigration attorney; Blanca Gamez, she's also a Dreamer and she lives in D.C. now—I even talk about her

and Rafa. They've been my backbone in all of this. They were like, "We're not going to come out, but we're going to support you." Then they finally came out and I was like, finally I'm not alone. I have A.J. Buhai who is one of our Asian, really, really incredible person; he's a teacher and he's an immigrant and military veteran. Francisco Morales who was the boy on stage with Senator Reid when I met him. He was sixteen then and now he works for the governor. I feel horrible that I'm forgetting who else is on the board. There is nine.

We can add it. I didn't mean to pressure you, but I want to make sure we don't neglect.

Steven Horsford was on it but he had to get off because he became a congressman. Jocelyn Torres, my board president, she's incredible. Jocelyn's family is immigrants and she was born and raised in Vegas. She is what keeps me going work-wise. And Danna Lovell who is the executive director of Emerge Nevada. The president and—the two most important, not that the others aren't important, but the two key players that have to sign my checks. They are so incredible. It is just me on staff.

Do people donate funds to you or how do you get financing?

It's just a lot of me calling my friends and saying, "Do you have twenty dollars? Do you have ten dollars a month?" Right now we're applying for grants and trying to get. We became a (c)3, a nonprofit in December. It was right after the end of applications for grants, so we're going for the next round of grants. Literally a lot of it is just the people that we help giving ten, fifteen dollars. That's what has really kept us afloat. We have the amazing people who have donated a little bit more just so we could keep doors open, but it is all community based right now. We hope to move into it.

Again, it's very difficult because there is a lot of work that needs to be done and there is a very limited amount of funds for the immigration work that we do. We don't provide legal

services. I don't have an attorney that I can say, hey, this is going to be your attorney. A lot of people, that's what they're looking for right now. I wouldn't waste an attorney's time answering a question about the DMV. Hopefully we'll get to a point where we can hire an attorney, but right now it's literally just laying the foundation.

I do a lot of speaking at non-friendly events just for people to be asking questions. A lot of what people need is just to ask, why are you still illegal?

How do you answer that?

I tell them because the system isn't meant for me to become documented. And they're like, but it is because if you do...And I'm like, okay, well, here is the wait...Once you explain to them the wait time and here is this process, they're like, well, why don't you just get married? I'm like, well, because I would have to do this and I would have to do this. And they're like, well, why can't you...? And I'm like, well, because then this...Even if it takes an hour, I'll sit there, because they'll come up with every scenario. I'm like, yes, I've seen the same TV shows you've seen; I watch them to see what you're going to ask me. Then they're like, well then, how can you do it? I'm like, I can't. And they're just like, well, I just thought there was a way. Then I'm like, well, I told you I'm not just doing this for fun. If I was to do whatever I wanted, I'd be at home painting and making crafts. I wouldn't be out here fighting with you. A lot of it is people have really, really misguided information.

I always tell them that my uncle is quadriplegic and if it wasn't because I know what he has to deal with, I wouldn't care about handicap ramps; I wouldn't care about any of the services that he needs, but I know because of that. So, I can't be mad—and I tell myself—I cannot be mad that they don't understand the system that they've never had to participate in. They've never had to. They don't know where USCIS is. They don't know where ICE is. I'm like, meanwhile I

had to drive out to Patrick where old ICE used to be and I get sick because I remember being so terrified of ‘we don’t go over there’ because that’s where *la migra* is when you’re little. If they don’t have to deal with it, they don’t understand it. I try and be the least amount of mad. Yes, do some of them make me mad because they come up with these far-fetched ideas? And I’m just like, no, I don’t get a free TV. Whatever they ask us about.

But, at the same time, I can see how through social media, how through TV...Like I said, I learned how to BYM on the “Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,” so I can understand how watching “90 Day Fiancé” is how they feel immigration works. I can understand that them watching whatever show they’re watching is how they interpret immigration law to be, because it’s a thirty-minute sitcom or whatever. Like I said, I can understand where they’re getting all this bad information from because I watch it just to see it. I’m like, okay, this is where this question comes from. I’m like, well, here is how this works, and they’re like, but they said...I’m like, they, yes, the show you were watching. I’m like, okay, you watched a Sandra Bullock movie, good for you, but this is how it actually works. And they’re like, but, but. I’m like, no, I have to go back for ten years. But why? You’re a good person. I’m like, we’re all good people. You just choose to pick out the people who do horrible things.

Do you worry about having to go back for ten years?

Yes, every day. I wake up and then I check my Twitter to see if anything was changed or if anything was moved. I’m like, what would I do if I was in Mexico, or my parents? How would I talk to them? Would I have to Skype them? Would I have to call them? Would I go with them? What would I do?

When DACA was rescinded what happened?

Oh, that day was crappy because everybody was so confused. I knew it was going to go away. I thought it was going to go away the first day. I went to renew my driver's license Inauguration Day because I was like, maybe I'll squeeze out two more years of it. Literally, my friend Rafa and I, we sat there and watched the inauguration on the DMV TV and they told us, no, we couldn't, and I was like, so close. I know, we were so close and they said no. So we were like, *ah, we tried*. Then we had to wait until the next go-round. But we got them renewed.

But we thought he was going to end it that day. The fact that he waited until September, I was like, *sneaky*. I was like, *he's going to do something*. I still believe he's going to give us immigration reform and make it be like 'I'm the king of the world.' I still believe that's what's going to happen. I thought he was going to do something then and it taught me a lot about preparation in our community; that there's not a lot of it. We ended up having about five hundred people show up to an event that we had planned that morning. We knew it was coming, but we kind of put it together. I remember because there will always be disagreement between organizations and between leaders and everything, and so I was like, *look, I'm going to do this; I'm going go ahead. Are you guys going to join or not? Cool*. People were like, *yes, okay, let's do this; all right, let's do it*. Then that day when we had about five hundred people show up, it was like, *where the hell were all of you last year when we asked you to go canvass?* A lot of anger was there. I'm like, *now you're here because we lost and where were you when we needed you to share your story?*

Again, I talked to my dad and I talked to my mom, and they're like, "Well, not everybody has to speak." And I'm like, "Fine." But I'm like, *ugh, whatever*. But then I remember because I went up to speak. I didn't want to speak because I was like, *whatever*. Everybody gave better information than I did; lawyers told you what to do; community members told you where to sign

up. I was like, *what am I going to do?* They were like, “No, you have to speak because you’re the Dreamer. Everybody else is documented that spoke.” Sometimes I forget that because sometimes I think documented people have more to say than I do because I’m like, well, they do. My friend came up to me and he goes, “No, you’re the only one that’s going to suffer this. Everybody else gets to go home and chill. You have to go home tonight and look over your shoulder.” I was like, “I didn’t think about that.” He said, “Get up there.” And I was like, “No, they didn’t offer me the mic.” And he’s like, “Just go.” And I was like, *eh, I don’t do things against the rules.* He’s like, “Go.” And I was like, “Okay.”

I get up there and I said, “I’m going to ask everybody to put their phones down.” Everybody has this thing about live feeding everything and it just bothers me. They are all with their phones out and going like this, and I said, “I need everybody to put their phone away, everybody.” And they’re like...And the media people were like, *hell no.* You could tell they were like, *huh-uh.* I said, “Please put away your cameras.” Reluctantly all these cameras go down. I knew the reporter from the Sun, Jeff. I was like, “Jeff, I see your camera.” And he’s like, *ugh,* and he puts his camera down. Everybody starts putting their camera down. I said, “Okay, please do not take any pictures. Please don’t take any video. Please, I’m asking you nicely.”

I was like, “Can we have everybody who is a Dreamer stand up?” All these kids stood up that I wasn’t planning because I thought everybody was just...And I’m like, *holy shit, where did they all come from?* Because for so long it was me, Blanca and Rafa. I’m like, *where were you guys?* I’m like, *fuck, this is real; these are all these kids.* I say kids because a lot of them are older than me, but these are the people that were affected. That hit me hard because I’m like, *what are we going to do?* I can figure out how to protect me, Blanca and Rafa. I can figure something out and be like, we’re going to move to Mexico and start a business or whatever,

whatever harebrained ideas we come up with when we're freaking out. But how do we do it for all of these people?

Because you have your Plan B?

Yes. I don't really, but I like to think up new ones every day.

But you'll land on your feet.

Right. Right.

You have the internal resources.

Right. I know that if I go I'll figure it out. Will I be happy? Maybe not. But I know that I'm not going to be homeless, I hope. A lot of these kids don't have college degrees. A lot of them had to take care of their parents. A lot of them got their DACAs and dropped out of school because now they could work and their parents couldn't and now they were making fifteen an hour where their mom and dad are making eight twenty-five. A lot of these kids are single moms, single dads who if they were deported, who do they leave their kids with?

Like I said, this all came from me leaving my safety bubble after the election, after the DNC, after all that, because I had only met Dreamers that were valedictorians; I had only met Dreamers that were business owners; I had only met Dreamers and given them the time because they were important. When I started working at the lawyer's office doing immigration, I was like, *these people are cool, too*. They're my dad's friends. They're my mom's friends. They are outside of that circle of just fancy Dreamers.

I looked around that room and there was a ton of them. Oh, there were so many. I seriously was like, *where do these people come from?* I looked around and I was like, *crap, this is so many people. How do we have plans for all of them? How do we figure out life without DACA?* Because in that time, that day, we thought they were going to cut off the cards, so we

were all just going to be undocumented again. He gave us to finish the card. That was incredible because, as bad as he is, he could have been worse. That day we were like, *all these people are about to be unemployed*, if they are employed. What about the Dreamers that we have that have—I forgot the correct term for disability. But we have a lot of Dreamers that are disabled; we have Dreamers with Down syndrome; we have Dreamers with cerebral palsy that just get their card so that they don't get deported. They're not working. They're not contributing, air quotes, to how they want us to contribute. But they're still people. They still don't deserve to be deported because they can't contribute to the economy. That was really frustrating because I was like, *oh man, this isn't good*.

That day was really, really crappy. And it wasn't even that day. The next week I went to speak at a high school. High school teachers are always like, come talk about how cool you are. I was like, okay, I'll go talk. Then you talk and I'm like, "I went to school for eleven years." And the kids are like, "What?" Because they're top four. I had a girl come up to me. I think it was A-Tech. I think it was my first time speaking at A-Tech. It was two weeks later and this girl comes up to me and she's like, "Miss, that sounds so great how you did this and how you did that." And I was like, "Yes." And she goes, "How do I apply?" Because he cut off the applications, you can't apply anymore. You can renew, but you can't apply. That was...

I went home and I was like, "Dad, how do I answer her?" I just told them I'm so cool and I made it through school and I have my organization now, but you can't have it. Good luck.

That you took away hope.

Yes. I'm like, I know what it feels like when people took my hope away and I just became them. I just literally became the person that took away that's kid's hope, and that's the most horrible thing out of all of this. Because our parents, they know; our parents know how to deal with this

stuff. They are so resilient. I don't even understand how they're so strong, I don't. Because they're used to being told no. They're used to being fired from good jobs because they didn't have a Social or because the boss told them, "Hey, we're going to check next week." Our parents know what it's like to be like, I have to give up that car because it's too flashy and the cops might pull me over. Our parents know what it's like to say, "Hey, I can't buy that house even though I have money and I have to keep renting because I couldn't find somebody to loan me the money." They know how to deal with it.

These kids, they don't know how to deal with it, they don't. They've been told, like I had, that they could be anything they wanted as long as you go to a good school and as long as you work hard, and they can't. That's been the hardest part, so I've stopped talking at high schools.

You spoke recently for the ADL for the Immigration Seder. Can you tell me about that? I had planned to be there, but had a family conflict come up, and so I wasn't able to be there. Of course, Jolie Brislin gave me the dickens for not being there. Talk about that.

I went to my first Seder the last year and it was really nice. Again, I've told you guys, I used to read every book. I used to go through different phases, so my fourth-grade phase was the Holocaust. My third-grade phase was Greek mythology. Second grade was Titanic. Every year was something where I spent my entire life learning everything. When they invited me to the Seder last year, I was like, how have I never done anything like this? That's weird. I was like, "Okay, thanks for the invite. I'll be there."

I went and I just thought it was incredible how they were sharing stories because literally a Seder is just telling a story again, just telling it again with ways that you can remember. One of the things for me, so many of my family's stories are lost; they're gone because we weren't allowed to talk about them. To me that's always been really important because we can't talk

about most of the things that we want to. Like I said, my parents don't talk about crossing; they just don't. They don't talk about their childhoods; they don't talk about those things because they're not good memories. Going to the Seder, they are telling this horrific story over and over again to not forget it. We've forgotten all of ours already. My grandmother will never be able to tell me her stories of having a difficult marriage, of leaving her husband, of raising her kids; she just won't be able to. I won't be able to fully tell my story because there are so many things that are painful just to remember. Being there, I was like, this is so incredible that there is so much dedication to retelling the story.

This year Jolie was like, "Hey, can you speak?" And I was like, "Yes." Usually I'm not really eager to speak at things. I'm like, *uh, I'm busy*. It's gotten harder to speak at things during this administration. I was like, "Yes, I want to speak." One of the things I was telling her is I remember being little and I used to watch "Rugrats" and they used to tell the story of Passover. That was how I knew what Passover was. Again, my parents were really open about figuring out and learning about religions. I knew what it was, I knew all these things, but I had never been to one.

When I got to speak at it, I was like, what is it for me? She asked me, "What is the one thing you want people to know?" For me it was our stories. It was that we have not been able to tell our stories. Our stories are dying with us. I had uncles who were Braceros and they died and they couldn't tell it. One of them, I actually did a paper on him and that's the only one that I have, and he passed away two years ago. I wonder now, what did the other ones have to say if that was his?

He would tell me about getting deported three times and coming back. He's not a blood uncle, but he was a family member. Him telling me his grandmother was buried in Arizona, I

was like, “But they’re Mexican.” And then him telling me, “Well, the train tracks used to stop and this is where people used to get run over and that’s where the bodies... They just kept them there and this is where...” You learn all these things. I’m like, so that’s how we’re family. And he’s like, “Yes, not really.” But it’s just where he’s from had a train stop where I’m from and that’s where he met his wife who was from where I’m from and they’re all *comadres* and they’re all friends and stuff. Then California happened and he was the one we went to live with when we arrived. It was just him telling it.

I always remember it because, like I said, my grandmother was very much about preserving... My grandmother was very much about, we have to take care of dead people, so Day of the Dead; all of that. You have to go to the cemetery and clean up things. I am the same way. I just don’t have many dead people here that I can do that for because all my family is there.

He was telling me a story of how my grandmother is there and he said, “I want to go see her. I just want to see her grave.” I’m like, isn’t that crazy that his grandmother—because his grandmother had some kids in Mexico and some kids here, but she had to leave the Mexican kids there because they were older. The young kids are here. I’m like, and those same young kids are probably the ones that are now saying, *go back to Mexico*, to me because they were born at a different time and a different place. It’s crazy to me how that works out.

I always remember my—I used to call him my *Ajuelo* Chato. He told me, “There is this cemetery and I think it’s called this.” He was getting older. He’s like, “I think it’s called this.” Of course, I went on Google and I was like, “Yes, there is a cemetery in Globe, Arizona.” He told me, “Because my dad died at thirty-two.” And I was like, “Oh, did he get run over?” He’s like, “No, he was just really sick all the time.” Then I started reading and in Globe, Arizona is where

the mines were, so everybody died young because of COPD. That's why the grandma stayed here. All these things. I don't know my family history, but I know his family history.

I ended up calling my uncle because Chato was passing away and there was just no way we could get him to Arizona. He's in California. I called my uncle who lives in Arizona and I said, "*Tío*, you need to find the cemetery." It was during the election, so I was like, "I can't go, but I need you find the cemetery." He went and he took pictures. He found it, but he didn't find the tomb, but he found the overrun cemetery. He showed him the pictures before Chato passed away. He said, "Here is the pictures of where maybe your grandma is buried."

I just think about those stories and how many of those stories are being lost every single day. How many people in Mexico—and other countries, but, again, I'm Mexican, so I can talk more about that—but how many people in Mexico are elderly people in their eighties, waiting for their kids to come back or thinking their kids are horrible people for abandoning them, and their kids died in the desert that same day they came over. These are our stories that are being lost.

When I went to that Seder and I'm like, "Millions of families were destroyed and their families just wiped off the face of the earth," and not that it compares to it, but we're losing our stories the same way. That's why when I spoke and she said, "What was the one thing?" I said that everybody has a story. Talk to your neighbor. Ask them, where are you from or how did you get here? It doesn't even have to be crossing a river. It could literally be, I moved here from Ohio. It doesn't have to be this grand adventure. It could just be that they had a really rough life or whatever. That was my thing. I said, "Everybody has a story and we just have to be able to share it with other people."

What's your train now? What's your vision of the years with the work you're doing or with the administration or, hopefully, a new presidency? Hopefully.

Hopefully we'll see a change for the better in the administration. But at least for my organization, I want us to grow and be able to provide more services for more people because right now it is just me and it gets really overwhelming. A lot of what I want to do is branch out into working with our therapists. A lot of our community needs really, really, really deep help because they're dealing with grief.

Even thinking about my dad being deported...My dad has an order of removal. My dad could be deported any day. Just thinking about him not being here, I can't even understand it. To think that my mom's dad died and she couldn't be there and thinking that my dad's dad died and he couldn't be there and his mom died and he couldn't be there, how much grief are they carrying that they just got up the next day and went to work? They didn't take a day off. They didn't get a week of grievance off. He had to go to work the next day because there was a sprinkler that needed to be fixed. How many people are living like that?

I have one of my volunteers who is incredible and she is a woman who has been living here for twenty-five years. She left her two-year-old daughter because she couldn't bring her. She's never met her. She talks to her on the phone. Now she has two grandkids, but she doesn't get to see them. What kind of grief is that?

I want people to understand more that there is this different form of grief that are families are carrying, which, yes, my dad will be alive if he's deported and I'll get to talk to him and Skype, but what are we losing? There is a grief there because you're losing a relationship. But our community doesn't understand that because they don't have time to process it. They just have to go to work because if you don't work, you don't eat.

That's what I want to do more with DREAM; I want us to branch out. Policy is important and I will continue to work on policy. But I want our organization to be able to reach out and help people where they need the help. Trust me, it's not going to be easy especially if you're Latina because they're like, *therapy is for crazy people*, and it's going to be overcoming that. But I've had it with people where we've sat them in a group, and, like I said, nobody talks about how they crossed. But then you sit them down and say, "Hey, where did you cross?" And then somebody says, "Oh, me too." And then they're like, "Did you see this?" They start talking about it and an hour later they're all telling each other, "I did this and I did that." "Oh, I thought I was the only one." It starts to open them up to talk about these deep wounds.

I think a lot of us end up in these criminalized policies of immigration, of DUIs, of domestic violence, of all these horrible things that on paper look horrible, but when you talk to people and you understand what led to them getting in that trouble, you don't excuse it and you don't wipe it away, but there is a big understanding to why people do the things they do. I have a man whose wife passed away and left him with two little kids and he got a DUI because he didn't grieve; he just went to work and was drinking and driving. On paper, he looks like a horrible human. How dare you drink and drive? But then when you talk to him and you see this man who still hasn't cried four years later that his wife died and he just chokes it up and continues talking, how long has he had that there and how long has there been more to that there?

I want us obviously to work with the policies and work to give people a better life and answer their questions about the DMV and answer their questions about how to enroll their kids in school, but, also, there are all these other things. Like I said, even for me dealing with it, if my dad were to be deported, I'm thirty-one, I have a job, I'm going to be able to take care of myself.

What happens to the sixteen-year-olds whose parents are like, it's better if you finish high school out and go live with your *tía*? You're destroying that family. You may not be thinking you are, but you are because that's not going to be a family anymore. Families separate and divorce and those things are fine because you make a choice, but this is something you're not making a choice about.

I really want with DREAM Big Nevada to be able to provide these services: help with citizenship, help people understand why citizenship is important. We do our citizenship fairs and it's great. But if we're not there telling the community why it's important for them to become citizens, it doesn't matter. If we're not telling them, okay, did you follow up? Did you go to the appointment? Did you take the class? It's not people being lazy. It's people not knowing. It's me buying brand-new textbooks. They just don't know. They've never gone through this process before. Sometimes I think we take it like, well, they don't want to apply; they're just lazy. It's like, no, where do they go? What do they do? Who do they talk to? It's all these processes that people just need better understanding of how to do it and, hopefully, we'll be able to guide them on that. That's where I see it.

Hopefully in the future we'll have a big office and we can have community events and do all kinds of things. For right now it's my little office with me and all my supplies in there and clipboards. Yes, that's where I see us going. Hopefully being here still in the United States, not even as an organization, but being here.

You're incredible. Changing the topic a little bit before we go, how do you feel about this new term *Latinx* as a way to identify the Latino community?

I struggle with it a lot.

Why is that?

I find it to be a little elitist because, again, I am working with a community that sometimes doesn't know how to read or write and we're telling them, you're Mexican, now you're Latino, or you were Hispanic and now you're Latino, and, wait, now you're Latinx. When I have my community members and I show them a flier or something, they're like, "*¿Qué es eso? ¿No saben escribir?*." "They don't know how to read or to write?" I explain it because I think everybody should have the opportunity to decide if they want to use it or not. But I do feel it's a very college educated... Again, not elitist in the mean way, but in that you have to be very understanding of what it means, and that's not to leave out people that are gender nonconforming and all the different binary issues, but just even as a term. Like I said, most of my community members are still like, *somos hispanos*. They are still in Hispanics and we haven't even jumped them to Latino and then we're jumping them two hundred years ahead to Latinx, and so it's been a very difficult thing for me to come to terms with.

I use it when I need to. I know if I'm at a college speaking event, yes, I'll use *Latinx*, but I only use it in that surrounding. Like I said, I have friends that only identify as that and I'm like, if that's your choice, then I will refer to you as you prefer to be. But in the real—it's mean saying the real community, but in the community, I work with, it's not really a term.

What makes Las Vegas home to you?

I mean, everything. I don't even know if it is the geography or the climate. It's nothing like that. It's just home. Whenever I go somewhere else, I'm like, *oh, two more hours for the flight; let's go*. I've never taken a real vacation, but when I've gone to places and I'm going to take an extra day; I have to do a conference in Miami and I'm going to take an extra day; I'm like, *okay, I'm ready to go home*. I am always—again, I think it's because from a young age we were only going to Disneyland and now this is my home and you can't take me away from it. Growing up, my

books were my home, being in my house and with my mom and dad; that was home and that's Vegas. I didn't leave, on a trip to Carson City, until 2011. I've gone to California, but I never left and it's always been home. I have my friends that moved; my friends have made their lives in other places and they'll come back and they are like, I miss it; I want to come back. It's weird because a lot of people are like, oh, I can't wait to leave Vegas. It's like, okay, you can leave, bye, but I'm going to stay here. Honestly, I don't even know what it is, but this is where I feel my heart is. Like I said, it's not even about a place; it's not a card; it's not a Social Security number; it's just my family; my family is here. There is no way to describe it. Home is just here; home is Vegas no matter what.

Any last thoughts or remarks you want the Latino community to know?

I think we're in a really weird place and I just want patience and kindness from everybody because as Latinos, as Latinx, as Hispanics, as undocumented, as Dreamers, as whatever you want to call yourself we're in a really weird place. I can get mad at you if you call me undocumented, and I'll be like, fine, I'm never talking to her again because she called me undocumented and I prefer Dreamer. You don't get to choose what people are. You don't get to choose. My cousin doesn't speak Spanish. I don't get to choose if she's Latina or not. Do I get to judge her for not speaking English? Yes. But do I get to decide who she is? No. If she wants to be Latina, if she wants to be Hispanic, if she wants to be Latinx, if she wants to be Chicano, whatever she wants to be, that's who she chooses to be. I don't get a say. I think right now, like I said, it's really weird where everybody just wants to write think pieces and essays and journals or art form or whatever, and it's like, that can be for you, great; I respect it and I go for it and if you want it I'll use it. But you also have to let other people figure out who they are.

Now the term *Dreamer* to me, it's become a label that I take on because I walked into that room and I finally belonged. I heard them say *Dreamers* and that's when I was like, *oh*. *Dreamer* to me isn't Dick Durbin; it's not policy. *Dreamer* to me is walking into that room and hearing it for the first time and saying, "That's me." I think we have to allow people to be what they are. I could tell you five years from now, F the word *Dreamer*; they just bound us and they didn't want to let us do. I could do that in five years. I could look back and say, oh well I said that then. But that's what I am right now; that's how I feel about it; that's who I am when it comes to anything. But I think we should be allowing people to have that because I've seen a lot of us, especially in the immigrants' rights community, where it's just bashing upon bashing because, oh, you said this.

Yes, when I started I used to say, "I came through this country through no fault of my own." That's blaming my parents. Do I say it now? No. But did I say it every single other day in 2009 through 2012? Yes. I don't blame age on it; I was twenty-one; I don't blame that. I blame that that was what I was hearing; that was what I understood. I don't think we allow the people the ability to change or grow. I am happy that I'm not the same person I was a month ago. I am going to be happy in two months when I'm not the same person. I don't think we allow people that opportunity. I think we just kind of say, this is what you did and it was wrong and we're never talking to you again. It's like, but...Okay. That comes a lot for me from my background.

My grandmother was a really strict Catholic. She prayed every single night. Do I agree with all the things? No. But can I respect that she used to pray for me every single night? Of course. A lot of that came with redemption and what it is that you're doing to make the world a better place. My dad isn't as keen on religion; my mom is. But no matter what, they've always said, be a good person. They're just like, just don't fuck people over; it's not that hard.

I hope, if anything, that's what people can start understanding. I don't think we've ever been in a place like this before. Even talking to people that are older in the different movements, they're like, no. And social media has done that because anybody can say anything they want at any given moment. I can tweet about you right now and invalidate everything you've done in the past five years because I can be like, she's a horrible person. It's so difficult for me to understand it. It's so difficult because we've all done things that are really dumb, horrible. I think that's a big thing for me, just letting people be who they are and understanding that people can change. Are some people horrible? Yes. But you'll get to see it. I can't just say you're horrible because of one thing you did or one time you called me the thing that I didn't want to be called. I would just be like, okay, cool.

With the word *illegal*, my whole life that's what I was. Do I not use it anymore? Yes. But my whole life that's what I was; I was *ilegal* because there was no other term. There was no Dreamers; there was no undocumented youth. It's just what I was. Does that make it bad that my dad told me, "*Sí, pues tu también eres ilegal,*" No. That's just what he was referring to. I think we just need to understand each other and be like, we're all growing; we're all learning and it's different paces. It's just very different paces and different perspectives and different understandings and different education levels. I just don't think people are forgiving enough, especially in movements.

Thank you so much for sharing your story.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]