

[00:02] **Evan Slupe:** My name is Evan Slupe. I am here with José Cardoso, and this is for History 439. So could you just go ahead and start off and tell me your name, your age, and who you are.

[00:18] **José Cardoso:** I am José Cardoso Martinez. I am twenty-four and I'm originally from Mexico and I've been in the US for the last fifteen years, fourteen to fifteen years.

[00:33] **E:** When did you come over from Mexico? At what age?

[00:36] **J:** I think I was around nine or ten years old. I can't really tell you exactly. I know it was in 2003 and I was in third grade when I arrived here at Harrisonburg, Virginia.

[00:52] **E:** What was that transition like from moving from Mexico to the United States? What do you remember about that process?

[00:57] **J:** It was really hard, to be honest, coming to a new country with no English at all, not knowing anyone. Of course my dad had some family, some relatives, living here, but it's still not the same. You're used to having friends having your whole family in your country and then showing up somewhere else you have to start brand new. So that was really hard that whole process, and it took a while to get used to the culture here in the US and to start making friends again and to start picking up the language and so it wasn't easy at all.

[01:38] **E:** And so you say your father, did he have family here in the area? Or what was the connection that brought you to Harrisonburg.

[01:43] **J:** Yeah my dad was a migrant worker for ten or twenty years, something like that. He used to work in Oregon state and then once he was finally able to obtain documentations for my family and I to come to the US he decided to move here to Harrisonburg. And the connection was my uncle. My uncle was working here, he had been living here in Harrisonburg for a few years, and he told my dad, want to try Harrisonburg? There are poultry plants for your wife. There's good schools for your children and jobs around poultry plants and construction for you to come. So that's when my dad decided to come to Harrisonburg. He was here for six to eight months before my mom, my sister, and I actually arrived, but I guess he liked it so we landed in Harrisonburg.

[02:49] **E:** So when he came over was he working in the poultry factories? What was he doing when he first came over?

[02:55] **J:** No, as soon as he came over, my uncle was working under construction and he got my dad a job right away. I think he only had to wait like a week or two or something like that through the whole hiring process. My dad has been working in the same place ever since. Construction for the last 15 years that we've been here. He went from working in the fields and picking apples and other fruit to working construction.

[03:28] **ES:** Did your mom also work when you first came over?

[03:31] **JC:** In our community there was a lot of unregistered babysitters, so my mom was like a babysitter in the neighborhood where we used to live because we lived in a little trailer. It was a two-bedroom trailer for four people. She was like a babysitter during the day, my dad was a construction worker, but that was only for the first couple months, first six or eight months and after that my mom was like, well I need benefits. How about if I get injured? I need insurance. So that's when she decided to work in the local poultry plants. She worked in several ones, then she got laid off from one I can't remember the name of it. She got laid off because I think that was when the economy started to go down here or something like that. Then after that, she changed poultry plants. Now she's working Purdue in Bridgewater and she's been there for I think a good ten, twelve years now I believe.

[04:37] **E:** When your father came over, he had documentation and then was he was able to get documentation for the rest of your family? For you, your mother, and your sister? How did that process go?

[04:46] **J:** No, my dad was undocumented when he first arrived to the US. He came several times to the US undocumented and during his last time he was – both him and I talk about it – and he was like, the last time I was coming to the US, I was like I'm going to make enough money, be here for one year and make enough money so I can go back to Mexico and start a small business: a small store. That was his plan. But that last year that he came, that's where something happened in the US where they started giving documents to several people, I can't remember who was the president. Either way, that year he applied and thanks to his boss in Oregon he was able to receive documents and as soon as he got his documents he put the application for my family. And I believe he put that application in '93 or something, 80's or 90's, it was around the early 90's when he put that application in. My family and I did not receive our documents until the early 2000's, so it took like ten years and tons of talks with lawyers and tons of money from my dad apparently, but during those ten years he was coming back and forth from Mexico to the US. He would spend 9 months in the US working, 3 months in Mexico visiting us and then would do it all over. But once we obtained our documents he said, okay, you guys are ready. You don't have to suffer crossing the border, crossing the desert or river or anything like that. You guys are ready. So that's when he decided to bring us here to Harrisonburg.

[06:50] **E:** What was that trip like? Did you drive all the way from where you were to Harrisonburg?

[06:55] **J:** I still remember the trip. It wasn't good, trust me. I was little kid, nine years old, I still remember I was excited. Back in Mexico if you say that you're going to the US they're like, oh yeah, you're going to the US! That's awesome! I was like, yeah I'm going to the US! I didn't know what it meant, I didn't know that I wasn't going to have any family or anything so I was like, this is going to be cool. I remember getting on the bus and the first hour it was all cool. We came on a bus so I think it was a two or three-day drive from Guanajuato, Mexico, where I'm from, all the way here to Harrisonburg. It was like a two, three-day drive and it was awful. It was stop after stop; you're tired. It takes a long time, but as soon as I got here, as soon as I got into the border, I remember the bus stop. There were dogs and people checking who were like, well, let me see your documents, and I was like, Dad why are they asking this? And he was explaining that you need to present your documentation so they can let you in. People were getting off the

bus, some people were getting on and I guessed this was normal because this was my first time. Then we came to the US and I was like, man, this is nice. Everything's different. As soon as you cross the border, you can notice a difference between Mexico and the US. As soon as I got here to Harrisonburg, that's when it hit that it was going to be difficult. I remember crying most of the nights for at least the first year of being in school. I cried and told my mom, I don't know why you brought me here to the US. I don't want to be here in the US, let's go back. And they were like, no, this is your new home and you're going to stay here. So yeah, it was rough for the first year. I'm pretty sure my dad was like, did I do the right decision or not, but I guess in the end he did.

[09:03] **E:** What was it like when you first were in Harrisonburg not being able to speak English and being enrolled in the schools here? What was that experience like?

[09:11] **J:** It was hard, it was hard. I remember, when we arrived my dad had a small trailer like I said – a two-bedroom trailer on country club road. The trailers are still there so it brings back a lot of memories when I drive though that road. It was a small trailer. The good thing was that there was a lot of Hispanic people living there, so I was like, this is nice. I got to meet some other kids around the neighborhood, which helped a lot, but you're new to a place and you still think that everyone speaks English. I was like, well how am I going to communicate? I remember sticking to staying inside the room and I would not come out I would just cry; I would go to sleep crying. My mom was like, well what's wrong? and I was like, well what if they don't understand? And she was like, well they speak Spanish too you know, and I was like, no they don't, it's America: they don't speak Spanish. In the neighborhood, it got better as soon as I started noticing that they knew Spanish, I knew I could do this. It got better then and I made some friends and started playing soccer around the neighborhood, so that helped a lot. In terms of school, it was hard as well. I remember going to my first day of school and coming back home crying. I was like, I don't want to go there. Even though some of the students in my class were in the same neighborhood it was not the same. I was like, they speak Spanish here, but they don't in school. Why are they doing that? My mom told me that I was going to learn. It was hard for my mom as well because she was the one staying at home most of the time since my dad worked a lot. I remember her crying with me saying, I'm sorry but this is our new life. You have to get used to it. In school my friends told me, don't worry, we'll try to help you out. I remember doing a lot of Rosetta Stone. I'm not sure what kinds of programs I was enrolled in, but I remember doing a lot of Rosetta Stone. I would go into a class and they would tell me, all right, you're going to do Rosetta Stone, and I said okay. They would take me into a separate group: it was the group, I guess, of students who were just learning English. Like I said, it was really difficult when I was there, but soon you get used to it. Yes, it is difficult, but after a year of not going back to Mexico or anything – we stayed here for three years without going to Mexico. After the first year I was like: I need to get used to this. The second year I was like, when are we going to Mexico? And my parents asked me, do you know English? And I was like, well I'm trying. It was until the third year that they told me that we could go back to Mexico. I think that they did it so that I wouldn't suffer so much from going back to Mexico and seeing my family again, then coming back and reliving the whole situation again. I guess that's why they did it. In school, a few teachers knew Spanish and one of the teachers that knew Spanish – he's my coworker now – those moments when he pulled me out of the class to talk to me and play some games, those were special moments. I was like, oh this is awesome! I get to speak Spanish for ten minutes, this

is great! And the rest of the day I was like, okay I guess I'm doing things right or I guess I'm doing things wrong. I'm not sure because I didn't know English, but that was the difficult part about it.

[12:48] **E:** Aside from the language barrier, were you treated differently because you were Hispanic in the school system, or was it a pretty friendly environment?

[13:03] **J:** Treated differently? I don't think we were treated differently with the exception that my parents got a lot of help from the school. My mom up to date keeps telling me, well when you were little this person used to do this for us, they used to help us set up appointments for this, they used to call us for notifications. So in terms of that, I guess you could call it different because I don't think a specific person would do it for someone else, but I don't consider that being a negative thing. I think it's a positive thing welcoming someone into the school system, making them feel welcome. In terms of myself, I don't think I was treated negatively or different. I think it was a positive. Of course, I didn't know any English so I guess their best idea was to use Rosetta Stone and place me with a group of students that were also learning English. Which made sense because if you're all learning English might as well use the same resource instead of having different resources for everybody. Some people might consider that negative, oh well they separated you from the rest of the class, but to me it was great. I mean, if I didn't have that one on one time with teachers or having a teacher for six or seven students of us, I don't know if I would have learned English as quickly as I did. But having that small class with one teacher helped a lot because if I didn't know something I would ask a teacher and the teacher didn't know any Spanish and teacher would tell me, I don't understand, and then ask other students to translate for me and I would ask them to tell the teacher that this was going on and that's how we communicated. So sometimes another friend who knew a little bit more English than I did translated for us and sometimes the teacher was like, can you tell him to do this, or not do this, when I was misbehaving and that's how I learned. I was like okay I shouldn't do this because my friend told me this or my teacher told my friend not to do this and that's how I just started to learn and pick up a little bit of English. But no I don't feel like I was treated negatively.

[15:18] **E:** Did either of your parents speak English at this point? Did your father speak English a little bit?

[15:23] **J:** No, my dad at that point I think my dad had been, like I said, a migrant worker for ten to twenty years now – no I don't think... No, up to date he doesn't know any English. Up to date, my mom doesn't know any English. And I asked them why, how come you haven't learned any? Especially my dad. I mean I was young when I was asking those questions. He said, For two reasons: One, when I came, I came to work. I wasn't coming to live here in the US, that was not my plan. My plan was to come, make enough money, start a business. Second reason is when I did bring the whole family to the US, my objective was the same thing. Work, make enough money so that you guys can have a good education. I never put myself first before the family. So it was all about the family, all about the children. And my mom is the same thing, I don't care if I have to work twenty, forty, fifty, sixty hours a week, as long as you and your sister have what you need. I don't care if I don't know the language, I don't care if I get discriminated in the community or anything like that, but as long as you two are set, that's what matters. And I think they both put that in front instead of learning English. They put the priority of my sister and

myself on top and then English was one of the last priorities, we have them two, we have bills, we have to pay for the cars, we got a lot of stuff going on, and English is the last thing on their mind and it is still the last thing on their mind up to date. But no, up to date, they don't know any English.

[17:08] **E:** So was there a point in school where you started to feel more comfortable with English that you could speak it without any issues?

[17:04] **J:** So I arrived in third grade, in the middle of third grade – that was hard because of all the language barriers. In fourth grade, I think I had a math class, I believe it was math class, in the regular class and that's when one of the teachers used to give – like if you did something good – she would have a little chart with like a gumball machine. So if you did something right or answer a question right she would give you a little drawing of a gumball and you would put it on the machine. And then when the machine got full, the whole class got a reward. So all my friends were like, you need to say something in English so you can get a little gumball. And that's when I remember saying my first English words by myself, they were like, come on you can do it, you can do it. So one morning I was like, good morning, and I said her name – I can't remember her name now it's been a long time. But I said good morning and she was like, wow! Congratulations! So she gave me one and I was like, I must have said it right. After that I would say one or two words like bye, hello, or have a good day; something like that, and that's what motivated me. Then in fifth grade, I started to talk a little bit more and more. I still had tons of difficulties in fifth grade, but I feel that it was in middle school when I started to come out more in terms of speaking. It started mostly in sixth grade and went on. Each year you feel a little bit better, feel a little bit better. There's always words that come to me easier in Spanish. Up to date, there's a lot of words that I would say in Spanish rather than English, but each year you just keep improving on what you feel that you need to improve. But yeah, it was hard.

[19:19] **E:** Moving on into high school, did you have a favorite subject that you were studying? Was school something you liked a lot or just something you went to?

[19:30] **J:** So high school was an interesting point – I think it's an interesting point for everybody. A lot of my friends I think seemed – well first of all, I was really interested in math. So ever since Mexico, math has been one of the things I am interested in like, math, math, math, math. In high school there's a lot of things going on. I joined the soccer team and I was like, my thing is to play soccer, that's all. I wasn't really thinking about school or anything. My first year I was like okay I'm just coming to school, doing my thing, getting my grades, that's it. sophomore year was the same thing: I was just going to school to go to school. It wasn't until my junior year when a chemistry teacher was like, well you've got really good grades. You've got A's and B's. And I was like, yeah. And I was falling asleep in that class, in chemistry, I was falling asleep. And she was like, well you keep getting good grades and you're falling asleep, and I'm like, yeah, I mean, this is pretty easy. That's when she was like, well you probably need to take AP classes. Have you talked to your counselor? And I was like, no, and she was like, well, have you thought about college? I was like, college? College for me? Yeah right, my parents can't afford college. And she was like, well there are a lot of ways, and I was like, yeah. I played it off. So at the end of my junior year, I went to my counselor and he was like, a few of your teachers have been saying that you've been doing really well. How about we give you some

AP classes for senior year? And I was like, okay, sure. I mean you guys are the experts. I don't know. I'm just here to graduate so I can go to work. And they were like, okay sounds good. So they gave me a couple of AP classes for the first semester and then I passed them. Only with a B or a C+ or something like that, but they were more difficult so I was happy. I was like, I passed, so that's all that matters to me. So that's when, in the middle of my senior year, they were like, okay we need to apply for college. And I was like, I told you guys I'm not going to college, and they were like, oh no, you're going to college. And they made sure that my parents knew about it too. They were like, okay so we already called your parents, and your parents are informed.

There was a college night where one night you went into the high school and they explained how college worked, how to pay for college. My dad came out of the meeting and he was like, that's it. You're going to college. I was like, I don't have money for college, and he was like, me neither, but you're going to college. So I was like, okay. I'll just go to Blue Ridge [Community College]. All of my friends were like, yeah we're going to Blue Ridge. And I was like, okay, Blue Ridge is an option I guess. At that time, I didn't know where Blue Ridge was. A few of the teachers were like, you have good grades. Not to put Blue Ridge down or anything because I think it's a great option for people, but my teachers were like, how about you apply for a four-year college? That way you can get a bigger scholarship. I was like, I don't know if I can pay for that. They were like, don't worry we'll help you out. Then one teacher was like, here – he gave me the websites and packages – apply for EMU [Eastern Mennonite University], Bridgewater, and JMU [James Madison University]. I was like, okay this is scary. My dad was like, well I can't help you. I was like, mom can you help – nope. Nobody could help me. I was on my own. I was filling out those college applications. I went to JMU – I went with like my dad driving around and then I actually went into a class and it was like huge. And I was like, I'm definitely not going to JMU. I was like, it's between Blue Ridge and Bridgewater and EMU. In the back of my mind I was like, Blue Ridge, Blue Ridge, Blue Ridge. Just because of the whole financial issue and then I didn't know if I had good enough grades and then we started talking about GPAs and stuff like that. I was like, I'm not good enough for a four-year college. I soon told the teachers, alright here, can you check my applications. They were like, no they look good. Send them in. I sent them in and then I got them back and they were like, you've been accepted to EMU and Bridgewater and here's your financial aid package. So I told my parents, I was like, well here it is. You told me to apply here it is, it's tons of money don't you think? And they were like, yeah, yeah it is a lot of money. I was like, told you. And then that's when they decided to make a deal with me. They were like, if you go to college, we'll pay for half of your semester and then you'll pay for half of the semester. And I was like, I don't know about that. I was still thinking about Blue Ridge. And they were like, but you gotta go to a four-year college. I was like, okay. And at that time I was thinking – by that time, at the end, by the time you make the decision I was like, okay I should definitely go to college. I saw both packages and I was thinking of doing something like the role that I'm doing right now in my current position or teaching. I saw myself helping students that went through a similar situation that I went through. I was like, I wanna do that. And I saw that both programs had education programs, both had like kinda social work programs and I was like, I guess that there's no difference. I was like, there's probably no difference in which school I went to. Even though I really wanted to go to EMU, it was a lot more expensive so that made my decision a lot easier to go to Bridgewater College. I was like, oh I'll go to Bridgewater. It's great financial package and they say it's great. And at that time there were people from Bridgewater that were like, yeah we're really diverse you should really come out and look at it. And I was like, well I don't have time to go and look at it. I

don't even know where Bridgewater college is. So I sent in, I was like, okay here's my deposit, I'm going to Bridgewater. Without even knowing the school. So that's how I went to Bridgewater. But to just back up a little bit, my junior year, I did drop out of college [possibly meant to say high school] because as any teenager you wanted a car and everything. So I was like, well I want a car, I want gas, I want all this. So I started working. So by my senior year, when my dad made the deal he knew that I was working. He was like, well you're working, you can work, pay half the tuition and then I'll work and we'll pay the other half. So that's why I was like, okay. I was like how hard can college be [laughing]? I was like how hard can college be? I knew it was gonna be hard. I was like, I know I'm going in like not knowing anything, but I figured it would be a lot like high school. Middle school, I didn't know what middle school was I didn't know what high school was. Maybe college is kinda similar to high school; it's just all AP classes. I was like, just think of AP classes, it's gonna be like all AP classes: really hard. As long as you put enough attention you can still work. I was like, okay. So that's how I made my decision and that's how my dad has been helping me. I mean they were like, we'll pay for half, and I mean thanks to them I was able to go to college.

[26:31] **E:** Did you enjoy being at Bridgewater after you had been there?

[26:35] **J:** Ah no. [Laughing] No, it was rough man, it was rough. Being the first generation in college you have a lot of pressure. I remember my mom and dad they were really proud. They were like, oh yeah you're in college. You're the first one in the family! Of course I had like other cousins who are in Michigan and California who actually went to college, but my family is just my mom and my dad and my sister and I. They were like, yeah you're going to college! Great, you're setting a great example for your younger sister. I was like, good. But it was hard. My first semester I wanted to drop out. I think after a month and a half I was like, this is not for me. I was like, I definitely should not be wasting all this money, all this tons of money that my parents are putting into my education and I'm putting all this money. I would rather just be working a full-time job getting as much money as I'm spending and saving it. I was like, this is hard. So my first time my parents talking to me they were like, well you just need to take four classes and do four classes instead of having five classes. And I was living at home to save up money because I couldn't afford for the whole board and room and stuff like that. I couldn't so I was living at home. They were like, well if you need to live in Bridgewater we'll help you pay for that that way you can feel more part of the community. And I was like, no that's like ten thousand dollars. Don't put all that money in there. So I stuck through it, but there were a few times where I just like, I need to drop out. One time my dad talked me into it. They were like, no you gotta stay. A few other times, a couple friends were like, no just keep going. It's gonna be hard. And even now professors from the Spanish department they were really helpful, they were like – and from the social work department as well – they were really helpful with that situation. They were like, well you need to stay, you're doing good. I mean, I had good grades. I had average grades: B's, C's. But they were like, you gotta stick through it. And they understood my situation. I was like, well I don't if I'm doing everything correctly and they were like, it's not about if you're doing it correctly. It's about you experimenting and getting to know what college is and taking something away from college that could help you in the future. And I was like, yeah that is true. So the first two years I hated it. I wanted to drop out. My junior year, that's when I kinda started to enjoy it a little bit more. I was like, okay this is not as bad. Two years already on the back. My junior year I was like, I'm set I'm good. There were a few times I was like, I wanna drop out. But for the

most part, I enjoyed it. My senior year I think it was... it was hard, it was hard my senior year just because you have the pressure of being a senior, getting a job, especially from my parents. You just graduated, you have a job already? I'm like, no not yet. But I enjoyed it for the most part. If you told me if I wanted to do the whole thing again I would say no. I would say I did it, I'm done with it, great. As of right now, maybe I'll go back and get a masters or do a couple more classes to get some other kind of certification, but if you tell me you wanna do the four years again, no thank you. I did that, I'm glad I got through it thanks to the help of teachers, friends, and family I got through it, but I don't wanna go through it again.

[Part Two]

[30:18] **E:** And so you majored in social work and Spanish?

[30:20] **J:** I actually majored – no, Bridgewater doesn't have a social work major. I majored in Spanish because, like I said, I wanted to help people that were in similar situations. So I was like, maybe I'll become a teacher. Maybe I wanna do a Spanish teacher and up to date I still have that thought in mind. Maybe I need to go back and be a teacher – a Spanish teacher. Maybe I'll do it, maybe I won't, I don't know, I'm not sure what the future holds, but that's one thing that I have in mind, like one possibility. So I majored in Spanish and I double minored in social work because that's the other big passion of mine: social work. The professors, and I love the whole department of social work at Bridgewater. That's one of the great thing about Bridgewater, the two things, Spanish department and social work, I was like, that's what kept me in there and not make me drop out. And my second minor is culture studies. Culture studies just kind of grab into the whole Spanish mixing social work. I was like, you know what? This is awesome. And my plans after college I was like, with this I can pretty much try to do a social work kind of job and like I said that's my passion, that is, helping others. It might not be tons of money, but to me that's not it. To me, it's helping families that went through a similar situation that I went through so I can make it easier for them and not have to feel the difficulties that I kind of felt when I was young. But that is what I studied in college.

[32:03] **E:** So I know you worked with Alicia Horst of the New Bridges Immigrant Center. When was that? Was that a little bit after you graduated from Bridgewater?

[32:11] **J:** No, that is actually – so in Bridgewater, like many other universities like JMU, EMU, you do internships. So that was one of the internships. I think I received that internship for social work. So one of the social work requirements to get your minor was you had to do a certain amount of hours. So that's when I talked to Alicia and they accepted me for a semester. I was like, this is good. I mean, I got to learn tons from that program, from that non-profit organization New Bridges, it was great. So I stayed there for the semester. And then I went to the Spanish department and I was like, well you know what? I love it here so much at New Bridges, what can I do to stay another semester with them? And they were like, well you can do an internship for us. So you did an internship for social work, now you can do an internship for Spanish. So I was like, okay. Since in New Bridges, you use Spanish a lot with people that you work with. So that's how I stayed for a whole year. Of course, there were weeks where I would go six hours, there were weeks where I could only go for four hours. It varied, but they were happy to have me there and I was happy to help them out with whatever I could. I didn't have tons of experience, I was



just a college student, but it helped me a lot. It helped me a lot how to talk to people, how to relate to them, and it showed me that there are still people in our community that still need the help that my parents once received and that I once received. That kind of pushed me forward. That's when I was like, I'm definitely going into social work. That helped me a lot. I was like, I need to go into social work. Unfortunately, I was only there for a whole year. My senior year, I think, I wasn't able to do it just because of all the other stuff that I had going on, but it was great. It was a great time.

[34:14] **E:** What was like a normal week there? What were the kinds of things that you were doing for the center?

[34:21] **J:** Well it was a little bit of everything. I didn't have any specific things. So they have an immigration center in there, which Alicia runs. I couldn't do any immigration situations: I didn't have the experience, the license, or anything like that, but I did everything that they told me to like answer phone calls, make phone calls, do research. Sometimes families would come in and were like, where can I apply for a job? So I would start doing research, let's find the local jobs that are currently hiring. Where can I find an apartment? I'm like, well let's do some research. They showed me how to fill out financial aid documents, I was doing a little bit of interpreting – not so much, but since a lot of them spoke Spanish there was no need for interpreting, but a lot of translating. So they were like, can you translate this birth certificate that was in Spanish to English? I was like, okay I will translate it. Can you translate this? Sure, why not. I helped a couple of fundraiser events finding sponsors for an event as well. So it was just a little bit of everything. You just don't know what you're coming into. You come in, you might for four hours, it could go really quickly because you've got a line of people or it might be like, well we only have two people. But you just didn't know what because as soon as you're done with the one person, the other person might be completely opposite from what you were doing. Which was interesting because you get to learn a little bit of everything and it's interesting learning all the resources that are in the community.

[36:08] **E:** After you graduated from Bridgewater, did you get involved with the Harrisonburg public school system pretty immediately afterwards?

[36:17] **J:** Yes. So, in Bridgewater College I did another internship, so I was doing a lot of internships. I did an internship with the home school liaisons here in Harrisonburg in Harrisonburg High School. I only did it for a semester: that was all I could do at that time. And I loved it. I knew what the job was kind of about just from people in the community and from other home school liaisons that I knew and I had talked to. I was like, well what is your job about? And they were telling me. So that made me get an internship at Harrisonburg High School with their home school liaisons. I was there for the semester. I liked it and I kinda wanted one. I was like, maybe I wanna do that job. But home school liaisons, you only need one per school or unless the school is so big then they start adding more. So positions are limited. So in my senior year, my last semester, I started to apply at different places. I applied at the correctional center, the juvenile correctional center and I got interviewed, but they never called me so I guess I wasn't good enough [laughing]. I was like, okay. I don't know if I'd be happier or not, but I guess I'm happy because I got the job that I am right now. So they didn't call me for that one and I applied for like two other jobs and I had interviews but nothing came through. I

also applied for the welcome center here at Harrisonburg city schools and I got the interview and they hired me and a week after I graduated, I started working with Harrisonburg city schools in the welcome center. So I was there for the whole first year, and then, this school year, here at Keister [Elementary School] as a home school liaison. So I've been in total two years. This is my second year with Harrisonburg city schools.

[38:15] **E:** So what do you do here as a home school liaison? What's your typical work week?

[38:21] **J:** Once again it's a little bit of everything, yeah. You're translating, you're interpreting, you're making phone calls to parents, parents are calling you. You're pretty much like a... like a bridge. You're a bridge between the school and home. You're a bridge between parents, administration, and teachers. If someone sends something home in English, parents might call me, hey they sent me this letter and I don't understand it, can you tell me what it is? But we tend to send everything Spanish and English. Or sometimes they're like, hey can you tell the teacher that such thing happened in school, is this true or not? And then that's when I go to the teachers and email and say, hey so so-and-so called me, so-and-so said something happened, is this true? What is your story? Or vice versa. The teacher might say, can you call the parents and say that their student is doing good, or tell them that this happened today, something happened in recess. Or sometimes they just send me translations. Can you translate this to send home? Because we try to send everything in English and Spanish, at least, home, and Arabic and Russian. I don't know Arabic or Russian [laughing], so someone else takes that, but I'm in charge of all the Spanish ones here at Keister. I'm also in charge of several other events. Not in charge, but to collaborate with administration. So our administration does, for example, Hispanic Family Night. So our administration is like, okay we're gonna work on this. So I work along with them. Try to recruit people, try to call parents say, hey we're having this event, come out. If there's after school events, then I'm there just in case a person comes in and says, hey what's going on? I can explain it to them. Sometimes when it's a big event and we know that a lot of parents are coming, I act as an interpreter. So I have an interpreter set, like with your headphones and everything. So as parents are coming in you're like, do you want an interpreter? A Spanish interpreter, yes or no? And they're like, yes. You give them a headset, then once the event starts, you're just interpreting the whole event. It's a lot of things. There's a lot of things that come in, so to say, I do this specifically every day – no. My day varies, just like in New Bridges. I might be really busy one day doing a lot of translations, but the next day I might be working on an event with my administration, or I might be doing something else with a teacher or student. It's awesome, it's a lot of work, but I enjoy it.

[41:09] **E:** And so kinda backtracking a little bit, back to when you were growing up here in Harrisonburg, were you involved with any sort of religious community here in Harrisonburg when you were growing up? You and your family?

[41:19] **J:** Well, yes. Traditionally, Hispanic community is very catholic, [inaudible], especially in Mexico, so my dad and my mom were very catholic. So we went to the local catholic church. I didn't enjoy it [laughing], I mean like most nine-year olds I was like, what do you gotta go to church for? But yeah, they were really involved in the – I wouldn't say very, very involved, but they were part of the catholic church. They went every Sunday just like any other person would go to church and they made me go. But after that, I don't know if my mom or dad ever did

something else. I don't remember doing anything specific with the church. I know my parents made us go. They were like, you gotta go on Sunday. I was like, okay. I mean I had no option: I was young, so they made me go.

[42:13] **E:** So I know when you first moved here, you were in that two-bedroom trailer. Did that change as you were growing up? Did you move around at all? Or were you mostly just in that same area?

[42:23] **J:** No, that did change. So when my dad arrived, he bought the trailer, we stayed there for three years. So like I was telling you, my parents were working long hours. My dad had a plan. He was like, I'm gonna work, I'm gonna get some good education for my children, and I'm gonna find a bigger place. Up to date, I was like, why? And he was like, well trailers were cheap. They're cheap. I mean, not so cheap but affordable. The parking space is affordable, the situation that your mom and I were – it just made sense. It made a lot more sense than getting an apartment. So we were there for three years. In 2006, I still remember in 2006, my dad bought the current home where we are right now. So he actually bought a home here in Harrisonburg. And he was like, okay this is what I came here for. I came here to bring you guys, to work, to buy a home. That's his American dream. And so he bought his home – he's still paying it, I mean, we say buy but he's still paying it. And that's where we moved, to that house, and we've been there ever since. Unless they plan to sell it sometime soon, but I don't know. Yeah so I've been there since '06. It's been quite a while now.

[43:42] **E:** And so has the area changed at all? Just Harrisonburg in general, has that changed at all since you first moved here, so over the course of fifteen years or so?

[43:51] **J:** I think it has changed a lot. A lot more business is coming in. In terms of people, I feel a lot more diversity has been happening. Not that back then there was not, but I feel like when I arrived there was less diversity. You can tell. There was less places where they knew Spanish, where they had Spanish speakers. Now, at least, you go somewhere, to a store, I'm pretty sure you can find a worker that knows Spanish in the store. Not a lot, but you can find someone or someone that speaks another language. I'm pretty sure that if you go to a doctor, there will be interpreters, so I have seen the community grow and be more diverse in the last couple years. And I feel that it's gonna become more diverse as more cultures come in, and we're gonna need more interpreters as well. We're gonna need a lot more interpreters, translators that are gonna be able to help us. Of course, there's those that speak Spanish, but what about the other ones that know Swahili, Tigrinya, Russian are a little bit more difficult to find. What about those families? So we're gonna need a lot more people that can help the community in those kinds of languages. But yes, it has become a lot more diverse, a lot bigger, and I'm just grateful to see this change and I'm really excited to see what Harrisonburg becomes in the future.

[45:21] **E:** And then looking towards the future, do you plan on staying in Harrisonburg for a long time or do you have any plans on leaving the area?

[45:29] **J:** That is questionable, yeah. In college, like I said, I wasn't getting any calls back to get a job so I was really planning on moving to California. Just because I have family over there. I have a few uncles that live over there. I was like, maybe I gotta over there. That's like social

work, that's like where else could you go and be like a social worker. I was like, maybe over there. But I got the job here so I stayed put. Right now, I am really happy with my job. I'm enjoying it, so for the short term no. I plan to stay here in the area. Of course, I don't know. Maybe in the long run I might move. But I don't have any plans of it right now. I really love how diverse this area is and that is one of the things that has made me stay here in Harrisonburg and not try to go somewhere else.

[46:30] **E:** How much younger is your sister than you?

[46:34] **J:** She is... what is she? So I'm twenty-four almost twenty-five, she... nineteen. I would say nineteen. She is currently at EMU. She is studying to be an RN nurse. She has one more year and then to work or to get her masters, I don't know what her plan is. Her story is a lot different than mine just because I came a lot older. She was probably like three, so she was able to [laughing] assimilate a lot better than I did into the whole education program, which has helped her a lot especially in her education career. I'm proud of her, but her story is a lot different than mine. Up to date, I feel that I don't belong to here, to the US, but I also don't belong to Mexico. Half my life has been in Mexico, a lot of memories have been from Mexico, but a lot of my recent memories are also from the US. To me I feel that I'm split in between. I'm not from here, I'm not from there, I'm right in between. I don't know how to describe it, which can be hard and easy at the same time, but in comparing that to my sister, if I tell my sister she feels more American even though she was born in Mexico. So that's interesting, yeah.

[48:07] **E:** So what are your thoughts on kinda on the national stage? Some of the rhetoric and some of the policies that are being taken away or put into place, depending on what they are specifically around DACA or stuff like that, what are your thoughts on that?

[48:22] **J:** I'm really sad. Yeah, it's a sad time for our community. Not just for the Hispanic community, for all diversities here in the US. It's a sad moment. I don't agree. I don't agree with a lot of the things that is going on in the media. I have tons of friends who benefit from DACA, tons of friends. So it's sad. It's sad seeing them suffer, it's sad hearing the stories that say, hey I might be here today, but maybe tomorrow I'm not or I might get split up from my parents. I have friends who were born here, who are under DACA – no, friends that were born in Mexico, but were brought to the US at a very young age, one years, two years. So they don't really know Mexico. I consider myself lucky, I know Mexico so if I ever go back, I know how everything works, but they don't. They were actually raised here even though they weren't born here so I feel sad. I feel really sad. I don't think Harrisonburg compares to that. I think Harrisonburg is a lot more open to diversity than some parts of the US. And I think the majority of the US is also very open to diversity. I think there's very few closeminded people in the US in general. Unfortunately, they have their way of thinking and I can't really do anything about it. I hope I could change it, but I can't. The only thing we can do is continue to support our diversity here in Harrisonburg and in the US. And like I said, I'm pretty sure the majority of the US is very open to diversity.

[50:16] **E:** Just lastly, what would you like students, or just anyone who might come along these archives, what would you like them to take away from your story as it relates to immigration as a whole or immigration to Harrisonburg?

[50:30] **J:** Each story's different. Take into perspective the story of everybody. Each immigrant, it's different. I consider myself lucky because I didn't have to cross the border undocumented, or as some people would say, illegally. I consider myself lucky. There are tons of people in this community that are not as lucky as I am. And I would say before you judge someone, you really got to know their story first before you can even comment on it. Each one is different. I would say accept diversity because we all bring something to the table. And if you accept it, and as long as you're in a community that accepts it, that community will prosper. It will be a lot of great things coming out of that community. So I would just say in terms of immigration, I can't really tell you believe this, believe that, but I can say listen. Listen to the stories and try to reflect and be in their shoes. Put yourself in their shoes and try to see if you would do the same thing or not. But I'm pretty sure a lot of the people would understand why families are immigrating to the US once they hear individual stories.