

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH ERICA MOSCA**

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

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

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
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# PREFACE



*“I think it’s pride that I come home to the Eastside of how I grew up. I just want to help people like me...”- Erica Mosca*

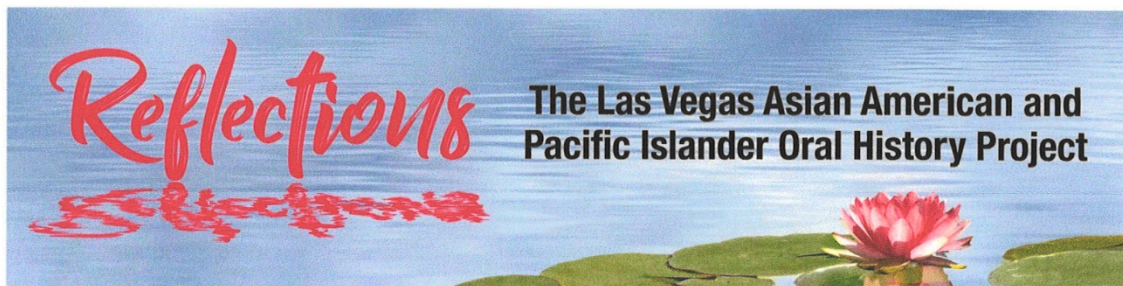
In this interview, Erica Mosca reflects on her life journey from her low-income childhood in Palm Springs, California, to her current service as an elected Nevada State Assemblywoman. As an Asian American child raised in a diverse community of students, she did not experience, until her family moved to Navato, California, the socio-economic and resource gaps between economically diverse groups. After participating in a college readiness program, Mosca earned a scholarship to Boston University. Following graduation, Mosca worked for Teach for America, which placed her on Eastside Las Vegas at Goldfarb Elementary School. Here, Mosca grew her passion for teaching and mentoring leadership. She eventually returned to school and graduated

from Harvard University, returning to Las Vegas to start her nonprofit, "Leaders in Training."  
Leaders in Training aims to inspire students to improve their communities through enacting  
legislation and initiatives targeted towards the communities in which they and their families live.

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February 3, 2023  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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**Good morning. Today's date is February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. This is Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Erica Mosca, Jerwin Tiu, and Stefani Evans.**

**Erica, may I ask you to please spell your first and last name for the record?**

Yes, thank you. Erica, E-R-I-C-A. Mosca, M-O-S-C-A.

**Thank you. To start off, could you just tell us about your childhood, where you grew up, your family, stuff like that?**

Yes. My dad emigrated from the Philippines when he was seventeen. He ended up coming to Missouri, of all places. He had to wait in the Philippines for a long time because his mother came over here and was able to bring some kids, but not all the kids. He is one of the older brothers, so he stayed in Manila with extended family. He came here because my grandmother married someone in the Navy, and he was able to petition him. My grandpa Dave, Grandpa Chillcut, was from Missouri, so that's why he came there first, and then he came to San Diego.



*Fig. 1: Erica Mosca with her family*

We lived in Mira Mesa, which they call "Little Manila." I lived in Mira Mesa; that's where I was born. My mother is half-Filipina, so her mother is from the Philippines and immigrated here because her husband, Frank, was in the Navy, so she came here through him.



Really interesting, she lived in a time of segregation for housing, and came here during that time period. My mother is half-Filipino; they say mestiza because she doesn't look it, so people would never know.

When my dad came over here—it's so funny—he met my mom pretty early; my mom was still in high school. They were very young. My mom moved out of her house in high school and moved in with him. They got married very young. My mom had me when she was, I think, twenty. We lived in Mira Mesa. It's so funny at the time. My dad was in the military, in the Navy, just for four years. I was born in a military hospital at the naval base in Mira Mesa, in San Diego. A very loving family. A very culturally Filipino family. We eat rice for everything, eat dinner together. But because they were so young, really struggled.

My dad taught himself English. He always says he watched "Sesame Street," and that's how he learned English. He earned his GED. My mom has a high school diploma. But higher education was never an option for them because they just had to survive. They were a very loving family, very hardworking, but really just trying to survive. I went to seven different schools growing up because each time my parents made a little more money, we moved up.

When I was in the fourth grade, we moved to Palm Springs. It's a little cheaper than San Diego. I went to school there from fourth grade to tenth grade. As a typical first-gen American family, we were always looking for better jobs. My mom now is a secretary here in Las Vegas. I'll get to the point. We all live—now—here.

But my dad has always been a pressman, so he's always worked at night my whole life. He still works at night today. That's how we made it work. He would pick us up from school. He was the one who would go on field trips when he could. I watched the handoff every day. He

would cook dinner. My parents could never see each other because my mom would be coming home, but my dad had to go to work.

I have a little brother. He's five years younger than me, Eddie. He's great. We're polar opposites. He's an artist. He lives in San Francisco, and he's a photographer. He lives his best



Fig. 2: Erica and family on her birthday

But we are a strong unit, struggled a lot financially, and so what happened was... My dad was looking for a better job, and we didn't know—again, going back to a typical first-gen family—about cost of living. It was me. My dad was looking for a better job. I'm the one that made my dad's resumé. I was the one that was looking for jobs. He got an interview in Marin County, in northern California, which we didn't really understand was a very high-income place. We just knew, hey, he makes this much in Palm Springs at the *Desert Sun*, but if he worked at the *Marin Independent Journal*, he would make

triple that amount. My dad, who is the most resilient person I know, drove up to northern California, which is eight hours away, couldn't afford a hotel, slept in his car, interviewed for the job, got the job, and drove right back.

We moved to Novato, California, when I was sixteen, so I lived there from sixteen to eighteen. It was probably the most pivotal experience for me and propelled me for the rest of my personal and professional career because I had always been a really good student, a straight-A

kid, involved in activities. My parents always said, “We struggled because we didn’t have a higher education.” It was really built into me that I needed to do that.

When I went to Novato High School from Palm Springs High School, I experienced the education gap without understanding what it was. Some examples are, I sat in my Spanish 3 class, which I would have had at my old school, and didn’t know anything, and so they put me back to Spanish 2 even though I had taken it at my old school and gotten an A. I started getting Ds and Fs in AP classes, and I had never seen that before. I didn’t understand at the time that it was systemic. I had always gone to Title I high schools, always been a free-and-reduced-lunch kid and didn’t know any better, so that when we went up to northern California, I was going into a higher income school and didn’t understand that. Things like people who were next to me in AP History had taken Geography their ninth-grade year. Geography was not offered or required at my school. I always felt lost, like, how do they know so much? Well, that’s why. Even though it was the same state, I always thought that was really interesting.

One of the positives, though, of that hard experience for me was now I was at a resourced school, so I was a free-and-reduced-lunch kid around not many of us. There were more resources for people like me, and I was accepted into a college access program that’s now called Ten Thousand Degrees; back then, it was called the Marin Education Fund, and they’re a college access group. I got to go to my first college tour. I got an SAT prep tutor. I got a mentor. In so much now, I see



*Fig. 3: High school graduation with Grandma Fay*

what they didn't help us with was understanding cultural difference, or really respecting my parents. My dad would drop me off. He would wait until the staff was there. I was always the first one there. But they never interacted with families. They never helped them to understand the process. I got a lot of help with college access.

I got into Boston University. I had never been to Massachusetts. I had never been to the East Coast. Almost, basically, a full ride. I decided to go. I didn't get to see it ahead of time. I didn't even know where Massachusetts was to be honest. I remember someone said, "Oh, that's where Harvard is. Cambridge is there." I have no idea where Cambridge is. I can't even imagine...I've never been on a plane with my whole family before. Because I had gone to this higher income school, I now know all how admissions work, right? It was easier for me to get in somewhere like Boston University because it's a higher rated academic school. The college access program made sure I knew how to apply, and I got in. For me, growing up, it's just so crazy.

I ended up going to Boston University, and I took a red-eye flight to move myself in. I didn't know any better. I got on a red-eye, Jet Blue flight, with my luggage. Got off the plane, rolled my luggage out. I took two trains, two buses, whatever to get yourself into 575 Commonwealth Avenue, which is right next to Fenway Park. I didn't really understand that I was going to go and be with bastions of privilege of people who...I had someone say they had never been to McDonald's before; people never been in Walmart. Every two weeks, that's where we would go on our paycheck; go get a Happy Meal. I moved into a place where I didn't even understand what I was going to face.

That really impacted the rest of my career because then I learned; I understood now. I went to seven different schools. I experienced all the education gaps. I then went to a very high

income, private, elite liberal arts college and was the only one that looked like me or had my experience. I worked two jobs. I ended up getting good grades, and I think that's what really saved my life, wow.

For the first semester, I didn't like it. "I hate it here." I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't feel like people understood me. My roommate, who, bless her heart, tried her best. I remember her parents. Her dad went to MIT. Her mom went to Boston University and was one of the first female engineer graduates. They couldn't believe that I had moved myself in. I remember he built me an ethernet cord. I didn't even have my parents there. People always tried their best to relate to me. My best friends at college were people who were like me that had a work-study as well.



*Fig. 4: With friends during freshman year at Boston University, 2004-2005*

But because I got good grades, I realized, okay, I can hang here; I'm meant to be here, and really just got involved. Whether it was the Admissions' Student Diversity Board, a mentor at my college, I just got really involved. I became a resident assistant. I realized I could make a

difference for people like me. That's what led me to join Teach for America. All this to say, how did I get to Las Vegas, right? In 2008, I was accepted into Teach for America.

One of the funny parts about Vegas for a family like mine—my parents like to gamble. I mean, I like to gamble. I don't know. [Laughing] My parents like to gamble, so this was their vacation. Growing up, when they could save enough money, they would come to Vegas. I remember the most fun I had was when we would stay at Circus Circus. My parents would drop us off at Primm so that we could go shopping, and then we'd go to Circus Circus.

I don't know what it was. I think I realized, after being on the East Coast for four years in the cold with no car, I really preferred to be in a more inclusive environment. I think Boston University and Boston really showed me what it's like to have a less integrated society, really long-term institutional racism in a place like Boston. Nobody spoke Spanish; I had never experienced that before, coming from California. I wanted to go somewhere similar to home but not home because California was never my home because I moved around so much.

In 2008, I was accepted in Teach for America in Las Vegas. Las Vegas was my first choice. It's where I wanted to go. Actually, oh, I'm so old and I don't remember, it was my second choice. My first choice, I actually put Phoenix because it was more 'deserty.' But I feel very lucky that this is where I ended up coming.

In 2008, though, the recession, oh, my gosh. In 2008, I got here. I lived in the Plaza for a week with my roommate. It was great because we were like, "Oh, \$20, at a casino, this is cool." I drove around East Las Vegas because I didn't know where I was going to teach, but I knew it would be around there. I lived in an apartment on Harmon and Boulder. I lived in that apartment right in front of the big dog park. I know people know about that dog park. Before the East Side Cannery was built. I lived behind the East Side Cannery; it wasn't even there yet. I could pay

rent because a one-bedroom apartment was, like, six hundred bucks. It ended up being ten minutes away from my school.

I taught at Goldfarb Elementary School, which is the Orchards community, a few blocks north of Charleston and Nellis, so closer to Charleston and Sloan. I lived here for a whole year by myself. I worked really hard. I was a very diligent teacher. I did nothing but work because I felt like it was my time to give back to young people who are like me.

2008 was so transient. I experienced young people who were in my class, and then they were not in my class. That part of the east side is really interesting. It's pretty diverse. I had AAPI kids. I had African American students. I had White kids. I had Latinx kids. I didn't expect that, either. I fell in love with my students. The theme of my classroom was "Leaders in Training."



*Fig. 5: Erica Mosca's Leaders in Training-themed classroom*

I'll stop with this—it's a long story—in a second. Then in 2009, my parents, one of them knew that they were most likely going to lose their job because of the recession. In Las Vegas at that time, I could buy a townhouse. In this whole period of our life, we had never owned. We always moved from apartment to apartment. I lived in a house for a little bit, but we rented it. I was able to do that. At twenty-one years old, I was able to start the process of applying to have

homeownership for our family. I was a first-year teacher on a \$32,000 salary at that time, and I was able to get a townhouse on Trop and Boulder. I lived there for a very long time. It's across from Sushi Twister. I love that place. I bought it knowing I was going to move my parents here because we weren't sure what was going to happen with them, and they loved Las Vegas. It just made sense. I was able to buy, the first one in my family to buy, and move my parents here.

Since 2009, Las Vegas has become home because it was the only place we could put down our stuff. It was a place that accepted us, and it was the place where I felt like it gave so much to me, and so I wanted to give back to it.

**Awesome. Thank you. I'm going to go back a little bit and ask you some questions. You said that your dad is a pressman. What exactly does that job entail?**

Oh, yes. The pressman is the guy that wears the blue-collar suit at night, and he had ink all over him. When the newspaper runs through a reel, if you've ever seen that, he is the one who has to set the ink into the paper. It's really loud. It's really big. Any paper here, they print the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, they print the *Las Vegas Sun*, they print the papers in Utah. It's very interesting because the press is now shrinking because of digital media. But it's right there on MLK and Bonanza by Tenaya Brewery; that's where he works, and they print all the print newspapers. You have to be able to know colors. You have to know how to set the plates. It's a little dangerous sometimes with all the big stuff, but it's an art, and he's been doing that for so long now.



**Did he get into that when he moved here?**

That's a great question. In 2008-2009, no one was printing. They were losing all the jobs. I'm glad you asked that. I really experienced... When my parents moved here, they could not find a job. That was the time of the recession. They did things like stand on the Strip with a sandwich board on them to try to get people to buy tickets. They were enumerators, so they would go to people's houses to make sure they would do the census. My parents are so funny. Everyone always says, "Oh, they're so loving." They're like teenagers; they've been together so long, but they're always together. My dad got that enumerator job, but he didn't want to go without my mom, and so my mom would go with him and canvass places.



*Fig. 6: Erica and her Father, Eric Mosca*

At some point, we just got really lucky that my mom found a temp agency, and they placed her where she has worked a long time now, at R and O Construction. It's a construction company in Henderson. She is the secretary. She's been there, I don't know how long, probably almost ten years now. They liked her so much that they bought out her temp contract, and she's been there.

My dad—I'll tell you later about what I do now, but I really understand what real people face—it was so hard for him to get a job. He applied to so many places. At one point, he was a security guard with Securitas. Those are contracted out security guards. He was at the hospitals. You know when you go to a hospital and there's a guard there. Those are such hard jobs; you're armed... And you get paid, like, \$10 an hour, and it's so dangerous. He did that, and then he did that for the RTC. He was a security guard that would go to the different bus stops. I remember

the year that a security bus stop person was shot on the Strip; that was his coworker. We're just really lucky that he didn't work that day. I know what it's like for people who have to just get a job to survive.

We're so lucky that eventually, maybe five or six years—I'd have to check—not the whole time he's lived here, there are finally openings. He would always check for the press. There was an opening, and he applied. He has a lot of experience. They hired him, and he's been there now for a long time, and he loves it there.

**That's awesome. Going back a little bit, do you know how your parents met? I know you said they met relatively soon after they immigrated here.**

Yes, after my dad immigrated here. I don't know. Who knows the story? There was some kind of under-twenty-one club, some social gathering where they met really young. I think my parents



*Fig. 7: Erica's parents, Carol and Eric Mosca, the weekend before the 82<sup>nd</sup> Nevada State legislative session.*

have a lot of issues they experienced in their own childhoods that they don't want to talk about. I think they found each other, and in each other they found their person. They were so young. I think they needed that.

It wasn't a perfect story. We tell all the young people we work with, "Life is not linear." I always say I grew up alongside my parents. It was a struggle, and there were issues that they had to deal with. They just had to survive, deal with poverty, deal with not having a higher education, deal with being evicted. We've been evicted before. We moved around. We had a car repossessed. We

experienced all of those things that people talk about when it comes to poverty. But I always had

two loving parents, and I think that's the story we don't always tell, is that they loved each other. They were just figuring it out. I'm very grateful that they stuck it out. They're still together.

What's funny is, and I say it's a very AAPI cultural thing, I bought that townhouse I talked about. We lived there for a time together. I was still a teacher at Goldfarb. Then I realized that I wanted to do educational equity work. From my own personal experience and from now being a teacher, I saw it firsthand. I went to the Ed School at Harvard. I left for a year. I think all I did for my two years here, 2008 to 2010, was work, and I was so burnt out. I didn't love Vegas at that time because it was synonymous with work. I remember there was a Chili's on Boulder and Tropicana that I loved. I would go there every Friday. And it closed. Then there was a Denny's, and it closed. I lived here during the recession. I wasn't loving it, so I went to Harvard. But I owned the townhouse, and my parents lived there.



*Fig. 8: Erica and her parents, Harvard graduation*

I realized pretty early, though, going back to Boston, which was good for me—I always say it was my year off going into a master's program. I got to go to the gym. I got to study what I

loved. I got to hang out with my friends that I had gone to college with. But I realized after probably two months in that Vegas had really become home and that whatever I was going to do next was going to be to help Nevada. I think I knew that, but I wasn't sure. Just being away for a little bit, I realized that was it. I did the Ed school there for a year.

I had made connections here, and my former boss at Teach for America, the executive director, Allison Serafin, had created some type of consulting contract with the new Superintendent who was coming, Superintendent Dwight Jones. I said, "I'll do anything. I'll come back. I'd love to work in CCSD. Let's take my personal experience, my experience in the classroom, my experience at Harvard, and let's make a difference for young people." I came back after a year.

While I was at Harvard, I did the Education Pioneers program, which was very helpful to support summer consulting groups. I worked for Teach Plus. Teach Plus is now here in Nevada, but I actually worked there, in Boston, in 2011. Then I also interned with Jeff Riley, who was the Superintendent for middle schools in Boston at the time. He was the Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts; I don't know if he is still. I interned with him, so I had policy experience.

The other thing that was really important, this whole time I was still talking to all my students. You look back at it, it's weird. But because I had experience, the education gap, and knew what I was missing, it was just my natural inclination because I had made good friends with some of the families. When I moved from my apartment to my townhouse, it was a family of a fifth grader who I had tutored extra, a Filipino, actually, who moved me. My parents couldn't come, and so that family moved me. I had really made deep relationships with families and students. I stayed connected with them. I came home over winter break from Harvard. We

took them ice skating. I think about it now, how did I do that? My ability and all this. But it was because I worked directly with families. The families dropped them off, and they all knew.

I came back. Gosh, I can just keep going. I forgot about a lot. But I was saying all that to say I came back—oh, and then my parents and I—people can't believe this—lived together until I got married—well, until I met my partner who is now my husband. We met in December 2018. We didn't move in together until the summer of 2019. That whole time when I came back in 2011, my parents and I lived together that whole time because culturally that's acceptable.

I can talk more about what I did in my profession, but I could not have started my nonprofit if it wasn't for my parents because my parents did my laundry. They paid the bills. It was my money, but I would give it to my mom. My mom made all my doctor's appointments. I was able to be a real entrepreneur and start the work of the community because I didn't have to worry about things at home. It took me a while before I could get paid when I came back to Vegas. I made \$80,000 as a twenty-five-year-old. That was more than both my parents combined. I was twenty-five. I didn't have a car yet because I didn't have a car in Boston. I didn't have a car in high school. My dad let me use his car the first month, and he would take the bus to work. We are family oriented, and people don't really get that.

When I got into Harvard, my dad was like, "Oh, people like us don't get into Harvard." Like, he didn't get it. In a very loving way because he just can't imagine it. Where did we go to celebrate? We went to Olive Garden on Charleston and Nellis. That's a big deal for us. Even though I have all these accolades, I have all these successes, I think what keeps me grounded is I still live in the real world.

I'm skipping now, but we lived in that townhouse for a long time. I was glad I was able to sell it. We made some money. I actually bought a home from a former teacher at Goldfarb

where I worked that was sixteen houses down from my placement school. I say I own my home sixteen houses down from the school I was placed in Teach for America, and that's where my parents live now, in East Las Vegas, and I live about five minutes from there.

**One more question about your childhood. What was it like moving around so much, but also, living in places that were so ethnically concentrated, like Mira Mesa? What was that experience like?**

Gosh, I feel like society has changed now. I wish I could have appreciated it more. But growing up, you have all these internalized issues of being "othered." I think, one, moving around a lot has made me very resilient today. I mean, why I'm an entrepreneur. It's very hard for people to not imagine being paid, or not having health insurance. I started my nonprofit and wasn't paid and had no health insurance. It's probably bad. I always say, there's no debtor's prison. I have had nothing before, so it doesn't scare me to have nothing because I always know that I will figure it out because of, now, all the accolades that I have. But I wouldn't feel that way if I didn't have this experience. I think moving around a lot allowed me to be someone who could make connections and relationships with people easily. It made me be able to be empathetic to people. But of course, at that time, you're mad. Why? But I'm grateful for it. My brother didn't have that same amount of moving, and I think in some ways we're a little different in the life paths that we chose, not good or bad, but I think it's different.

I think being ethnically concentrated, even in a place like San Diego or Palm Springs, I guess there was always people of color, but at the time, on TV or Barbie. We weren't having the conversations about inclusivity and needing figures who look like young people to understand. I never had a Filipino teacher or an Asian teacher even in very ethnically concentrated places. I think I always knew, too, to be Filipina, I think with my AAPI identity, which everyone's is

complicated, but mine felt complicated as a kid because we were Asian, but we were poor, and that's sometimes different than the stereotype. In the whole range of AAPI identities, Filipino identity is usually the more lower income one. When people would compare us...I always felt like an underdog. I always felt like a marginalized person, which really makes me an advocate today, and so I'm really proud of that.

**Actually, could you tell us a little bit about what made you want to pursue Teach for America and what kind of work you ended up getting to do there?**

Yes, that's great. Let me go there. It's a story. It was actually my dean, which was great, who donated to my campaign and is still in my life today, told me about Teach for America. When I learned what it was, I was like, "That's what I want to do," pretty early. That was my number-one thing I wanted to do after I graduated. I majored in print journalism. I love to write. I thought I was going to be a journalist. My beat would be education, and then I realized, man, I want to be in there teaching, a facilitator; I don't want to be the person writing the story about it. I got in, first in line. I applied right away. That's what I wanted to do.



*Fig. 9: Erica Mosca (far left) at Teach for America summer institute as Academic Dean*

I came here. I was a natural teacher. I don't know why. I'm pretty good at facilitating being in front of people and getting people's energy and getting them to listen and respond. I also am very organized. Being a teacher was right there for me, very organized. I just wanted to help people like me. That was what I came in with.

"Leaders in Training" was the theme of my classroom because I wanted them to know they could be leaders. We had college themes at the tables. We had leader bucks where it was our economy. They could earn leader bucks. They had a leader nametag where I took a picture. We would say the word *leader* in front of their names. It would say *Leader Linda*.

What's funny about it now...I was all about that, and then I went to the Ed School at Harvard. I worked for Superintendent Jones. I was the original project manager of the school performance framework. In Nevada, we rank all our schools by five stars. The original came off my computer when I was twenty-five years old. I really had this immense experience that I would have waited my whole life to move up to that central office on the fourth floor of the Sahara building. I learned pretty quick that policy is hard, especially in the Clark County School District. We made that school performance framework, really believing it would make change because we weren't evaluating schools before. We would, in the community, know what a school that wasn't doing well was, but we wouldn't actually label it. I know now people hate that. But if you at least label the school, you can give more support. We can give differentiated supports. We could help; that was always the purpose. If we know you're a lower rank, let's give you more supports, and let's not take it away right away. If you're a five-star, let's also talk about what's going well in our community, especially in places people didn't expect. That's what we wanted to show, the highlights.



But I just didn't see it trickling down in East Las Vegas where I still lived and with the kids I was still talking to. At this time, my students were in the eighth grade. I stayed with them fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth. I knew what was happening. I didn't live exactly in the community yet, but I lived on Boulder tangentially, and I knew what was happening to them. My kids were getting straight A's who should not have been; kids who are failing who should not have been. And I worked in the system now. Like, what?

I was just very naïve. I was twenty-five, twenty-six. I had made more money than I had ever seen before, so I had more savings than I had ever seen. Like I said before, it didn't scare me to be an entrepreneur. It didn't scare me to not have anything. Follow your dreams, like they say. I decided that I was going to start Leaders in Training as a nonprofit; that I would figure it out. I used my own savings. At night, I figured out how to write a 501(c) (3) application. I definitely had people help me figure out how to get a board. I talked to my old principal and said, "Hey, will you give us your portable after school? Our high schoolers who went to this school will come back and tutor the young people." Mostly, kids went to Vegas and ECTA, so they could walk, or I could pick them up after school.

That whole year that I was working in the superintendent's office, I got more motivated that I was working at this high-level place, I wasn't fulfilled, I wasn't married, I didn't have kids, I didn't have debt at that time, like, "Let's just try it. Why not? No one will notice if it doesn't work."

I asked the kids and their families to join. About twenty of them joined, mostly from my class, but some of their friends and cousins. The first year, in 2012, I started Leaders in Training as a nonprofit. The kids I have been with since they were ten, they are now fourteen. They would come after school three days a week to their old portable. We would tutor kids. We would do

leadership lessons. We would learn about college. We would volunteer in the community once a month. We would go on college trips. It was a very scrappy—that's what they called us—a scrappy nonprofit. Our budget was less than \$10,000. I didn't get paid, and so I was always consulting or doing something else. I didn't have health insurance. I really just believed we could make a difference.

Something really crazy happened that first year. Senator Reid put out the tickets for the inauguration, and we won them somehow. It was a random lottery. I had this decision at twenty-six: Should I spend almost all of our fiscal year budget to do something that was a once-in-a-lifetime? When people ask me, what is the craziest thing you've ever done, this is the answer. It was like, "Well, we could take kids from the east side to D.C. and watch President Obama get inaugurated. Why not?" But we had no money. We literally took an Amtrak. We drove to Arizona, took an Amtrak across the country, stayed one night in Washington, D.C. I had to call up all the people I knew and people who had friends and said, "Hey, if you let the kids stay here, I'll give you a ticket." We took two moms, bless their hearts. It was so hard for them. They had never been out of Vegas. Of course, it was going to be hard. I should have known. My dad went. Oh, my god, it was crazy. It was a crazy experience, but they got to see the inauguration. We took the Amtrak right back.

The couple of stories I always tell from that experience...One, there was a conductor on the train who stopped and talked to the kids and said he had never seen young people of different backgrounds interact so well because this was on the East Coast. It was very integrated. We had students from every racial background represented, and we were all together, and that's just not what they see in the East Coast because it's so much more segregated. That was interesting.

The second, so crazy, we ended up picking up the tickets at Senator Harry Reid’s office, and the young man who was the aide at the time, his name was Lance Arberry, and he asked us, “Oh, where are you coming from?” And he was like, “Wait. What? I went to Goldfarb.” We had taken these kids all the way from Vegas to Washington, D.C., and the college UNLV intern was from their community and was half-Black, half-Filipino. Just to see the kids, like, wow, I can do that someday. You can’t make that up. That’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done is take a whole bunch of twenty-year-olds across the country on Amtrak to see the inauguration.

It’s crazy. Some of those kids today—and this is skipping—but we really care about long-term outcomes—some of those kids from that trip, one is at Touro to become a PA. She is a first-gen American AAPI, grew up low income. She has followed her dreams. She graduated from UNR. She’s at Touro. One is the communications director at the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, so PLAN. When I see him, people are like, “How do you know Hector Fung?” It’s like, “Oh, I was his fifth-grade teacher. I’ve known him since he was ten.” I sat next to his mom at his wedding. He went on that trip. Another young person, Troy Emmons, on that trip was in my class in fifth grade. He is now a Clark County School District teacher. He has always wanted to give back.



*Fig. 10: Erica Mosca with first Leaders in Training college graduate, Angel Edwards-Fort*

One works at NBC as a broadcaster. One is the communications director at a Pilot Ed, which is a new charter school. We're able to see, where are these young people now? What is the impact?

It was really hard. Leaders in Training was the hardest thing I ever did. In this community, especially with my background—microaggressions all daylong—they'd ask me if I was a volunteer. They didn't understand I was the Founder and Executive Director. It took about five years before we really got any big money, before people cared. The Windsong Trust gave us twenty-five thousand at year three, and we would have closed if it wasn't for that. At year four, we finally...It takes four years. Now kids got into Boston University; kids got into University of San Diego, all from this little place in East Las Vegas. People were confused. Then by the fifth year, we did it again, and so then we got a grant from the United Way that allowed us to move out of this tiny portable to an office on Lamb and Washington next to Futuro Academy thanks to the founders, Ignacio Prado and Cindi Rivera, that gave us a space, so then we have a space. Then I was able to hire a staff. Every year we earned a little more money. I had to beg and plead and work with people.

At Leaders in Training, our vision is to empower students to be the first in their family to graduate from college, but more importantly, come back to our community to be the leaders that we need. It's a four-year high school after-school program, and it's a four-year postsecondary program so that we support students whether it's college, military, or trade school, but we make sure that every young person has a choice. Ninety percent go on to a traditional four years. Most stay here locally. Then some go to trade school, and we have three in the military. We have kids at NYU, Middlebury, USD. We have young people at HBCUs, all over the country, UNR. Now we have graduates, so we have an alumni program. Now we say, what are you doing, and how are you giving back? We have alumni who have graduated from University of San Diego, all of

our local institutions in the whole state. We had one graduate from...I guess it would be just USD. We have one who is going to graduate from Reed College and University of Michigan this semester.

We can say it took ten years. You want to see the change. It's not easy. It's not fast. Probably one of the hardest things to do—that first year, it was ten thousand. This past year, I've raised half a million. As a person of color, as a first gen, as someone without a network and a net worth, is what I usually say back then, and I'm a proximate leader. That's one of those terms that if you're a nonprofit person who has experienced the injustice you're trying to solve, you should be the person who is leading the org, right? That's real equity.

Then the hardest thing I did is I left. I left in July of last year. I knew I had to spend ten years. I ran it for ten years. I met my husband December 2018. We got married during COVID



*Fig. 11: Erica Mosca and her husband, Nick Smith*

on Zoom in April 2020. Not even engaged. He is in the military, so we didn't know what was going to happen to him because he is a medic. We thought he was going to get shipped out. We just got married on paper and we're going to live together. I could feel my world changing. I started at LIT at twenty-six and left at thirty-six—oh, I guess thirty-five, and that was really hard. It was great, though. I left. A lot of founders don't leave. They have founder's syndrome. They stay.

I am on the board. The first six months, I met with the executive director once a week, and now I don't meet with him. Some people don't even know I left. That's the biggest compliment there can be when you

can create something that is sustainable and that you can take yourself out of it. I left so that I could run for political office.

**Did you have medical insurance by the time you left?**

Oh, good question. So funny, one of my really good friends, Lindsay Eanes, she was on our board, and she was like, “I’m going to leave this board when you finally get insurance.” I think by year seven, we did. Now I’m on my husband’s insurance. But even understanding that...

I pursued political office. I won. I’m the first Filipina to ever be in the state legislature. I represent East Las Vegas. It’s like everything that I could have ever wanted without knowing that I probably wanted that because I never saw anyone that looked like me be in political office, so I couldn’t imagine that that would have been my path. But what’s really interesting about me is I’m a liberal Democrat. I usually say I’m a pragmatic progressive because I started a business. I wish I could have had health insurance, but I couldn’t pay myself health insurance. I hire people, and we hire at \$15 an hour, but I know what that means on my budget. For us, an example, we made a decision that we pay for 70 percent of dependent healthcare. I wish it were 100 percent.

But even having these conversations at a state level, I not only know education, I not only know what it’s like to live from a struggling background and still be in the community, even though I’m not struggling as much, I still choose to live there, but I also know what it means to have to balance a budget and understand competing costs and line items. I’m really excited that I’m on the Education Committee, but I’m also on the Revenue Committee, and I think that’s where, hopefully, my contribution will be, as someone who is a businesswoman but is a social justice advocate, holding both things. We’ll see. That’s what I’m excited to see, how is that all going to play out?

### **What inspired your decision to run for political office?**

A lot of people don't realize that I actually ran in 2016. Once we got our first group through into college, I was still young. I was twenty-nine. I was like, "See, we did it. I can have more impact." I was pretty naïve. I lived on Boulder and Trop [Tropicana], and it's not the same district as Charleston and Nellis, which is not the same district as Sahara and Nellis. I moved a little bit over. But at that time when I ran in 2016, the assembly person didn't really ever respond to me. I didn't feel like I was getting the feedback, and I was trying to make a difference. I just decided to run. I had never really gone to a party event. I didn't know what a caucus was. This is someone who is just coming from the community who wanted to run. I learned pretty quick that you don't do it that way. You usually don't run against an incumbent, especially of your own party. You usually don't not seek the caucus endorsement. I think that's a really important experience for me that I tried it as a regular person and was shut down. They said things about me that weren't true. It wasn't a positive experience in some ways. But I had that experience, which was good. I didn't win, and I was like, ugh. It took me a long time, but it put me on that radar, and that's a good thing.



*Fig. 12: Erica Mosca's 2016 run for Nevada State Assembly*

I tell young people, just run. There are systems in place, and I understand why there are. But we also have to recognize there are real people that just want to make a difference. Because I did that, I was always on the radar. They were always thinking about me. I was always asked in some way, when are you going to do it again? I always said *no* because I was done with it after that experience.

But then this time around, I'm now married. I have a more stable income. Our legislature is a citizen legislature. It can be very hard to figure out how to pay your bills and go up there as a single person. Now I'm married. I have a husband who pretty much knew this was probably going to be it, who understands a strong woman and could see that this was a path and was fine with it. The seat was open in East Las Vegas. Someone had termed out. They say politics is all about timing, setting yourself up to be asked during that timing, and it was time to go at LIT. I like to think I would always have left, but I needed something to throw myself into so that I wasn't telling people what to do even though I'm not there anymore. I decided to run. I interviewed with the caucus in January of 2022. I was endorsed. I was still at LIT during the primary, but after I won the primary, I left.

Now I'm an education consultant. I created my own LLC. Just doing some work that I always say I can do with my eyes closed, stuff I love, getting young people to give feedback. I'm working on the Portrait of a Learner to get young people to give their feedback in what they want standards to be. I've worked with the Asian Community Development Council on their College Readiness Bootcamp. Really anything in the college access, student empowerment nonprofit space. I'm just not able to do as much right now because of the session. I needed something flexible.



I move tomorrow up to Carson City where I'll be until June. Then when I return in June, my husband is like, "You've got to make more money." I've either got to get more consulting contracts or get a real job, is what I say. I think the cool part is it's probably one of the first times in my life I don't have a plan, and it's cool. I can just see, what do we get to do?

I ran for office to help people. I want to take the experience on the ground, my personal experience, and my professional experience, and have a say in the policies that are made. I really hope that we can make a difference at scale, or I'm not going to keep doing it. We'll see.

**What are you most excited to work on this upcoming legislative session?**

One of my bills that I'm excited about is actually a higher ed bill. It would be interesting to get your thoughts. I know in higher ed from the students I work with that if you owe on your bill, like if you owe \$105 because you didn't pay something or you have a late fee, you can't access your transcript. That's just policy. It makes sense to me why it's a policy. We need young people to pay their debts. We know institutions pay for things. I get all that. But I've also seen on the other end where young people then don't go to school. They need that transcript to transfer. You're telling me you're not going to give me my transcript? I'm done with you. Especially first-gen youth who then accrue loans who then have to pay back. Or young people who are trying to get a job need their transcripts to apply.



*Fig. 13: Erica Mosca and students at the 82<sup>nd</sup> Nevada legislative session*

One of my bills is to have—the Board of Regents develop a policy, “Well, we don’t do that anymore; our young people can get their transcripts.” But it’s not a fee waiver, and so they still have to pay back, but we just have to come up with a mechanism that will allow them to pay the debt. It’s interesting because that can seem like such a small thing, but we know on the ground how many people that impacts, especially in our community. When I share this example with people, so many people don’t even know it’s an issue because unless you’re on the ground, you don’t really know.

I’m really working on policies that are pragmatic that will help people that have to do with access that hopefully are not a big shift but will make a difference. I’m at least trying to do this session that way. I’m on Revenue and Education, and then I’m on Judiciary. All my bills are basically education related, but I know we’ll touch on other issues and areas just through committees and what I’ll be voting on.

**Very cool. You’ve been in Vegas for a substantial amount of time. Throughout your time here, I was wondering how you’ve seen things change, especially in your area, which is education. Have you seen CCSD change?**

Wow, yes, I would say there’s a lot of changes. I think with education—and it’s interesting because I am a proud Democrat, and not all Democrats like charter schools. I’m a pro charter advocate because I’ve seen what happens to kids. That’s what I care about. I’ve seen young people stuck at a school where no one cares about them, no one pays attention to them, and they go to a different school, and now they’re graduating and going to college. I’ve seen it firsthand many, many times. In 2012, we didn’t have any charters here.

I think something that happened negatively was that the charter authority just let people open them anywhere. I think that’s where you get all the arguments today that there are a whole

bunch of charters on the outer rims and several in Henderson, and there are some in the inner core. The purpose is really to get them in the inner core. It's really interesting how it played out.

I was on the Charter Authority for the last year and a half. I know now how, under a different director, it's very different. To open a charter now, you have to fit a needs assessment, which you have to have certain demographics, you have to be near schools with a certain star rating. I am supportive of charter schools, especially knowing now what they have to do to open. Charter schools are public schools that a lot of people don't realize. That's different that there were no charters in 2012.

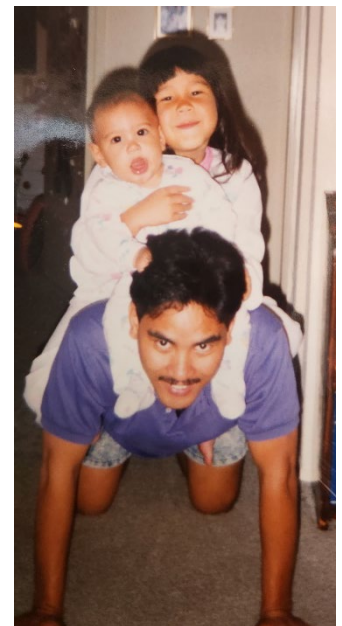
We are the first, I'm pretty sure—no one has ever told me different—we're the first Las Vegas based college access program. What that means is we have GEAR UP. We have AVID in schools. We have I Have a Dream Foundation. Core Academy used to be I Have a Dream Foundation. Those are all things that started in other places that people opened here. Leaders in Training was the first, from Las Vegas for Las Vegas, nonprofit. That's crazy because I did a college access program in California. I would say there are much more of us now. I remember when Communities in Schools was just the bag pack program; that's what we knew of it as. Think about how it's expanded to statewide. There was no JAG before, either. (Jay Forinchi) wasn't here. I think in the nonprofit after-school space, in school space, there has been a lot of growth, which is good. I feel there is still not enough.

We've always had the teacher vacancy issue. That's always been there. I think what's changed in the environment is I've never heard people talk so much about breakup of the school district. I think people would say it hush-hush. This is the first time I've really heard it promoted widely.

The people-centered funding formula, we changed how we funded schools from the Nevada plan to the pupil-centered funding formula. I've always been a fan of that. When I ran for the first time, I talked about that because most states are that. Really, the money is supposed to follow the student, and we're supposed to give more money to certain demographics who we know need more support. We have to see if that works. I always tell people if the student funding formula really works, and we need to give it time to see, I could support a breakup. I don't know yet. We have to make sure that the money is going to kids and that it's going to the right place because I always say if you gave East Las Vegas its own district, we would be fine if we had the money. If we had the money we should have, I think we could do the work and really show people what's possible in the community because so much of the achievement just gets averaged out because we're so big. But I am not going to be supportive of it if the money doesn't work, so I'm still open.

**Where does your brother live right now?**

He lives in Oakland. He always tells me don't say San Francisco. He lives in Oakland. He went to the Academy of Art. He is proud LGBTQ. He came out in high school. He is really awesome, like an advocate, a very strong individual. He did fashion photography, which was really cool. He used to work at The RealReal. He worked at Stitch Fix for a long time. He actually just lost his job with the recession. I know we say, "It's coming; it's not coming." He was making more money than I was or I am, but he actually unfortunately just lost that job. Hopefully he'll be finding something else. But he lives in Oakland.



*Fig. 14: Erica and her brother Eddie Mosca playing with their dad.*

He comes to Vegas for all the holidays, but then ends up hating it here after a week or two. He doesn't drive, so it's really hard. He doesn't have a license because in the Bay Area, you don't need a license. Coming to Vegas, he's like, "No." It's where he relaxes. He goes to my parents' house. I just saw him over winter break.

**What does your family do for cultural celebrations? What kind of traditions do you guys still follow?**

I think in some ways, I'd say we are very culturally Filipino, but my parents are pretty insular people. They're not at the events with all the aunties and the uncles. They're their own little unit, their own little thing. They're pretty antisocial, but they have each other. It's more probably our tradition. Something my husband always makes fun of, like we have ham at Thanksgiving, and we always have rice. I didn't even know that's a tradition, but it is because it's different. We have that. We get together pretty frequently. We're proud to be Filipino, but I think in some ways, my parents...It's interesting. I just say it's just how they are, if that makes sense. They're not so big on going to the cultural events unless I make them go. I think it's more just we eat the food.

I don't speak Tagalog. I think that's hard. My mom doesn't speak Tagalog, either, but my dad does. Anytime he sees someone that speaks Tagalog, they speak Tagalog. But they shop at a Palengke on Stewart and Nellis. They buy all their groceries from Pacific Island Harbor, the grocery store. They are cultural, but it's more the everyday, if that makes sense.

**Yes. What kinds of foods do you guys cook or eat?**

Oh, yes. The funny thing about me is I don't cook at all, and people don't really believe me when I'm like, "No, I don't cook." It comes from this place of seeing my grandmothers and my aunts. I'm the only one that went to college out of everybody, like my cousins, my aunts, my uncles. I

think as a little kid, I was probably bad, a little elitist. I was like, “Ugh, I’m not going to roll lumpia; I need to do my homework.” I wanted to do schoolwork, and I didn’t want to be serving people. In some ways, I took it too far because I really don’t know how to cook.

But my husband is so funny because he is the person that cooks. He loves to cook. He also loves Asian culture. He was stationed in Japan for four years. It’s like the best time of his life. He cooks lots of Asian food. He is a white guy from Georgia, so it’s really funny. We will make lumpia sometimes. We honestly just get the frozen kind and fry it. But we definitely have adobo; that’s our favorite thing to eat. I won’t eat dinuguan. I mean, I’ve had it before. My dad made my husband eat balut in front of him, which is the egg and the...Some people don’t know that. He did that, I think, to show him he was legit. Then of course, though, we have the pandesal and the siopao.



*Fig. 15: Erica and her husband, Nick Smith, on the Legislature floor*

**Also, growing up, obviously, your parents are very Filipino, and you guys have embraced the culture, but how has that affected how you've understood your own identity, and how has that changed throughout your life?**

I think this is an interesting question, too. I'll be honest, it's probably recently that I'm so loud and proud. It's kind of funny because the work I've been doing in East Las Vegas, it's a very Latinx community, and so in some ways, you always feel like, well, you're doing the work, but you're not Latinx, and you feel some type of way towards that that can be perceived in the community or be perceived to funders. A lot of education funding, especially grants, they say very specifically, "Only to Black, African American, or Latinx founders." When we talk about diversity in teachers, we usually talk about Black, African American, and Latinx. In some ways, it's so interesting to always have to fight for that AAPI identity. I think a lot of people don't even know—now they do because it's all we talk about, but before. I think I can blend. They know I'm a person of color. They know I'm a minority, but they don't know exactly what. It's just been so interesting.

I would honestly say ACDC, the Asian Community Development Council, was the first group that was like, "Oh, you're an AAPI founder; we're going to give a grant to you." That's when it was like, okay, I can use this. It's my identity that I've always had, but I haven't found a way to use it to my advantage yet, and I don't even know if that's the right way to say it. It's not like there was a grant for Filipino educators or Filipino nonprofit founders. I've always identified as being low income even though I'm not low income now; I'm working class. My whole identity has always been... When I introduce myself, I say, "I'm a proud first-generation college graduate," because that's the assets' base way of saying I grew up low income and got a Pell Grant.

I've always felt more comfortable with people like me who are from more marginalized communities. We know in the Filipino culture there is a huge difference. In the AAPI culture, there is a huge difference between what people's social class ranks are. I've really always just felt more comfortable to be around people who grew up poor.

I've done all my work, but for the AAPI community, which is also interesting, too. We've had some AAPI students. We have at least 20 percent of our kids are Asian in LIT, which is bigger than the population there, which I think sometimes comes when you have an Asian founder.

But really, it was meeting ACDC, them being here, them really being proud of our heritage. That's when I got more involved in things. I got to travel to Washington, D.C. for the AAPI Lobby Day with them. That's when I was like, okay, now I can have this identity, and it was more an asset or positive that I was AAPI, but I was working for people who are not AAPI because then it's, how do you have those lines of empowering the whole community? It's just so full circle that now running for office—when I ran the first time, Senator Rochelle Nguyen was not in office. When I ran in 2016, it was like, there are no Asians. Hello, I'll just run because I'll be the first AAPI. I lost, but I couldn't believe that I would be the first Filipino or Filipina to ever win. That was just such an assets based in the campaign that I just feel like in some ways, my whole life is full circle of, like, wow, I can really own this identity that I've always had, but there has been nowhere to wear it. It hasn't fit somewhere. Now it just so fits. People love it. I'm so proud and happy.

I've been working with the Filipino community since I met them in 2016. I was part of AAPI Dems a long time ago when Tita Margie and Tito Beck were running it. I've always kind of been there, and sometimes it's like, who are you and where have you been? You're now



representing us, but we don't see you at the parties. I say, "I've been doing work in the community." I at least have met them and I've worked with them. I've sent volunteers. But I think when I talk to groups, I just recognize a lot of the groups have done the work for a long time, and I'm only in office because of the groundwork that they laid even if it didn't touch me directly, and it's now my responsibility to make sure that the door is left wide open so that people like me can continue. We always say first but not the last, and if we are the last, then we didn't do our job.

**Have you faced discrimination in your life, and if so, how has that affected you?**

Yes, for sure, I have faced discrimination. I would say growing up, it's like, you're not Asian enough because it wasn't what people knew of. I went to school with a lot of young people of Mexican decent. But I wasn't a Mexican, right? But I always felt like I was lumped, too. I think my discrimination really comes from being, again, a poor person of color and schools not understanding or respecting. My parents hated when they would go to school, and they would say, "Oh, I thought you were her sister," because we all look young, I think, so they looked really young back then. I think people didn't take them seriously when they were trying to advocate for me. I think they didn't know how to advocate.

I think my whole life would have changed... When I was in the seventh grade, I had an English language arts teacher who I loved, Ms. Jackson. In the eighth grade, I wasn't put in the advanced track, and she was so mad. She went to the principal's office and got my classes changed. She couldn't believe it.

That wasn't something that my parents would have known to do. I would say my is like a pit bull. She is the one; if she feels like you even slighted her, she's going to say something. It's internalized because she feels like someone is always doing something to her, and it's true in some ways. I think by that time in my life, they had always just pushed her back so much in elementary school that she wouldn't have even known what to do or what to say.



*Fig. 16: Erica and her mother, Carol Mosca*

Yes, definitely I faced discrimination by just being the only person in the room, but I always say it's my superpower. I can walk into a board room of all White men and pitch Leaders in Training and get a grant, and then go home at night and go to a quince on the east side and feel more comfortable at that quince than with that board room, but I can work that board room just as much.

I think it's taken a long time to come into my identity, to not have the imposter syndrome, to be proud of who I am, and to understand that everything I'm doing is to push it forward. The real work of Leaders in Training is to have diversity in leadership that I will not see in my lifetime but knowing that I at least helped lay the groundwork. I've never seen a Filipino teacher, never seen an Asian mentor. Think of the thousands of kids I've now worked with who at least know what a Filipino is because I worked with them. Hopefully, now being in the legislature, I can bring that up, too.

**Before you leave Las Vegas for four months, what do you think you're going to miss the most?**

Because my husband is in the military, he can't move. Some people's spouses have easier jobs where they can be online. I'm coming home every weekend. We've got all those plans already made. I've got to visit my parents, my mother-in-law. We want to do events in the community on the weekends, so I'll be here every weekend.

But what will I miss? I, actually, this month took time and went to all seventeen counties. I talked to every superintendent about my bills, or someone on staff. I think that's important. Now that I've seen the whole state, I think I can talk more about all this. I think I'll miss all our hole-in-the-wall food in East Las Vegas that I love, of course. I love the weather here, and that's why I live here, so I'll miss the weather. But I think I've already made it part of my value set that I'm bringing the community with me up there. We've already booked seven flights for young people to come up to Carson. My parents are coming up. I was just talking on the way over to one of my interns who is going to find a cheap bus so we can bring people up. I think I'm going to miss things, but I think I know how to keep them with me, if that makes sense, or at least try to.

**I'll pass it on to Jerwin and Stefani.**

**JT: Just a few questions. I wanted to know in your opinion, what do you feel are the most pressing issues facing the AAPI community today?**

I think AAPI hate is about people not understanding differences in culture, differences in people. I think stereotypes still exist, of course, discrimination. I think within our own community, people not being inclusive is a problem, language barriers. But I think the biggest thing is probably just, are people understanding what's happening, and then people understanding about

us? Places like—not just ACDC, but the ACRC with Mark and different organizations now exist that didn't exist before, which gives us visibility to help our community.

**Thank you. Just overarching goals in your career, what do you plan to do after your term?**

That's a good question. That's part of this not having a plan. I'm pretty open. If someone says, what's your dream of dreams, I'm always like, I will be the Secretary of Education someday. My dream is really in the ed world, ed space, to make a difference, whatever that may be. It's the first time in my life I don't have a plan.

**Thank you. Lastly for me, since we covered a lot of your career based aspects, I wanted to know more about your hobbies and what you do in your free time and things like that.**

I think now it's great that young people think about that more. I was in a generation of the hustle culture. You work hard. There are nights I didn't sleep. That's what's important to your success. We always made ourselves feel better that our success was about helping other people. You'd be like, I'm not trying to get money; I'm trying to help people so I can burn myself out. I think for a long time my identity was work. I think that's okay. I know not everyone agrees with that. I love my work. It's fine. It's good that once we got to that point of sustainability, I could do more things, like some funny things. I love J. Cole. He is my favorite rap artist, and he's all I talk about and listen to. I somehow—this is so crazy—got the COO of Live Nation is on the LIT board, very randomly. I talk about it so much. He came to town, and I got to meet him. I gave him a First Gen Icon Award. We took pictures. I met a kid that also loves J. Cole that's not in college go meet him, and then he enrolled back in school. I'm a big J. Cole fan.

I have a dog named Panda, a border collie mix. I spend a lot of time with him. I think it's so funny. I love to veg out, and my husband hates it. If we start a show, I want to watch all of it.

Even though I'm not being productive, I guess it's productive to feel like you finished it. I can binge when I have time.

I used to go to Camp Rhino and be a really good workout person. That's what I loved, but not anymore. No time.

Thank you. I'll hand it over to Stefani.

**SE: I just have a few as well. You mentioned at one point that you know what it feels like to go through eviction and repossession. Can you talk some more about that?**

Yes, yes, yes.

**How that affected you as a kid and how you watched your parents go through that.**

Yes, and I think that's important. It's stuff people don't want to talk about, but I think you have to talk about it because it's happening in people's lives. Yes, I definitely experienced where we would have to move because my parents couldn't pay rent. There were times where we lost all our stuff. The hardest part is I know my parents had a storage unit, and they lost all their pictures. I watched the car be rolled out. I've walked to school in the heat before. It's tough because there is some type of shame that there shouldn't be around that. But they were working. That's the thing. My parents were working two or three jobs just to put a roof over our heads. When we don't have a system that supports that, we know it's a system issue. The hardest thing as a kid is you don't know it's a system issue.

That's what all my work in Leaders in Trainers, we talk about structural inequity. I think young people love it because it's a community because they know they're poor, but no one wants to talk about it, especially at school. Now when you have a group of people where you can be like, "Oh, yes, me too. But what are we doing about it?" Well, we're on a college track, or we're going to do XYZ. They feel some empowerment.

I think that's what's going to make me a strong politician, I hope, is that, yes, I have a degree from wherever, and I'm a successful professional, but those are the experiences that most impact all of my viewings of the world. Why I choose to live in East Las Vegas is because I feel more comfortable on Sahara and Nellis than I do in Summerlin, still. Whatever internalized thing that is, I think it's pride that I come home to the east side of how I grew up. I just want to help people like me because I'm not ashamed of those experiences.

**Given your identity based on income or class, how did the model minority myth play out in your life?**

I appreciate that question because that's why the question about my AAPI identity is so complicated. People sometimes would put that myth on. Well, if you don't have food to eat, you're not that. People couldn't put me in a box. Oh, you're AAPI. You're Asian. In school, I was quiet, very differential, very respectful, but I didn't have all the resources. I think I always dealt with, where do you fit when you don't really fit? I have more AAPI friends now for sure, but growing up I didn't have that many. I think that's the complicated identity work for a lot of people. Now because people are so proud that I'm the first Filipina, I can be proud of this identity, but it's not the same for so many Filipinos or Filipinas because it's the low-income experience that makes it so complicated.

**How might the income affect the way people can interact with their own communities when they're working three jobs?**

Oh, yes, yes. That's the thing like I said about that nonprofit was...My dad just dropping me off at that nonprofit was the most he could do, and to some people that's not anything. You just dropped her off. My nonprofit should have been thanking him for his sacrifice that he would make sure I was there. I think understanding that there are scales of what people are able to do

when they're just trying to survive. When I ran Leaders in Training, we loved parents. We texted them all the time. We had parents' meetings. There is a hundred people in a room, and we take them to the Mob Museum or the Las Vegas Lights, and it's a whole family. We have kids present, and so that's why they want to be there. We are very differential. We always say, it's not me, it's you. We make kids thank their parents. At the scholarship night, they have to thank their parents. They have to talk about what their parents did. I think it's that we don't understand that, yes, a parent didn't come to a teacher conference because they're working because don't you want them to make sure they have somewhere to live? Unless you've experienced that, it's really hard for you to understand. That is the bigger sign of love and sacrifice that if you're not from the identity, you miss it.

**How might Leaders in Training or some other nonprofit create that opportunity for these families that are working all these different shifts to create community?**

One example I always give is...I have a phone, an LIT phone. We always text parents all the updates. We say one thing is that the picture should be to a parent before it's on social media. Even thinking about that, that we use these young people's pictures to market, we give it to the real person who is owed the thank-you. That's why we always include them. If we have an event, if we go to Reno on the bus for ten hours, they get texted every other hour what's happening because those are their kids. Whenever we have volunteer opportunities, they're always invited on the trips.

One story I always tell is I had a parent. I met the mom. I never met the dad. The mom went to the meetings. But they're all on the text chain. Adding both parents; people forget about that. I'd always need volunteers. When we were moving offices to a new office, we needed painting done. I always am setting up these asks. This parent after three years showed up, and I

had never met him, and it was because I had asked for something he could do. He was a painter. He had his whole paint truck, his whole paint crew, and they did it because he was asked. It was continuing to ask until there was something he could do. He showed up. I think people just understanding, that allows space. In this proximate leadership thing, we have to have more people in positions of leadership who understand that on a visceral level. Yes, you can learn that. We need allies. You can execute that. But you need some people who already know that because that happened to them, and that's when real change will happen.

**I'm going to turn it back to Cecilia for the last question.**

**CW: Is there anything else that we haven't asked you about that you would like to talk about?**

This is great. We talked about so much. I guess the only other thing that I would say is that I also know I'm here from two grandmothers who had no options at all. Both married White men in the military, and I never thought that that's what I was going to do, so it's so funny. They came here, and they're both still alive. I don't get a chance to thank them or talk to them as much as I should, just like living in the world, but I do understand their immense sacrifice is why I'm here.

I never thought it would be like this. I was very much like, we're not going to get married and have kids; I'm just going to go to work. But my husband really is the reason why I'm able to do the work I can do because he supports me as a partner financially, mentally, in all ways. I just always love to say that anything I do, it is as much a part of him. Thanks, Nick.

**ALL: Thank you.**

Thank you.

**[End of recorded interview]**